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Accountable for Care: Cultivating Caring School Communities in Urban High Schools

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ABSTRACT

This comparative case study examines the prevalence of caring practices in two higher performing and two lower performing urban high schools and the contextual factors that helped or hindered the extent to which students felt cared for. We found that higher performing schools demonstrated caring communities, where interpersonal relationships and high academic expectations were prevalent throughout the school. Strong leadership support, caring as a core school value, and abundant curricular and extracurricular structures facilitated relationships in caring school communities; these contextual factors were less prevalent in lower performing schools with isolated instances of care. Implications for school leaders are discussed.

In the past decade and a half, schools have been pushed to align students' educational experiences with test-driven accountability measures as a response to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which coupled standards-based reforms with stringent consequences for schools and districts that do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state standardized tests (Darling-Hammond, 2007). With standardized tests in core subject areas—specifically reading, math, and science—as the primary mechanism of accountability, teachers and school leaders have felt pressured to leave behind practices and programs that do not directly relate to high-stakes tests, including those that respond to students' academic, social, and emotional developmental needs and interests (Cobb & Rallis, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Noddings, 2005). While a broad coalition, ranging from business leaders who want a skilled workforce to civil rights advocates seeking equitable education opportunities for all, agrees that school should be held accountable for student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009), there has been little debate over the question, “But for what should schools be held accountable? Surely they should be accountable for more than test scores in basic reading, mathematics, and science” (Noddings, 2005, p. xiv).

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Research suggests that rather than push aside school practices that facilitate students' academic, social, and emotional development, schools should hold themselves accountable for adopting a *relational approach* to school reform (Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997). This expands accountability beyond performance measures in core subject areas to one that encompasses the holistic development of students' academic, social, and emotional competencies. Borrowing from Cobb and Rallis (2008), we conceptualize accountability as a two-way obligation to fulfill a condition to which both parties have agreed. Test-based accountability can be perceived as external, hierarchical accountability whereby educators and administrators in schools are accountable to the state and federal government; in a relational approach to education, educators and administrators are responsible to one another and to their students, in what Cobb and Rallis (2008) define as an internal, lateral method for accountability.

A relational approach to education fosters caring connections to others *and* to meaningful academic work (Baker et al., 1997). This ethic of care manifests itself in reciprocal, interpersonal relationships between students and teachers (Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999), and is best nurtured in schools with a strong sense of community and commitment to meeting students' academic and social needs (Ancess, 2003; Baker et al., 1997). School leaders, therefore, play a vital role in deliberately fostering a school-wide culture that both nurtures and holds high expectations for students (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007; Nell, 2012; Rodriguez, 2007).

Relatedness, “the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others,” is essential for students to internalize positive school-related behaviors such as engagement, which can then lead to positive outcomes related to performance and graduation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 73). Research has shown that in a variety of contexts, caring teachers in caring schools positively impact students' social development, academic achievement and attainment, and future aspirations (Ancess, 2003). A variety of researchers using multilevel models have found positive effects of caring student-teacher relationships on academic and social indicators, such as academic effort and responsibility (Wentzel, 1997), motivation (Maulana, Opdenakker, Stroet, & Bosker, 2013), and high school retention rates (Lee & Burkam, 2003). Case studies of successful urban high schools serving low-income or minority students or students at risk of dropping out further revealed that a school-wide ethic of care—emphasizing respectful, trusting relationships and academic rigor—led to higher levels of student engagement, social and emotional competence, academic achievement and attainment, and reduced dropout rates (Ancess, 2003; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Carter, 2012; Johnson, 2009; Pang, Rivera, & Mora, 2000; Schussler & Collins, 2006). Conversely, Valenzuela's ethnography of a school where teachers did not care for students revealed that in such uncaring contexts, students exhibited less

attachment and belongingness to school, lower achievement, and higher drop-out rates (Valenzuela, 1999).

Corroborating this rich body of caring literature, a comparative case study of four urban high schools found that an ethic of care was a key component that differentiated the two higher performing high schools from the two lower performing high schools (Rutledge, Cohen-Vogel, & Osborne-Lampkin, 2012). Building on this finding, this study explores how urban high school teachers from that case study care in the era of accountability and the school environments that facilitate caring relationships. This study adds to the rich literature on caring by comparing how teachers in high- and low-performing comprehensive urban high schools care for students in today's era of accountability and, furthermore, adds to our understanding of the contextual factors that facilitate caring school communities amidst accountability pressures that reward or sanction administrators, teachers, and students in public school districts based on standardized test scores. Specifically, we seek to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the ways that high school teachers in lower and higher performing schools in an urban public school district care for their students?
- (2) What contextual school factors help or hinder these teachers' attitudes toward and ability to care for their students?

Conceptual framework

Aesthetic, authentic, and hard caring

Valenzuela (1999), drawing upon the theoretical contributions of Noddings' (1984) ethic of care, illuminated different perceptions between what it means to care in a large urban high school and the challenges of holistically caring for students in a hierarchal bureaucratic educational setting. As such, these conceptualizations of caring are particularly relevant in understanding how urban high school teachers care for students in today's accountability environment. As Noddings (1984) and Valenzuela (1999) purport, relationships lay at the heart of caring teachers and caring schools. The carer is responsive to the needs for the cared-for; the cared-for receives, recognizes, and responds to the care (Noddings, 1984, 2005). These relationships are reciprocal. As Noddings (2005) explained, "If, for whatever reason, the cared-for denies that he or she is cared for, there is no caring relation" (p. xv). While caring can be seen in the carer's visible actions, it is most accurately categorized as an attitude in which the carer feels a sense of burden and commitment to the cared for. Through engrossment—"seeing the other's reality as a

possibility for my own”—the carer is receptive to the needs of the cared-for (Noddings, 1984, p. 14). The relationship is reciprocated when the cared-for holds the attitudes of acceptance and trust. When two unequal parties are involved, such as a student seeking help from a teacher, it becomes inclusive and moves toward friendship (Noddings, 1984). Prior studies suggest that a teacher simply *caring about* whether a student receives a high grade or shows up to class (i.e., aesthetic care) will not result in prosocial outcomes and academic success. Rather, *caring for* the unique needs of individual students (i.e., authentic care) and using relationships to leverage high expectations for student learning (i.e., hard care) have been found to promote students’ holistic success, especially for those from marginalized backgrounds. These three types of care are described below and illustrated in Table 1.

Aesthetic care

Drawing upon Noddings (1984) conceptualization of “caring about” and “caring for,” Valenzuela (1999) differentiated between *aesthetic caring* and *authentic caring* in education. Aesthetic caring focuses attention on things and ideas, such as test scores, grades, and appearances. Valenzuela (1999) argued that the structure of schools tend to embody an aesthetic care, with a narrow, objective focus on items such as standardized curricula. In her ethnographic case study of a large, predominantly Latino, urban high school in Texas, she found that many teachers were “concerned first and foremost with form and non-personal content” (p. 22). These teachers cared about what students wore and how they spoke, assuming that students did not care about school because of their deportment. The lack of personal connectedness reduced students “to the level of objects” (p. 62), which contrasted against students’ view of education as embodying respectful relationships between student and teacher.

Authentic care

In contrast to aesthetic care, *authentic care* centers on reciprocal, trusting relationships between students and teachers (Noddings, 2005). Caring relationships are built through open, continuous dialogue, which allows the teacher to become engrossed in the circumstances and needs of the students

Table 1. Typology of Care Framework.

Caring Type	Definition
<i>Aesthetic care</i>	Test scores, grades, appearances (Valenzuela, 1999)
<i>Authentic care</i>	Reciprocal relationships, mentorship, dialogue, family, community, social/cultural/political acknowledgement (Ancess, 2003; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Noddings, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999)
<i>Hard care</i>	Academic press, relationships to leverage learning (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Ancess, 2003; Bondy & Ross, 2008; Murphy et al., 1982)

and facilitates teachers and students to build up a “substantial knowledge of one another” (Noddings, 2005, p. 23). At the core of these authentic relationships is mutual respect and trust (Noddings, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999).

A variety of studies have identified examples of teachers who authentically care for their students. Such teachers know students academically and personally. They are attuned to students’ school and home lives, integrate dialogue into classroom instruction, provide guidance and mentorship about academic and social issues, make themselves accessible to students outside of class, build relationships between themselves and students’ families and communities, and open up to let students get to know them personally as well (Ancess, 2003; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Baker et al., 1997; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Garza, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Pang, Rivera, & Mora, 2000; Rivera-McCutchen, 2012; Rodriguez, 2007; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Schussler & Collins, 2006; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). In addition, authentically caring teachers have awareness of the social, cultural, and political contexts of their students, and incorporate that awareness into their teaching of and interactions with students (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Rivera-McCutchen, 2012).

Authentic relationships transcend traditional power structures between teacher and student, creating friendship or family-like relationships (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Schussler & Collins, 2006). These horizontal relationships place teachers as facilitators or partners in helping students work together to achieve shared goals (Ancess, 2003; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Johnson, 2009). This is in contrast to hierarchical power relations in which the carer “may decide what those best interests are without listening to the expressed needs of the cared-for” (Noddings, 2005, p. xv), or a savior or colonialist mentality in which teachers, holding deficit views of students and the communities they come from, believe they have to “save” students from what they perceive to be uncaring family or community environments (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Toshalis, 2012).

