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Examining the Effectiveness of Dropout Prevention Practices and Their Implications for Intervention with Public School Students

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The University of Southern Mississippi

EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DROPOUT PREVENTION
PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTION
WITH PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Louisa Pollack

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2010

ABSTRACT

EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DROPOUT PREVENTION PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTION WITH PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

by Louisa Pollack

December 2010

Schools face the dilemma of transforming both the trend of students dropping out of school and the associated negative socioeconomic outcomes into a positive path of persistence and school completion. Despite ongoing efforts of the federal and state government, as well as those of the local school districts, this problem continues to burden the educational system and society as a whole. The opinions of those with the experience of dropping out and returning to school are pertinent sources of information on educative practices that can help stem the dropout rate.

A survey was conducted to gather the opinions of students regarding dropout prevention practice they feel would be effective to deter students from dropping out of public schools. These students were previous dropouts who had elected to enroll in a GED program in a community college in a mid-South state. Frequency distributions identified the demographic characteristics of the sample population, which was consistent with the literature for at-risk populations. Mixed methodology statistical testing was used to analyze the results. Descriptive statistical summaries rated practices under each of four constructs according to the degree that each was likely to support student persistence and deter dropping out. The results indicated that the sample population generally agreed that dropout prevention practices are effective for dropout prevention; however, some

practices were weakly supported. The highest mean score among the four sub-scales was given to In-School Support Programs, and more specifically, to items that addressed tutoring after school and increased instruction for social skills, mathematics, and reading in early years. The next highest overall mean score from the constructs was given to School Climate, with items concerning experienced teachers and safe schools having the highest mean scores. The highest ratings for the items under the construct of School Intervention Programs were given to learning through real-life projects, ordinary classroom learning, intervention to prevent dropping out that begins in high school and principals who are more involved with students. The last construct of School/Home/Community Involvement received the lowest overall mean score from the responses, which is contrary to the literature. The mean scores in this construct ranged from just above a *neither agree nor disagree* scale to *mildly agree*, with no strong agreement on any item or construct.

Significance testing results indicated that there were no significant relationships among the perspectives of the sample population and their demographic characteristics. Results from the qualitative study generated from an open-ended item on beliefs about the effectiveness of dropout prevention practices differed in several areas. The highest number of responses from coded items was under the theme of School Climate, followed by Innovative Learning and Instruction, and School/Home/Community Involvement, which differed from the findings in the quantitative portion of the study. However, the qualitative study broadened the interpretation of the some elements of the quantitative results. Those areas were age at the time dropout prevention was initiated, and school climate. From these findings implications for implementation of effective practices for

dropout prevention in public schools were methods of supporting positive school climate through professional development for teachers and staff on caring and supportive instructional behaviors, collaborations with home and community for safe school plans, after-school provided tutoring and youth programs, school-backed but community-based early childhood programs for math, reading, and social skills, and school leadership in touch with students and their needs. The study also addressed recommendations for policy and future research.

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December 2010

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my children, Rachael Jenny Pruitt Amen and Seth David Pruitt, who have stood behind me through this process. I thank them for their selflessness and understanding and for their pride in this accomplishment.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the statement of problem and purpose for the study will be described, as well as the background to support this research. Justification for this research addresses a view not often brought to light in the body of literature on dropping out; this perspective will be explained. This chapter also contains the research questions, which arise from conditions revealed through the background study, pertinent theory, and review of literature in subsequent chapters. During the course of this chapter, special terms, assumptions, restrictions or limits are identified and defined. The chapter concludes with a summary provided to the reader.

Schools face the dilemma of transforming both the trend of students dropping out of school and the associated negative socioeconomic outcomes into a positive path of persistence and school completion. This is not a new problem, but one that historically impacted generations. Despite efforts of the federal and state government, as well as those of local schools, the problem continues and in some instances, has gained momentum in recent years (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). To be able to redirect this pattern, an accurate sense of the problem is warranted as well as an understanding of present dynamics for dropping out. Concurrently, an overview of successful school model design and the subsequent changes that supported the positive outcomes of those models is recommended in order to provide a framework for public school success in reducing dropout rates.

This study addresses and identifies present causes for students dropping out of school. The study further identifies innovative and productive changes schools can and have made to address the high dropout rates. Educational models that have been

effective in reducing dropout rates within the socio-economic context in which they exist are identified and effective strategies are translated into a suggested plan of action to address current dropout rates through innovative educational change in public education. Investigations into some new and pertinent factors impacting the causes for students to drop out and accept social bias and economic hardship are examined. Alternatively, reasons for students' persistence toward receiving a diploma despite social and economic barriers are investigated. General Education Development (GED) students' opinions will be gathered through a questionnaire that examines the educational options that might have, if available, deterred their choice to drop out, and the interventions they believe will have the greatest impact on lowering dropout rates. A synthesis of information obtained between effective educational models, reasons why students persist, and opinions from the GED population will provide a framework for preliminary recommendations for intervention programs to assist potential dropouts in public schools.

Statement of the Problem

Schools continue to deal with the dilemma of students dropping out of school and facing negative social and economic consequences. Despite growing emphasis within education toward reform to address this dilemma, dropping out has continued and in some instances has increased. *The Silent Epidemic*, a report on the drop out problem funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, stated almost one-third of all high school students including almost half of African Americans, Hispanics, or Native Americans are projected to dropout (Bridgeland et al., 2006). This substantial figure is likely to increase since the majority of dropouts are within minority populations whose numbers are predicted to rise.

Historically, the contributing factors for students dropping out of school included disciplinary problems at school, familial obligations, (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007) and the socio-economic factors associated with poverty, which are manifested in feelings of hopelessness and shame (Raphael, 2005). Fault has often centered on the individual dropout, who is viewed as socially maladaptive. Likewise, the consequent economic dependence on society reinforces that view, resulting in low self-image and feelings of social helplessness (McCaul, Donaldson, Coladarci, & Davis, 1992).

Reasons that students drop out can be viewed in terms of an individual student's inability to cope and succeed and/or in terms of inadequacies in the educational system from which they dropped out. Some have believed that the act of dropping out is a constructed social phenomenon created by the educational system that channels students toward an illusion of *equal* opportunity for all, when social and economic biases are imbedded within the same system (Fine & Rosenberg, 1983). Others believe it is not in the educational system alone that the problem of students dropping out of school exists; rather, they believe that the problem also lies within the social class system that unofficially exists within society. The disadvantaged student is led to drop out by daily interaction within a secondary class system in their immediate environment that tolerates failure (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008). Therefore, responsibility for lowering dropout rates is shared between social systems and educational systems.

From the perspective of educational outcomes alone, The National Center for Education Statistics (2002) and other research organizations have identified the factors associated with dropping out and have placed those factors into two main categories: *factors associated with family*, and *factors associated with individual school experience* (NCES, 2002). Consequently, the reasons most associated with students dropping out

(e.g., excessive absenteeism, academic underachievement, and behavior issues) can be examined under both categories. If considering only what schools and educational systems can do within an individual's school experience to prevent the student from dropping out, it is beneficial to seek information from the viewpoint of the student. Society and educational systems have gained some ground in learning how, when and why students begin the process of dropping out, but it is necessary to go to the source to further the understanding of the reasons that some students persist despite the barriers that cause others to drop out.

Regardless of the potential value of their experience, the opinions of those who could not succeed within public education are usually not heard or valued and the dropouts, due to their lack of success, are considered outcasts from the educational system who are not capable of contributing pertinent information toward preventing students from dropping out. However, research since before the 1980s has shown that dropouts are capable of learning and succeeding in academic performance and achievement (Fine & Rosenberg, 1983) as attested by student dropouts who returned to school to complete their diplomas or gain a GED. Those students who did decide to return to school and complete their high school education can provide a valuable source of information on initial interventions to lower dropout rates. GED students have the unique posture of experiencing both the process of dropping out and returning to school and attaining the academic skills necessary to receive a certificate. Therefore, by surveying those students who have dropped out and have made the decision to return to school, this research gains an often unexamined perspective. A synthesis of information from practices used by effective educational models, reasons why students persist, and

opinions from the GED population will provide a framework for preliminary recommendations for intervention programs to assist potential dropouts in public schools.

Research Questions

This study is designed to examine present causes of students dropping out of school, and the dynamics within the schools, educational systems, and social environment that contribute to dropping out. Conversely, this study examines the differences between students who persist in seeking a diploma despite adverse conditions, and those who leave before graduation under those same conditions. For those who chose the path of dropping out of school, the dynamics that caused them to return and seek an equivalency provides them with unique insight into both the process of dropping out and persisting. Information that is gathered from these students adds to the body of knowledge about preliminary changes that public schools can make to support student persistence. The conditions most associated with dropping out of school, practices used by effective school models, and students' experience offer a framework for the following research questions:

1. According to students who have dropped out, are there effective practices implemented by schools to prevent students from dropping out?
2. What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected dimensions of school climate, as perceived by students who have dropped out?
3. What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected in-school support programs upon dropout rates, as perceived by students who have dropped out?

4. What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected school intervention programs upon dropout rates, as perceived by students who have dropped out?
5. What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected school/home/community involvement supports upon dropout rates, as perceived by students who have dropped out?
6. Are there relationships among the student demographic characteristics of age, gender, ethnicity/race and place of residence, and student perceptions regarding the potential impact of dropout reduction strategies?

Delimitations

GED participants were limited to persons 18 years of age or older. The GED program offered through the community college chosen for survey has students from Mississippi or the surrounding states, which provides a representative minority population reflective of the largest percentage of status dropouts or students between 16 and 24 years of age (NCES 2009b). All participants will be enrolled in a GED program as a result of non-completion of high school, and are expected to attend the necessary classes to attain certificate completion.

Assumptions

Initially, it is assumed that all participants will be able to read and understand the question items contained within the survey instrument. It is assumed that the participants will be able to respond to the items within the survey instrument honestly and from their own personal experience. Additionally, it is assumed that the participants will follow directions and complete the question items. It is also assumed that any question items not answered were omitted by choice.

Definitions of Terms

At-risk – Individual or population that exhibits known signs and symptoms for dropping out of school.

Autonomy – The state of individuality and self-reliance.

Causality – A result from a cause or reason which generates subsequent events.

Community-based Vocational Programs – Programs provided within the local community for vocational career training.

Community-School Interaction – A system of involvement in which the school, students, parents, and the local community interact toward the benefit of all.

Continuous Progress Model of Promotion – The progression of multiage students to the next higher learning level based on readiness.

Cost-Benefit Analysis – A budgetary appraisal conducted to determine the benefit of funding a particular program.

Dropouts – Those students who did not complete and did not receive a high school diploma.

Dropping Out – A “process of disengagement” by which students do not persist toward graduation and drop out before gaining a high school diploma. This process is often incremental and may begin as early as elementary years (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Drop Out Rates – A mathematical quantification of the number of events for students who have dropped out of school within a designated population. Dropout rates may occur as continuous numbers, ratios, or as percentages. For purposes of this study, the term is further defined to mean the number of students who did not receive a traditional high school diploma at the end of their senior year in high school.

Educative Reform – A change in schools or educational organizations program structure, instruction, or curriculum that is instituted to produce benefit, often aimed at higher achievement by students.

Experiential Learning – Learning is gained through experience or performance as in project-based learning.

General Education Development (GED) Certificate – A certificate awarded when a student has passed the GED Battery Test consisting of five content area assessments, which ensure the student has gained academic skills and knowledge at the high school level (GED Testing Service, 2010).

Inquiry-based Learning – A higher-level cognitive thinking technique usually using hands-on activities to generate investigation and constructed learning (Kuhn & Dean, 2005).

Integrated Curriculum – Learning gained through, activities, projects, or in learning centers (Bredekamp, as cited by North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, n.d.).

Internalization – Information that is mentally accepted and is incorporated as part of an individual's knowledge and belief system.

Intervention – A means to intercede in an educational process, such that the outcome is improved.

Learning Modalities – Different methods or styles in which individuals gain learning.

Lock and Step System - Yearly advancement to a higher grade level from K through 12.

Maladaptive – Inability to adapt or conform to expected social norms.

Multi-tiered Activities – Activities occurring simultaneously that address different levels of student interest and orientation (Dynarski & Gleason as cited in Muir, 2004), or differing levels and topics for teacher professional development (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007).

Non-Governmental Support Agencies – Private agencies that provide educational and social support to students.

Outreach Programs – Programs that are funded publicly or privately, and which offer support services to youth.

Pedagogy – The study of teaching and instruction.

Persistence – A process by which students persevere through middle and high school years to gain a high school diploma.

Poverty – Insufficient financial resources to provide necessary care and services for individuals and families. The federal government publishes poverty measure yearly (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

Quality Assurance – A process of ongoing checks and support implemented for the efficient use of resources toward reaching a specific objective or goal.

School Completion – Completion of all twelve required school years following kindergarten in order to gain a high school diploma.

Socio-Economic Status (SES) – The student's or group of students' social position that is based on income level.

Standards-driven Curriculum and Assessment – Curriculum and assessment based on state and federally published learning and performance objectives (standards) as goals or benchmarks for achievement.

Strategies – Practices used as a means of deterring students from dropping out of school.

Student-centered Pedagogy – Curriculum and instruction method originally spawned by Dewey (Tzuo, 2007) where learning is initiated through student-driven interests and construction of knowledge.

Transformational Learning – A learning theory based in the belief that people learn and subsequently change through critical reflection and internalization (Mezirow, 2004).

Justification

Efforts to address the gap in educational systems between the low dropout rates and high graduation rates of suburban, charter, and alternatives schools is needed. Whether or not charter schools outrank public education in promoting student achievement is not always certain; however, their enrollment had tripled in 2008 leaving behind urban at-risk student populations in the public education system (Hess & Petrilli, 2009). A means of gaining some insight into what public education can do to turn the tide of dropping out is to support persistence by examining the educational practices some effective school models have employed and discern which of those practices will be effective in public schools.

In the research reported in Chapter II, the many sides of the drop out issue are identified and the strategies used to reverse the trend are described; however, the identification of effective practices that would have significant influence within public education as a strategy to prevent students from dropping out is not readily available. In this review of literature, several successful school models have been examined. Effective practices and theory to support those strategies have yielded interventions for public

education. A means of discerning from these models, which educational practices the reports of dropouts suggest are beneficial in preventing students from dropping out, is to submit a questionnaire as a survey instrument to GED students, who have the added benefit of experiencing both dropping out of high school and persisting toward a GED. From their responses on dropout prevention, this vantage point, often overlooked in literature, can provide a valuable resource toward effective educational practices for implementation in public schools.

