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The Relationship Between School Leadership and Graduation Coach Interventions in Rural and Urban Settings

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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND GRADUATION
COACH INTERVENTIONS IN RURAL AND URBAN SETTINGS

by

Christopher Nicholas Amos

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

May 2012

ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND GRADUATION COACH INTERVENTIONS IN RURAL AND URBAN SETTINGS

By Christopher Nicholas Amos

May 2012

The primary purpose for the Graduation Coach intervention is to increase the graduation rate and help schools produce a student that can be a productive citizen. The increasing dropout rate in the United States of America, coupled with the recent addition of some legislation, has forced schools and districts to implement programs to combat this deficiency. The economic and social impacts that dropouts have on society are vast and can be devastating for some communities. The setting in which a school resides and the leadership style of the school principal are factors that could have a significant impact on the success of the students and the intervention that is used to help increase the graduation rate. This study investigated if the setting, rural or urban, impacts the Graduation Coach intervention as measured by the graduation rate of the schools in each setting. A T-test was conducted and showed that there was no significance between the setting and graduation rate.

A survey was sent to 50 principals, 25 from each setting, to investigate if there is any correlation between leadership style and graduation rate, their level of support for the Graduation Coach Intervention, the level of training the Graduation Coach received and their perceptions of the Graduation Coach's duties. The first 40 statements on the survey were closed statements in which the respondents indicated their level of agreement by marking the appropriate box on the six-point Likert scale. The final two statements were

open-ended questions that addressed the level of training the Graduation Coaches received and the perceptions of the principal about the role of the Graduation Coach. The results from this survey were evaluated through the use of a Pearson Correlation and indicated that there was no correlation between the leadership style and the graduation rate. The level of support for the intervention indicated by the principals also showed no significance when compared to the graduation rate. The data collected for the level of training had no significance, however, some schools that did have training had lower graduation rates than schools that did not receive training.

The results of this study indicated that there are many other factors that impact student success and graduation rates. The variables that impact the success of a school are varied from school to school and the formula to having a successful school might never be found.

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A Dissertation
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

School districts throughout the United States are under an enormous amount of pressure to increase test scores, produce more competitive students for the global markets and increase their graduation rates, all while cutting budgets during this downturn in the economy. This task seems almost impossible; however, school districts across the country are excelling in all these areas. Graduation rates and dropout rates have made improvements, but in recent years they have been affected negatively. The dropout rate in the United States in 2010 was 8.7%, which was slightly lower than 2011. Males were more likely to drop out (9.8%) than females (7.7%) and dropout rates by race and ethnicity were White-5.3%, Asian/Pacific Islander-6.1%, Black-8.4%, Hispanic-21.4% (“NCES fact sheet,” 2010). These dropout rates have an effect on the local and global economies and expenditures for uninsured healthcare over the course of those young people’s lives. The average dropout earns an income of \$18,000 annually. This is significantly lower than the average income for people who earn a diploma, which is \$40,000 annually. Over their life time earnings, graduates will earn \$1,034,000 more than dropouts. That money that is not earned has an effect on local and global markets.

The dropouts from the Class of 2008 alone will cost the nation more than \$319 billion in lost wages over the course of their lifetimes (Alliance for excellent education, 2009 fact sheet, 2009). If the likely dropouts from the class of 2006 in the United States would have graduated, the United States could have saved more than \$17 billion in Medicaid costs. If schools and colleges raise the graduation rates of Hispanic, African American, and Native American students to the levels of white students by 2020, the

potential increase in personal income would add more than \$310 billion to the U.S. economy. Increasing the graduation rate and college matriculation of male students in the United States by just 5% could lead to combined savings and revenue of almost \$8 billion each year by reducing crime-related costs (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009 fact sheet, 2009). Generally, the more money people make, the more they spend which is what keeps this economy going.

An area of our culture that has significantly high dropout rates is our correctional facilities. There are about 2,304,115 inmates in the United States. That is equal to about 3.5% of all citizens. Seventy-five percent of state prison inmates and 59% of federal inmates are high-school dropouts. A high school dropout is 3.5 times more likely to go to jail than a student with a high school diploma (NCES fact sheet, 2010). The question remains, why do students dropout of high school? This is a question that seems simple and complex at the same time.

There are a few factors that have a direct impact on the likeliness a student will drop out. One is the economic trend in the United States. The labor force is requiring a higher-skilled worker in recent years. There are fewer jobs for students who dropout. Fewer jobs increase crime rates and burden the economy and the public assistance programs available to low-income families (Alliance for excellent education, 2009 fact sheet, 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the average annual income for individuals without a high school diploma or GED is \$18,734. Compared to 1971, when average earnings were \$35,087, today's dropouts face a tough economic future. Another factor is the demographic trend. Students who are at risk of dropping out typically come from poor and low-income households, racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Each year, approximately 1.2 million students fail to graduate from high school, and more than half are from minority groups (NCES fact sheet, 2010). Almost 50% of dropouts are Black or Hispanic. A 16 to 24 year-old from the highest quartile of family income is about seven times as likely to have completed high school as a 16 to 24 year-old from the lowest quartile. Some reasons for such significant differences between both groups are resources available, parental involvement and the area in which the student lives (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

Dropouts also have pressure from family members to work at an earlier age. The increase in costs in the economy force younger family members to go to work and contribute to the household earnings, which in turn forces them to dropout of high school. These economic pressures and cultural influences force students from these lower income and mostly minority families to dropout of school to fulfill this immediate family need for more income. This in turn increases the need for public assistance thus increasing the burden on society to help these families in need (National dropout prevention center/network, 2007). Most dropouts are already on the path to failure in the middle grades and engage in behaviors that strongly correlate to dropping out in high school.

Various researchers have identified specific risk factors, such as low attendance or a failing grade, which can identify future dropouts, in some cases as early as sixth grade. Ninth grade serves as an indicator for many students who begin their freshman year only to find that their academic skills are not adequate for high school-level work (National dropout prevention center/network, 2007).