Hard care

Teachers who exhibit hard caring for their students hold high expectations for students’ academic and future success in addition to caring for their personal well-being (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006). Sympathetic or “soft caring” teachers who take pity on students’ social circumstances may have good intentions, but this may ultimately harm students as it lowers academic expectations. For example, in a study of preservice teachers intern-ing in urban schools, Toshalis (2012) found that, in response to severe underperformance of students, interns would praise students’ nonacademic qualities while ignoring the students’ need for remediation. In contrast, “hard-caring” teachers hold high expectations coupled with supportive,

instrumental relationships that facilitate academic and social development and orient students toward the future (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006). Researchers have observed that hard caring teachers leverage relationships with students as tools for learning, persist in the face of student resistance (Ancess, 2003; Rivera-McCutchen, 2012), push students to attend college (Knight-Diop, 2010; Rodriguez, 2007), and provide the academic supports (e.g., scaffolds in daily instruction, tutoring outside of class) to ensure that students meet those expectations. This is similar to “academic press,” whereby teachers create an academically demanding classroom environment to ensure scholastic success (Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982; Shouse, 1996), or a “warm demander” mentality by which teachers exude “both warmth and a nonnegotiable demand for student effort and mutual respect” (Bondy & Ross, 2008, p. 54).

Hard care and authentic care are not mutually exclusive. As Ancess (2003) elucidated, “educational, social, and emotional issues are inexorably intertwined” (p. 9). Thus, a teacher who embodies an ethic of care responds to students’ academic, social, and personal circumstances and holds high expectations for academic success.

Contexts of caring

School contexts impact how teachers demonstrate authentic and hard caring. Caring relationships between teachers and students thrive when school environments emphasize a sense of community to which teachers, administrators, students, and families feel committed (Ancess, 2003; Beck, 1994). Conversely, individual teachers are limited in their ability to transform a student’s education when working in an institution that does not intentionally work toward caring for all students (Rolón-Dow, 2005). In schools that embrace a community of care, caring transcends the interpersonal teacher-student relationships. As with caring teachers, a caring school community “constructs strong social and affective bonds between the students and adults as well as develops a strong pedagogical infrastructure for intellectual challenge and achievement” (Ancess, 2003, p. 9). School-wide organizational and institutional factors also help facilitate relationships that foster a sense of connectedness to others and belongingness and ownership of the school (Ancess, 2003; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; Knight-Diop, 2010; Schussler & Collins, 2006; Tshalis, 2012). The following school factors have been identified in a variety of qualitative studies examining the ethic of care in schools.

Leadership

Caring school communities are “led by principals who have a deep concern for students’ holistic, personal development” (Beck, 1994, p. 49). A substantial body of literature has examined the leadership styles that lend themselves to caring school environments, and the impact these relationships have on

students' academic outcomes (e.g., Fullan, 2001, 2002; Nell, 2012). Ethical, transformational, authoritative, and reciprocal leadership styles have been found to lend themselves to more caring school environments, while authoritarian and transactional leadership styles are detrimental to the building of caring communities in schools (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Follett, 1919, 1917/2003; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Pellerin, 2005; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Studies examining caring in schools have found that administrative leaders in caring communities are accessible to teachers and students, forge supportive, trusting relationships with faculty, provide teachers autonomy in how they teach, give teachers a voice in school decision-making, and build time into the schedule for teachers to build relationships with students and the local community (Ancess, 2003; Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Jacobson et al., 2007; Johnson, 2009; McQuillan, 1997; Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2009). Conversely, standardized, bureaucratic workplaces that ignore teachers' individual professional competencies, needs, aspirations, and input have potential to impede on teachers' commitment to their students and result in impersonal, uncaring educational environments (Beck, 1994).

Core values

Core values are deeply rooted ideologies shared by all members of the school community (Schussler & Collins, 2006). Schools that agree upon caring as a core value imbue caring relationships into school structures and routines, and emphasize caring through the "written expression of institutional beliefs, actions, and attitudes" within documents and activities related to the school mission, staffing procedures, curriculum, courses, extracurricular activities, and parent involvement (Knight-Diop, 2010, p. 160). School choice may influence how easy it is for students to believe in the school's values. Schussler and Collins (2006) noted from their research in a small alternative high school that it was easier to adopt an agreed-upon core value amongst students because students elected to enroll in the school, whereas traditional comprehensive high schools have far more diversity in values across students, faculty, and administrators.

School-wide supports

Studies of caring school communities have highlighted school supports that facilitate relationships between students, teachers, and the school, leading to an increased sense of student connectedness. First, mentoring and advising programs have been found to increase students' sense of being cared for and engagement at school (Ancess, 2003; Rivera-McCutchen, 2012). For example, a phenomenological study of 14 Black and Latino males in an all-male mentoring program at an alternative high school (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014) explored how the reciprocal love and the ethos of care that developed between the mentees and the

mentor through familial support, trust, and open dialogue led to mentees' increased confidence and aspirations. Second, researchers have highlighted curricular and extracurricular opportunities for students to practice caring (Noddings, 2005), including cooperative learning classroom activities, informal opportunities for peers to assist each other (McQuillan, 1997; Schussler & Collins, 2006), student-to-student tutoring (Baker et al., 1997), community outreach (Baker et al., 1997), service-learning opportunities in the neighborhoods where students live (Rolón-Dow, 2005), and student leadership opportunities (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012).

Third, structures such as looping, when students stay with the same teacher and cohort of students for multiple years, and small schools or cohorts within schools reinforce the “continuity of place, people, purpose and curriculum” that allow caring relationships to flourish (Baker et al., 1997; Johnson, 2009; McQuillan, 1997; Noddings, 2005). For example, the critical small-school movement in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s created downsized high school structures as a means to facilitate attributes of caring such as personalization between teachers, students, parents, and community; authentic learning opportunities and assessment; equity in educational opportunities for historically marginalized populations; and participatory democracy for local schools and the communities they served (Hantzopoulos & Tyner, 2012). This has contributed to positive student outcomes, such as higher attendance, better performance on reading and math assessments and increased graduation and college-going rates (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Ort, 2002). Similarly, in a case study of a Freshman Focus program at a large, urban comprehensive high school, Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) found that the program produced strong relationships between students and teachers, teachers and the program, and students and the school, with students taking pride in their cohesive school group.

All of these structures extend student-teacher contact, which increases opportunities for relationships to form. However, the presence of these structures alone cannot guarantee an improvement in students' educational experiences if they are not filled with caring, interpersonal relationships (Knight-Diop, 2010). From his case study of two northeast high schools deliberately structured to personalize the learning experience, Rodriguez (2007) concluded that the presence of small learning environments was not sufficient in creating a sense of belongingness for students and teachers. Similarly, the New Century Schools Initiative, funded through philanthro-capitalists such as the Gates Foundation, sought to scale up the community-driven critical small-school movement in New York City. Yet researchers found that just the presence of small-school and within-school structures such as small advising groups—devoid of caring characteristics such as student-centered pedagogy and relationship-building between teachers, students, and community—did not sufficiently support teachers in building caring relationships (Hantzopoulos & Tyner, 2012; Shiller, 2009).

While organizational structures such as small school size can mediate what teachers are able to do, schools must also actively embrace a school culture committed to caring student-teacher relationships that attend to students' socio-emotional needs and leverage student success in a rigorous academic environment (Rodriguez, 2007).

Many of the schools studied above that have developed communities of care are elementary schools, alternative schools, community schools, or high schools born out of the small school movement, and fall outside of the jurisdiction—and therefore accountability demands—of high schools in traditional districts (Ancess, 2003; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Jacobson et al., 2007; Johnson, 2009; McQuillan, 1997; Schussler & Collins, 2006; Shiller, 2009). As others have argued, the caring pedagogy that occurs within a small-school structure, rather than the structure itself, is most important in fostering student success (Ancess, 2003, 2008; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Shiller, 2009). As such, we explore whether and how those same caring practices that did manifest in small, caring high schools were able to occur in large high schools, which have been critiqued for being impersonal and unable to effectively respond to students' needs (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; McQuillan, 1997). Furthermore, the current study builds on prior literature by illuminating different categories of how teachers care, thus expanding Antrop-González and De Jesús's (2006) conceptualization of caring as a *continuum* rather than a binary and connecting those caring categories to both relative school performance and direct actions that school leaders can take to create the conditions that foster caring relationships. Therefore, this study fills an important gap in the caring literature by examining how caring in high schools can be operationalized in the contexts of large, public school districts that serve the majority of urban students in the U.S.

Methods

Research design

Our comparative case study (Yin, 2009) examined the practices of four high schools in one large, urban school district in Florida. The large, urban school district in Florida that served as the context for our study was selected using a value-added achievement model (VAM) to estimate the relative state test performance of all of the state's high schools from the 2005–2006 to the 2008–2009 school years, with a particular focus on schools that were making academic gains with minority students, low-income students, and English language learners (ELLs). The estimated fixed effect for each high school in the state was put in rank order and classified by deciles of value added for these groups. (For a full technical report on the VAM model used and the

rationale for using the VAM model, see Sass, 2012). These analyses identified only one Florida district with multiple high- and low-value-added schools. This large district, with a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse student population and diversity in school performance, was chosen for our work.

The VAM analysis was used to select from the district two low-valued-added (LVA) high schools and two high-value-added (HVA) high schools for in-depth case studies (Sass, 2012). The two lowest ranked schools on math and reading gains overall and for low-income, minority, and ELL students were selected, followed by the two highest ranked schools overall and for student subgroups that had comparable student demographics to the LVA schools. The HVA school scores were cross-checked with graduation rates for students of different racial and socioeconomic (SES) subgroups to ensure that the higher test scores did not come at the cost of student attrition. Alternative and charter schools were excluded from our sample as this study was specifically focused on understanding caring practices in the context of comprehensive public high schools that must act in accordance with district and state accountability mandates.