Summary

The number of students who are dropping out of school is of particular concern to educational systems and society as a whole. Estimates differ, but projected dropout rates can run as high as one-third of all students will not reach graduation (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The reasons why students drop out and face the associated socio-economic hardships are varied; historically, those reasons were disciplinary problems at school, inability to cope with academic requirements, familial obligations (Suh et al., 2007), and other dynamics associated with poverty (Raphael, 2005). However, some students make the choice to return to school and complete a GED certificate despite these conditions. These students have the unique position of experiencing both dropping out and persisting in the completion of their GED. The focus of this study is to gain the insight of those who have experience with both dropping out and persisting by presenting practices that have been effective in innovative educational models and gaining their opinions on practices that they believe are effective in deterring students from dropping out. There is much in the literature on the severity of the problem of students dropping out of school, on the theories concerning the psychological factors that contribute to drop out, and on the instructional techniques and strategies to thwart students from dropping out; however,

there exists a gap in the research on what students in GED programs have to say about innovative instructional practices to prevent drop out. In that regard, GED students' opinions will be gathered through a questionnaire that examines social and educational practices that might have, if available, deterred their choice to drop out, and which positively impact dropout rates and persistence. The practices identified may serve as a framework for implementation of effective educational reforms in public schools.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to inform the reader on the background of students who drop out of school, on the theories that affect dropping out and persistence, and on effective models and strategies used to prevent students from dropping out. The effects that dropping out have had on students and society as a whole are recounted, as well as projections for future dropout rates. This chapter describes the dynamics concerned with the dilemma of dropping out of school, the high rates of dropping out despite many reform efforts, and the changes in students' needs requiring educational systems to seek new and innovative approaches toward preventing drop out.

Psychological theories that support persistence are explained, and educational and social theories concerning learning and social adjustment are presented. The influences that community, family, and peers have on student persistence are described, as well as the role the family, community, and school play in order to reverse the trend of dropping out. Likewise the function social systems can play within and outside the community are examined.

Within this chapter, descriptions of effective models and the strategies they employed as intervention toward lowering dropout rates are presented. Additionally in this chapter, innovative alternative educational models, which are not supported by the body of published literature, provide a basis for consideration and further study. Finally, consistencies in strategies between the varied educational models presented, and the theories and research that support those models provide a basis for this study's research.

Background

Despite the underlying factors that historically have been associated with dropping out, the educational changes that were put in place to address those factors typically have done little to deter the rise in dropout rates, nor to forestall the considerable negative consequences to not only the dropouts, but to schools and society as a whole. Educational Testing Service (ETS) reported that in the United States, the rate of high school completion for 17 year olds reached a high of 77.1% in 1969 and has declined since, showing little improvement in reversing the trend (Barton, 2005). From ETS, high school completion rates in some areas have reached below 50%, such as in the District of Columbia (48%), while in the state of Vermont, the rate reached 88%. This report pointed out that U.S. Census statistics for dropout and graduation rates include students who have dropped out and later decided to return to school, as well as those who have received a GED certificate, in the overall numbers. This may serve to mask the true level of students whose preliminary action was to drop out of high school and not persist toward graduation. From the statistics gathered by ETS in 2005, one-third of the nation's students will decide to drop out from high school and not receive a diploma (Barton, 2005).

In the 1996 U.S. Department of Education Consumer Guide, the number of dropouts reported was influenced by the individual state, district, and schools' descriptions of dropouts. Some districts did not report students who dropped out over the summer, or had gotten married (Hollinger, 1996). The guide also mentioned the non-inclusion of GED students in some districts within the total number of dropouts, which is the reverse of what was mentioned by the much later ETS report (Barton, 2005). Concomitantly, the validity of the reporting was dependent on accurate records, which

can vary from state to state, district to district and school to school (Hollinger, 1996). The inability to maintain a standard for national descriptions of what constitutes a dropout and a national quality assurance system to maintain accurate records leaves some statistical reporting in doubt. It is possible that the number of dropouts were higher in previous years than reported. To address this deficit in accurate statistics for dropouts, the Committee on Educational Excellence and Testing Equity in 2001 made the following recommendations: states and districts disaggregate data for varying minority and special service populations for students who receive differing kinds of school completion credential including employment possibilities; which knowledge and skills were gained as a result of receiving the credential including comparison data across states; follow up data of those receiving an alternate route certificate, and data to support improved follow up of students who display characteristics of the student at risk at the elementary and middle school level (Beatty, Ulric, Trent, & Heubert, 2001).

For the economic effects on society, a Princeton University study that was conducted in 2005 and cited in an Issue Brief from the Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) showed that for each student who drops out of school, the cost to American society is \$260,000; for total financial losses expected over the next 10 years, the estimate rises to \$3 trillion. The economic losses from students dropping out are not new to society. As far back as 1980 and earlier, the cost to society from lost revenue from students dropping out for just one class was \$228 billion of earnings over their lifetimes (McCaul et al., 1992).

Dynamics that impact the possibility that a student will drop out thus incurring the associated economic hardships are not only related to limitations within the educational system; social systems have added to the dilemma of students dropping out, and which if

changed, could contribute to lowering dropout rates and subsequent costs to society. An example of a social condition, related to dropouts, that leads to a significant societal cost burden is cited in a 2005 study and cost-benefit analysis of California's foster youth (Packard, Delgado, Fellmeth, & McCready, 2008). The study stated, nationwide, 50% of foster care youth who have left the system did not graduate from high school. In the state of California, 40% of those in homeless shelters were foster youth who had reached the age of 18 years or older (Packard et al., 2008). Additionally, from a survey conducted by the California's Foster Care system (2009), one-fourth of youths emancipated from the foster care system sell drugs in order to support themselves. The projected tax benefit of prolonging assistance for foster youth to age 23, allowing them the option of financial support in order to graduate from high school or get a GED, would benefit the state of California by \$6,095,822 annually (Packard et al., 2008). Regardless of the fact that dropouts who have gone on to receive a GED earn 8% less than their high school graduate counterparts, overall their increased earning power and subsequent benefit to society is far greater (Packard et al., 2008). Therefore, it is possible that the impact from social services, both state and local, can be a primary deterrent for students dropping out of school. Most probably, it is beyond the reach of today's public schools to try to address all of the educational, social, and economic needs of the student at risk of dropping out. Social support systems such as affordable housing, adequate wages with health benefits, and pre-school education programs, which work to address social inequalities (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008) have a part to play in supporting student persistence toward graduation. From this vantage point, inequalities within social systems can be rectified, and along with educational reform successfully address lowering the dropout rate.

For further economic impact, it is not hard to imagine the significant future effects to society of continued lowered earning power for students who do not graduate from high school when the population of high school dropouts continues to increase in some locations. In 1971, the average male high school dropout earned approximately \$35,000 annually, while in 2002 the amount dropped to approximately \$24,000. For females, wages that were already depressed due to gender based inequalities dropped an average of \$2800 annually (Barton, 2005). Whether future earnings would approach the same potential as regular high school graduates if these student dropouts were to go on and receive a GED was not determined, nor was there an indication of whether they would have the same likelihood of finding employment. GED's are not considered equivalent to a high school diploma, and can place the graduate at a disadvantage economically both in job potential, job retention, and in furthering their education (Greene, 2001).

Adjustments for GED programs in order to create a sense of equivalency with a high school diploma, previously lacking, can assist in helping establish economic self-sufficiency.

In addition to the declining earning power, and increased costs to society, federal funding for programs to prevent students from dropping out have reduced their funding from \$15 billion in the 1970s to \$3 billion presently (Barton, 2005). Federally backed programs, which were initiated in 1989 by President George H.W. Bush to address dropping out, focused on educational reform rather than implementation of specific interventions to reduce dropout rates; it was not until the administration of President George W. Bush that educational reform took on a much more significant role through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB) (Barton, 2005). Some researchers believe that NCLB had both positive and negative effects upon education. NCLB helped

educational reform significantly in terms of greater enrollment in charter schools, which tripled, alternative methods of certification to boost the teacher workforce, which doubled, and merit pay which was relatively unknown in educational pay systems (Hess & Petrilli, 2009). However, these same researchers believed that NCLB ignored the needs of overall student achievement, while instead singling out specific racial and ethnic groups, and holding schools accountable not only for their achievement, but also for the achievement of English language learners and children with learning or behavioral difficulties (Hess & Petrilli, 2009). This research proposed that this kind of reform shifts the focus and funding of educational systems to specific ethnic and racial group gaps, but ignores other groups and drains local and federal resources away from the public education system. Alternative instructional approaches, innovative curricula, and other effective strategies used by successful school models benefit all students, and would serve toward higher achievement and opportunities at all performance levels.

Regardless of efforts resulting from NCLB, in some locations dropout rates continue to increase. North Carolina reported an overall increase in dropout rates from 5.04% in 2005 to 5.24% in 2007; however, 115 of the state's districts showed lower dropout rates; with "a handful" causing the increase (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2008). Despite the majority of districts dropout rates decreasing in 2008, status offenses in North Carolina attributed to youths below the age of 16 increased from 4,744 to 4,896 statewide (North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2009). These findings suggest the continued need to investigate the validity of dropout reporting data, whether the relationship between dropout rates and criminal behavior still exists in its historical form, or whether other factors such as grade retention have contributed to this discrepancy. The benefits of grade retention as a means

of deterring students from dropping out remains under scrutiny since researchers associate grade retention as a single event, while dropping out of school as a process over years (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). Ironically, grade retention remains a significant indicator for potential dropouts (Jimerson et al., 2002). It is possible then, to suggest that postponing dropping out by grade retention, which does little toward educative reform, or act as an effective intervention toward increasing student achievement, may exacerbate the problem of juvenile crime. Another side of this issue, in this case enacted by law in the state of Michigan, is the school reform initiative to advance the dropout age to 18 years. The cost to Michigan state taxpayers is \$230 million per year; however, the initiative may make the state eligible for significant federal tax dollars through the Obama administration's Race to the Top grant program (Gundle-Krieg, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). It is of significant concern that these reforms do not include innovative alternative educative practices as strategies to prevent students from disengaging from the educational system, but instead serve to prolong the status quo.

In order to focus on today's dropout population and the models that have been effective in deterring the decision to dropout, it is necessary to identify the demographics associated with the student who makes the decision not to persist toward graduation. Additionally, in light of recent federal and state initiatives for student success and dropout prevention, a sociocultural understanding of today's dropout is recommended with knowledge of the current demographics of dropouts, and the educational models that have demonstrated effective preventative measures against dropping out of school. These effective measures can be translated into a suggested plan of action to address current dropout rates through innovative educational change in public education.

The majority of students who do not persist toward high school graduation come from minority populations, who disproportionately live in depressed economic circumstances and/or single-parent homes within urban settings, and attend large centralized public high schools (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The U.S. Census Bureau (2008) identified the Hispanic population as showing the largest growth in dropout rates, with more than 45 million students (15% of the total population) dropping out. For the minority distribution of states from the U.S. Census Bureau in the following sentences, 24 states have Black as the highest minority population; 20 states having a majority of Hispanics as their largest minority population. California had a Hispanic population of 13.2 million with a total minority population of 20.9 million, or 20% of the total minority population in the United States. Texas lagged behind at 12% of the nation's total minority population. There are four states with more than 50% of their population as recognized minorities; those states are: Hawaii, New Mexico, California, and Texas. The District of Columbia likewise has a population with more than 50% minority. Three other states, which do not have a majority or over 50% of their population as minority, have 42% of their population as minority (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Another concurring report on Hispanic minorities stated that in the United States the population with the highest dropout rate is Hispanics, two-thirds of whom are of Mexican origin (Fry, 2010). Mayer (2004) described the Hispanic dropout group as predominantly of lower socio-economic status, with low parental education and income. Cultural gender norms such as females as home keepers and mothers, rather than going on to higher education, are prevalent. This research pointed out that as a consequence, females received greater influence from home and family than did Hispanic males. Ironically, this study also stated that influence from family and community of Mexican

females supported positive persistence toward a high school diploma when communities reinforced academic achievement. However, community support for Hispanics within the non-Hispanic population is often lacking and augments the trend toward non-persistence due to the projection of a negative social image (Mayer, 2004).

The largest population of status dropouts (those between 16 and 24 years of age) is made up of Hispanics; the second largest status dropout rate is found among the American Indian and Alaskan Native populations (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). As far back as 1992, the dropout rate for American Indians was 35.5% (Reyner, 1992). The literature is unclear due to standard error concerning the present rates of dropout for American Indian and Alaskan Native; however, the information from DeVoe and Darling-Churchill (2008) states status dropout rate for American Indian and Alaskan Native is 15% of all ethnic dropout populations surpassed by Hispanics at 24%, with only 6% for Whites.

Literature on the dropout rates of Native Americans in the 1990s attributed discordance between family values and the school as a significant cause of resistance to the expectations of public education (Reyner, 1992). This research described the impact these cultural differences between school and home had on young Native Americans, which resulted in many young people between the ages of 16 and 19 who lived on reservations during the 1980s did not attend school at all. Reyner (1992) stated in 1989, the likelihood of dropping out of school for Native Americans was twice that of the general population in the United States. The American Indian or Native American populations possess a unique character in terms of the causes for students to drop out, which is their perceived lack of cultural recognition by teachers and school personnel; teachers were viewed by American Indian students as uncaring and unfair, with little

interest in them as a people (Reyner, 1992). The inability of national education to identify the individuality of American Indian cultures is due to the deficiency of training for school personnel in cultural heritage and sensitivity (Reyner, 1992). Teachers within the general population have not been exposed to the different cultural heritages of Native Americans, this hinders the likelihood that teachers can connect culturally to reasons why Native Americans students do not readily identify with the manner or content of what is being taught (Robinson-Zanartu, 1996). Research showed that teachers who shared cultural heritage with the students, or who had received training in methods to support Native American cultural identity, were more likely to support these students toward school completion (Robinson-Zanartu, 1996).

DeVoe and Darling-Churchill reported in 2008 poverty within American indigenous populations was as high as 43% for children under the age of 5 years, and in female parent only households for children under the age of 18, the percentage increased to 45.7%. Twelve percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students received benefits under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) as compared to 9% nationally (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008).

In a time of cultural and ethnic population shifts in public schools, the main role of the school guidance counselor remains helping students choose and apply to college, scheduling their classes, and maintaining increased responsibility for overseeing the school's standardized testing (Barton, 2005). School counselors' traditional roles of individual student counseling and crisis management no longer support the school within high poverty areas with different teacher and student needs. Some research suggested that school counselors assume a connective role between the school, the teacher, the cultural community, and the home and family in general in order to address the

continuing problem of students dropping out (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). This same research proposes that the modification of the role of counselor significantly increases the leadership responsibility of the counselor as liaison and advocate for school, community, and family. The counselor, according to this staff design, provides support for the teacher by acting as liaison between the family, who often do not feel they have the skills to interact with what is being learned; relates what is being studied within their cultural context, and also provides the foundation for community-school interaction (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007).

According to the data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2009a), significant decreases in status dropout rate were observed in a population of 16 to 24 year olds, from a total of 14.1% in 1980 to 8.7 % in 2007. Race and ethnicity dropout statistics from NCES show that the White population dropped from 11.4% in 1980 to 5.3% in 2007, and the Black population dropped from 19.1% or a total of 7.7% increase over Whites, to 8.4% in 2007 with only a narrowing gap increase of 3.1%. However, NCES data showed for Hispanics in 1980, 35.2% dropped out, and in 2007, though considerably improved, 21.4% continue to drop out of school. Interestingly, the dynamics for these decreases vary according to the year. The majority of the narrowing of the gap between Whites and Blacks occurred in the 1980s with little change since, and for Hispanics the majority of change to narrow the gap occurred in the 1990s (NCES, 2009b, 2009c).