Up to 40% of ninth grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeat ninth grade and only 10 to 15% of those repeaters go on to graduate (National dropout

prevention center/network, 2007). Academic success in ninth grade course work is highly predictive of eventual graduation; it is even more telling than demographic characteristics or prior academic achievement (NCES fact sheet, 2010). Unfortunately, many students are not given the extra support they need to successfully make the transition to high school. As a result, over one-third of all dropouts are lost in ninth grade. The six million secondary students who comprise the lowest 25% of achievement are twenty times more likely to drop out of high school than students in the top-performing quartile. Both academic and social engagements are integral components of successfully completing an education. Research shows that a lack of student engagement is predictive of dropping out (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

Where and why are these students dropping out? Approximately 2,000 high schools, or about 12% of American high schools, produce more than half of the nation's dropouts. In these schools, the number of seniors enrolled is routinely at or below 60% the number of freshmen three years earlier. Eighty percent of the high schools that produce the most dropouts can be found in a subset of just fifteen states. The majority of these schools are located in northern and western cities and throughout the southern states. They produce 69% of all African American dropouts and 63% of all Hispanic dropouts, compared to 30% of all white dropouts (National dropout prevention center/network, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

The issue of student retention and dropout prevention is a major factor in the decisions school leaders make to ensure student success. Many of the current obstacles that schools and school districts face are related to graduation rates and student

achievement. The issue that arises from these obstacles is how to address the dropout rate and what prevention and retention programs are most appropriate to ensure the success of the program and increase student achievement. This study looked at the effectiveness of the graduation coach intervention in both rural and urban settings and the impact the school leadership has on the success of this intervention. Schools and school districts spend millions of dollars every year on a variety of programs that they believe will have an impact on their graduation rate, and some of them are not getting any positive results.

This study examined quantitative data to see the appropriateness of the graduation coach intervention in both rural and urban schools as measured by the graduation rate and the qualitative data on the leadership style of the principal of the various schools. This study examined the graduation data from the various schools, the leadership survey and the differences, if any, between urban and rural schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine if the success rate of graduation coach intervention is affected by the setting, rural or urban, in which the school is located and the leadership effectiveness of the school principal. The outcome of this study may justify the use of the intervention or bring to light that there are other interventions to prevent dropouts that would be more appropriate depending on the setting. This study will also assist principals and school districts by providing research to help these stakeholders make more informed decisions about the effectiveness of this intervention and assist them in making fiscally responsible decision based on these research findings.

The costs that are associated with the students who dropout of school have a huge impact on society (Suh, 2011). This study will give school leaders an understanding if the

use of a graduation coach is necessary and if they can anticipate the graduation rate of the program to increase or decrease. Understanding these impacts will allow school leaders to be more fiscally responsible when they have to decide which dropout intervention program will have the greatest impact on the success of the students.

In 2006, Governor Sonny Perdue of Georgia established a new program that placed a graduation coach in each of the state's public high schools. The state of Georgia was the first state to mandate that every middle school and high school use this intervention; however, many other schools in a variety of states have utilized the graduation coach intervention (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*). A graduation coach is a teacher or counselor that works with students who are labeled as at-risk, and their responsibility is to help these students make it through school and graduate. Some of the specific duties of a graduation coach may vary depending on the specific school location; however, the general goal of the graduation is to help the student graduate. The program in these schools across the country has had some success through increasing the graduation rate. This study will investigate if the setting of the school would show that a different intervention would be more effective and appropriate thus saving the schools time, effort and money. The state of Georgia graduation coach intervention was selected to be a part of this study because they are the only state that has mandated the intervention.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Data was collected from specific schools that use the graduation coach intervention and analyzed to compare its impact on their dropout rates. Of particular interests of this study is the school setting. The tested hypothesis for this study was the

setting, rural or urban, in which the Graduation Coach intervention is used will not have a significant impact on the graduation rate as measured by the differences in graduation rates before and after the intervention. The graduation rates from all high schools in Georgia were used to test this hypothesis. Other demographical information was included to examine if there were any differences between the various groups.

The study examined the leadership style of 50 principals, 25 from rural schools and 25 urban schools, and its impact on the success of the intervention. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Did the opinion given by the principals about their leadership style indicate a significant impact on the success of the intervention program?

RQ2: Did the opinion given by the principals on the success of intervention have a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate at their school?

RQ3: Did the opinions given by the principals about the level of training the Graduation Coaches received indicate a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate?

RQ4: Did the opinions given by the principals about the expectations of their Graduation Coaches indicate a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate?

The basis for this hypothesis and these research questions is rooted in the dropout issue that schools are facing. The dropout rate in the United States is 8.7%. Males were more likely to drop out (9.8%) than females (7.7%) and dropout rates by race and ethnicity are: White-5.3%, Asian/Pacific Islander-6.1%, Black-8.4%, Hispanic- 21.4% (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

What are states and school districts doing to combat the dropout rate? There are many interventions and prevention plans that many different states use to address this issue. There have been mixed results and the slight increase in the dropout rate seems to indicate that some programs are working and some are not. One intervention that has seen success in the state of Georgia is the implementation of Graduation Coaches (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

The High School Graduation Coach initiative allows each of Georgia's high schools and middle schools to employ a coach. This is the first program of its kind to be implemented statewide. The coach's primary responsibility is to identify at-risk students and help them succeed in school by keeping them on track academically before they consider dropping out. The coaches identify, recruit, and engage parents and concerned adults, organizations and government agencies to serve in a variety of ancillary roles. Since the success of Graduation Coaches in Georgia, many other states have implemented Graduation Coaches such as Mississippi, Nevada, Illinois, and California. In Mississippi, it is not mandated by state law but some smaller school districts have employed a Graduation Coach to help combat the dropout rate at their schools. There are, however, differences in the type of work the graduation coach is required to perform (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

In Georgia, the Graduation Coach is in a counselor capacity and does not teach classes. Graduation Coaches are there in a support capacity only but do require a degree and teacher or counselor credentials to be hired as a graduation coach (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*). In Pass Christian, Mississippi, the school district has merged the Graduation Coach position with that of a teacher and a counselor (*Pass*

Christian School District, 2010). The Graduation Coach still has to keep track of the student's progress but also teaches classes. Another intervention program is ninth grade teaming or sometimes called a ninth grade prevention program (NGP). An NGP focuses on preventing school dropout. Fundamental goals of the program include meeting students' academic needs, creating a caring atmosphere for students, and providing relevant and challenging curriculum. Strategies for meeting these goals are carried out mainly by teachers, but also with the help of administrators and peer tutors.