Case study context

State context

We were particularly interested in studying school contexts in Florida schools because Florida has been a leader amongst the states in implementing rigid accountability measures in addition to the AYP sanctions of No Child Left Behind. Since 1999, the Florida Department of Education assigned schools a grade of A, B, C, D, or F on the basis of student achievement scores and gains on the reading and math standards-aligned annual Florida Comprehensive Assessment Tests (FCAT), including those scores of the bottom 25% of students. Schools that did not make the grade faced severe sanctions, among them replacing the incumbent principal and providing vouchers to students to attend other schools. In 2009, Florida introduced a differentiated accountability (DA) system. As a part of the DA system, schools were classified into one of several tiers, based on multiple measures of performance, including school grades, progress toward AYP, and changes in student performance (Rutledge et al., 2012). The categories (in order of fewest sanctions to most stringent) included Prevent I, Prevent II, Correct I, Correct II, and Intervene. One of our case-study schools was in Correct I status, meaning that the school faced increased accountability measures targeting specific subgroups not meeting AYP targets. While Correct I schools were required to implement district-directed interventions, they could still apply for waivers from oversight. Our three other case-study schools were all in Correct II status, meaning they were required to implement whole-school interventions under the direction of the district, and under the supervision of both the district and the state. Further, Title I

schools placed in Correct II status were not allowed to apply for a waiver of district and state oversight.

District context

As mentioned above, the district in which the schools were situated was culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse. In the 2010–2011 school year, the district's student population was 38% African American, 28% Hispanic, 27% White, 10% English language learner (ELL), and 48% free-or-reduced lunch. High schools in the district were large, with an average enrollment of 2,327 students. The district had a number of policies in place as a response to statewide accountability pressures, including the administration of multiple practice FCAT exams throughout the school year, assigning students to honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses based on FCAT scores, holding optional weekend classes to prepare students for the FCAT, and having teachers adhere to an instructional focus calendar based upon the Florida state standards.

School context

Within the district, Bayfront and Starling were selected as the lower valued-added schools and Torreya and Water Oak were selected as the higher value-added schools.¹ In the 2010–2011 school year, the four case-study schools had comparable demographics. Each school was considered a large comprehensive high school, enrolling over 1,800 students of racially, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse backgrounds (see [Table 2](#) for details). Starling had the lowest school enrollment, enrolling between 1,800 and 2,100 students, while Water Oak had the highest, enrolling between 2,800 and 3,100 students.² These schools, respectively, had the highest and lowest levels of students who qualified for free-and-reduced lunch as well. Torreya had the highest percentage of students of color (over 65%). With the exception of Torreya, which was under Correct I status, the schools were under Correct II status under Florida's accountability system. Principals differed in their leadership tenure at each school. The Starling principal had 4 years of experience at that school, at Bayfront the principal had less than 3 years of experience, at Torreya the principal had been there for 11 years, and the principal at Water Oak had 8 years of experience at that school. The average teaching experience of teacher participants somewhat varied. At Starling, teachers reported 11 years average experience, at Bayfront 9, Torreya teachers reported on average 10 years of experience, and Water Oak teachers reported an average of 17 years of experience.

Data collection

Researchers visited the school sites in three weeklong visits spread across the 2010–2011 school year. Researchers conducted student and teacher focus

Table 2. Case-Study Schools' Demographic Information.

	Total Enrollment	Students of Color (%)	Free-or-Reduced Lunch (%)	English Language Learner (%)	FL School Grade
LVA					
Bayfront	2000–2300	55–65	45–55	5–10	A-B
Starling	1800–2100	55–65	60–70	10–15	C-D
HVA					
Torrey	2100–2400	65–75	45–55	5–10	A
Water Oak	2800–3100	50–60	30–40	5–10	A-B

Note. In order to protect anonymity of the schools, exact demographic percentages and enrollment numbers have been converted to ranges. "Students of color" includes students identifying as African American, Latino/a, Asian, or "other." FL School Grade is based on the Florida Department of Education School Accountability Report from the five years leading up to the study (2005–2006 to 2009–2010).

groups; classroom observations; semi-structured interviews with English, math, and science teachers, department heads, administrators, guidance counselors, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), and ELL coordinators; and student shadowing followed by semi-structured reflective interviews. This study specifically focused on how classroom teachers, the carers, and students, the cared-for, conceptualized caring. Therefore, we analyzed 81 teacher interviews, 24 student interviews, and 10 student focus groups distributed equally across the four case study schools. For teachers, we conducted stratified, random purposeful sampling to select a cross-section of English, math, and science teachers in each case-study school. We were specifically interested in these teachers because they taught tested subject areas and therefore faced accountability pressures. For students, we utilized a stratified purposeful sampling strategy based on course-taking patterns. In each school, one student focus group consisted of students classified as taking *honors/advanced* courses, another consisted of students primarily enrolled in *regular* courses, and the third consisted of students taking primarily *remedial* courses. Student focus groups consisted of eight to twelve students each. Likewise, six students from each case-study school were identified for interviews based on their course assignment track. The research team interviewed three students from the honors/advanced track and three students from the regular assignment track; these students represented the demographics of the student body (Rutledge et al., 2012). The number of participants for each school is listed in Table 3.

Interview questions were based upon a framework of essential components of effective high schools that framed the larger study from which this research is drawn (Rutledge, Cohen-Vogel, Osborne-Lampkin, & Roberts, 2015). These components included learning-centered leadership, organization of the learning environment, culture of learning and professional behavior, systemic performance accountability, personalized learning connections, quality instruction, rigorous and

Table 3. Participants by Case-Study School.

	LVA		HVA	
	Bayfront	Starling	Torreya	Water Oak
Teachers (total)	18	16	15	18
English	6	6	6	6
Math	6	5	4	6
Science	6	5	5	6
Student Int.	6	6	6	6
Student FG	2	3	3	2

Note. LVA = lower value added, HVA = higher value added, Student Int. = Student Interview, Student FG = Student Focus Group

aligned curriculum, systemic use of data, variability in student experiences, and connections to external communities (e.g., Dolejs, 2006; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2006). Of particular concern to our inquiry on the existence and contexts of caring, we focused our analysis on questions that asked how teachers supported students' learning, how teachers and the schools facilitated student-adult relationships and students' sense of belongingness to the school, how teachers felt supported by administrators and colleagues, and the school's overall strengths and challenges. (See the Appendix for the complete teacher and student interview guides.)

Data analysis

To determine the extent to which and the contexts wherein teachers cared for students, we analyzed teacher interviews, student interviews, and student focus groups. The inclusion of teacher and student voices allowed for data triangulation (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and revealed whether the students reciprocated teachers' perceptions of caring (Noddings, 2005).

Two researchers coded the data to promote reliability in the coding process. To establish reliability, the coding pair analyzed and scored the same transcripts on the theoretical codes. The coding pair met weekly to work through coding inconsistencies and to refine the coding framework. Once inter-rater reliability was established, researchers individually coded the data. This process was repeated for teacher and student transcripts. As the researchers individually coded, they wrote in-depth memos that synthesized coded transcripts for each case-study school. The team continued to meet to discuss potential issues in the coding process, emergent codes, and disconfirming evidence (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the case of disconfirming evidence, the team worked collaboratively to revise its coding structure (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data were analyzed iteratively through theory-generated codes from the corpus of caring literature discussed in the conceptual framework above

and open coding derived from the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Through this process, the resulting coding framework included the broad constructs of *aesthetic care*, *authentic care*, *hard caring*, *uncaring*, and *contexts*. Table 4 provides a complete list of codes. Initial a priori codes that were derived from the caring literature included the broad constructs of *aesthetic care* (e.g., Valenzuela, 1999), *authentic care* (e.g., Valenzuela, 1999), *hard care* (e.g., Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006), and *context* (e.g., Aness, 2003). Initial sub-codes under aesthetic care included *test scores*, *grades*, and *attendance rates* (e.g., Shiller, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). Authentic care sub-codes included *accessibility*, *dialogue*, *family and friendship*, *mentorship*, *personal supports*, *parent/community involvement*, *respect*, *trust*, *students practice caring*, and *addressing sociopolitical realities* (e.g., Aness, 2003; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Noddings, 2005; Rivera-McCutchen, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999). *Academic supports*, *high expectations*, *leveraging relationships for academic learning*, and *teacher persistence* were codes derived from the literature on hard caring (Aness, 2003; Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Bondy & Ross, 2008; Rivera-McCutchen, 2012). Contexts consisted of *organizational structures* such as extracurricular activities, size, and time (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; McQuillan, 1997; Noddings, 2005; Rodriguez, 2007; Schussler & Collins, 2006) and *professionalism*, including leadership, classroom supports, collaboration, and autonomy (Aness, 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; McQuillan, 1997).

District and state policies, an inductive code that emerged from the data, captured participants' reference to accountability policies (e.g., district and

Table 4. Coding Framework.

Caring Codes		Context Codes
<i>Aesthetic Caring</i>	<i>Authentic Caring</i>	<i>District/State Policy</i>
Attendance	Accessibility	Accountability
Grades	Community involvement	Budget/resources
Graduation	Dialogue	Curriculum
Test scores	Intimacy	
	Family/friendship	<i>Structures/Organization</i>
<i>Uncaring</i>	Personal supports	Extracurriculars
Deficit views—parents	Mentorship	Facilities
Deficit views—students	Respect	Size
Differentiated care	Parent involvement	Time
Un-aesthetic caring	Student practice caring	
Un-authentic caring	School belongingness	<i>Professionalism</i>
Un-hard caring	Sociopolitical realities	Autonomy
	Student welfare	Classroom support
		Collaboration
	<i>Hard Caring</i>	Facilities
	Academic supports	Leadership
	High expectations	
	Relationships for learning	
	Teacher persistence	

state testing and the state school-grade formula), district-mandated curriculum or instructional focus, or the district budget. A fifth broad construct emerged from the data, which we classified as *uncaring*. This included (a) *unaesthetic care*, or instances that teachers did not care about students' academic learning or performance, (b) *unauthentic care*, or examples of teachers not wanting to form relationships with students or support their socio-emotional needs, distrust, unfairness, or inaccessibility, (c) *deficit views*, where participants stated negative perceptions of students or students' parents, families, neighborhoods, and communities, and (d) *differentiated care*, where teachers showed authentic or hard care to some groups of students but not others. Using a constant comparative analysis (Glaser, 1965), we generated patterns and themes within and across schools to come to an understanding of how caring manifested itself in different comprehensive high school contexts in the same school district.