According to the *Digest of Educational Statistics* (NCES, 2009c), gender comparisons in 1980 revealed that White males dropped out of school at 12.3% of total students, with White females at 10.5% of the total. Other data from this report stated that Black males made up 20.8% with Black females at 17.7%. However concurrently

reported, Hispanic males in 1980 made up 37.2%, while Hispanic females were at 33.2%. The data gathered for these statistics did not include those who were incarcerated, but only those not attending school between the ages of 16 and 24 (NCES, 2009b). It is, therefore, imaginable that these percentages would increase if incarcerated youth were included.

From the aforementioned statistical research, the gap between White and Black students dropping out of school remains consistent during the 1990s to 2008 (NCES, 2009b). The statistical percentages of Hispanics dropping out, though less than previous years, continued to be significant; and from the years mentioned males were more likely to dropout compared to females. According to the 2006 state statistics, the state most likely to have had dropouts was the state of Louisiana, followed by Alaska and Colorado (NCES, 2007a). According to ethnicity within state, in the reported statistics from the NCES (2007b), Hispanics, Blacks, and Native Americans showed prevalence for dropping out in Colorado, followed by Alaska, and Louisiana. Native Americans showed the highest dropout rate in the states of South Dakota, Wyoming and Arizona (NCES, 2007b).

In the preceding paragraphs, identification of statistical disparities between White and minority populations who have persisted toward receiving a high school diploma are evident. Populations at risk for non-persistence toward high school graduation are identified. From the research, the causes for dropping out are varied. Suggestions are made for schools to branch out into the community toward a positive collaboration. This collaboration would entail social support systems from governmental local and state agencies, the school as a safe and culturally sensitive environment, and available non-governmental support agencies within the local community.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this research includes theories of change and transformation grounded in the ability to construct ideas through learned skills to reflect and, therefore, choose positive options over negative. What is integral to the idea of making positive choices is an understanding that the process of making choices is imbedded within personal reality; therefore, the investigation of the dynamics within students' realities in terms of sociological changes connected to past and present learning, and the identification of the impact that school and educational systems have had on that reality, is of particular interest. In Mezirow's (2004) Theory of Transformational Learning, it is the ability to reflect critically that provides the impetus for change, which then provides the framework for learning. Consequently, it is the learned ability to reflect critically that supports making positive life choices.

The action of choosing to drop out of school is a decidedly negative choice, as is suggested by the previously referenced social consequences. Yet, according to those few districts in the example of North Carolina, and many others, students are continuing to make that choice. Because this dilemma remains, it is important to consider the pedagogical, learning and social theories that are utilized by programs that have been successful in helping students make positive decisions that have supported personal transformation.

Some researchers have looked within the pedagogical ideals of Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky for answers. Tzuo (2007) identifies the child-centered approach spawned by Dewey, and supported by Piaget and Vygotsky, as a child-centered learning reality in which students construct their own knowledge through interaction toward chosen learning goals, which are sought and engaged in. It is the student who seeks knowledge

within their own personal reality, and makes choices toward attainment of that learning. It is also in the seeking and finding of knowledge that the student gains a sense of accomplishment. Likewise, Grossman's (2009) ideas on learning described a process that transports the learner through a series of stages ending in reflecting on the learning and its application to one's own life. This process of learning, a student-centered constructivist approach, is based in the student's new found ability to initiate and self-direct the learning experience (Grossman, 2009).

The development of inquiry skills is also a necessary part of achieving the ability to think at higher cognitive levels and hence learn concepts, and is developed over time by the consistent rather than intermittent use of inquiry. This experience is gained by constructing learning through repeated inquiry based hands-on problem solving rather than face to face traditional classroom instruction (Kuhn & Dean, 2005).

In addition to the theoretical bases mentioned for a framework of learning in the preceding paragraphs, educational programs need to discourage students from dropping out of school by understanding and providing the emotional and social support that is needed to not only persist, but to excel. Research from the University of Ottawa (Legault, Pelletier, & Green-demers, 2006) into the emotional and social manifestations of failure to achieve in school subscribe to the Self-Determination Theory. In this model, students are placed on a sliding scale between interest-related motivation and lack of motivation with investigations into the internalization of reasons to continue and, therefore, sustain involvement (Legault et al., 2006). Motivated learning is further supported by the maintained interest in what is being learned, a belief in personal capability and a sense of autonomy (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).

One of the reasons that some students do not persist can be demonstrated by the Consistency Theory (Shrauger & Lund, 1975), which subscribed to the notion that people with low self-image will agree with low evaluations of their performance more readily than those with a higher self-image. Consequently, students who received consistently low scores in school believe they will not be successful. On the other hand, students with higher self-image denied poor evaluations and instead suspected the veracity of the evaluator (Shrauger & Lund, 1975). From this vantage point, the student with lower self-image will accept poor performance in school, while the student with higher self-image will persist and deny failure.

One Self-Consistency model suggested that persons with higher self image are less likely to seek positive reinforcement from outside sources than those with lower self-image who seek acknowledgment by indirect or covert means (Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988). Therefore, people with lower self image seek verification of that image rather than seek means to elevate themselves (Brown et al., 1988). It is not difficult from this theoretical vantage point for a consistently low performing student to become disenfranchised from school and seek verification of their *low status* through friendships and social interchanges that support that image.

Bernard Wiener (1985) in his Attributional Theory and studies of causality describes the *locus of causality* as both internal and external with controllable and uncontrollable elements. According to this theory, the unsuccessful student will seek causality in terms of other causes rather than their own ability. This thinking causes the student to not only accept the failure, but to believe in future failures; additionally, they consider their ability to be uncontrollable and out of the sphere of internal control (Wiener, 1985). Subsequently, they are more likely to accept bad luck, a decidedly

uncontrollable factor, as a dynamic of causality (Wiener, 1985), especially since what they are tasked to learn in most schools is outside of their control. The reality that most students do not control what they are to learn, brings one back to the child-centered learning approach previously described (Tzuo, 2007), in which students are invested in their own self-directed learning goal. Therefore, it is advisable to provide an atmosphere that would support persistence by giving the control previously lacking in learning to the student with the guidance and support of sound pedagogy and curriculum design in order to support effective learning, and belief in personal ability.

Hirschi's Control Theory explains how the attachment to the school can be a means toward making positive choices both academically and socially. According to Matsueda (1982), Hirschi differed from other research theorists on students dropping out from school and society by instead focusing on why some students persisted and chose a more positive path. This researcher affirmed that Hirschi considered engagement in anti-social behaviors as a "constant across persons" (Matsueda, 1982, p. 490) and instead attributed persistence to a sense of attachment to the school community.

The choice of school completion is an example of a positive choice fostered by an environment of acceptance from likeminded social groups, which include not only peers but teachers and administrators (Reio, Marcus, & Sanders-Reio, 2009). As a result, the relationship with peers who have developed an attachment to the school and a commitment to completion contributes directly to a student deciding to persist. Likewise, secure gratifying relationships with teachers and administrators further support the student to persist rather than dropout (Reio et al., 2009). The complexity of factors that support student motivation also needs to address the social context of the student not only within but from without the school. Motivation to learn and achieve, as affirmed by

research, is dependent on a community of support from peers to parents in all areas of a student's life (Legault et al., 2006). The research asserted students' sense of belonging to the school community is nurtured through constructive feedback, and emotional safety by means of caring support (Legault et al., 2006).

Mischel and Mischel's (1983) work on delay of gratification plays a part in the overall scheme of academic focus and building self-confidence for task completion, a challenge that all children face in school. Children before the age of five have internalized the ability, along with the necessary coping mechanisms, to delay receiving an award. This delay can take the form of negation of the reward or an activity that serves to change the focus temporarily from immediate gratification (Mischel & Mischel, 1983). Mischel and Mischel asserted the student who had not learned to delay gratification is likely to have had ego developmental delays as well as a lack of trust in the environment from which they found themselves. It is possible to contemplate, therefore, that the likelihood that some students who struggle in the conventional school system and do not receive positive feedback will lower or cease to expend effort toward school completion. Mischel, Shoda, and Rodriguez's (1989) research on persistence focused on the pre-school child's ability to delay gratification as a precursor to self-control and goal attainment behavior including later school performance and achievement in adolescence. Schools can take a positive role in supporting students toward reaching the academic goal of school completion, by providing instructional choices at early ages within the public school system in order to allow the student to build the behavioral tools necessary to succeed (Knesting, 2008). However, if early instruction is not available, to assist in student persistence, a beneficial strategy is to provide, after effort is expended, attainable goals, sustained individual support, and reward for accomplishment.

Additionally, learning techniques such as internalizing talking and visualizing with guidance or *scaffolding* becomes a powerful expressive tool to support the attainment of skills for self-reflection, necessary for learning at the psychological level (Grossman, 2009). An example of utilization of scaffolding is the pilot curriculum program Project Metamorphosis from The National Institute of Corrections, which uses the effectiveness of internalized talking and visualization in order to learn skills to reorient prison inmates into society and reduce recidivism (Atkinson, Cook, & Goux, 1999). In this curriculum, self-reflection and active visualization are taught and utilized for assistance in building an inner sense of self-worth, as well as, skill competencies, and capabilities with an emphasis on new and different ways of thinking.

In order to support the struggling student who is at risk for dropping out, and in regard to the aforementioned literature on scaffolding, self-talk (Grossman, 2009) assists in internalization, which is instrumental for learning at the conceptual level from motivational research and addresses the ability to internalize what is learned emanating from personal interest rather than from outside controls (Deci et al., 1991). Motivational studies by Deci et al. (1991) identified three areas of needs: capability, connectivity to the learner, and self-sufficiency as key motivating factors. Students' interest in what is being learned as pertinent to their sphere of reality is an integral part of engaging the student in persisting toward high school graduation. The applicability of methods for reinventing old patterns of thinking into new and effective patterns can be a tool for public schools to engage at-risk students toward persistence and achievement of academic goals.

This theoretical framework suggests a synthesis of approaches to deter students at risk from dropping out of school, which begins with examination of the sociological and emotional dynamics of students' past learning experiences. A positive approach to low-

achieving students is to address their capabilities within their own spheres of reality and to expand those capabilities within the learning experience through constructivist child-centered approaches. Those approaches can be supported by instruction on self-reflection of their learning in order to apply what they have learned to their own lives. In addition, learned skills for critical reflection will enable students to make choices that support a belief in their own capabilities without seeking causality outside of themselves in addition to building autonomy.

However, learning modalities, instructional choices, or social adjustments may not prove effective within an environment unconnected to the student. It is students' emotional and social investment in the learning organization that supports success.

Pertinent Research Literature

In this section, expert opinions and descriptions of practices and strategies to support positive change for educational organizations are profiled. Models that have been described as effective in deterring dropout rates are recounted and the practices they have used to support persistence are described.

Suggested Supportive Practices for Dropout Prevention

Conclusions from a study in the United Kingdom concerning college students who dropped out might be generalized to the scenario of high school students dropping out. The connection lies in the link between emotion and the environment; specifically, the relationship of students' emotions to their environment. This study likens dropping out of school to a self-destructive force based in the perceptions of the students' immediate sphere of reality in response to an environment that has not fostered their emotional trust (McQueen, 2009). Kronick and Hargis (1990) described the Association for Community Learning (ACL), advocates for student learning, as a structure that

prioritizes emotional well-being over academic achievement, and through that prioritization, supports achievement. This reinforces the importance of environment, which either aids or inhibits student success. Knesting (2008) asserts when students felt they are a part of the school community they not only exhibited more academic persistence but also were more likely to accept school rules and regulations. Knesting's study identified key elements associated with persistence and school completion, which were listening to students, conveying caring, and delineating the student's and school's role in dropout prevention. In order to foster attachment of the student to the environment, it is recommended to regard the aforementioned social and emotional supports.

Kronick and Hargis (1990) delved further into the establishment of a positive and supportive learning environment by suggesting a restructuring of the lock and step system of yearly grade-level progression into a continuous progress model of promotion. They recommend learning levels rather than grades and that the first grade be extended to ensure a foundation on which to build reading and math skills. When mastery is obtained the student then moves on to the next level; therefore, the stigma of being left behind will be removed as will the practice of promotion without achievement, since a student may be in multi-levels depending on their academic needs (Kronick & Hargis, 1990).

One alternative school's positive environment model is in an adolescent treatment center, which applies positive acceptance, an essential component of a productive school climate, by regarding their students as valuable members of the organization (Halas & van Ingen, 2009). The center focuses on practices for engagement of students in their learning in order to keep students coming and staying in school by involving family and home, and instructing on the development of social skills that allow them to cope and

function successfully within society (Halas & van Ingen, 2009). These practices foster an emotional connection to not only the school, but to the teachers and fellow students.

Therefore, programs that utilize positive emotional connections with the school environment, which have successfully reduced dropout rates, are recommended.

One research study on dropping out revealed that students do not identify with the financial worth of staying in school and, therefore, do not recognize that education can lead toward economic self-sufficiency (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009). This study posits the influence of parents as a far greater power over the ideas and beliefs of their children and suggested the need to prepare parents through training as advocates and role models. The training proposed in this study consisted of letting parents understand how they can act positively toward their child's future through learned involvement in the school process (Somers et al., 2009).

Partnerships between school, family, and community have been found to be instrumental in promoting both a positive environment and academic outcome (Michael, Dittus, & Epstein, 2007). Partnerships supported making effective use of resources, which enabled sharing in the learning process. Three primary areas of importance for student achievement were recognized: school, home, and community (Michael et al., 2007). Unfortunately, parents are not often given direction on how they can participate in supporting their child's academic outcome or on what their school or child should be contributing to that outcome. Nor are they provided guidance on the impact that joining organizations such as the Parent Teachers Organization could have on student achievement (Teachman, Day, & Carver, 1991). Research showed that parent and school responsibilities toward student achievement could be merged in terms of making adjustments for school and home particular needs, which provides a foundation for a

“sense of community” (Teachman et al., 1991, p. 169) so necessary for student persistence.

For educational systems’ perspectives, it is beneficial to address the changing roles of teachers. Teachers in poverty districts, where dropout rates are higher, are often new to the profession and lack the experience to deal with both the responsibilities of a teacher and the social issues concerning poverty. Most experienced teachers seek more advantageous posts, where the demands of teaching are less and where support is greater (Center for Public Education, 2006). As a result, there is an average attrition rate of 40 to 50% within the first five years after hire in many poverty level districts (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). This results in significant costs to the school district who, from the available pool of applicants, rehires inexperienced teachers only to repeat the cycle (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Professional development and training to deal with the demands of at-risk students, and cultural perspectives, as well as to provide ongoing in-house support are recommended for teachers within high poverty school districts. If professional support was provided, more experienced teachers would be attracted to inner city poverty level teaching posts. This would provide a bank of experienced teaching skills and essential mentoring for new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). One of the ways to provide teacher and student support is through the changing role of the school counselor as mentioned; where the counselors’ role is transformed into a liaison between home, community and school (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007).