Each school designs an intervention plan to achieve the goals of the program. A summary of services offered across the district showed plans focused on academics, study skills, socialization, and attendance and offered an orientation component. Creating a positive school climate and promoting feelings of belonging to the school environment via positive relationships with teachers and peers are key foundational constructs. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania the nation's eighth-largest school district, high school reform has emerged as an urgent and visible priority. Uneven performances on statewide tests and recent public concern over school dropouts have added to the school district's desire to strengthen the performance of students throughout high school. Thomas A. Edison High School, a comprehensive high school serving a low-income, largely Hispanic population, uses the Ninth Grade Success Academy, a component of the Talent Development High School program, a reform strategy developed by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) at Johns Hopkins University. The Success Academy, perhaps the most critical element of the Talent Development program, reflects a number of assumptions about how to make the ninth-grade transition successful. Many entering students have deficient basic skills,

particularly in English and mathematics, which must be addressed using well-designed curricula and high-quality instruction. Students need added structure and extra personal support and attention as they make their way through ninth grade. All ninth-grade teaching staff needs opportunities to collaborate, both on their teaching and their support for students. The Success Academy is a school-within-a-school with a number of features specifically designed to help ninth-graders make a successful transition, and is described below. There are many programs out there with mixed results as well. No matter what the program or intervention used to address dropout rate, an important factor for success is the school leadership. If there is a vested interest from the administration of the school, community leaders and family members than the impact on student achievement is higher.

There are several interventions in education; however, there is little data available that indicates which setting, rural or metro school districts, has the greatest impact on increasing the graduation when they employ the same intervention. The research plan is to compare the effectiveness of graduation coach intervention in the two school settings, rural or urban, by comparing the graduation rate of the various schools. This will give a descriptive representation of the effectiveness on the dropout rate and how they impact student achievement.

Definition of Key Terms

Urban Schools - Schools located in major cities that draw a significant portion of their enrollment from low-income and ethnically diverse families. These school systems have enrollments that are 10,000 students or more. High schools might have graduating classes exceeding 2,000 students (Debertin & Goetz, 1994).

Rural Schools - Schools located in or near towns with populations of 5,000 residents or less. For these schools, their total enrollment does not exceed 5,000 students, and graduating classes are usually under 700 students (Debertin & Goetz, 1994).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) - The No Child Left Behind Act was designed to have more accountability for schools with an emphasis on data based research driven programs in schools. It was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002 (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) - An indicator for each state that is required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 to establish standards that measure student performance each year (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004).

Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) - The comparison of a school's performance to a specific target, which determines whether a school meets Adequate Yearly Progress (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004).

At-Risk Student - A student at-risk of dropping out of school due to a history of school failure, academic struggles, poor attendance, disengagement from school, and/or frequent behavior problems (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

Attendance Rate - The number of school days a student has attended. Various states have different qualifications for meeting the minimum number of days needed to have fulfilled the attendance requirement. In some states, if the student does not meet the requirement, the students can be required to repeat the year of school in which they failed to meet the required number of days attended (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

Dropout - A student who withdraws from school before graduating (IDEA 2004, 2010).

Graduation Coach - A person employed at the middle and high school levels whose job is to identify and work with at-risk students so that they graduate from high school. The qualifications of graduation coaches are defined by the various school districts and state that employ them but in general they have a bachelor's degree from an accredited four-year college, credentials are issued by the Professional Standards Commission, and they have three years' experience involving work with students (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

Limitations

There are pre-known limitations or factors that could influence the outcome of the study. The types of methodologies used for this study are archival data study of dropout rates and student retention rates at the high schools that employ a graduation coach as well as a qualitative interview of the principals who utilize the graduation coach intervention. However, factors that are known that may limit the study are as follows:

1. A survey was sent to fifty principals, 25 from a rural school setting and 25 from an urban school setting about their leadership style and abilities and their view on the effectiveness of the programs and leadership support at their schools will be used. A limiting factor was the number of responses received by the researcher on this part of the study.
2. Every high school in the state of Georgia who employs a graduation coach was chosen for the study because of the state mandate that is in place, which explains the requirements to be a graduation coach. Their graduation data was gathered and analyzed to extract the effectiveness of their programs as it pertains to the

overall dropout rate of the school. A limitation here was the reported data could be false or not complete which will in turn impact the validity of the study.

3. The data collected from the survey of the principal might not reflect their true feelings about the success of the intervention and/or their ability to lead effectively. This could impact the validity of the qualitative piece of the study.

The data collected from the surveys will be utilized to add to the impact of the study by using these opinions of the professionals who work in those areas. Their view on the intervention and the impact their leadership has on the success of the programs will help refine these various programs as well as indicate which intervention has the greatest impact on student achievement and in which setting is it most successful.

Assumptions

The following assumptions will ground the study:

1. The school districts chosen for the study will have similar hiring processes and requirements for employment as a graduation coach such as: being a licensed teacher, having a degree from a four-year college or university, and having some experience working with students who are at-risk.
2. The principals who respond to the questionnaire supplied honest answers and filled it out completely.
3. The graduation requirements used to measure student success are the same for all schools.

Justification

This study has many implications from political to financial. The main impact will be to allow schools and districts to use the results to give them the information that will show that the graduation coach intervention is or is not appropriate for their school based on the school setting and demographics. By using research to drive their decisions, schools and districts are looking for proof that the idea or program they are about to spend money, time, and effort on is right for them and will show results. The spirit of this study is to help principals and school district leaders make the most appropriate choices to enhance student success and graduation rates in their schools.