Results

Rather than fall in a binary of caring or uncaring schools, our in-depth analyses revealed that our four case-study schools formed a continuum of care: *isolated caring*, *pockets of caring*, and *caring communities* (see Figure 1). Participants at all schools described state and district policies—such as frequent testing and the mandated instructional focus calendar to guide the curriculum—as unresponsive to the needs of teachers and students. However, the way that individual teachers and school leaders interacted with students and structured the school environment facilitated different levels of caring. In schools with caring communities, faculty and administration created a school environment that emphasized high expectations and interpersonal relationships, while providing structures for academic and personal supports. This may have mediated potentially deleterious effects of uncaring state and district mandates found in the school with isolated caring, such as low morale amongst teachers and students, low expectations, and a lack of students' sense of belongingness. The following section first describes where each case-study school fell on the continuum of care. Then, it explains the school contexts that differentiated the isolating caring, pockets of caring, and caring community schools.

Isolated care: Starling

Participant interviews revealed a pervasive uncaring atmosphere at Starling. While there were isolated pockets of teachers who demonstrated authentic and hard caring practices, the caring in the school overall was characterized by immense testing pressure, low academic rigor, and a lack of relationships between students and teachers and students and the school. Starling reflected

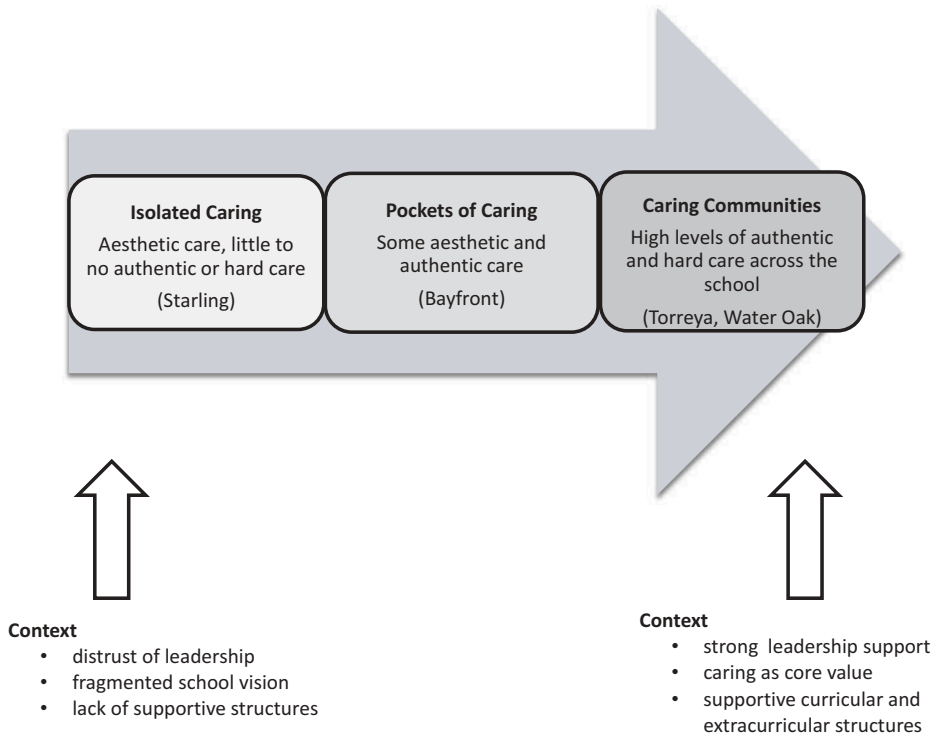


Figure 1. Continuum of care.

what Valenzuela (1999) found in her ethnography of a comprehensive urban high school—an emphasis on caring about students’ test scores rather than caring for and respecting students’ holistic needs and no room to engage students in authentic curriculum that connected to students’ experiences, interests, and sociocultural realities (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006).

Aesthetic care

The dominant type of care observed at Starling was aesthetic care. A school-wide emphasis on FCAT test scores dominated interview responses related to leadership and academic supports. Nearly all teachers reported that the principal only cared about test scores. For example, April, a third-year chemistry teacher, commented, “All he talks about is numbers. The kids to him mean numbers. All he wants is to keep his job and make sure we meet AYP, so he looks good. I think that’s all he wants, honestly.” The academic supports that the school provided also focused on FCAT preparation, including providing students monetary incentives for high performance, Saturday FCAT camp, “drill and kill” FCAT practice packets, FCAT pull-out interventions led by the district, FCAT practice bell-work, and a shift in academic

instruction concentrated on teaching to the test. As Cindy, a 20-year veteran 10th and 12th grade English teacher, pointed out,

In all honesty, the principal is concerned only with scores. Quite frankly, I don't blame him because the state says, "Listen, we will give benefits to those schools who earn B's and A's, and show improvement, and if your school doesn't show improvement you don't get the same monetary benefits or programs" Basically it's about money and trying to get our scores higher, so we are forced to teach to a test. A lot of teachers don't want to admit that, but we are forced to teach to a test that the kids are not necessarily ready for.

This was accompanied by numerous teacher complaints that "the kids are so over-assessed," the school was "just a testing site at times," and "some of my kids say they don't have fun. FCAT. FCAT. FCAT." Testing was especially problematic for the half of teachers, representing English, math, and science, who expressed that it took away from instructional time and some teachers who believed that tests were not "valid or reliable" in demonstrating what students actually knew.

About half of teachers reported that students did not care for the tests either. According to teachers, teaching to the test was "boring" and "irrelevant" for students; furthermore, a few teachers complained that students did not try hard on the FCAT or district practice FCAT tests. Sarah, a biology teacher explained, "kids know that the science FCAT doesn't mean anything, so they are not going to try their hardest every spring." Many students also held strong, unfavorable opinions on testing, citing too much pressure, fear of doing poorly, and tediousness. Miranda, an honors/advanced student, went so far as to question the principal about his FCAT incentive policy, arguing that the school needed to provide students basic learning materials first:

One time my English teacher was absent and the school principal came to the class and he addressed a \$50 incentive for everybody that got a six on the writing. With all due respect, I kind of pointed a few things out to him that weren't very good around the school, like some laptops are missing keys on them. Three of my core classes don't have a class set of books. Just very important things that he should notice before he passes out \$50 to anybody that did well on the writing. . .I received a few incentives, yes, but that's not really what matters to me. To me, it's more important to have a class set of books.

The comment by this student is reminiscent of the Latina middle school students in Rolón-Dow's (2005) study who perceived the lack of school materials and dilapidated facilities as evidence that the school did not care for their education.

A handful of teachers, most of whom represented the English department, also appeared to care about test scores reflecting badly upon their professional reputation and lowering workplace morale. They disliked that the

administration judged them by student FCAT scores and benchmark exams and reported that the tests made them “worried,” “anxious,” “exhausted,” and fearful of “embarrassment” if their scores were lower than other teachers. Mary Catherine, an English teacher, even reported that she passed out from FCAT-induced stress. Test-related teacher stress trickled down to students. As Ben, a novice chemistry teacher, explained, “We all get very stressed with [testing] and sometimes we end up taking it out on the students.”

Little hard care

While administrators and many teachers directed academic attention to the state assessment, a number of students in the focus groups and interviews reported that a number of teachers in the school did not care about educating them at all. For example, a student in the “regular” track focus group stated,

They need to get some more teachers that do care because some of my teachers be sayin’, “oh, we don’t care, I don’t care if you get your education or not, I got mine, I got my degree, I’m workin’ here, I don’t care if you do your work or not, so that’s just you.”

Aaron, an English teacher, corroborated this sentiment, saying, “Some of these people also don’t really care about the kids they teach. They look forward to summer and vacations.” Students also reported instances of teachers who “really didn’t teach you.” Such teachers handed out assignments without explaining them or did not answer questions that students asked. Students reported some academic rigor in the AP classes, but for the majority of students in regular classes, honors classes, or AP classes where students had low FCAT scores, teachers reported that these students would not do well, thus revealing low expectations.

Little authentic care

There was a dearth of positive, interpersonal relationships at Starling. First, students reported that, in general, teachers were inaccessible. For example, Sam, an honors/advanced student, noted that students had to take the initiative to seek teachers out in order to learn:

Teaching wise, it’s really just—you have to care. I know the whole class cannot care and teacher will be okay. If you, yourself, go to the teacher and try to benefit yourself, then you can. I think they will care if you come up and say, oh, I know nobody else cares, but I want to learn. I know in my seventh period, everybody would talk and didn’t really care, and I was like, I need to pass the FCAT. Can you teach me? He sat there and he taught me. So, it’s up to you, you know. Not up to the teacher.

That Sam knew teachers did not take responsibility for teaching students, never mind reach out to them, is particularly problematic as Noddings (1984) and Valenzuela (1999) have both noted that due to teachers’ relative power as

compared to students, teachers should initiate relationships. When teachers do not, students come to not expect that teachers care, and in turn, may be less engaged or not try as hard as they could in school (Valenzuela, 1999).

Second, teachers did not try to get to know their students on a personal level or build relationships with family members and the community. Instead, the vast majority of teachers blamed students' low SES background as the reason for academic failure. Multiple teachers reported that the students were a weakness of the school, stating that students had little academic skills, low test scores, and bad home lives. Teachers also described students using phrases such as bored, don't care, disrespectful, behavior problems, lazy, "dumber than dirt." and "thugs." This derogatory language was similar to the low expectations that students at a small community school, El Puente, reported encountering at the traditional public high schools they formerly attended (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006). Furthermore, it was reminiscent of the voices of teachers in Valenzuela's (1999) ethnography that blamed students for not caring about school when in fact students desired that adults in the school reach out to them to form reciprocal relationships. Such language suggests that it was the attitudes rather than organizational structures within Starling that prevented reciprocal relationships from forming. Such deficit views extended to parents; almost all teachers assumed that because of their low SES, parents were not involved in the education of their children. As Cindy stated, "We don't have the affluent parent. Again, it's easy to blame the parent, but we don't have the same affluence that we had before." Although teachers had negative perceptions of parents, students reported that parents and extended families cared about their grades and motivated them to do well in school.