High school has been historically thought to be the environment in which the student began a path toward dropping out and where emphasis was placed to deter dropouts. Emphasis has shifted to the middle school where the signs and symptoms of dropping out were recognized and addressed (Balfanz & MacIver, 2000). However,

these students still live and socialize for the most part in large urban poverty locations and have the social options that have been counterproductive to academic success; therefore, school reform needs the support of school administration, school districts as a whole, and social organizations both outside and within the community in order to create a viable alternative (Balfanz & MacIver, 2000).

Dropout Prevention Models and Strategies

The Johns Hopkins Talent Development Middle School (TDMS) model used research in order to design strategies for reducing dropouts and disciplinary problems in urban schools. Johns Hopkins used the findings from a New York based non-profit research organization on increases in math and reading achievement, and absenteeism reductions as intervention for their TDMS model (Headlines@Hopkins, 2005). The TDMS model, which was implemented in several middle schools within poverty areas in large urban centers, has met with considerable success. In a TDMS created within a large urban poverty area middle school in Philadelphia, gains confirmed through the Stanford 9 Achievement tests occurred in the first year after implementation and were twice the national average or equivalent to two years of instruction (Balfanz & MacIver, 2000).

The TDMS model centered on the middle school student population by providing cohesion between improving school climate, identifying signs of academic detachment and focusing support, while providing progressive curriculum changes to address deficits in reading and mathematics (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). The TDMS model's main design plan is made up of five contributing initiatives: extra learning help and support provided by outside agencies, outside agency personnel serving as mentors, high teacher support including multi-level professional development, research-based, standards-driven curriculum and assessment, continuous formative evaluation of model

effectiveness, and development of supplementary local social and private associations to support student achievement (Balfanz et al., 2007).

A development from the TDMS model is the Diplomas Now model, which has been effective in deterring students from dropping out of school by recognizing the early warning signs of a potential dropout and providing interventions for success (Gewertz, 2009). The Diplomas Now model addresses the problem of students dropping out by identifying and tracking the signs of a potential dropout such as poor attendance, disciplinary problems, and low academic achievement, and then channeling academic and social services toward the individual student (Gewertz, 2009). Balfanz and MacIver (2000) affirmed the student who is likely to drop out displays the warning signs of dropping out in the middle school years. As demonstrated by a longitudinal study of 13,000 middle school students, 60% of those who displayed signs of dropping out were tracked and successfully identified as potential dropouts (Balfanz et al., 2007).

Gewertz (2009) studied The Diplomas Now model and drew several conclusions. The Diplomas Now model design was implemented in a 750-student school in north Philadelphia. The model combined reform at the school level with social services. In tandem with these measures was a data driven computerized warning system that tracks at-risk indicators among students. Gewertz (2009) described the Diplomas Now model as utilizing role playing strategies for the parts of mentors, monitors, teachers, naggers, and nurturers. Some students in this model were shadowed the entire day to provide constant support. As stated in this research, private social service agencies from Boston, Massachusetts and Arlington, Virginia furnished a service staff of 17 to 24-year-olds who provided student support. Costs for these services were provided through a grant from the PepsiCo Foundation. Dr. Arlene Ackerman, the Superintendent of Education for the

city of Philadelphia, made the computerized system for tracking signs of at-risk students available to all the Philadelphia schools, as well as more counselors and report card reforms to indicate those students on track toward graduation (Gewertz, 2009).

The Knowledge is Power program (KIPP) was put into effect as a result of NCLB, and is a private charter school management system that has in place 82 charter schools nationally for the socio-economically at-risk student. According to Peterson (2010), this program was designed after successful business ventures; it offers 9-hour days, some weekend classes, and summer school with motivational strategies, such as using names associated with success for class names, and morale building team practices. Overall, the student body consists of 90% minority students, both African American and Hispanic, with 80% on subsidized meal plans (Peterson, 2010). This program claimed that 85% of its students go on to college, a sizeable percentage; however, there are some questions concerning the true applicability of KIPP for public schools in general. A large percentage of the teachers recruited for KIPP come from upper echelon colleges and universities rather than from the widely available teacher workforce, making for possible issues with teacher recruitment (Peterson, 2010). Other research on what are considered sensible choices for public schools disagree with the percentages of success lauded by the program. The charter schools under this program in the San Francisco area in previous years had half of their fifth graders drop out before the eighth grade (Lewis, 2007). With such numbers of dropouts within an acclaimed effective alternative school, the practices used leave some room for doubt.

Lewis (2007) suggested a reward system that spurs students and parents into making valid and sensible choices and could provide the impetus needed to excel. The reward system mentioned in this study and described in the following sentences is based

in economic theory from the University of Chicago, which supports offering monetary reward for performance in schools. Parents are rewarded by vouchers from student achievement, and students in some schools are rewarded by direct monetary gain (Lewis, 2007). For example, fourth graders are given \$25 raised from private educational support organizations for each perfect score on standardized tests (Lewis, 2007).

An offshoot of the aforementioned research on monetary reward is the impact which financial support has on retention. A study, conducted at a liberal arts college in the Northeast, revealed that all freshman students whether or not fitting into the category of needing Student Support Services (SSS) under Education Act of 1965, were more likely to stay and attend sophomore year if grants and special services were provided (Braunstein, Lesser, & Pescatrice, 2008). Though what is being examined here is at the college level, the applicability of student financial security and school retention might be translated into the middle and high school scenario. Studies on the influence that grants to students and family can have toward high school retention and persistence is not readily available in the literature; however, the possibility that funding with accompanying support services within specific educational facilities may be worth further consideration.

The Virtual Education Academy was put in place to address the increasing numbers of students who are homebound due to physical, psychological, or behavioral limitations (White, Lare, Mueller, Smeaton, & Water, 2007). The program offers a blended format consisting of face-to-face mentoring and online distance-based course delivery. This delivery method offers the student the opportunity to receive learning from both curriculum content and direct social interchange. The program includes a component of particular interest called The Citizenship Component. In the Citizenship

component, an alternative social skills curriculum including research-driven approaches was chosen by the design team as part of a three-part approach that also included selective content and instructional strategies. Content for the component on citizenship addressed knowing the self as a preliminary step toward knowing and understanding others. Such strategies as mentoring, which were supported by the face-to-face blended instructional portion, and self-reflection and internalization, were related to academic core curriculum in order to conform to state standards. This research claimed that the program's strength is due to choosing research based practice, concentration on social skills, and cost-effectiveness when compared to traditional instruction (White et al., 2007). It is possible to expand this approach as intervention for at-risk students as part of alternative instructional strategies in public schools.

The Ombudsman, with 100 centers nationwide, is another program that also uses face-to-face and online blended instruction concentrating on both academic achievement and social skills (Ombudsman, 2010). The program described below is geared at the at-risk population, has a four-step approach. Preliminarily, diagnostic tests are performed, and then the second stage or an individual learning program designed, and then mentored online provided coursework, and finally evaluation. This program's philosophy is to provide at their learning centers support designed to individual student's needs as a basis for success. Advanced Excellence in Education (AdvanceEd) supports the program, and Title I funds may be used. In 2008, Ombudsman claimed an approximately 85% rate of attendance for the students enrolled, with an equal percentage of students earning lost credits, receiving a diploma, or returning to appropriate grade level. The aim of the program is to have students return to their original school district at the appropriate grade

level, but some districts now have accepted the alternative program's plan and instruction as adequate for an accredited diploma (Ombudsman, 2010).

Vocational education has long been an option in the public school system; however, according to one study, vocational options have met of late with little success in either convincing students to register for the vocational option, or gaining employment for those students who fulfilled the vocational program requirements (Anderson, 2009). The decrease in interest is attributed to lack of an appropriate credential upon completion of courses, and an inability to connect vocational training to real job related performance. Anderson relates the applicability of real job experience, sponsored by private business, combined with an integrated curriculum as a possible productive avenue to reduce dropout rates. This program, established in Chicago Public Schools, supports gaining a trained workforce for industry as well as providing career options for students, and as a result a deterrent from dropping out (Anderson, 2009). Chicago's city government took the vocational option further by promoting high school students vocational entrepreneurship for students through The Aspen Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Group (YES) (Lewis, 2009). This group, according to this report, offered low income urban area students the option of entrepreneurship training while completing high school. Students within the program have improved interest in reading, leadership skills, and going to college (Lewis, 2009).

In terms of strategies, a report from The Principal's Partnership (Muir, 2004) identified both effective and ineffective practices that were aimed at preventing students from dropping out of school. The effective programs have several strategies in common. Those strategies are student-centered experiential learning through multi-tiered activities addressing a range of student interests, emotional support based on the student as an

individual, emphasis on literacy with available remediation, an organized and safe environment, committed school staff at all levels, and high expectations (Dynarski & Gleason, as cited in Muir, 2004). The findings from a large longitudinal study of dropout prevention programs receiving federal funds identified two generally effective models to address dropping out of school: alternative middle school design and, for students of acceptable age, GED programs (Dynarski & Gleason, as cited in Muir, 2004). It is essential at this point to note that some research addressed a stage by which a process begins in which the student who has dropped out chooses to return to school. This process is termed an “awakening,” which if left unrequited, may not persist; therefore, resources for returning students need to be readily accessible and community-based (Piiparinen, 2006).

Experts not only address the impact of educative dynamics and supportive social in dropout behavior; they also recognize that the influence of peers. A study on the relationships between parents and peers and urban youth differentiated between internal and external behaviors (Montague, Cavendish, Enders, & Dietz, 2010). The authors reported that internal behaviors were manifest in symptoms such as depression as a result of low self-image from past associations either with parents or adults, while external behaviors from the same associations manifested in aggressive and defiant behaviors. Minority groups in urban settings from this study were made up of African Americans and Hispanics and were found to be more prone to externalized behaviors, which are prompts for disciplinary action, an at-risk feature for dropping out. Likewise, this research showed that males were found to have more externalized behavior issues than females, while females especially during adolescence leaned toward internalized behaviors. The study’s findings suggest that adolescents establish relationships with

those persons and organizations they trust. If the trust was established at school between students and between student and adult (teacher or administrator), the likelihood according to these findings, would be a positive attachment to school and achievement. If, on the other hand, the attachment is weak or fraught with mistrust, the likelihood that positive attachments in school would result is low. This study suggests the need to establish trust between students and the school, in order to support positive attachments to the educative process (Montague et al., 2010).

Along a similar research vein, Ream and Rumberger (2008) recommended further analysis of the influence peers have on school performance; they identify peers as a likely proximal cause of dropping out. However, in this same research, school success was found to be a basis for students seeking success-oriented peers. These researchers recommend a careful analysis of friendship group complexities (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). An example of group success through peer association was a study conducted on peer interactions between Hispanic students enrolled in an Advanced Placement (AP) course for 8th grade students (Shiu, Kettler, & Johnsen, 2010). The students, as a result of their background, were comfortable with the language, and therefore, excelled through constructive associations with their peers in an advanced academic climate. The study results showed positive growth in other academic areas, such as reading English and fostered positive outlooks on students' academic future.

A parochial school in New Hampshire has taken initiative to surmount the controversies surrounding the Catholic Church and safe school relationships by instituting a comprehensive plan to promote healthy school relationships. As stated in the preceding paragraphs, healthy relationships in school are an important supporting strategy for dropout prevention (Dynarski & Gleason, as cited in Muir, 2004). St. Paul's

School, through the benefit of legal guidance, designed a plan of action, which they feel is applicable to any independent school, to deter harmful relationships in school (Dickson, Wolowitz, & Johnson, 2005). The intervention plan starts with faculty professional development, and training for any individuals who come in contact with the students. A facilitator begins by establishing the criteria and terminology appropriate for their goal, and by instructing on the identification of the conditions that foster harmful relationships, such as depression, substance abuse, or isolation. Though this plan is aimed at faculty-student relationships, the same plan is applicable for student-student relationships. From this plan, it is recommended that schools foster safe environments by revealing the sometimes hidden language of harmful relationships through training, and have in place as policy an intervention plan for healthy relationship awareness that students and faculty can follow to foster safe and productive school environments (Dickson et al., 2005).

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998, or WIA, provides a federal source of financial support for at-risk youths in order to provide vocational and remedial training to assist them in gaining reliable employment; however, many local agency rendered services did not address the various levels of education or interest each youth possessed and instead focused on getting their participants whatever employment was available (Piiparinen, 2006). The education provided as described in this study was broad and standard, without regard to individual interests or capabilities, which resulted in issues with retention. Concurrently, this study included a description of research conducted on at-risk youth in Cleveland, Ohio, which used a needs-based assessment of reading, multiplication, division, and gaining meaning from a written passage. The study's author recommended an appropriate level of remediation based on an established baseline, and

then coordination between results of individual career interests, local social services, and adequate and responsible training programs (Piiparinen, 2006). Community organizations, which receive funding from WIA, can redirect their efforts into pertinent vocational and remedial programs. It is conceivable that the school can take a part by partnering with the local support organizations to create outreach programs able to provide accessible services to at-risk youth within their own community. The general intent of this approach is to provide a responsiveness to individual needs and capabilities, which can provide a more enduring platform for employability.

Additional models have asserted powerful interventions for reducing dropout rates; however, many of these are unsupported by research studies and literature. Examples include Big Picture Learning, a series of small schools in low-income urban locations (Big Picture Learning, 2009), Urban Youth Racing School's Build-A-Dream-Project in Philadelphia and Washington D.C. (Squadrito, 2009), and others with new instructional methods such as Second Life or three dimensional virtual realities (Jamaludin, Chee, & Ho, 2009). The approaches used in these models are experiential, project-based, student-centered learning, with such learning supports as mentoring and community outreach.

A Synthesis of Recommendations from the Literature

This research section contains suggestions for effective practices from educational models that have employed those practices with positive outcomes related to student retention and achievement. These practices have been reported as effective in deterring students from dropping out of school and supporting persistence toward high school graduation.

It is important for school personnel and other adults to recognize the early warning signs of at-risk youth when they occur and to provide interventions at that time rather than waiting until the high school years. Models that have been effective, as well as those that have asserted effectiveness, provide secure and emotionally supportive school climates, and maintain outreach strategies to home and community in order to foster emotional connections to the school. Curriculum and assessment are standards-driven, student-centered, and experiential, with emphasis on addressing deficits in reading and mathematics. In some models, training in social skills is provided. It is recommended, to provide incentives, to retain experienced teachers. Experienced teachers can act as mentors to novice teachers. Additionally, it is recommended to provide continuous teacher in-house support with multi-tiered professional development, as well as administrative support and extra learning support from private and public social organizations both inside and outside of the community. Collaboration between school and effective community-based vocational programs can provide an option for many students. Finally, in order to maintain educational model effectiveness, ongoing formative assessment is a requisite.