Taxpayers expect that the schools will be fiscally responsible when selecting programs to spend money to enhance the education for the students in their community. This study will allow school leaders, who utilize this intervention, to have the data to justify the implementation or removal of the Graduation Coach position. Understanding if this intervention is more effective in one setting and not the other is a tremendous tool to have to make a sound decision that is based on the students' best interests. Dropout prevention is a topic in American schools that has tremendous implications for a large portion of students. The decisions made by school leaders will have implications that could not only impact an individual student's ability to graduate but also impact all taxpayers across the country.

This study will examine if the settings, rural or urban, impact the effectiveness of the graduation coach intervention as measured by the overall graduation rates and a qualitative piece which will be in the form of a survey. If this intervention is not examined then the implications could mean that the information and its impact on

education could be minimized because of the lack of data that indicates its success. If this issue is addressed by the researcher, then it will investigate the impact the setting, rural or urban, has on the success of the graduation coach intervention. Solving this problem can be difficult for school administrators because finding data and updated information on programs in education is continuously changing. The findings of this study will empower school administrators to make the necessary changes in their school where appropriate by giving them data driven information to feel empowered about the changes needed.

Summary

The challenge of closing the achievement gap and increasing the graduation rate, while lowering costs is one challenge that seems almost impossible to accomplish. Schools are using programs and interventions to combat the dropout rate. This study will examine the Graduation Coach intervention and the setting (rural or urban) the school is in. The study will examine the success of each program based on the graduation rate and the success or lack of success each program has experienced. The schools will be picked through matching of various variables to limit the amount of factors that could impact the data. A survey will also be sent to the principals to rate their leadership style, motivation, and support level for the graduation coach intervention. Once all the data has been collected, the data will be examined to identify if the setting in which the intervention is used impacts the success of the students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review will examine a selection of books, articles, and information to situate this work in the existing literature. Dropout prevention programs are varied and have a wide range of results. To ensure a complete review of the literature, understanding the law behind education is paramount and necessary. This literature review will start with the in-depth look at the law and end with a description of the specific intervention that will be examined in this study.

Theoretical Framework

In the ever-increasing global market, the pressure to succeed in education does not fall just on the students. Principals, teachers, and parents all are feeling the pressure to raise graduation rates and increase the academic standards. There are many theories that have been proposed explaining the factors that impact graduation rate and how schools and districts combat this issue. One theory indicates that there are four major categories that impact the student's ability to graduate. These categories are factors that relate to: 1) the student such as truancy and a negative attitude toward the school; 2) the family structure such as having a low-income or lack of parental involvement; 3) to the school such as a negative school climate or low expectations; 4) to the communities such as lack of support for area schools or high crime rates (Elias, O'Brien, & Weissberg, 2003). In secondary education some of the research has focused on why a student drops-out and the various variables that have impacted student success. It has been suggested that the factors that impact a student's ability to graduate reach farther than the school and home

setting. In a recent study by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), students who were more likely to dropout in high school usually exhibited certain behaviors that were clear indicators that they were at risk. If a student had not mastered reading by the third grade, there was a good chance that student would dropout by the eleventh grade. No studies were found comparing interventions to high school dropout rate. How particular interventions increased student achievement and address the various social constraints are of interest for this work.

Accountability: Laws and Governance

Compulsory Attendance

There are several laws and mandates which force schools to develop plans of action to increase student achievement while maintaining enrollment. Each state has a compulsory attendance law which forces the schools to do everything in their power to keep students in school. Massachusetts was the first state to put a compulsory law into place in 1852 and Mississippi was the last in 1918. Today, every state and territory requires children to enroll in public or private education or to be home-schooled. Thirty-two states require students to begin education by age six. Some states' have an age requirement from as low as age five and as high as age eight. Every state requires their children to continue their education until they reach high school where some states, twenty-six, have set the age requirement to age sixteen and the remaining states have a cut-off age of seventeen or eighteen (*National Conference of State Legislators, 2011*). Compulsory education laws are different depending on the state. Some states use a student's birthday to the compulsory status of their education, while other states require a student to start attending if he turns six during that school year, and they also require the

student remain in school until he has reached the age stated in their law. Arizona's, Montana's, Vermont's and Wyoming's students are required to remain in school through a specified grade. Most states allow parents to petition their local school board or principal for a waiver of these requirements. Under certain circumstances, such as enrollment in a vocational education program, a student is granted early release from the compulsory law (*National Conference of State Legislators, 2011*).

Some states that have increased their dropout age limit to 17 and 18 with the notion of encouraging more students to graduate high school and decrease juvenile crime and teen pregnancy. Some people are opposed to this because they feel it forces students to attend against their will. Opponents of the increase say that this may actually increase disruptive student behavior and increase time spent on such disruptions that could also lead to more violent offenses by these students (*National Conference of State Legislators, 2011*). These activists also say that the funding for school will need to be increased because of the increase in attendance in regular and alternative education programs (*National Conference of State Legislators, 2011*).

California's compulsory education laws require children between six and eighteen years of age to attend school. The law states that a pupil who is absent from school without a valid excuse, or is tardy or absent for more than thirty minutes during the school day on three occasions in one school year, is considered truant. Once a student is designated a truant, state law requires schools, districts, counties, and courts to intervene to ensure that parents and pupils receive certain services to assist them in complying with attendance laws (*California's Legislative Analyst's Office, 2010*). When these various interventions fail and parents or guardians still do not send a child to school or a student

continues to violate the law, the matter is referred to the courts. Courts can then use their power to penalize the student and parent to have these students meet their requirements that are set by the law. These different interventions are in place to ensure that students remain in school and graduate with a diploma (*California's Legislative Analyst's Office, 2010*).