Third, students reported that they did not feel connected to the school as a result of feeling uncared for. One student in the remedial course focus group explained, "Not just the funding but just the people that are here, like most of the majority of them don't really care. Like even the teachers and stuff don't care." Students did not seem to care for each other either. For example, a student in the honors/advanced focus group stated that he did not care how other students performed, and was only concerned about his own GPA. This lack of school connection is problematic as school belongingness has positive associations with graduation rates and school performance (Baker et al., 1997). In addition, the lack of reported connection corroborates research that suggests an emphasis on test-based accountability, the lack of personalization, and student alienation in comprehensive public high schools is associated with increased dropout rates and decreased student performance (Carter, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Johnson, 2009; Schussler & Collins, 2006).

However, there were caveats. A few individual teachers reported making efforts to build relationships with students, engage in dialogue, and provide

academic supports. Such authentic caring practices that teachers described included greeting students every day at the front of the door, helping students navigate social services, and being accessible to students to talk about personal issues. When asked, students in both focus groups described the teachers in the schools who cared about them as those who went out of their way for them, such as the teacher who spent money out of their own pocket to ensure students had a functioning science lab and teachers “who take the time to help you out.” Yet these efforts were not systematically supported across the school, resulting in isolated caring relationships.

Context of caring

Multiple student and adult participants believed that the school did nothing to help build caring relationships between students and teachers. Instead, teachers and students interviewed at Starling pointed to (1) a distrust and dislike toward the school administration, (2) a perceived lack of support from school leadership, and (3) a core value emanating from the administration that the school focus should be test scores. Rather than exhibiting strong leadership that supported relationships between teachers and administrators (Johnson, 2009), Starling’s leadership created a standardized, bureaucratic workplace characterized by a lacked morale and lack of teacher commitment to students (Beck, 1994).

First, the vast majority of teachers spoke negatively about the principal; complaints included that “he [had] no backbone,” was “inconsistent,” and was “unsupportive.” One teacher blamed the lack of strictness of the administration for why the school had a “D” grade, and claimed that veteran teachers similarly blamed the school “falling apart” on administration. Half of the interviewed teachers, representing all subject areas, suggested that there was distrust between the faculty and administrators as well. When asked if the principal did anything to limit their ability to work with students, April, a science teacher, replied,

If they say one thing, like you are going to have hall sweep, and then there is no hall sweep, or they tell us one thing and they tell the student different things. Sometimes what happens is that for the FCAT, they try to make it important. They [the administrators] say they [the students] are going to win all these prizes, and they don’t win the prize, it makes it me seem like why am I trying.

This response suggests that the perceived empty promises that the administrators made lowered teachers’ effort.

Second, most teachers reported that the administration did not provide school-wide supports to foster hard or authentic care. Any support teachers reported receiving was from their colleagues. For example, a science teacher described her support system in the following way: “My own support. My department supports. Sometimes I don’t think the

administration, or the principal knows how much hard work I put in, or other teachers put in, to the work that we do here.” Any school-wide supports for caring were sporadic or constrained to a small subset of students. The school did institute a mentoring program, but the targets of the program were students categorized as the lowest 25% of test scores. No structures were in place to help the other 75% of students connect to adults in the school or orient them toward future college enrollment or careers. Most participants reported that the school had a variety of afterschool clubs and sports, and teachers who did coach or sponsor clubs thought it helped them forge relationships with students. As one teacher-coach stated, “I attend all of the sporting events that I can. The kids like to see the teachers involved.” Yet teachers and students did not think that the administration encouraged students or teachers to participate. According to students in the regular course focus group, “They [the administrators] really don’t tell you what’s going on.” That same teacher-coach stated, “I really can’t think of anything that the school is doing to help us improve our relationships with our kids. It’s more what are we doing.” Other teachers suggested that as a result, the school lacked student connectedness. Multiple students even expressed that they disliked the school and preferred to attend somewhere else. Though there were supportive structures in place at Starling, the school leadership failed to show support for them.

Third, this disconnect was exacerbated by perceived differences in what the administration and teachers wanted for students. Nearly every teacher stated that what the principal wanted for the school was higher test scores and complying with the district. Harrison, an English teacher, went so far as to call the administration “nice robots.” However, many teachers did not measure the value of their work in test scores, and suggested that the emphasis on testing compromised their ability to engage students academically and get to know them personally. Herman, another English teacher, remarked, “I think that’s been the downside of all of this emphasis on data collection and testing is that many teachers feel that if this is the way they are going to be assessed, that’s the way I need to teach.” Sarah also noted that accountability compromised the formation of personal teacher-student relationships:

It’s hard to get to know our students the past couple of years because we feel like we are on a time schedule. If we are off our [curriculum] map, administrators and the county look at us and say, “why are you behind, why are you not on,” so a lot of teachers have said, “I don’t get to know my students because it’s instruction, instruction, instruction.”

These disparate visions of what teachers and administrators wanted for students revealed that teachers felt like they could not engage in instruction

that would form more caring relationships because the administration did not value it.

Pockets of caring teachers: Bayfront

Analysis of interviews conducted at Bayfront indicated a general sense of authentic and aesthetic care amongst teachers, administrators, and students, though student and teacher interviews suggested that a subset of teachers demonstrated uncaring attitudes and practices. There was less evidence of hard care, particularly high academic rigor, for all students. In contrast to Starling, Bayfront teachers expressed a mixed perception of the school leadership, although participants generally thought that the principal cared about the students. They also had extracurricular programs that some students felt connected to. However, a sense of belongingness fostered through extracurricular activities was not pervasive across all students.

Aesthetic care

Both teachers and students indicated a high overall emphasis on test performance and moving the school from a “B” to an “A.” When asked to discuss the administration’s overall goal for the school and the school’s greatest strength, about half of the teachers mentioned improved achievement on FCAT and pass rates for students. As James, a math teacher who had taught at the school for 7 years, stated, “We have a B. [The principal] is not satisfied. We want to get that A. That’s what we are aiming for, shooting for.” Emotions surrounding test performance were mixed. As one teacher reported, “I think as a school we try really hard. The whole school wants to get an A. It’s not like we have a lot of negativity.” However, other teachers stated discontent with FCAT testing and the school-wide emphasis on getting an A grade. For example, Karen, a first-year science teacher, lamented,

My biggest thing is quit testing. It’s not doing them any good. I don’t care what they say. We do teach to the test. I always said, isn’t it better to find out what they know, or not know, rather than let’s spend three months out of your nine month educational period in school teaching a test. There is a lot of other stuff that goes on besides what’s on an FCAT. I don’t get it.

Ben, a seventh-year English teacher, complained that some people in the school “want an A for bragging rights” but that the accountability environment created a negative atmosphere for teachers and students:

It was a scare tactic when we were told, if we received a certain grade we would have people from the county coming in telling us how to instruct our children. We made as many gains across the board as we could, except for that deep 30 percent that is just engrained in mediocrity, low scores, and not giving a care. We have to pick up their slack, if they don’t do it, because we become accountable. English, we

are supposed to be top man. We are low man. I have kids in my class who have horrible test anxiety. They get the test results back—it's not their fault. It's just they can't take the test. They fall asleep during the test because they stayed up until 3 o'clock in the morning. So a test result is nothing.

This suggested that the administrators “cared about” test scores rather than “cared for” students as individuals (Noddings, 1984), which frustrated some teachers and for others, led them to blame the student for low scores as had been done in Starling.

Differentiated hard care

Teachers also reported a lack of rigor due to FCAT testing and explained how it contributed to divisions in the expectations of students depending on the courses they took. Teachers and students expressed a difference in the level of rigor for AP students as opposed to those in general classes. An English teacher explained,

There seems to be an interesting division between those people who are teaching the classes that deal with FCAT, and the other people who are teaching classes that deal with say AP. I see the division all of the time, particularly in our English department. It's like, you guys need to get everybody ready for FCAT, or you guys need to them get ready for our AP classes. I don't want to say one group looks down on the other, but you can see the difference in attitude of my class who don't deal with FCAT. There is always this attitude of, we can do the higher level stuff, because we don't have to focus on FCAT.

This suggested that rigor was determined by the tests, rather than the attitude of holding high expectations for students' future success (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006).

Students also perceived this difference in rigor; as Jessie, a student taking honors/advanced courses, explained, “Honors and AP history are two different things. In honors, you colored a map. . .it's nothing compared to what the AP kids had to do.” This provides evidence of differentiated care in Bayfront, where rigorous instruction was reserved for certain students. Another honors/advanced student suggested that the faculty was split over whether they cared if students even learned at all:

I know some teachers it seems like they don't care. They are just here to teach you what they are supposed to teach you, from the book, and they don't care what time is wasted or what not. They care because they get paid no matter what. I know some other teachers they do care about their students and they try to teach them as much they can, so they progress a lot when they go to college and they get a good job.

In this regard, teachers who did care about students' futures helped them succeed, but this was not pervasive across the school.

Authentic care

Virtually all of the Bayfront teachers described ways that they demonstrated authentic care for students, including regularly talking to students in an attempt to get to know them and making themselves accessible before and after school for academic and extracurricular support. As Armond, an experienced math teacher, reported:

I talk to them. We talk during class, or they talk to me in the hallway. They know about me. They know I have a wife, they know I have a child. I tell them stories about my kid. . . They know about me a little bit, so they feel comfortable to tell me about them. I have good rapport with the kids.

Teachers in the school also frequently made themselves available to students. Joseph, an English teacher, reported “a lot of teacher involvement as far as clubs are concerned” and “an overall attitude in the school where there are a lot of teachers who have personal relationships with students, and will stay after or come before school.” Jane, a veteran math teacher of 33 years, shared her experience of being asked to serve as a homecoming chaperone and building relationships with students that way: “The students choose who is going to be at homecoming and proms as chaperones. Like this year, they all came to my classroom and wanted me to be one of the chaperones for the homecoming, which I felt, you can’t turn a student down when they ask you.”