The numerous interventions and rationales addressing students dropping out begin to have similar foci: they are typically student-centered, experiential and cooperative. They place a premium on a trusting and nurturing climate, social and family involvement, community and social systems involvement. Many also provide recommendations for the restructuring of the diploma following K through 12 grade levels to alternative paths toward achievement and graduation.

Summary

In Chapter II, the background for students' dropping out of school and various authors' perspectives on the severity of the problem were described. National statistical reports related a shift in student demographics that support projections for increased numbers of students dropping out of school in the future. In order to address this growing concern, theories that support achievement and persistence are profiled. Strategies, based in theory and research, are suggested through effective practices used by successful educative models. Implications from those practices and models for changes in public schools were examined.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research method design used for this study of dropout prevention practices. Research questions and hypotheses are delineated. The rationale for the selection of GED students as the research population is explained. The contents of Chapter III consist of a description of method, procedure, and results of the data collected from the pilot study conducted in the spring of 2010. The chapter further describes the survey instrument (Appendix A) that was used to collect the data. The independent and dependent variables are described, along with the statistical processes that were employed for analysis of data.

This chapter also describes the 2010 pilot study that was completed in fulfillment of course requirements. Based on the results of this study, suggestions for modifications for final research were developed and implemented.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

In order to gain insight into the effectiveness of educative practices used by models that purported to be effective in dropout prevention, an overlooked source of information was tapped. GED students' opinions on the applicability and effectiveness of these practices in public schools were solicited. Dropouts continue to significantly impact educative systems and society as a whole; there is a need, therefore, to gain insight into this dilemma. Some educative models have had success in reducing dropout rates by implementing practices outlined in the preceding chapter. Based upon these gleanings from the literature, the following research questions are proposed:

1. According to students who have dropped out, are there effective practices implemented by schools to prevent students from dropping out?
2. What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected dimensions of school climate, as perceived by students who have dropped out?
3. What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected in-school support programs upon dropout rates, as perceived by students who have dropped out?
4. What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected school intervention programs upon dropout rates, as perceived by students who have dropped out?
5. What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected school/home/community involvement supports upon dropout rates, as perceived by students who have dropped out?
6. Are there relationships among the student demographic characteristics of age, gender, ethnicity/race and place of residence, and student perceptions regarding the potential impact of dropout reduction strategies?

Research Question 1, which addresses the qualitative component of this research, was supported by responses to the constructed-item, question number 26, in the survey instrument. Data for Research Question 6 was drawn from the following factors or subscales, which describe strategies, used in dropout prevention educative models. Each subscale was explicated by the related educative practices that are identified in the items listed under and corresponding to the following strategy headings:

- School Climate
- In-School Support Programs

- School Intervention Programs
- School/Home/Community Involvement

The last research question also suggests the appropriateness of a related hypothesis. To date, there is insufficient evidence of relationships among the demographic characteristics of students and their perceptions of the effectiveness of dropout prevention strategies to state this as a directional hypothesis. The hypothesis related to Research Question 6 is, therefore, a null hypothesis and is stated as follows:

H₀: There is no statistically significant relationship between student demographic characteristics and the perceptions of students regarding the impact of various dropout reduction strategies.

Participants in the Study

The study sample of 151 participants came from a state-sponsored GED program offered in a mid-southern state. Permission for participation was granted from the Director of Adult Education (Appendix B) after the research received approval from The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (Appendix C). Student populations in these areas are largely composed of the socio-economic groups consistent with the literature on at-risk populations. GED students were chosen as the study population due to accessibility of a population with experience in both dropping out of school and deciding to return to persist toward a certificate. This population offers an often overlooked resource for opinions on dropout prevention strategies and practices. Both genders and a representative sample of the race/ethnicity categories were present in the sample.

A pilot study, submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for previous research course, was conducted. The participants in this study were 18 years of age or older, with

the oldest participant in the pilot study having reached 47 years of age. All pilot participants attended a state-sponsored GED program in the southwest and after course completion, were expected to pass the GED full test battery in order to receive a certificate. The pilot study, which had 50 participants, was disproportionately female; this was, however, representative of overall enrollment. The ethnic group with the highest percentage of participation was Hispanic, followed by African American and White, with a small representation of Asian and Native American participants. These ratios are consistent with national statistics provided in Chapter II for at-risk high school populations. All participants were attending the GED program as a result of dropping out of high school. All but one of the participants in this research resided in southwest; one participant resided in the south.

When pilot study results were analyzed using Pearson's Chi-Square tests, significant relationships were found between family counseling and ethnicity/race; the majority of the participants were Hispanic and African American, $\chi^2 (20, N = 46) = 36.52, p = .013$. Similarly for the demographic of ethnicity and race, Chi-Square tests showed significant relationships for intervention to prevent dropout in middle school, $\chi^2 (20, N = 46) = 43.44, p = .002$, after school youth programs, $\chi^2 (20, N = 45) = 41.20, p = .004$, having experienced teachers, $\chi^2 (20, N = 46) = 32.82, p = .035$, and family counseling, $\chi^2 (20, N = 46) = 36.52, p = .013$. Concerning age ranges and the variable school safety, almost half of participants in the 18 – 21 year range strongly agreed school safety is a deterrent to dropping out; Chi-Square test results showed a significant relationship between age range and school safety, $\chi^2 (28, N = 46) = 46.77, p = .014$. There were results that were very close to critical value, which included items such as “counselors involved with the local community,” “real-life projects,” “culturally sensitive

teachers,” and “after-school tutoring.” The responses from the open-ended question (number 26) were organized with the following two categories:

School/Family/Community Involvement, and Supportive and Safe Schools.

Research Design and Procedures

Study Design

The research design included mixed methodologies; quantitative data was gathered from a survey on dropout prevention practices completed by students who have previously dropped out of high school. Additionally, responses to a constructed-response item provided the elements for the qualitative component of the study. The student participants were enrolled in a GED program at a community college at the time of the survey. The survey focused on practices recommended by the literature and used by models that are purported to be effective. These practices pertain to curriculum, instruction, school climate, school staffing, and community.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was designed to gather information in response to the dependent variable concerned with the ratings based on the perceptions of GED students regarding the impact of dropout prevention strategies and practices. The independent variables were practices utilized under strategies gleaned from the research to prevent dropping out. For this research, the data gathering research tool was a questionnaire (Appendix A) submitted to a population of approximately 150 General Education Development (GED) students. The questionnaire consisted of 25 quantitative items related to the literature on the child-centered learning approach, emotional support and safety, cultural sensitivity, the roles of administrators, teachers and counselors, and social systems under the four main sub-scales mentioned previously. An item on preferred

grade level for intervention was also included in the instrument. The five demographic items addressed age, gender, race/ethnicity, and location by state, specifying locality as urban/suburban/rural. One open-ended item asked for respondents' input on the practices that they believe are most valuable in preventing students from dropping out.

The items were grouped in subscales under the following categorical constructs: School Climate, School Support Programs, School Intervention Programs, and School/Home/Community Involvement. Items 1-6 addressed school climate, while items 7-12 addressed in-school support programs. Items 13-17 explicated the school intervention programs subscale and items 18-25 were associated with the School/Home/Community Involvement subscale. The item subscales have Cronbach Alpha (α) levels noted under the subheading of Data Collection Process in this chapter.

The 25 quantitative items were constructed with a 5-point Likert-type rating scale. Continuous age ranges are provided for the demographic item on age and will be organized into four 10-year groups starting with 18 years through 50 or above. Ethnicity and race options include the following classifications: White, African American, Asian, Native American, Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, or Other.

From the lessons learned in the pilot study, the research instrument was refined to address repetitive options in order to support full reading of items. Adjustments to the research instrument and sample size increased reliability and validity of results. The number of respondents (156 participants) provided a level of confidence sufficient for typical at-risk population demographics. The sample size in the present study allowed for clarification of results that in the pilot were not satisfactorily statistically analyzed due to the low membership of male responses, some ethnic or racial group responses, and low or missing values. In addition, the items were adjusted to support closer examination and

consideration by the participant before responding, since a number of returned completed questionnaires in the pilot showed repetitive responses. A separate choice option was included for the demographics of urban, suburban and rural.

Data Collection Process

A permission letter (Appendix D) was attached to the survey instrument for the persons in the sample in order to request participation in the study. This letter further advised recipients of the voluntary nature of participation and affirmed there were no negative consequences for the participant if they choose not to participate. By filling out the questionnaire, the participants agreed to participate in the research.

The questionnaires, which were provided in sealable envelopes, were distributed by an assigned, non-biased designee at the GED program location to the participants. The participants filled out and sealed the questionnaire within the accompanying envelope when the instrument was completed. All completed sealed questionnaires were placed in a secure location by the designee. When all questionnaires were distributed and returned within their sealed envelopes, they were mailed via international express mail to the researcher by the designee.

Variables in the Study

The dependent variable for the study was ratings based on the perceptions of GED students regarding the impact of dropout prevention strategies and practices. The primary variables for the study were the ratings for practices suggested by the literature on effective models and strategies believed to be helpful in reducing dropout rates. Some of the variables in the instrument were worded in reverse of effective practice as represented in the research in order to provoke a more thoughtful response. The independent variables are practices asserted by the literature to be effective dropout

prevention strategies. These strategies were grouped into four main categories as factors or sub-scales based on unifying themes. Under each of the four sub-scales were listed educative practices used as intervention toward dropout prevention.

From the pilot study, Cronbach's Alpha (α) test of reliability showed an acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .76$) for the first construct of School Climate for all six items. For the second construct, In-School Support Programs, the Cronbach's Alpha (α) measure of .86, shows relatively high internal consistency. An adjustment was made to the instrument as a result of the responses gathered from constructed response item 26 from the pilot. The item on a *strong disciplinary policy* received a substantially negative response rate, and was replaced with *in-school childcare* and moved under the subscale of In-School Support Programs.

From the responses gathered from item 26 in the pilot on a practice respondents believed would deter students from dropping out, the item on strong disciplinary policy received a substantially negative response rate, and was replaced with In-School Childcare. This item was moved under the subscale of In-School Support Programs. For School Intervention Programs, the five question items generated a Cronbach's Alpha (α) at an acceptable level of .70. As a result, items 14 and 16 were rephrased to make clear the meaning to the respondent that in item 14 learning through *real-life projects* was a practice used as intervention to prevent dropping out, and that in item 16 *traditional classroom instruction* meant instructional methods that have been ordinarily used in average American public school classrooms. For the items under the construct of School/Home/Community Involvement, the Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = .87$) showed a relatively high level of internal consistency.

Demographic variables included age, gender, and ethnicity/race. The demographic items also addressed whether students lived in urban/suburban/rural locations and the state in which students lived. As described above, the open-ended question was categorized according to responses in the final study, which represented participants responses, which represented respondents' personal views on the practices that they believed would positively impact dropout prevention.

Analysis of Data

Qualitative studies attempt to gain understanding by uncovering inner meanings from person's responses. The qualitative portion of this research, constructed responses to question number 26 associated with research question 1, was developed to allow full expression of responses ranging from a simple *no* response to expressive descriptions of personal experience with dropping out. The survey instrument for this portion of the study was the researcher. The researcher listed the responses to question 26 in order of receipt. Before the coding process, Research Question 1 provided the context for this part of the research, which stated: According to students who have dropped out, are there effective practices implemented by schools to prevent students from dropping out? The method for identification of categories and themes was to list the responses from question 26 asking for opinions on whether or not certain educative practices are valuable in preventing students from dropping out. Pertinent phrases from initial responses served to provide code names. As the researcher compiled responses, like responses were coded and then placed into categories for examination. Categories that shared central meaning with other categories were collapsed into categories and their overarching themes were identified. A frequency table containing coded similar response categories under each theme was constructed by the researcher. Finally, an explanation of the findings was

reported. Comparisons of meaning from both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study served to broaden the scope of understanding from the perspective of the sample population on the process of dropping out and on the effectiveness of practices to prevent students from dropping out.

For the quantitative study, data from items 1–25 were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Analysis of Variance ANOVA statistical tests. Descriptive statistics were engaged in the examination of the characteristics of the sample respondents and gave summary descriptions of what was shown in the data associated with Research Questions 2–5. For Research Question 6, four Analyses of Variance were performed to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between the demographic characteristics and students' perceptions of the effectiveness of selected dropout prevention practices.

For the demographic of age, four age ranges were determined within the span of 18 years to 50 and above. A continuous nominal scale of ten year groupings was created, and was correspondingly statistically analyzed via ANOVA.

All questionnaires received were statistically analyzed via the Predictive Analytic Software Statistics (PASW) SPSS program except for the constructed response question 26. The variables for the first 25 quantitative items were scaled from *strongly disagree* (rating of 1) to *strongly agree* (rating of 5). The rating of 3 indicated neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Value codes were assigned for gender: Males = 1, Females = 2. For ethnicity and race: White = 1, African American = 2, Asian = 3, Native American = 4, Asian Pacific Islander = 5, and Hispanic = 6, and Other = 7. As stated above the continuous nominal scale for age, was described in the following groups: 18-28 years, 29-39 years, 40-50 years, and 51 and above.

Summary

The final study utilized in-depth examination of both quantitative and qualitative components for the study. Descriptive statistical data summaries and ANOVA to test for significant differences between groups on the dependent variable of student perceptions of the effectiveness of certain strategies for dropout prevention were performed. From these findings, conclusions were reached about the potential effectiveness of dropout prevention practices in public education.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

Dropout rates continue to rise in some school districts despite efforts at state, federal, and district levels. This research examined the effectiveness of practices associated with selected dropout prevention models for application toward dropout prevention practices in public education. GED students have experienced both dropping out of school and making the decision to return, and therefore, have experience both in the processes of disengagement and persistence. This research gathered the opinions of GED students regarding educative practices that they believe are effective in reducing the dropout rate in public education and, therefore, practices that supports the at-risk student toward persistence. This chapter describes the results, statistical analysis, and findings from a survey of GED students.

Description of the Respondents

The participants at the time of the survey were enrolled in a state-sponsored GED program within a community college in a mid-south state. Of the 156 questionnaires distributed by the staff designee, 151 (96.8%) were completed and returned to the designee. The designee then sent the responses to the researcher via air mail service. The completed questionnaires were numbered in order of receipt. As the data were entered for the quantitative study, notations were made from the qualitative constructed response question number 26. When the primary data was entered into PAWS (SPSS) Predictive Analytic Software program and separate notations compiled from the constructed response question, the results were analyzed and reported.

Initially, a frequency table was generated for all items and demographics. From that data, the following demographic information was obtained: For the demographic of age, 148 responses were received. Of these responses, 135 were between the ages of 18 and 28 years for a majority valid percent of 91.2% (a valid percent does not include missing values, and for the purposes of the study was used throughout). The 29-39 age group had eight respondents or 5.4%. There were five respondents in the 40-50 age group or 3.4% and none in the age group over 50 years.

Females outnumbered males by four participants or 76 females to 72 males. The valid percentages were 51% to 48.3% females to males.