The Mississippi Department of Education explains that the Office of Compulsory School Attendance Enforcement has the responsibility of ensuring that all Mississippi students are afforded the opportunity to attend school and to enforce the Mississippi Compulsory School Attendance Law §37-13-91 of the Mississippi Code 1972 Annotated (*Mississippi Department of Education, 2010*). This law requires that children from ages six to sixteen attend school. This law also requires parents to make sure that these minors are attending an educational program. Student enrollment must occur except under the limited circumstances specified in subsection three of §37-13-91 which includes, but are not limited to, sending the child to a state approved school, nonpublic school, or educating the child at home in an organized educational program. On July 1, 2003, the law was amended to include children, five years of age, who enrolls in public kindergarten, will have to abide by the same guidelines as outlined in §37-13-91.

There are many similarities between states and their compulsory requirements. The most common is that students must attend until a designated age, most commonly noted as seventeen, or complete a certain grade, which in most states is eighth. Failure to follow these laws can lead to prosecution of parents and students in various states. These laws force schools to adopt policies on attendance and force the schools to work with the

local judicial system to ensure the students and parents are complying with the law (*Mississippi Department of Education, 2010*).

No Child Left Behind

Another law that has impacted schools is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Enacted by Congress in 2001, it increases the role of the federal government in education, both in terms of the law's requirements and its funding of education. This law requires every state education system to mandate all of their school systems to adopt common curriculum standards and test these standards for student mastery (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004). The NCLB Act requires states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades, if those states are to receive federal funding for schools. The Act does allow each state's Department of Education to set their own achievement standards. By requiring specific changes in the basic assessment and accountability systems of states, establishing timelines for improving student achievement, outlining specific sanctions for low-performing schools, and commanding many other forms of specific state action, NCLB has expanded federal power to regulate education.

NCLB is the newest addition to the original law, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which provided funding to school districts to help low-income students increase achievement. Today, NCLB holds Title I schools that receive this federal money accountable by requiring them to meet proficiency targets on annual assessments. In 2006, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has called testing "the linchpin of the whole doggone thing" (Feller, "Spellings Pledges Vigorous Pursuit of Education Agenda Secretary Lays out Vision for Change," pg. 1). The law requires tests

in reading and math for students annually in grades 3–8 and once in high school. In 2005–2006, 23 states that had not yet fully implemented NCLB needed to administer 11.4 million new tests in reading and math. When science testing began in 2007, one test in each of three grade spans (3–5, 6–9, and 10–12), the number of tests that states administered annually to comply with NCLB was 68 million (Guilfoyle, 2006).

These tests carry a great deal of weight with them for the schools and districts that administer them. Schools that fail to increase their student achievement will endure escalating requirements, such as having to offer public school choice or provide supplemental education services. If the school is rated as “in need of improvement” for five consecutive years, there is a possibility that they will be taken over by the state system or restructured to help facilitate positive growth (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004). There is concern that these sanctions and other issues these low performing schools face will have little effect on increasing the tests score. There is another opinion that says that the need to comply with the law stifles innovation and that the limited focus on a small subset of subjects narrows the curriculum (Guilfoyle, 2006).

NCLB requires that the nation’s public school systems to be held accountable for achieving high levels of educational proficiency. This law increases the arm of the federal government in education, which, throughout the history of education in America, was mainly relegated to the local and state governments. These mandates that NCLB established for all students are meant to increase the student achievement from all states (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004). Each state is required to establish performance-based accountability systems that include clear standards and goals for improvement; rigorous methods of measuring progress towards established performance targets; and

high-stakes consequences for schools and districts that fail to make sufficient progress in reaching the goal of universal student proficiency. While achievement testing will be the central component of these state accountability systems, high school graduation rates are also a requirement indicator of performance at the secondary level (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004).

Holding states to the same standards is another area in which experts are worried about. States are required to establish an accountability system that has separate performance goals in reading and mathematics with all schools reaching 100% proficiency in each area within 12 years. In addition, states must require all schools and districts, regardless of where they are when they enter NCLB, to have annual academic proficiency or annual yearly progress. Achieving this will keep schools off of the “needing improvement” list (Guilfoyle, 2006). Each school system must meet annual academic proficiency goals established by the state that are designed to make steady progress toward the 12-year target of universal proficiency. In addition, the accountability system holds schools and districts responsible for the adequate yearly progress for students in specified subgroups, including the major racial and ethnic groups and students with disabilities (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004).

While achievement testing is the central component of state accountability systems under NCLB, the achievement formula also includes graduation rates as an academic accountability indicator at the high school level (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004). Graduating from high school is important and the central reason for students who attend school. It is a strong predictor for economic and social issues in the United States of America. In addition, holding schools and districts accountable for

academic achievement levels, based on both test scores and high school graduation rates, is intended to increase student achievement and increase the competitiveness of students who graduate in this ever expanding global economy. This accountability system is also to help safeguard against schools and districts removing lower performing students from the tests. It encourages schools and districts to help these students increase their own individual achievement and meet test-based accountability benchmarks (No Child Left Behind - ED.gov, 2004).

On March 13, 2011, the United States Department of Education proposed their restructuring of NCLB and explained in their plan that the current accountability system is flawed because “it provides states with incentives to lower standards. It mislabels schools as failing and imposes one-size-fits-all interventions. It doesn’t do enough to recognize student growth or school progress” (Obama, 2011, p. 1). These areas of concern will be addressed through the following procedures proposed in the March 13, 2011 document. This document states they will accomplish these goals by “asking states to set standards that prepare students for college and careers” (Obama, 2011, p. 1).