The majority of teachers interviewed also shared instructional practices that allowed students to share personal information, incorporated students’ interests into lessons, and encouraged group work to help students become acquainted with one another. English teacher Sharon described:

I like to make them write about themselves as much as possible. Yesterday we did write about the person next to you, but it had to be something nice. That was fun because each person came up and brought me their paragraph and it was about somebody else, but the way that students write about somebody else is fantastic because they help me. I am still learning about them, even when they are writing about somebody else.

These practices helped teachers get to know students and form trusting relationships. However, as previous scholarship has suggested (Rodriguez, 2007), absent an equal focus on leveraging relationships to press for academic rigor, teachers in Bayfront did not embody a holistic ethic of care.

Context of caring

In this environment with pockets of aesthetic, authentic, and hard care, Bayfront teachers and students generally felt supported by the principal and suggested that the school had a number of extracurricular programs that helped build relationships between students and teachers and students

and the school; however, this was not ubiquitous across all students. Concerning the administration, teachers generally described the principal as “very caring, not just for teachers but for students overall” and “visible.” According to many teachers, the principal wanted students to excel, the school to have a “family spirit” throughout where students “feel like they can go to anybody with their problems or situations,” and “to make everybody happy on every level, and every angle.” Students expressed positive perceptions about the principal as well, but held mixed perceptions about the rest of the administration. Several honors/advanced and regular course-taking students in both focus groups and interviews individually mentioned the principal as an adult in the school who helped them feel as though they belonged to the school family. Other students, across course levels, felt like the assistant principals focused too much on discipline, citing practices such the lock-out—where administration locked the school door the second school started and sent anyone late to detention—as “unnecessary.”

The majority of teachers also reported that the school had many extracurricular activities available for students in which the majority of students were active. As Carla, a biology teacher, stated, “We have a ton of after-school programs. The teachers that sponsor these clubs build these great relationships. . . For the most part kids are involved. Almost half my classes are involved in some club. Their teachers I think build that environment.” Louis, another science teacher, concurred, saying,

As a whole the entire school does try to get students involved. I don’t think there is anyone in this school who is saying, “no, be apathetic.” I think that we do have the good attitude in this school, as far as you see with most teachers. You are going to see some that are lost in the shuffle, but for the most part, I think we have a good support system.

The Bayfront Club served as an example of one extracurricular activity that supported students academically and socially. Yesenia, a science teacher, described it as follows:

[The Bayfront Club] is a select group of teachers, and we each have three to four students that we mentor. We are called coaches and they are our players, the lowest 25 percent, and it’s a way of being able to pull them aside and handle the outside issues so they can focus better in class. Hopefully, that is translated even if it doesn’t translate on the FCAT, hopefully, they just enjoy school more.

While this quote illuminates how the Bayfront Club mentoring program provided personal and academic supports to students, it also shows that the push to develop a sense of belongingness was only targeted toward the lowest performing students.

As with teachers, students similarly described pockets of extracurricular participation. Some interviewed students were highly involved in extracurricular activities, and described how it helped them feel a stronger sense of

engagement and belonging to the school community. According to Lesley, a sophomore in the honors/advanced focus group:

I feel like being in extracurricular activities helps you come to school. Like you kind of look forward to it a little bit. I am in a sophomore class, I am in student government, in track, and Spanish club, so it takes time out of my life, but when I come to school, like you know people and—it's just not boring.

However, this sentiment was not shared across all students. As another student, Trey, reported in the honors/advanced focus group, “It depends on the student. Some of the students are really spirited here and others aren't.”

Even students who reported high involvement expressed disappointment at the lack of cohesiveness and school spirit amongst their classmates. Another honors/advanced student, Shante, shared,

I am in student government, and that's our job to get the spirit up, to get people to participate. It's almost like as soon as an idea is put out there, negativity goes out. Our homecoming was nicely decorated. We had a DJ. It was nicer than other schools' venue, and we had just over 100 people go. We lost money.

Fellow student athlete Brandon concurred, saying “I have pride in my clubs and baseball, but I don't really feel anything towards the actual school. I don't know why that is.”

Other students expressed that several cliques existed among the student body, which lessened the connections students felt to the school. One honors/advanced student, Nneka, reported, “We don't interact with each other. We stay to the group of people we know. It's bad.” Shante, in answering whether students felt like they were a part of the school, responded, “No. Not at all. If you see us at lunch, everybody has their own little click. Like Spanish people here, and they have their own little wall.” While extracurricular activities provided some students an avenue to form caring relations, those structures weren't enough to create a culture of caring across all students.

Caring communities: Torreya and Water Oak

In contrast to Starling and Bayfront, the caring communities created in Torreya and Water Oak embodied authentic and hard care. As with alternative and small community high schools identified as caring (e.g., Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Schussler & Collins, 2006), adults across each school built relationships with the majority of the student population, facilitated a strong sense of belongingness amongst students and faculty, held high expectations for all students' current and future success, and provided students with supports to reach those expectations. In addition, Torreya and Water Oak stood out from Starling and Bayfront in their exuberant support toward the school leadership, emphasis on

students and teachers participating in extracurricular activities, and looping structures that facilitated a tight-knit community.

Authentic care

The vast majority of participants in both schools highlighted the pervasiveness of strong relationships between students and teachers, students with each other, and students and the school. Symbolizing the close-knit ties between individuals at the school, many student and teacher participants at Water Oak referred to one another as “family.” Teachers in these schools emphasized the importance of forming relationships for students’ success in school. As Torreyia teacher Nancy stated, “I think that’s a number-one thing, to make a difference; if you have a relationship with the student and being able to talk to them, because if they like you, or they respect you, I think that makes a difference.” Ryan, a Water Oak 10th and 11th grade English teacher explained about his teaching style, “I try to reach each and every single student somehow, some way. That’s what I think is important, to show you are able to be like a father figure to them.”

Teachers formed caring relationships both in and outside of the classroom. In the classroom, teachers created assignments that helped them get to know students, such as writing personal poems in English class, noting what activities students are involved in through formal questionnaires, and observing what they do around the school, then using that information to start conversations. In addition, teachers took time to discuss personal and social issues. Teachers shared their own life challenges and successes to relate to students and took the time during and outside of class to talk to students one-on-one to provide guidance on personal issues.

Teachers also reached out to students’ families. For example, nearly all Water Oak teachers reported that they kept the lines of communication open with parents, making phone calls and sending emails on a regular basis about students’ successes and challenges and having an open door policy that “encouraged” parents to visit the school. Teachers in both schools expressed that reaching out to parents about student tardiness, truanancies, and missed assignments helped them become engrossed in students’ lives, because that communication often revealed difficult situations in which students were living. Once parents were contacted, teachers reported that behaviors generally improved, illustrating how teacher-parent communication helped build trusting relationships with students and their families.

In Torreyia and Water Oak, students reported that they cared for one another as well, evidenced in cooperative work in class, peer tutoring, and informally helping one another out during lunch and extracurricular activities. During an honors/advanced focus group, a Water Oak student described his role as football team captain as, “Mostly it’s being just cooperative with everybody else on the team with the same objective. Proper

cooperation and leadership skills fall underneath the captain of the football team.” Another honors/advanced Water Oak student, Jo, described how students in the same AP classes provided an additional academic support system: “If you don’t understand, and your friends are willing to help, they are right there to help you. If don’t understand a certain question, they will assist you so that you understand.” Furthermore, all students interviewed at Water Oak and Torreyia felt a strong sense of belongingness to the school. Students agreed that their schools were “good schools” and took pride in being involved in sports and clubs. This sense of students practicing caring (Noddings, 2005) and student-to-student relationships have been found to be important to student success as they foster a sense of school belongingness and personal and academic support (Schussler & Collins, 2006).

Hard caring

Torreyia and Water Oak teachers also exhibited hard caring, evident in the emphasis on rigor, future orientation toward college, and abundance of academic supports. Torreyia students thought that the school held them to a “high caliber” by encouraging all students to take AP courses. At both Torreyia and Water Oak, nearly all students suggested that adults in the school pushed them to be future-oriented—with goals for attending college and becoming a doctor, for example—and reported that the school itself was “very involved with other colleges.” Students also reported that most adults in their respective schools, including teachers and coaches, pushed them to succeed. A regular track Water Oak student stated that “all of my teachers push their students to get better,” and further emphasized the role her cheerleading coach played:

The one person that I do talk to is my cheerleading coach. She has high expectations for me, and she pushes me to become a doctor, to become a better cheerleader, bring my grades up, so it’s easier. I mean, they all encourage high expectation, but I have a closer relationship with her because I see her. I am able to talk to her with anything. So it’s like all of my teachers expect me to get this and get that, but with her I am more aware of it because I am with her most of the time.

Torreyia teachers held similar college-oriented expectations for students. As Sheree, an honors/advanced student, stated in an interview, adults in the school “expect me to pass and care deeply for my grades.” The student went on to describe how all teachers expect students to go to college:

At the beginning of the year most of them ask, how many of you are expecting to go to university, and if there are some people that don’t raise their hand they say, by the end of the year I expect all of you to raise your hands if I ask this question again.

The push for college and an emphasis on students’ futures, similarly identified in prior research on caring (Knight-Diop, 2010), distinguished

caring school communities from Bayfront and Starling, whose expectations for students centered on test scores.