Out of 150 respondent answers to the item on ethnicity/race, 84 indicated that they were African Americans, for a majority of 56%. The next largest ethnic group was Whites with 58 respondents or 38.7 %; there were very low numbers in other ethnic groups. For the respondent's residence in city center, suburb, or rural location, 61 out of the 102 that responded were city dwellers for the majority of 59.8%, 32 or 31.4% lived in rural areas, and there were very low numbers that lived in suburban areas. All of the participants were residents of the mid-south. Table 1 provides the demographic frequencies and valid percents.

Table 1

Demographic Data of Sample

	N	Valid Percent
Age Ranges		
18-28	135	91.2
29-39	8	5.4
40-50	5	3.4
Not Reported	3	
Total	151	100.0
Gender		
Male	72	48.6
Female	76	51.4
Not Reported	4	
Total	151	100.0
Ethnicity		
White	58	38.7
African-American	84	56.0
Asian	1	.6
Hispanic	3	2.0
Other	4	2.7
Not Reported	1	
Total	151	100.0
City Type		
Center	61	59.8
Suburb	8	7.8
Rural	32	31.4
Not Reported	49	
Total	151	100.0
State		
LA	1	(Normal Percent) .7
MS	137	90.7
Not Reported	13	8.6
Total	151	100.0

Findings

Quantitative Study

Before doing statistical significance and correlation testing, tests of internal consistency and reliability were performed for the overall survey instrument and for the items under each subscale of School Climate, In-School Support Programs, School Intervention Programs, and School/Home/Community Involvement. For the six items under the first subscale of School Climate, Cronbach's Alpha showed an acceptable level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .78$). For the second subscale of In-School Support Programs, Cronbach's Alpha showed a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .81$). Under School Intervention Programs, the five items generated a Cronbach's Alpha at an acceptable level ($\alpha = .72$), though not far above critical value. For the eight items under the last subscale of School/Home/Community Involvement, Cronbach's Alpha showed a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$). When all the items on the survey instrument were combined for an overall Cronbach's Alpha, the entire survey instrument showed a high level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$).

Data Findings

After all the data were entered and statistical analyses completed, the findings were generated. The first statistical tests performed were the descriptive statistics, which addressed research questions 2 through 5. Summary reporting of *Means (M)* and *Standard Deviations (SD)* for measures of central tendency were performed for the population sample based on the numbers of responses *N* for the items under each subscale as well as a separate summary for each overall construct and for the instrument as a whole. The new variables created in SPSS for each subscale were: Climate, Support, Intervention, and Involvement.

To analyze the responses to the research questions in the quantitative portion of the study, a careful inspection of the descriptive summaries was performed. The overall mean of the survey instrument from the Likert scale range of 1 to 5 from 1 *Strongly Disagree* to 5 *Strongly Agree*, was $M = 3.73$ ($SD = .77$). Even though 3 indicated *Neither Agree nor Disagree*, the mean was closer to 4 or *Agree*. Therefore, the population sample had a propensity to agree with the practices to prevent dropping out suggested in the survey instrument.

Statistical Analyses for Research Questions 2 through 5

Research Question 2: What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected dimensions of school climate, as perceived by students who have dropped out?

GED students' responses from the first six items under the subscale of School Climate showed the highest mean score was $M = 4.15$ ($SD = 1.15$) for the item *Experienced Classroom Teachers*, followed by *After School Youth Programs*, *When Schools are Safe*, *When Parents/Guardians are Involved With School Activities*, *Strong Attendance Policy*, and *Culturally Sensitive Classroom Teachers* in descending order. Standard deviations SD did not exceed 1.31 for the items under this subscale. The overall mean for the construct of School Climate was $M = 3.82$ ($SD = .85$). Table 2 provides means and standard deviations for School Climate.

Table 2

School Climate Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. When schools are safe.	151	3.91	1.23
2. A strong attendance policy.	151	3.74	1.28
3. Culturally sensitive classroom teachers.	149	3.54	1.19
4. Experienced classroom teachers.	149	4.15	1.15
5. After school youth programs.	150	3.80	1.31
6. When parents/guardians are involved with school activities.	150	3.75	1.31
Valid N (list wise)	145	3.82	.85
Overall Mean			

Research Question 3: What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected in-school support programs upon dropout rates, as perceived by students who have dropped out?

Descriptive statistics were reported for items 7 through 12 under the subscale of In-School Support Programs, which included *Tutoring Provided after School*. This item had the highest mean value of $M = 4.13$ ($SD = 1.12$) or above agree, followed by *Learning Social Skills in Early Years, When More Reading and Mathematics are Taught in Early Grades*, and *School to Job Vocational Programs*. *In-School Mentoring or Guided Learning*, and *School Provided Childcare* followed the first four items in descending order of means value. Standard deviations were below $SD = 1.20$ except for In-School Childcare at $SD = 1.34$. The overall mean for the construct of In-School

Support Programs was $M = 3.99$ ($SD = .84$). Table 3 contains the means and standard deviations for In-School Support Programs.

Table 3

In-School Support Programs Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
7. In-school mentoring (guided learning).	150	3.93	1.18
8. School to job vocational programs.	150	3.99	1.16
9. Learning social skills in the early years.	151	4.05	1.16
10. When more reading and mathematics are taught in early grades.	151	4.01	1.12
11. Tutoring provided after school.	151	4.13	1.12
12. School provided childcare.	151	3.83	1.34
Valid N (list wise)	150	3.99	.84
Overall Mean			

Research Question 4: What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected school intervention programs upon dropout rates, as perceived by students who have dropped out?

The highest mean score for items 13 through 17 under the subscale of School Intervention Programs was for *Learning Through Real-Life Projects* as a support for student persistence with a mean score of $M = 4.05$ ($SD = 1.13$) or above agree. The next highest mean score was *Ordinary Classroom Learning*, followed by *When Intervention to Prevent Dropout Begins in High School*, *When Intervention to Prevent Dropout Begins in Middle School*, and *When Intervention to Prevent Dropout Begins in Elementary School*

in descending order. The overall mean score for the construct of School Intervention Programs was $M = 3.65$ ($SD = .90$). Table 4 contains the means and standards deviations for School Intervention Programs.

Table 4

School Intervention Programs Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
13. When intervention to prevent dropping out begins in elementary school.	150	3.33	1.46
14. Learning through real-life projects	151	4.05	1.13
15. When intervention to prevent dropping out begins in middle school.	151	3.52	1.33
16. Ordinary classroom learning.	149	3.67	1.19
17. When intervention to prevent dropout begins in high school.	149	3.66	1.42
Valid N (list wise)	146	3.65	.90
Overall Mean			

Research Question 5: What is the impact upon student persistence in school of selected school/home/community involvement supports upon dropout rates, as perceived by students who have dropped out?

In response to this question on the impact of selected school/home/community involvement on student persistence and under the subscale of the same name, the highest mean score was $M = 3.78$ ($SD = 1.26$) for *When Principals are More Involved With Students*, followed by *When Teachers are Involved With the Local Community*, *When School Counselors are Involved with Students' Families*, *When Principals are Involved with the Local Community*, *Community Based Family Counseling*, *When School are*

Involved with the Local Community, and When Principals are Involved with Students' Families in descending order of means value. The overall mean for the construct of School/Home/Community Involvement was $M = 3.55$ ($SD = .99$). Table 5 contains means and standard deviations for School/Home/Community Involvement.

Table 5

School/Home/Community Involvement Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
18. When principals are involved with students' families.	151	3.33	1.30
19. When teachers are involved with the local community.	150	3.65	1.29
20. When teachers are involved with students' families.	151	3.53	1.34
22. When school counselors are involved with the local community.	151	3.42	1.22
21. When school counselors are involved with students' families.	151	3.59	1.33
23. When principals are more involved with students.	151	3.78	1.26
24. When principals are involved with the local community.	150	3.53	1.18
25. Community-based family counseling.	149	3.48	1.28
Valid N (list wise)	148	3.55	.99
Overall Mean			

The descriptive statistical analyses for individual items associated with Research Questions 2 through 5 revealed that the highest mean score for the sample GED population relative to their perceptions for the effectiveness of practices to reduce

dropping out of school are: Experienced classroom teachers, tutoring provided after school, learning through real-life projects, and Principals more involved with students. Among the four constructs or subscales, the highest mean score was $M = 3.99$ ($SD = .84$) for In-School Support Programs, followed by School Climate $M = 3.82$ ($SD = .85$), School Intervention Programs $M = 3.65$ ($SD = .90$), and lastly School/Home/Community Involvement $M = 3.55$ ($SD = 1.18$).

Hypothesis Results

Research Question 6 reads as follows: Are there relationships among the student demographic characteristics of age, gender, ethnicity/race and place of residence, and student perceptions regarding the potential impact of dropout reduction strategies? Four calculations using a one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to assess whether the dependent variable of GED students' perceptions of the effectiveness of selected dropout prevention practices were related to age, gender, ethnicity/race, and residence location type. There were no significant differences in GED students' perceptions based on age [$F = (2, 132) = 2.38, p = .096$]. There was no significant differences in GED students' perceptions based on gender [$F = (2, 132) = 1.97, p = .143$]. There were no significant differences in GED students' perceptions based on ethnicity/race [$F = (4, 131) = .45, p = .77$]. For the final factor of locality, there were no significant differences in GED students' perceptions and residence location type [$F = (2, 45) = 2.32, p = .104$]. Thus, all the data were collapsed. The null hypothesis was not rejected. The statistical analyses revealed no statistically significant relationship between student demographic characteristics and the perceptions of students regarding the impact of various dropout reduction strategies.

Qualitative Study

The qualitative study addressed Research Question 1 on whether or not the respondents thought there were effective practices that schools could implement to prevent students from dropping out? This research added a qualitative element to the research design in order to provide a multi-dimensional perspective on research findings. The aim of this qualitative portion of the study was to bring to light factors that impact the likelihood of persisting in school by gaining knowledge from the personal beliefs and experiences of the respondents. GED students' rationales on the causes of dropping out as well as the practices to support or hinder persistence emerged from the responses to the constructed response question 26. The wording of question 26 was made as non-restrictive as possible to allow for a broad range of responses from *no* to an elaborate explanation of practices that the respondent perceived would or would not deter students from dropping out.

Initially, the researcher served as a research instrument used to collect data for analysis and findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The researcher, upon receipt of the questionnaires from the community college designee, listed responses to question 26. There were 101 responses to this question in the 151 returned survey instruments. Many respondents expressed their beliefs with statements such as "life is hard," or "I don't like school." Like responses were coded using the direct wording taken from preliminary responses; like codes were then compiled into categories. The codes were *life is hard, fun at school, teachers that care, school that care, boring, too early, no, childcare, safety, decide to drop out, need someone to talk to, and I don't know*. After the coding was completed similar main themes began to emerge from the categories. Categories names were edited from the wording used in the coding into comprehensive

titles. Several of the categories collapsed under the umbrella of themes as a result of what appeared to be congruent beliefs. There were a total of six themes identified as they surfaced from responses, three of which were consistent with the subscales in the quantitative portion of the survey instrument. These themes were as follows:

- Positive School Climate
- Innovative Learning and Instruction
- School/Home/Community Involvement
- Social Support
- A Personal Decision
- Undetermined.

The first coded category had responses such as “let students learn without degrading them,” “teachers that care,” “give encouragement” and “tries to see what the student is capable of.” This grouping of codes was organized under the category of Caring and Supportive Teachers with the identified theme of Positive School Climate.

The second coded category identified by the respondents as practices to prevent students from dropping out of school was having fun at school. These responses ranged from “more learning sports” to “making learning fun and exciting,” and “fun activities.” This category was named Fun Learning and fell under the theme of Innovative Learning and Instruction.

The third coded category that was identified had responses such as “a role model, because someone needs someone to talk to,” or “talk to your kids.” This grouping was categorized as Communication and fell under the theme of School/Home/Community Involvement.

The last three coded categories concerned social support issues, personal issues, or undetermined issues. The first of which were responses suggesting childcare assistance as a deterrent to dropping out. This grouping's category was name Childcare Assistance and fell under the theme of Social Support. In the quantitative portion of the survey instrument childcare fell under In-School Support Programs; however, for this qualitative portion of the study results, social support and academic support are differentiated. The final two coded categories address "no" responses and "I don't know" responses.

After the categories and themes were identified, the researcher conducted an analysis of results. Before analyzing all categories and themes, the categories pertaining to *no* responses was analyzed. The *no* responses indicated the respondents believed there were no educative practices that would prevent a student from dropping out and considered dropping out a personal choice and decision. Responses placed in this category varied from "no" to "if it is in their mind nothing can stop them," or "they just don't want to listen." The category for this grouping was No Effective Practices and fell under the theme of A Personal Decision. The responses concerned with making a personal decision to drop out varied from the simple statement, *a person decision*, to *they make up their mind*. Exploration into interpretations for these responses could include self-blame or helplessness. For the group of respondents' who did not know if educative practices can deter a student from dropping out, the category was I Don't Know. From that category of responses the identified theme was named Undetermined.

Table 6 details the number of responses under each category and theme and provides a rank order from the highest number of responses to lowest.

Table 6

Frequencies and Themes of Responses to Open-Ended Question

Rank Order	Category	Theme	Number of Responses
1	Caring and Supportive Teachers	School Climate	32
2	Fun Learning	Innovative Learning and Instruction	22
3	Communication	School /Home/Community Involvement	16
4	No Effective Practices	Personal Decision	14
5	I Don't Know	Undetermined	11
6	Childcare	Social Services	6
TOTAL RESPONSES			101

The qualitative portion of the study yielded additional insight into both the phenomenon of dropping out and the phenomenon of persisting in school. A discussion from the results of this portion of the study will be provided in Chapter V.

Summary

Upon receipt of the survey instruments, all were numbered and notations made for the qualitative portion of the results. There were 156 questionnaires distributed and 151 returned representing a substantially high return rate. Raw data from the quantitative portion were input into SPSS and statistically analyzed and reported. Analyses were performed for the qualitative portion of the study and reported.

Frequency data from this sample indicated that the majority of the respondents were between 18 and 28 years of age. Females outnumbered males by a slim margin of four persons. Most of the respondents were African American followed by White and lived in urban centers in the mid-south.

Descriptive statistics pertaining to research questions 2 through 5 showed the highest mean score for GED students' perceptions on the effectiveness of practices to reduce dropping out of school to be experienced classroom teachers, tutoring provided after school, learning through real-life projects, and Principals more involved with students. The highest overall mean score from the four subscales was *In-School Support Programs*. It was worth noting that this subscale outweighed in terms of students' perceptions, the subscales of School Climate, School Intervention Programs, and School/Home/Community Involvement.

Analysis of Variance ANOVA results showed that there were no statistically significant relationships between GED students' perceptions of selected dropout prevention practices and their demographic characteristics. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

The results from the qualitative portion of the data indicated the highest number of responses for GED students' perceptions on the effectiveness of dropout prevention practices was caring and supportive teachers followed by fun learning and communication. In Chapter V, implications from the findings from the quantitative and qualitative research results will be discussed as well as recommendations made for implementation in public education.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify which of the educative practices that are described as effective in the literature about dropout prevention models were perceived as effective by GED students who have experienced both the process of dropping out and returning to school. In Chapter IV, the results portion of this study identified practices that were perceived as effective by the GED students in the sample population through quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative analysis. In spite of the many practices, strategies, and interventions believed to support students' persistence toward high school completion, dropping out continues to negatively impact young people and to reflect poorly on the educational system. The intent of this research was to present findings on effective dropout prevention practices and discern the implications of these practices in public education. This chapter discusses findings, presents conclusions, and makes recommendations for effective practice, and future research.