Creating a fair accountability system that recognizes and rewards growth and progress is critical to the success of NCLB. Providing flexibility to state and local educators to innovate and create local solutions to their immediate needs. This flexibility coupled with rigorous, meaningful interventions and support for the lowest-performing schools that also have not demonstrated any progress will ensure that the program has a greater level of success (Obama, 2011). The way NCLB and states evaluate the success of students will change but the fundamental idea that the practices and levels of success in all schools will be evaluated will remain.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004

The individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA) is another groundbreaking law in education. Congress enacted what was then the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) on November 29, 1975. The law was intended to support states and localities in protecting the rights of, meeting the individual needs of, and improving the results for infants, toddlers, children and youths with disabilities and their families. Today, IDEA, established early intervention programs and services are provided to more than 200,000 eligible infants and toddlers and their families, while about 6.5 million children and youths receive special education and related services to meet their individual needs (IDEA 2004, 2010). More students with disabilities are attending classes in their own neighborhood schools that may not have been open to them previously. Fewer students with disabilities are in separate buildings or separate classrooms on school campuses, and are instead learning in classes with their peers (IDEA 2004, 2010).

Compulsory Law, NCLB, and IDEA all play a vital role in schools. They are the backbone of education in America and they impact the dropout rates of mainstream students and students with disabilities. These laws were developed to give the education process some guidance and accountability. These laws are focused on increasing student achievement, and they help school and district leadership stay on track with what is required in the global markets of today and the future. These laws factor in the decision making process for school leaders and the effect these decisions have on the dropout rate in America.

Social Factors

Societal Impact

The risk factors that predict if a student is going to dropout of school cannot be singled out to a single factor that defines why a student drops out of school. There are numerous risk factors that, in combination with each other, raise the probability of a student leaving high school early. There are four major categories that impact the student's ability to graduate. These categories are factors that relate to the student such as truancy and a negative attitude toward the school; factors that relate to the family structure such as having a low-income or lack of parental involvement; factors that relate to the school such as a negative school climate or low expectations; and factors that relate to the communities such as a high crime rate or a they are unsupportive of the schools in the area (Elias, et al., 2003).

The dropout rate data has indicated that there is a significant correlation between high poverty rates, poor school attendance, poor academic performance, grade retention and disengagement from school (Hammond, 2007). The author has indicated that there are a few ways to combat this trend in schools and they attest that the intervention must be done prior to the student's arrival in high school. Early childhood is the foundation upon which the student can build on for future academic success. Early interventions have shown to provide an important role with child development and optimal brain development. Ninety percent of brain development is estimated to occur before age five (Jensen, 2008). In contrast, this early stage of development puts the student at risk of being vulnerable to the environmental risks. When children receive a variety of early interventions and services such as holistic nurturing, consistent and interesting learning

environments, they have shown to have higher levels of achievement, a stronger commitment to graduating from school, and have a lower retention rate (Moore, Redd, Burkhauser, Mbwana, & Collins, 2009). Combating these various delays is important to the student and the country. Early literacy is another area that plays a vital role in a student having a successful academic career because children who do not develop a strong reading skill level are more likely to fail and repeat a grade, which is how the pattern of failure begins. The fundamental base for reading is learned prior to a child enrolling in schools. In communities across the United States, there are organizations that are using interventions targeted at children during birth to age three. Utilizing these services can have a significant impact on the students' achievement (National dropout prevention center/network, 2007).

In schools there are benchmarks that students need to reach to increase their success. A student's failure to meet these milestones can be a predictor for them dropping out of school later on. It is important for all parents and educators to stay observant regarding a student's ability to have academic success. It is crucial to the success of the student for stakeholders to intervene with effective research-based programs or interventions that can help the student reach the various academic milestones. One early predictor states that students should have mastered how to read by the third grade. Reading is the foundation for all future academic success, and failing to do so by the third grade puts the students at a disadvantage because the complexity of reading becomes more rigorous as the child gets older, thus reinforcing his feelings of failing and resulting in him leaving school early. The transition of learning to read to reading to learn is most relevant in the upper elementary grades and above. If the student is still learning to read

in these grades the probability of them dropping out increases (Early warning! why reading by the end of third grade matters, 2010).

Once students move out of elementary grades into middle school or 6th-8th grades the most reliable predictors for a student dropping out of high school shifts to poor academic performance in mathematics and English, high absenteeism, and disengagement from the school culture. These students will exhibit these various issues in a variety of combinations but the evidence of any of them can be shown to have a significant impact on their ability to complete school (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). During this early adolescence, a student's belief in his own academic abilities decreases as he gets older. This issue has a significant impact on the student academically because as he becomes more disengaged in a particular subject he tends to value it less. This tendency will lead students to increased failure in their academic and personal lives (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

If a student has a higher level of effort then he is more likely to have positive academic outcomes. The way students interact with their peers also has a huge impact on their ability to achieve. If a student has a positive relationship with peers who have a positive and meaningful view on education, he tends to promote that view within his peer group. Students, who fall into this positive peer association group, have shown to be more successful academically and in life achievement. However, in contrast, students who have negative peer relationship experiences are more likely to have a negative view of the educational process and fail to meet the benchmarks for success in academic achievement (Stewart, 2008).

One of the most difficult times in a student's life is when he transitions into the 9th grade. Unfortunately for these students, academic failure in the 9th grade is the greatest predictor of a student dropping out of high school. The increase in academic rigor at this point is the greatest, and if a student is transitioning and is already behind then he is at a significant disadvantage (Belfanz, 2007). This increase in 9th grade repeaters has been described as the "ninth grade bulge" and the "tenth grade dip" in high school enrollment (NCES fact sheet, 2010). This factor is increased by poverty in low-income schools. Forty percent of 9th grade repeaters at a low-income school will dropout when they reach the 11th grade (Belfanz, 2007).

In high school there are four types of categories that students who dropout will fall into. The factors in all of these groups are that each of these students will exhibit all or a combination of poor grades, poor attendance, and disengagement from the school culture. These factors may not have been prominent in a student's behavior prior to high school; however, there are life-changing issues that can push a student to lose interest in school and thus dropout. The four dropout categories that high school students fall into are life events, fade-outs, push outs, and failure to succeed. The life events category indicates that an event in the student's life outside of school, such as transiency, teen pregnancy or foster care placement, has forced them to leave school early. The fade-outs category is when a dropout is prompted by frustration and or boredom even though they have never failed a grade previously. The push outs category is when a dropout is basically forced or encouraged to leave school because he is detrimental to the schools success. The final category is the failure to succeed dropout. These students leave school because of their prior academic failures, high absenteeism and/or lack of engagement

(Belfanz, 2007). Schools are exploring the various ways to combat these issues. Schools are not only trying to improve the quality of their school environment but they are also implementing prevention and intervention programs that focus on enhancing the student's social and emotional behaviors as well as their academic skills. Academic programs that focus on these three areas have shown positive increases in their students' attitudes toward school, teacher-pleasing behavior, and academic achievement (Elias, et al., 2003).