Teachers in these caring school communities not only held high expectations for students' futures, but provided academic supports to help students reach those expectations. Generally all Water Oak and Torreya teachers reported being accessible before and after school. Further, the majority of students interviewed at Water Oak reported that teachers emphasized rigorous instruction, provided support for college preparation, and made themselves accessible to students outside of class to give extra help. As one regular course-taking student, Anna, said, "Before and after school my teachers have their door open to where if you want to come in, and you need help on something, they would come and help you with it." Torreya students across the board similarly emphasized that teachers cared about their academic success. As a Torreya student in the honors/advanced focus group shared:

Sometimes your teacher, if you're falling behind or you're slacking and your grades are dropping, they'll come up and ask you what you need or what's wrong, and they'll try to help you out so you can get a good grade in their class. It's not like if you pass you pass if you fail you fail. They care.

This quote directly contrasts with Starling students who reported that students had to approach teachers to receive academic support. Rather, in these caring school communities, students and teachers demonstrated reciprocal relationships whereby both the carer and cared-for felt comfortable approaching one another.

Context of caring

Strong leadership that supported both teachers and students, caring as a core value, and curricular and extracurricular structures that facilitated relationships characterized the school contexts where hard and authentic caring thrived. Nearly all Torreya teachers and Water Oak teachers described the school leadership in positive terms such as "uplifting," "amazing," "motivating," "supportive," and "phenomenal." Teachers also reported that the school leadership was highly supportive and trusting of them. Nicole, an experienced Water Oak math teacher, stated, "We have an administration that supports you, like trusts you. Yes, you are accountable, but you almost just do it automatically. You don't feel like you got cameras looking at you. They trust you to do a good job."

In addition, teachers and students reported that the principals were concerned about the academic success *and* general welfare of students. Principals at these schools championed academic rigor and personal relationships. For example, Barbara, an algebra and geometry teacher who had taught two out of her 12 years as an educator at Water Oak, described the principal as having "a very good vision. His vision is keep moving the school forward and

higher, and that it become one of the best schools in [the county], not only academically, but as a big family.” Ken, a Water Oak English teacher, similarly described the principal as

...an amazing man. Very positive, very people oriented, very supportive. He wants what’s best for this school. He wants us to achieve. He wants to obviously make the learning gains and numbers. But, I truly believe he is an individual that wants to see people happy, enjoying what they are doing, and he creates an atmosphere that’s positive to work in, positive to learn in, and I have nothing but positive things to say.

Students at Torreyia similarly described how they felt supported by their principal. Students concurred that “the principal actually cares about us,” providing evidence of how he knew students by name, checked in on their grades, asked them personal questions, and looked out for their safety. As Melvin, an honors/advanced student, stated, “If there’s anything that will harm the kids, the principal makes sure it doesn’t happen.”

At Torreyia, caring for students’ personal and academic well-being was infused in the core values of “do the right thing” and a “tradition of excellence,” which were introduced and reinforced by the principal. Students and faculty embraced the “do the right thing” mantra; as one teacher put it, “it’s written on the wall, it’s everywhere. They are supposed to be doing the right thing, whether it’s school, or just like the way they interact with each other.” Torreyia student Ryan, on the regular course-taking path, stressed the importance of maintaining the school’s reputation of excellence: “Especially since the principal announced yesterday that we’re an A school for the sixth year in a row, it makes you want to keep up. Our standards are high.” Though Schussler and Collins (2006) noted from their research in a small alternative high school that it was easier to adopt an agreed-upon core value in schools of choice, Torreyia in particular revealed its feasibility in traditional public high schools as well.

Finally, looping structures and widespread participation in extracurricular activities, which can make large schools more personal and forge relationships between students and adults in the school (e.g., Baker et al., 1997; McQuillan, 1997; Noddings, 2005), provided teachers and students an outlet to form relationships. Torreyia had small learning communities (SLCs) in which teachers, counselors, and administrators shared the same group of students for ninth and tenth grade. Teachers sharing the same group of students provided them the structure to collaborate around students’ academic, behavioral, and personal needs and to get to know their students better. Water Oak’s CAT program, a college preparation program within the school in which students took the same core classes for two years, created a family environment that fostered high expectations and personal supports. Teachers in the program described how it

“nurtured” and “took care of” the students, while students explained how this sense of connection formed a “family” environment that helped them improve their GPAs.

While all of the case-study schools had extracurricular programs in place, the leadership in Torrey and Water Oak heavily encouraged student *and* teacher participation, and supported a culture amongst faculty of attending after-school events such as sports and plays. This was reported by multiple teachers in Water Oak. As Chris, an English teacher, described,

They do encourage the teachers to go to games, or plays, or rallies for the kids outside of schools. They encourage the teachers to go there, so the students get to see you and they know you are caring about them. The school is very supportive of that too. The school does encourage that a lot. This is a very good school as far as pushing student and teacher relations.

These schools provided an abundance of activities for students to participate in, ranging from sports to arts to community service. The majority of students interviewed individually or in focus groups reported that extracurriculars helped them feel connected to the school, feel cared for, and reach future goals. Honors/advanced Water Oak student Cara emphasized the importance of extracurricular activities in facilitating a sense of connection to the school:

I think it has to do with how much you get involved. I don't know that many people that don't like it, because the people that I hang around are very involved. They care about being in school, coming and doing your school work, getting your stuff done. I play softball, and I'm in student government. I love it here, but that's because I do things and I keep myself busy.

A Torrey student expressed the same sentiment, saying, “There are a lot of opportunities to find something that makes you feel a part of this school. We've got like a bajillion clubs, and if you don't find the one you want you can start it.” Extracurriculars also provided more opportunities for teachers to form relationships with students. As Bertha, a math teacher explained, “with this club I am the sponsor, I have developed a lot of interaction with students I never would have.”

Participants also described how extracurricular activities promoted academic success in addition to relationships. Students reported that teachers who coached sports or sponsored clubs constantly checked in on their grades and provided academic supports via study halls and tutoring sessions. Lonnie, an honors student and senior on the soccer team explained how his soccer coach cared for his academic success, saying “Soccer and [Teacher J], [Teacher J's] on top of our grades like white on rice. So, I'm a senior, and it's embarrassing if a senior doesn't start at a game, and who doesn't want to start?” Likewise, a student on the debate team said, “[During] debate, [Teacher G] is always asking

what our grades are, if we need help in a certain area, and [Teacher G] will try to get students to help us and tutor us.” This demonstrates the interconnected of students’ academic and social needs and the role of schools in providing activities for students that can simultaneously meet both of those needs (Ancess, 2003).

Discussion

The study revealed differences in the way that four large, urban high schools in the same school district cared for their students in the context of high-stakes, test-based accountability. Our findings extend the notion found in research on the critical small-school movement and its “mainstream” counterpart to large, comprehensive high schools: size does not determine the extent of caring (e.g., Ancess, 2008; Shiller, 2009). Rather, as Ancess (2008) argued, the “inevitability of caring depends on the determination to establish and sustain such relationships as a norm of the school’s culture” (p. 50). As such, this contributes to the literature by pointing to the intersection of aesthetic, hard, and authentic caring in large, diverse public high schools and the challenges and possibilities of creating caring environments in that setting.

As Antrop-González and De Jesús (2006) suggested in their discussion of hard versus soft care, our four case-study schools did not fall on a binary of caring or uncaring. Rather, schools fell on a continuum characterized by specific types and prevalence of care. In Starling, the *isolated caring* school, there was a prevalence of aesthetic care, coupled with a school context with a distrust of leadership, a fragmented school vision, and a lack of structures that facilitated student-teacher relationships. This school had the lowest value-added score and the lowest Florida school grade across the four case-study sites. The comments of Starling students and teachers corroborated Valenzuela’s (1999) findings on the adverse effects of teachers only caring about grades, test scores, and appearances.

Bayfront, the second lower valued-added school, was characterized by *pockets of caring*. There was a prevalence of aesthetic care, particularly in regard to accountability measures, and authentic care, but a lack of hard care. Furthermore, while there was evidence of leadership and extracurricular supports for forging a caring school environment, this was not widespread across the school. Bayfront was similar to Bridges, a small school formed out of the restructuring of a failing high school in the Bronx that Rivera-McCutchen (2012) studied. In both schools, teachers attended to the affective needs of their students, but failed to hold rigorous expectations for students’ academic performance and neglected to focus on students’ future-oriented goals such as college readiness. This confirms what researchers have found in studying small high schools; that an emphasis on test scores is not sufficient, nor is neglecting to orient students toward college (Ancess, 2008). As

Rivera-McCutchen (2012) argued, “Providing students with emotional support is important but not sufficient. Without a fundamental belief that students are capable, the other qualities the literature identifies as part of a caring framework, including valuing parents and communities as resources and being knowledgeable about the sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts impacting their students are ultimately secondary” (p. 677).

The deepest levels of authentic and hard caring were prevalent in the two higher value-added case study schools: Torrey and Water Oak. The two higher value-added schools with *caring communities* had high levels of authentic and hard care across the school, facilitated by strong leadership that emphasized relationships, rigor as a core value, and participation in curricular and extracurricular programs. This upholds findings of prior research in schools born out of the critical small-school movement, which highlighted the importance of hard care in addition to authentic care in regards to scholastic achievement and attainment, particularly for low-income and minority students (e.g., Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006). Like the “communities of commitment” (Acess, 2003) found in alternative small urban high schools in New York City, adults in Torrey and Water Oak fostered relationships with students in order to attend to students’ personal and academic needs and help them obtain high expectations for their future.

Schussler and Collins (2006) contended that structural aspects of small, alternative high schools (i.e., size, autonomy from district mandates) contributed to the formation of caring relationships, and called on more research to study care in traditional public school contexts. Heeding that call, our comparative case-study design, in which the state and district policy contexts were held constant, allowed us to extend the literature on caring by teasing apart school-level factors that differentiating isolated caring, pockets of caring, and caring school communities. We found that it was not just structural and policy factors within large schools that forged a school context conducive to caring relationships, but the attitudes and actions of school leaders that demonstrated a commitment to cultivating caring school communities. That different levels of caring occurred in the same district context of ubiquitous high-stakes testing and a mandated curriculum emphasizes the need for school leaders within test-based accountability contexts to take responsibility for holding teachers internally accountable (Cobb & Rallis) for academic press and forging authentic relationships that allow them to stay attuned to students scholastic and personal needs. As such, our study holds implications for school leaders.