Summary of Procedures

The data gathered from this research were obtained from 151 survey instruments submitted to the students in a GED program in a community college. After receiving permission from the community college (Appendix B) and from the Institutional Review Board from The University of Southern Mississippi (Appendix C), 156 questionnaires were distributed to the students via a community college designee. The students were allowed to respond to the questionnaires over a ten day period. When the questionnaires were returned within their sealed envelopes to the designee, they were forwarded to the researcher by express international mail.

Upon receipt of the sealed questionnaires, they were opened and each numbered and notations made for the qualitative portion of the study from the responses to the constructed response item, question 26. Raw data from the Likert type scale items 1 through 25 were entered into SPSS; the demographic data were also entered, and notations from the question 26 were compiled. Data analysis began with frequency distributions of the demographic data, including frequency of age group, gender, ethnicity/race, and locality by city, suburb, or rural in order to determine population the demographic profile of the population sample.

Before any other statistical tests were performed, the Cronbach's Alpha test for consistency and reliability was conducted for the items under each subscale of School Climate, In-School Support Programs, School Intervention Programs, and School/Home/Community Involvement, and for the instrument as a whole.

Descriptive statistical summaries were generated for the items under each subscale in the instrument in reference to Research Questions 2 through 5, which addressed the impact upon student persistence in school of school climate, in-school support programs, school intervention programs, and school/home/community involvement.

Analysis of Variance or ANOVA statistical inferential testing was used to determine if there was a significant relationship among student demographic characteristics and the perceptions of students regarding the impact of various dropout reduction strategies.

For the qualitative portion of the analysis, the notations taken from the questionnaires from question 26 were collated and collapsed into six categories. Those categories were: Caring and Supportive Teachers, Fun Learning, Communication, No

Effective Practices, No, I Don't Know, and Childcare. The themes identified from these categories were School Climate, Innovative Learning and Instruction, School/Home/Community Involvement, Personal Decision, Social Services, and Undetermined. A frequency table included in Chapter IV was constructed in order to provide the rank order of the categories and themes according to their respective counts.

Major Findings

The demographic composition of the population sample by ethnicity/race was predominantly young and African American. African Americans outnumbered Whites in this sample population by 17.3%. Ages ranged between 18 and 28 years, indicating that dropouts tended to return to gain their GED certificate from a time span that ranged from immediately after dropping out to within 10 years of doing so. The average age for passing the GED according to research is 23.8 years (Hassen, 2004), which is consistent with the age group of the sample. African Americans, according to the literature cited in Chapter II, are more likely than Whites to be in at-risk populations and drop out; however, African Americans are surpassed in dropout rates by Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). In reference to the sample population, the GED program in question had a low percentage of Hispanic respondents with only three participants. This could be due to low numbers of Hispanics living in that area of the mid-south or because Hispanics are not choosing to enroll in that particular GED program.

There were only four more females than males, resulting in an almost equal division by gender for this sample population; however, research shows that males are more likely than females to view school negatively and drop out (Poyrazli, Ferrer-Wreder, Meister, Forthun, Coatsworth, & Grahame, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

This demonstrates that the sample population is not consistent with the general U.S. dropout population relative to gender.

In terms of residence in city, suburb, or rural locality, the majority of the respondents lived in city areas, with a very low number in suburbs, and the rest of the population lived in rural areas. Extant statistical data for dropouts concurs with this finding that most dropouts live in urban centers (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Therefore, according to the frequency distribution, the sample population according to age ranged from between 18 and 28 years, was largely African American, and tended to reside in urban locales. Women outnumbered men to a slight degree.

Responses to the 25 Likert-type items revealed participant perspectives on practices that might be effective in reducing dropout rates. Descriptive statistical summaries indicated that the respondents tended to agree somewhat that the items under the subscale of School Climate were effective in deterring students from dropping out. The highest agreement (mean score) for the six items under this subscale was for the items *experienced classroom teachers*, *safe schools*, and *after school youth programs*.

In the descriptives summary for the subscale In-School Support Programs, mean scores consistently tended toward the rating associated with agreement that the practices in the subscale would be effective in deterring students from dropping out. The highest mean scores from the responses were for *after school tutoring*, *learning social skills in early years*, and *more mathematics and reading taught in early grades*. A fourth practice was included in this subscale, which is *school to job vocational programs*. While the mean was not as high as the others mentioned, the sample population agreed that this was an effective practice toward dropout prevention. Therefore, the results from this descriptive summary indicated in this population perceived that a need existed for after

school tutoring and greater emphasis in instructional support for math, reading, and social skills in early years.

The descriptives summary for In-School Intervention Programs showed that the respondents perceived that learning through real-life projects, or hands-on experiential learning in an ordinary classroom situation is an effective practice to reduce dropout rates. The respondents also perceived that intervention to prevent students from dropping out should begin in high school. Research shows that learning through real-life projects has a positive impact on the learning experience, as exemplified by students involved with the community on service projects or projects like neighborhood gardens (Dobson, 2006; Kielsmeier, 2010). Kuhn and Dean's (2005) research concurs that hands-on inquiry based learning, and learning modalities employed in real-life projects helps students develop the necessary problem-solving skills for higher academic achievement. The response to item 13, *intervention to prevent dropping out begins in elementary school*, appeared to contradict the literature; the item received just above a neither agree nor disagree mean score. Some research findings assert that the process of dropping out begins in elementary school and that intervention to prevent dropping out should begin as early as the elementary grades (DeRidder, 1988; Kronick & Hargis, 1990). The sample population mean score for intervention to begin in the high school could be attributed to factors associated with the overall age of the population. Since the majority of the population was between 18 and 28, dropping out may be a recent experience. The responses to this item relative to age will be addressed further under the discussion and limitations sections of this chapter.

Upon reflection after the survey instruments were returned, it appeared to the researcher that the item regarding ordinary classroom learning item could have been

interpreted in different ways. The intent was to exemplify the traditional teacher in front of the classroom in an information repository fashion; however, the responses indicated their perception that learning occurs in a normal classroom within a school.

The subscale School/Home/Community Involvement yielded the lowest mean rating of any of the four subscales. Under this subscale, the educative practice that the sample population most readily agreed was effective in preventing students from dropping out was *Principals more involved with students*. This suggests that respondents believe greater communication and involvement with leadership within the school positively impacts student persistence. The next items, in order of their agreement, were *teachers involved with the community*, and *counselors more involved with students' families*. These responses could be interpreted to mean that the perceptions of the students from the sample population are that students are less likely to drop out when teachers are acquainted with students' communities, and likewise when counselors know more about students' family situations.

From the descriptive summaries of the four subscales, the highest overall mean score from the constructs was In-School Support Programs, followed in rank order by School Climate, School Intervention Programs, and School/Home/Community Involvement. These results show that the participants tended to agree more with the construct of In-School Support Programs as an effective strategy against dropping out than the other constructs.

Research question 6 addressed relationships among the student demographic characteristics of age, gender, ethnicity/race and place of residence, and student perceptions regarding the potential impact of dropout reduction strategies. There was no

significant relationship between students' perceptions of the effectiveness of educative practices and the demographic variables.

The results from the qualitative portion of this study showed the sample population's responses to the open-ended question on whether or not they concur there are practices that can deter students from dropping out did not necessarily correspond with quantitative results in all instances; however, when qualitative results were compared to quantitative results, several perspectives came to light. Qualitative results provide a more broadened approach to data interpretation (Chow, Quine, & Li, 2010). From the analyses of findings, the majority agreed that there were practices to prevent dropping out and described some of these practices in their responses. The most prevalent suggested practices for dropout prevention from the qualitative study were caring and supportive teachers, having fun learning, and communicating between students, teachers, home and the community. In the quantitative portion of this research, School Climate, which was the construct for caring and supportive teaching, had a mean score that was lower than that for In-School Support Programs and more specifically, the item *culturally sensitive classroom teachers* had a lower mean score than that for *experienced teachers*. However, in the qualitative portion of the study, caring and supportive teachers had the highest frequency from all the responses. This may bring to light two perspectives. One perspective is that the item chosen most frequently in the quantitative portion of the study, which was *Experienced Teachers*, can be interpreted to mean from the responses to the qualitative study that the respondents associate teaching experience with caring and supportive teaching behaviors. The other perspective is that in the quantitative portion of the instrument, the respondents' did not relate to or understand the meaning of culturally sensitive teaching.

The second highest frequency from the qualitative study of *fun learning* under the theme of Innovative Learning and Instruction also received a high mean from the quantitative counterpart item of *Learning through Real-Life Projects*; however, the qualitative results elaborated on that response by indicating that in order for real-life projects to impact dropout prevention, enjoyment is integral to the process.

When the theme of School/Home/Community/Involvement in the qualitative study was compared to the related subscale in the quantitative study by the same name, it was apparent that the qualitative results differed. Quantitative results showed this subscale to have the lowest overall mean score, while in the qualitative study, this theme was the third most effective set of practices to prevent students from dropping out. The item under this subscale with the highest mean in the quantitative study was *Principals more involved with students*, while many of the coded responses from the qualitative study asked for direct communication with a mentor or leader for advice and support. These results can be interpreted to mean that the respondents look upon school leaders as sources of communication for both academic and emotional support.

To summarize major findings from the results of this study addressing research questions 1 (qualitative) and research questions 2 through 5 (quantitative), the highest mean scores of responses under each subscale from the quantitative portion of the research were: *Experienced Classroom Teachers*, *Tutoring Provided after School*, and *Learning through Real-Life Projects*. For the major qualitative findings, the highest frequencies were under the categories of *Caring and Supportive Teachers*, *Fun Learning*, and *Communication*.

Discussion

From major findings from the statistical analysis several common themes emerged. Those themes concerned teachers and instruction, school environment, and in-school programs. Effective educative practices that are outlined from the quantitative and qualitative analyses are supported by the literature on dropout prevention in this study and may provide a framework for implementation of dropout prevention strategies. Further insight into the effectiveness of these practices and their applicability toward dropout prevention and student persistence are included in this discussion.

In Chapter II of this study, the benefits of experienced teachers for at-risk populations are described (Darling-Hammond, 2010). It is not difficult to imagine for any teaching professional that the teaching of at-risk populations in high poverty areas requires skills and abilities that an inexperienced teacher may not possess. The sample population, from the analyses provided in Chapter IV, appeared to concur that a practice to deter students from dropping out is to have experienced teachers in the classroom.

In the qualitative portion of this research, the practice suggested by the greatest number of respondents was having caring and supportive teachers. This response suggests that it is not only the teacher with experience who is beneficial for at-risk populations, but also the experienced teacher who cares for and supports the student both academically and emotionally.

The effectiveness of early childhood education programs toward providing a more developed academic and social learning foundation was described in a 2007 report regarding the results of a longitudinal study of predominantly disadvantaged African American children ages 3 to 9 years (Niles, Reynolds, & Roe-Sepowitz, 2008). These children participated in a reading, mathematics, and social skills program offered in

centers called Child Parent Centers (CPC) in Chicago. The program was coordinated and connected to the public elementary school and was studied for positive effects on social behaviors and reading and mathematics skills. A second analysis was conducted in adolescence to measure enduring effects. Both groups showed improvement in reading and mathematics, as well as social behavior outcomes against similar social groups within their location who did not participate (Niles et al., 2008). Findings suggest that the sample population in the current study concurs with previous conclusions that younger students should be given additional academic support in reading and mathematics, and guidance with social skills in order to support successful relationships within the school and community.

A practice that the respondents believed to be effective against students dropping out was learning through real-life projects. Inquiry-based learning supported by the research of Kuhn and Dean (2005) is based on hands-on problem solving within real conditions in order to gain the problem-solving skills necessary to increase academic performance and achievement (Kuhn & Dean, 2005). Programs purported by experts to be effective against dropping out often utilize the approach of real-life project learning. Though unsubstantiated by research, these programs focus on the students as problem solvers and provide the support that is needed through mentoring on projects originating from the student's sphere of reality (Big Picture Learning, 2009; Squadrito, 2009). These are examples of child-centered learning, which creates a focus for learning from the students' personal sphere of reference, and therefore, emanates from the student's own interest rather than outside interests (Tzuo, 2007). One teacher's experience was reported in the literature on project-based learning; it described an inclusion classroom project-based experiential learning activity, a communal garden, and asserted the benefit of this

educative practice for increased problem solving skills and support for enhanced emotional and social well-being (Dobson, 2006).

Inquiry and project-based learning, as well as the programs supported by experts in the field, fall under the practice identified in the qualitative portion of this research on making learning fun. The respondents identified fun learning as the second most frequent response, after caring and supportive teachers, as a practice they perceived was effective to prevent students from dropping out.

A practice that was identified in both the quantitative and qualitative portions of this study was the involvement of the school with home, family, and community. Contemporary research, along with the results of this study, concur that the involvement of parents/guardians with their children's education is a major contributor to persistence and school completion (Michael et al., 2007). The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NREL) as early as 1998 recommended the school take a proactive stance in creating positive interaction between the school, the home, and the community.

For the subscale school/home/community involvement, statistical analysis showed that the item rated highest as effective in preventing students from dropping out was *Principal more involved with students*. This choice of practice by the respondents demonstrates the influence leadership can have on student performance. A student who is recognized as a valuable member of the school community by an approachable principal is able to build an attachment to the school and is, therefore, more likely, as stated earlier in this study by Matsueda (1982), to show increased achievement and performance. The statistical results from this study are consistent with Matsueda's analysis of Hirschi's Control Theory and his assertion that students who feel they are members of the school community are more likely to persist toward graduation. The

sample population did not strongly agree, however, with any of the practices in this subscale of the quantitative study and only tended to agree with the few mentioned. In the qualitative study school/home/community involvement was within the three most beneficial dropout prevention strategies. Interpretations could center on the respondents recognizing the benefit of school/home/community involvement, but perhaps needing more clarification as to the manner of involvement.

Continuing with school/home/community involvement and relationships, the respondents generally concurred with Amatea and West-Olatunji's (2007) research on the benefits of school counselors' involvement with students' families. It was recommended by those researchers that counselors go into the community and meet with parents and students in their homes. The counselor can provide support for the teacher through a connective role between the family, who often do not have the background to understand what is being taught and are reticent to interact, and the school. The counselor can act as liaison by interpreting what is being studied and advising families' of options within the school and community that can support students' academic needs, as well as providing a foundation for community-school interaction (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). However, this item in the present quantitative study did not receive a rating much above a neither agree nor disagree, and is therefore, not consistent with the literature.