There is a disproportionate representation of minorities in the population of students who leave school early. African American students, American Indian/Alaskan Native students and Latino Students have the largest disproportionate percentage of dropouts (NCES fact sheet, 2010). The previous predictors are even more impactful in students from minority races, which can be directly linked to the higher poverty rate in these populations, less access to early childhood education and a higher representation in schools that fail to meet their academics needs. For the Latino student, the greatest factor that impacts his education attainment is their ability to learn English. There is an increase in the English-language learner population and their frustration with their lack of ability to master reading and writing in English exacerbates their risk of leaving school early (Fry, 2003).

Recent studies have indicated that the social skills of Latino students in low-income areas are strong; however, these students tend to attend schools that are mediocre academically and these students still fail to meet the achievement levels needed to be successful (Fuller, 2010). This intersection of race and poverty has several risk factors that impact a student's likeliness of academic failure, leaving school early and entering the juvenile justice system. Minority students who act out in a school setting are more

likely to be given police intervention, suspensions or expulsions instead of academic interventions that could help them significantly better (America's cradle to prison pipeline, 2007). African American students are disciplined or suspended at a disproportionate rate when compared to other groups. The lack of training and sensitivity for educators on this issue leads to further school disengagement and eventually further high school dropout for this population of students. The association of failing in school and going to prison is prominent among African American and Latino boys. Research indicates that 1 in 3 African American boys and 1 in 6 Latino boys will become incarcerated at least once in their lifetimes (America's cradle to prison pipeline).

In schools that have shown to have success with these populations and reversed these negative trends use a variety of interventions that make the most of intensive, robust instruction; monitoring and encouragement of high attendance; intense monitoring of student behavior; promotion of after-school involvement and extra-curricular activities; maintaining an expectation of personal responsibility and academic success from adults and students; and involving parents and community stakeholders in the growth of the school culture (Myint-U, O'Donnell, Osher, Petrosino, & Stueve, 2008). The success of dropout prevention in the minority communities must pay attention to the factors, social and emotional, that impact student achievement, school culture, values and the general wellbeing of the students and stakeholders (Becker & Luthar, 2002).

Education is woven into the fabric of society as a necessity for success. When students choose to leave school early they severely limit their likelihood of future success. This continuous cycle of dropouts increases the poverty of future generations and severely limits the social equality in the academic and non-academic worlds. Robust

and engaging education is the lifeline by which many students can change their likelihood of remaining in poverty. Parents, community leaders, and schools can impact this population by committing to invest in high quality early childhood education. These stakeholders can also have an impact by paying attention to the social and emotional needs of the students, as well as the continual monitoring of academic progress and attendance, intensive and robust instruction, using alternatives to pushing students out of school, creating a positive and healthy learning environment at school and at home, and continuous engagement with each other.

The future success of America depends on the quality of student the education system produces. This can be achieved through a delivery of a high quality education to all students regardless of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic factors, disabilities or other social factors that help all students reach their fullest potential (Myint-U, et al., 2008).

Teen Pregnancy Rate

There are other factors that impact the dropout rate in America. Social factors can have a large impact on why children drop out of school. One social factor is teenage pregnancy. An article from January 2010 explained that recently released government data shows that in 2006, the U.S. teen birth rate began to increase, marking the end of a 14-year period of decline. More specifically, these data show that the birth rate increased 5% in teen birth rate from 2005 to 2007. The research states: “The increase in teen pregnancy is an issue for educators and all stakeholders in education” (Perper, et al., 2010, p.1). Teenage mothers seem to be more likely to have negative consequences for themselves as well as the child they produce. Children of teen mothers tend to do worse cognitively and behaviorally when compared to their peers who have older mothers.

These teen mothers are more likely to be dependent on the use of public assistance and are more likely to have family issues and continue a cycle of poverty for themselves and their child. In addition to these issues, teen mothers are more likely to drop-out of school following giving birth; however, previous research has shown that teen mothers were more likely to have academic issues prior to becoming pregnant and giving birth. Young women who had been teen mothers were less likely than other young women to earn a high school diploma by the age of 22. Eighty-nine percent of young women who had not given birth as a teen earned a high school diploma before the age of 22. By comparison, only 51 percent young women who had been a teen mother earned a high school diploma by that age (Perper, et al., 2010,)

Teenage pregnancy has ramifications that impact many other people and entities in the United States. Unintended teenage pregnancy in the United States is a public health issue that impacts a variety of social, economic and health costs. Teen mothers who give birth before the age of 18 impact the United States economy. These births have been estimated to cost the United States \$9.1 billion dollars annually (Kids Count Data Center, 2010). Latest available national data indicate a slight increase in rates of unintended teen pregnancy after a 15-year period of steady decline. The unintended teen pregnancy rate in Troup County, Georgia in 2006 was 51.9/1,000, which was higher than the national average of 41.9/1,000 (Kids Count Data Center, 2010). In 2008, a study was done to review the Circle of Care intervention program, which is a collaborative multi-agency teen pregnancy prevention program (Brace, Hall, & Hunt, 2008). The Circle of Care Program was developed in 1997 through the efforts of multiple community partner organizations.