Implications for school leaders

As evidenced from Water Oak and Torreya, schools facing accountability pressures can still cultivate caring communities. The leaders in these schools supported specific classroom and school-level *practices, attitudes, and leadership styles* that cultivated caring school communities, which could serve as a guide for administrators in determining how to create similar communities in their own schools. Authentic and hard caring teacher practices, for example, included the intentional use of assignments to build personal relationships such as writing assignments or class discussions; frequent parent communication; supporting students in extracurricular activities; being accessible to students before, during, and after the school day for academic or personal support; and providing resources and supports to orient students toward successful futures. Although the school administration did not directly require these practices, teachers expressed that the principals' attitudes encouraged and supported them, thus creating an atmosphere where teachers felt comfortable taking the time to care for students.

At the school level, principals in caring school communities (1) had a core vision statement or mission centered on the holistic success of students, (2) strongly encouraged extracurricular involvement for students and teachers, and (3) had programs and structures in place that focused on students' futures (e.g., college and career) and personalized school for students (e.g., the CAT cohort, 9th and 10th grade looping, the Bayfront Club). The case-study design of our study precludes us from drawing causal inferences between practices and levels of care in schools, yet our findings suggest that principals could adopt these three practices to establish greater levels of care.

Finally, the principals in each of the caring school communities were reported as demonstrating a leadership style that lent itself to creating a caring school environment. Teachers pointed to the principal as a leading force in creating this environment, by caring about both academic and personal growth for students as well as maintaining a positive environment in which teachers were happy and enthusiastic to work. Administrators in these schools were praised for forging a high degree of mutual respect between leadership and faculty and students, while administrators in the school with isolated care were reported to be untrustworthy. Torreya and Water Oak principals were further commended by teachers for building camaraderie amongst faculty and administrators and working with teachers in creating school structures that fostered relationships. This exhibits an ethical leadership style found to help foster care in schools (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011), in contrast to the leadership style at Starling which far more reflected an authoritarian style uncondusive to caring.

An important contextual feature of this work is that the study was conducted in schools with significant proportions of students of color and students from low-income families. The research on caring leadership practices for these subgroups largely concludes that social justice and equity must remain at the fore (Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2009). However, very few teachers at Torrey and Water Oak brought up issues of inequities, race, class, cultural heritage, or the sociopolitical realities of students' lives, serving as reminder that this crucial aspect of care remains difficult to incorporate into traditional public high schools.

Further, the literature base on caring leadership further highlights that the role of school leadership's motivation and capacity to implement reforms aimed at improving student outcomes cannot be understated (Brown, 2006). For this reason, the authors are currently expanding this research to include data from interviews with school leaders at each of the four participating schools in order to triangulate administrators' perspectives of how they build caring school communities with the perceptions of teachers and students. This subsequent look at the data will focus exclusively on the role and perceptions of school administrators in cultivating caring communities.

Limitations and future directions

While important insights came from the interview and focus group data, some limitations should be addressed. One major limitation of our study is that researchers did not collect data on individual participants' race and ethnicity; therefore, differences in levels of caring from teachers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds could not be ascertained, nor could we differentiate how caring was perceived by students of different races and ethnicities. Other scholars have discussed that perceptions of caring may differ depending on one's racial or cultural background (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Thompson, 1998). Future research may want to explore these differences to determine if types of care—and practices embedded in each type of care—have different levels of effectiveness for students of varying racial, ethnic, and SES backgrounds. This line of questioning may provide helpful information for school leaders in how to promote the academic and social welfare of different subgroups of students.

Because we were interested in the perceptions of the carer and cared for, following Noddings (1984), who has argued that the act of care must be acknowledged by the cared-for, our study is also limited in that we relied on student and teacher interview data. Observational data of teacher-student interactions over the course of the school day could have added more robustness to the data, triangulating, for example, teacher reports of ways they care with how they actually demonstrated care. Another avenue for

future research, therefore, could be observing caring in action. In such research, the continuum of care developed here could be used as an observational tool to capture evidence of the type and extent of care within individuals and across the school.

Another limitation is that, given that the descriptive nature of our case study design, we were unable to make causal claims connecting school practices to levels of caring and to student outcomes. In the future, researchers may want to conduct quantitative analyses to measure the relationship between the school context variables identified in this study that differentiated schools with different levels of care; types and prevalence of caring; and students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes. Finally, future research might consider how contexts may be related to different types of caring in different districts (e.g., rural, suburban, smaller urban) and states other than Florida with different accountability levers to examine how the level of caring in those environments may have varying influences on students outcomes.

Conclusion

The individual and collective practices at Torreya and Water Oak show possibilities for how comprehensive urban high schools can nurture caring communities despite stringent state and district accountability contexts. Caring school communities attended not only to students' achievement on state tests but addressed students' needs for feeling connected with others and realizing future aspirations. As this study suggests, adopting an ethic of care does not require additional funding or external accountability mechanisms. School leaders can begin by holding themselves and their faculty accountable to the caring practices exhibited in the caring school communities. They can make changes to the vision that they promote and the programs they introduce in order to support their school in (a) forging strong interpersonal relationships between students, faculty, and administration *and* (b) holding high expectations for student success in high school and beyond.

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Notes

1. All school names and participant names are pseudonyms.
2. In order to protect anonymity of the schools, exact enrollment numbers and demographic percentages have been converted to ranges.

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Appendix

Interview Protocols

I. Teacher Interview Protocol

- (1) Could you briefly describe your work position at this school?
 - (a) Please describe any other teaching positions you have held.
- (2) What is your overall assessment of your school's strengths in terms of student outcomes?
- (3) What is your overall assessment of your school's challenges in terms of student outcomes?
- (4) How would you describe what the principal wants for this school?
- (5) Could you describe what you as a teacher want for this school?
- (6) To what extent do teachers and other professional staff have a shared sense of direction for the school?
 - (a) How did it come about?
- (7) What do you see as the major challenges for improving student learning in your classroom?
 - (a) How are you addressing these challenges?
 - (b) How, if at all, have you been supported in these efforts? If so, how or in what form?
- (8) What does high quality instruction look like to you?
- (9) What are you doing to improve the quality of your instruction in this school?
- (10) Are there specific instructional practices encouraged by the schools?
- (11) How do you decide what curricular content to teach and when to teach it?
- (12) What are you doing to get to know your students as individuals?
- (13) What does the school do to build relationships between students and teachers?
- (14) In what ways do teachers in this school collaborate? If so, how?
 - (a) What supports are in place that help teacher collaboration?
 - (b) Who do you collaborate with?
- (15) How do you know about how well you are doing a good job as a teacher?
- (16) What roles do information and data play in your school and classroom?
- (17) How are you, as a teacher, held accountable as a teacher?

- (18) At this school, how do the principal and assistant principals' policies and practices help you effectively teach the students in your classes? Be as specific as possible. That is, what are they doing to keep you to improve your students' learning?
- (19) Is there anything that the principals do that limit your ability to work effectively with your students?
- (20) Tell me about your interactions with school administrators about your professional needs and goals.
- (21) How are parents involved in your school?
 - (a) What about community members and organizations?
 - (b) What do you do to reach out to parents?
 - (c) What do you do to reach out to community agencies and organizations?
- (22) If there were one thing that could be improved about this school, what would it be?

II. Student Interview Protocol

- (1) How long have you been attending [_____] school?
- (2) What kind of student do you think you are?
- (3) What activities are you involved in that are affiliated with the school?
- (4) Are you involved in any activities that are not affiliated with the school?
 - (a) Can you tell me about how you chose your classes this year?
- (5) What teacher have you learned the most from this year?
 - (a) Can you tell me why?
- (6) What teacher have you learned the least from this year?
 - (a) Can you tell me why?
- (7) What do you think makes these two teachers different?
- (8) Which of your classes do you think is the hardest?
 - (a) Can you tell me why?
- (9) Which of your classes do you think is the easiest?
 - (a) Can you tell me why?
- (10) What do you think makes these two classes different?
- (11) Can you tell me about Pinnacle and what you use it for?
 - (a) Probe: How often do you use it?
- (12) What impact does your performance in your classes have on your life?
- (13) Can you tell me about your experience preparing for the 10th grade FCAT?
- (14) What impact does your performance on the FCAT or BAT have on your life?
- (15) What do different adults in the school expect from you?
 - (a) Can you give me some examples?
- (16) What would you like to do after you graduate from high school?
- (17) What kinds of things are you doing to get ready for that?
- (18) What have adults in this school done to help you achieve your goals?
- (19) Do you feel like you are a part of this school?
- (20) What do adults in the school do to make you feel this way?
- (21) Are there adults at this school that you feel care about you?
 - (a) Who are they? Can you give me examples of what they do to show that?
- (22) What kinds of interactions have you had with your guidance counselor since arriving at [_____] school?
- (23) What do your parents do to support your education?
 - (a) Can you tell me about the types of things that they do?

III. Student Focus Group Protocol

Before we begin, please say your first name, grade, and academy/pathway.

- (1) First of all, who in the school most helps you learn?
- (2) What do they do to help you learn?
- (3) What do you participate in here at this school that helps you learn? How does it help you learn?
- (4) What does the principal do at this school?
- (5) How about the assistant principals? What do they do?
- (6) What outside of school helps you be successful in school?
- (7) How do your parents support your learning?
- (8) In what ways do students in this school help you learn?
- (9) How do they get in the way of your learning?
- (10) Do you think students feel that they are a part of this school?
- (11) How do students decide which courses to take? Who influences that decision?
- (12) How hard do students have to work here?
- (13) How do you know how you are doing in school?
- (14) Is this a good school? What makes a good school?
- (15) Would you recommend this school to friends? Why or why not?
- (16) If there were one thing that could be improved about this school, what would it be?