The results from this research also showed that the respondents perceived that after school activities, including tutoring, are effective in preventing students from dropping out. Along with the practice of after school youth programs and tutoring as a deterrent to dropping out, the respondents also perceived school to job vocational programs as effective. Some research suggests that vocational programs are not as

popular as they have been in the past and that many suffered for lack of student retention due to the lack of equivalent credits toward a high school diploma (Anderson, 2009).

The choices of after school youth programs and after school tutoring have been initiated in many schools, and some with a great deal of success. The Chicago based project called The Aspen Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Group (YES), which offered low income urban area students an option to own and run their own businesses while completing high school, reported successful outcomes (Lewis, 2009). The students who worked on their businesses during the school day, as project based learning, and after school as an activity, showed improved interest in reading, leadership skills, and going to college (Lewis, 2009).

After school tutoring can have a substantially positive effect on student performance as supported by the results of this study and according to one study of an after-school reading program (Saddler & Staulters, 2008). The program served at-risk youth in the upper elementary grades and utilized mentors and parent volunteers. The results lauded enhanced ability to develop beneficial relationships, a feeling of belonging, and increased skill building (Saddler & Staulters, 2008).

Practices described by the literature and included in this discussion from those deemed effective by the respondents would likely not be as effective without students feeling safe at school. Safe schools were a variable under the subscale of School Climate which respondents agreed would serve as a deterrent to dropping out. A positive attachment to the school is fostered through emotional safety between teachers, school leadership, and student-to-student relationships, which in turn supports student achievement (Montague et al., 2010). One of the ways this can be accomplished is by the

school/home/community devising and committing to a central safe school plan (Dynarski & Gleason, as cited in Muir, 2004).

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tests were performed to determine if there were significant relationships among demographic characteristics and students' perceptions on dropout prevention practices. An ANOVA was performed for each of the subscales of School Climate, In-School Support Programs, School Intervention Programs, and School/Home/Community Involvement. There were no significant relationships found among the demographics and the subscales. This finding suggests that the practices that these respondents perceived as effective dropout prevention practices were not influenced by demographic variables and are, therefore, generally effective for the entire sample. The research in this study in many instances concurs with previous research on effective educative practices to reduce dropout rates. Such practices include student-centered, experiential learning addressing students' interests, along with emotional and academic support within a safe school environment with committed and experienced staff (Dynarski & Gleason, as cited in Muir, 2004). Additionally, to enhance student persistence, the results suggest that the following practices should be emphasized: principals more involved with students, academic and social supports beginning in early years, and after school programs and activities, particularly those with an academic emphasis.

With respect to the three practices that were given the highest ratings, the quantitative and qualitative results differed somewhat in the practices that respondents perceived were most effective in reducing dropout rates. However, after review and analysis, different perspectives from both parts of the research came to light. The qualitative study served to clarify and broaden the interpretation from the statistical

results. *Experienced classroom teachers*, the item with the highest mean from responses for effective dropout prevention practices, coincided with the qualitative category of *caring and supportive teachers*, indicating that the respondents may view the experienced teacher as more caring and supportive. *Learning through real life projects* in the quantitative study similarly coincided with *Fun Learning* in the qualitative study, but not in same degree. Fun learning was the second most frequent response category, indicating that the effectiveness of dropout prevention practices may be relative to the degree of enjoyment received from the learning process.

Limitations

This study's findings were limited by some factors. Item 16 from the survey instrument, which asked for students' perceptions on ordinary classroom learning as a practice to prevent drop out, left room for misinterpretation. The intent of the researcher was to gather the opinions from the sample population concerning traditional teacher centered classroom learning. However, upon reflection, it appeared that the interpretation by the sample population focused on whether or not respondents perceived being taught within a classroom as a deterrent to dropping out.

The composition of the population, which was predominantly African American, was consistent with at-risk minority populations. However, Hispanics, whom the literature indicates have the greatest percent of dropouts, were not represented (Fry, 2010). There may be a small Hispanic population in the research area from the sample, or and it may be that Hispanic dropouts within that area did not attend that specific GED program.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

From the results of this research several key practices surfaced as recommendations to deter students from dropping out. It is of relevance that the sample population identified these practices from the vantage point of personal experience with both dropping out and deciding to return to school to complete a GED. These key practices were also corroborated by findings from both the quantitative results and the qualitative results. It is within the framework of these practices that recommendations were made for implementation in public educational systems. The key practices chosen as recommendations from this research are experienced classroom teachers, tutoring provided after school, learning through real-life projects, and principals more involved with students. The qualitative results support these findings under the main themes of positive school climate, innovative learning and instruction, and communication.

In order to provide experienced classroom teachers who practice caring and supportive behaviors, it is recommended that schools provide appropriate compensation as well as focused on-going professional development. Professional development and training to deal with the demands of at-risk students, and cultural perspectives, as well as to provide ongoing in-house support are recommended for teachers within high poverty school districts. If professional support was provided, more experienced teachers might be attracted to inner city poverty level teaching posts. This would provide a bank of experienced teaching skills and essential mentoring for new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). However, the level of instructional expertise and teaching experience needed to teach in a school with at-risk populations involves the need to take a close look at salary scales and stipends. Higher pay scales based on experience and performance and merit

increases along with in school support can generate a higher performing teaching staff, which eventually filters down to greater student achievement.

In regard to the practice of providing after school tutoring, which was supported by this research it is recommended that programs be put in place to accommodate this need in public education. Considering possible difficulties with retaining staff involvement in after school programs, it is recommended that public school districts investigate non-governmental or private mentoring programs in collaboration with public education. A model that is supported by research and has had a great deal of success is Johns Hopkins Talent Development Middle School, which uses mentors from private agencies as a strategy to increase student achievement (Balfanz & MacIver, 2000). Mentors, with the support of the community, can provide after school tutoring and run after-school youth programs.

The results from this research also recommended a positive school climate in relation to safe schools with open lines of communication with school administrators. Safe schools was one of the practices in the survey rated as likely to deter students from dropping out. It is apparent that dropout prevention practices are not as effective when students do not feel safe, either physically or emotionally. Teachers and school leaders should also feel safe within the school environment. It is recommended that collaboration for a safe school be initiated from the school, but also include a strong emphasis on family and community collaboration with shared responsibility. Local police as well as neighborhood watch organizations can become involved. Through collaboration, a safe school plan can be devised and implemented. The safe school plan should also address emotional safety, with suggested practices for teachers and staff on methods to promote positive school climate. Safe schools also refer to the

communication style of leaders to the students. The principal's role as education leader, as demonstrated in this research, can have a significantly positive effect on student performance; therefore, it is recommended that principals promote greater involvement with students, with what is being taught, and with student support needs.

It was mentioned in the research findings that the key practices of learning through real-life projects and fun learning were interrelated. Learning through real-life projects, which is experiential in nature, according to the sample population, indicated learning as fun. Therefore, it is recommended that school leaders support experiential learning. This can be enhanced through collaboration with community businesses and organizations, and by providing teacher resources and advocacy for real-life project instruction. Real-life projects may require facility modifications and/or collaboration with other experts outside of the school. Lastly, it is recommended that the school play an active role in involving families and community with students' education through collaboration with social systems, and community organizations. As suggested from the CPC studies on the enduring effects of academic and social skills education at early ages (Niles et al., 2008), public school education should extend into the community for pre-school educational programs, or tutoring programs in collaboration with community services.

Recommendations for Future Research

As is often the case with such research, these findings reveal additional avenues for future inquiry. The following studies would yield additional insights into the problems associated with student dropout rates and interventions that may reduce such rates.

1. Further research is recommended on the interrelationship of collaborations between social system support and educational systems to provide schools as safe havens to support student persistence.
2. Research should address methods to create a cohesive interrelationship between federal, state, and district policy and initiatives in order to channel funds and programs more strategically toward dropout prevention.
3. As suggested as a deterrent to dropping out in this research, future research is recommended in providing a sound academic and social foundation for later learning through pre-school programs or extended years for early grades, focusing on those in poverty areas.
4. Future studies are recommended on effective after school programs in collaboration with job skills. Specifically, studies on youth programs for life and job skill training are recommended with credentialing applicable toward a high school diploma.
5. To support school/home/community involvements, future research is recommended on parent involvement needs. These studies could extend into the effects of different kinds of parent involvement training and parent involvement programs.
6. As mentioned in Chapter II, experts assert the effectiveness of new and innovative technologies such as Second Life and Virtual technologies as effective instructional strategies. Studies on the applicability of virtual technologies on real-life project-based learning may provide a viable substitute for the hands-on learning experience.

7. In order to provide a more representative sample of perceptions, it is recommended that future research of this sort include larger proportions of older persons who have dropped out of school and completed a GED.
8. A study of differences in the demographic profile and perspectives on dropout prevention practices of those who elected not to participate in the constructed response item that invited respondents to identify dropout prevention practices is warranted.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to gain the perspectives of GED students on educative practices, purported to be effective by the literature and dropout prevention models that are perceived effective in preventing students from dropping out. GED students' opinions were gathered by a questionnaire containing items for educative practices under each of four subscales: School Climate, In-School Support Programs, School Intervention Programs, and School/Home/Community Involvement.

The analysis contained both quantitative and qualitative portions. Frequency distributions results showed the majority of respondents were young, between the ages of 18 and 28 years, and mostly African American. The population was almost split equally for gender with a slight propensity for females. The majority lived in city areas. The demographic distribution was consistent with at-risk populations.

The statistical analysis descriptive summaries showed the highest mean scores for experienced teachers, safe schools, and after school tutoring. Other suggested practices from the results for the quantitative portion were early support for reading, math, and social skills, principals more involved with students, learning through real life projects, and after-school youth programs. Some mean scores showed a slight agreement, but were

not rated much above neither agree nor disagree. All overall mean scores under each subscale were above 3, but under 4 in the Likert scale.

It was determined through statistical testing that there were no significant relationships among student demographic characteristics and their perceptions about the effectiveness of dropout prevention practices. Therefore, applicability of practices to prevent dropping out within the sample population could be equally as effective.

Despite some limitations, recommendations were made from the results for both policy and practice. These recommendations included methods to gain experienced teachers in high at-risk student schools using incentives, pay scale adjustments, and multi-tiered ongoing professional development and support. Implementation of professional development for sustained positive school as well as safe school plans was recommended. It was also recommended that school leaders support experiential learning through collaboration with community businesses and organizations. From this research, programs promoting reading, math, and social skills instruction for pre-school and early grades are recommended. Recommendations were also made for investigations into private mentoring programs in collaboration with public education. Principals' increased involvement with students demonstrating positive and supportive school leadership is recommended.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Questionnaire on Educational Practices

This research deals with dropout prevention. Your input provides a meaningful source of information on how to prevent students from dropping out of school. I, respectfully, request that you read each question item carefully, but refrain from including any identifying information. This questionnaire is completely anonymous.

Thank you for your participation.

Please rate items 1 – 25 on a scale of 1 – 5, circling one number response for each question.

To what extent do you agree that the following would be likely to prevent a person from dropping out?

School Climate

1. When schools are safe.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
2. A strong attendance policy.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
3. Culturally sensitive classroom teachers.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
4. Experienced classroom teachers.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
5. After school youth programs.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
6. When parents/guardians are involved with school activities.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree

In-School Support Programs

7. In-school mentoring (guided learning).	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
8. School to job vocational programs.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree

9. Learning social skills in the early years.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
10. When more reading and mathematics are taught in early grades.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
11. Tutoring provided after school.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
12. School provided childcare.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree

School Intervention Programs

13. When intervention to prevent dropping out begins in elementary school.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
14. Learning through real-life projects	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
15. When intervention to prevent dropping out begins in middle school.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
16. Ordinary classroom learning.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
17. When intervention to prevent dropout begins in high school.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree

School/Home/Community Involvement

18. When principals are involved with students' families.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
19. When teachers are involved with the local community.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
20. When teachers are involved with students' families.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
21. When school counselors are involved with students' families.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree

22. When school counselors are involved with the local community.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
23. When principals are more involved with students.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
24. When principals are involved with the local community.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
25. Community-based family counseling.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree

26. Please write a short response to the following:

Are there practices that you believe would be valuable to prevent students from dropping out of public schools?

Please circle the appropriate response below:

27. Age: 18 – 28 29 – 39 40 – 50 51 – Above

28. Gender: Male Female

29. Race/Ethnicity: White African American Asian Native American

Asian Pacific Islander Hispanic Other

30. I live in a city center/suburb/rural (underline one) location in the state of _____.

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX B
LETTER OF PERMISSION



July 26, 2010

Dr. Mike Ward
University of Southern Mississippi
School of Educational Leadership
Hattiesburg, MS

Dear Dr. Ward:

Upon approval of The University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB), Louisa Pollack Pruitt has my permission to survey Adult Basic Education/GED students in the seven county Copiah-Lincoln Community College district in order to collect data for her research project, *Effective Practices Used by Dropout Prevention Models*.

I understand that all participation is voluntary and that individual responses will be kept confidential. Further, any changes in the research protocol must be approved by the Southern Miss IRB. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 601-643-8651.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael J. Posey".

Michael Jeffrey Posey, M.Ed., District Director
Adult Basic Education/GED Testing/Dropout Recovery
Copiah-Lincoln Community College District

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH APPROVAL



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 Tel: 601.266.6820
 Fax: 601.266.5509
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 10081001

PROJECT TITLE: **Examining the Effectiveness of Dropout Prevention Models and their Implications for Intervention with Public School Students**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 08/15/2010 to 10/15/2011

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Louisa Pollack Pruitt**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **08/17/2010 to 08/16/2011**



 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 HSPRC Chair

8-15-2010

 Date

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION OF PARTICIPANT

Dear Participants,

I am conducting research on the effectiveness of practices used by dropout prevention models. I am interested in your opinion as to which interventional practice you believe would be effective in reducing dropout rates.

Please take a few moments of your time to fill out the attached questionnaire. It should take no more than 15 minutes. The questionnaire contains 25 questions for your opinion on whether or not certain education practices could be effective for lowering dropout rates in public schools. There is 1 open-ended question item for your thoughts (# 26) concerning dropout prevention, and there are 4 demographic questions. The data collected from the completed questionnaires will be compiled and analyzed. All data collected is anonymous. Respectfully, I request that you refrain from writing your name or identifying information. All information gathered will be kept completely confidential. As the researcher, I am very grateful for your participation; your completed questionnaire will serve as your consent to participate. However, you have the option to decline to participate if you so wish. If you decide to withdraw from participation at any time there is no penalty or risk of negative consequence.

From your experience, and from receiving or working toward a General Education Development (GED) certificate, you can provide a valuable source of information about those practices you deem to be most effective for use by public education. The data you provide will be used by me, the researcher, to add to the bank of research on suggested interventions for preventing students from dropping out.

Should you have any questions please contact: Louisa Pollack Pruitt, email: Louisa.Pruitt@eu.dodea.edu, or Louisa1@rocketmail.com. This research is under the supervising Professor, Dr. Mike Ward, University of Southern Mississippi, email: mike.ward@usm.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that all research fits the federal guidelines for involving human subjects. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266 6820.

Sincerely,

Louisa Pollack Pruitt, M.S.

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