There are many organizations included in the Circle of Care program. They are the local school system, the Division of Family and Children Services, Troup County Family Connection, the local teen clinic, the local hospital, Department of Public Health, and other organizations. Participants in the Circle of Care program receive multiple services, including case management, a family assessment, parenting classes, home visits from the case manager, family planning assistance, services from the teen health clinic and the Division of Family and Children Services. Preliminary data indicate that Circle of Care participants gained social, economic, and health benefits from participation in the program including higher rates of high school enrollment, no repeat pregnancies, and no reported incidences of child abuse or child neglect (Brace, Hall, & Hunt, 2008) Projected cost savings from these outcomes are also reported. Preliminary examination of the Circle of Care program supports the efficacy of multi-level, collaborative efforts to reduce unintended teen pregnancy and subsequent social, economic and health risks. Future research should examine longer-term outcomes of this program (Brace, et al., 2008).

Race, Gender and Dropout Rates

Another social issue that impacts dropout rates is the elevated dropout rate for minorities in the United States. The overall dropout rate in the United States is 8.7%. Males were more likely to drop out (9.8%) than females (7.7%), and dropout rates by race and ethnicity are White-5.3%, Asian/Pacific Islander-6.1%, Black-8.4%, Hispanic-21.4% (NCES fact sheet, 2010). In general, the status dropout rates for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics declined between 1997 and 2007. However, for each year during that period, the status dropout rate was lower for Whites and Blacks than for Hispanics. The

rate for Asians/Pacific Islanders was also lower than the rates for Hispanics and Blacks between 1997 and 2007. During that period, the gap between the status dropout rates of Blacks and Whites narrowed. While the gap between the dropout rates of Hispanics and Whites was larger in 1998 than in 1997, this gap has narrowed between 1998 and 2007 (NCES fact sheet, 2010). Of all the minority groups the Hispanic and Asian populations have the highest dropout rates. Among Hispanic subgroups, Other Central Americans (29%) and Salvadorans (26%) in the United States had the highest percentages of young adults who were status dropouts, followed by Mexicans (22%), Puerto Ricans (15%), Dominicans (13%), and Other Hispanics or Latinos (12%). Cubans (6%) and South Americans (8%) had the lowest percentages among all Hispanic subgroups of young adults who were status dropouts. Among Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Salvadorans, Other Central Americans, South Americans, and Other Hispanics or Latinos, the status dropout rate was higher for young adults who were born outside the United States than for those who were born in the United States (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

Among Asian subgroups, the status dropout rate for young adults in the Other Asian subgroup (including Cambodian, Hmong, and other groups) (7%) was higher than the rates for Indian (1%), Filipino (1%), Korean (1%), Chinese (3%), Japanese (3%), and Vietnamese young adults (4%). Indian, Chinese, Filipino, and Other Asian young adults who were born outside the United States had higher status dropout rates than did those born in the United States of the same subgroups (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

Economic Issues

The economic factors that are affected by the increase of dropouts in America have a profound impact on many different areas of commerce. In addition to commerce,

the Social Capital of this country is also impacted at local and regional levels by the dropout rate. Social Capital is the network of social connections and their shared values and norms of behavior that exist between people which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation (*Collins Dictionary*, 2009). In many small towns, Social Capital has a huge impact on the success of their residents and their ability to be productive citizens. Dropouts limit their access to various parts of a Social structure because they limit their own access to various opportunities because they lack the education to be a part of the group, thus hindering them from advancing in their local communities. Social Capital systems are important to the growth of the job markets and the increase in local economies. A theory that affects local economies is the Cultural Capital.

The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, developed, with the help of others, the concept of cultural capital in the early 1960s. He used this theory to help address the issue that economic obstacles are not sufficient enough to explain the disparities in the education of the youth regardless of the social classes in which they were raised (Wacquant, 2002). The Cultural Capital Theory is one that focuses on non-financial social assets; they may be educational or intellectual, which might promote social mobility beyond economic means.

Cultural Capital has been a factor in the success of communities both large and small. The ability for a community to directly influence their own economic success is done through the increase of productive, educated citizens who can create wealth and impact the global and local economies. The Cultural Capital of a community has an impact on the success of each person and his or her access to higher levels of society.

In addition to Social Capital and Cultural Capital, Social Identity Theory also has an impact on the various forms of capital and the global and local economies. The Social Identity Theory focuses on the perceived memberships and access a person has to various levels of society and it helps explain the various interactions with various groups regardless of the socio-economic affiliation of the individual. This theory explains that the various groups interact with each other and that this interaction can lead to a variety of benefits to the economies (Social capital, 2010).

The financial impact of dropouts and dropout prevention programs are an issue that is at the heart of the dropout crisis in the United States. The economic machine that drives the U.S. economy generously rewards highly skilled, highly credentialed labor; however, it can be as hard on those who do not succeed in education as it is kind to those who do. The dropout rate can have high social and personal costs of all the stakeholders. In the United States, about half of all welfare recipients and half of the prison population lack high school degrees; and dropout's earnings lag far behind those of degree holders, even when they work full-time, and even after earnings are adjusted for differences in school achievement and other factors that distinguish dropouts from degree earners, the degree earner earns more on average (Suh, 2011).

In an increasingly competitive global economy, the consequences of dropping out of high school are devastating to individuals, communities, and the national economy. At an absolute minimum, adults need a high school diploma if they are to have any reasonable opportunities to earn a living wage. A community where many parents are dropouts is unlikely to have stable families or social structures. Most businesses need workers with technical skills that require at least a high school diploma (Swanson &

Chaplin, 2003). Yet, with little notice, the United States is allowing a dangerously high percentage of students to disappear from the educational pipeline before graduating from high school. Nationally, high school graduation rates are low for all students, with only an estimated 68% of those who enter 9th grade graduating with a regular diploma in 12th grade. They are substantially lower for most minority groups, and particularly for males. According to the Urban Institute, in 2001, only 50% of all black students, 51% of Native American students, and 53% of all Hispanic students graduated from high school. Black, Native American, and Hispanic male graduation rates were 43%, 47%, and 48% respectively (Swanson & Chaplin, 2003).

In North Carolina, the issue with dropout rate is also impacting their economies and communities. The United States have made strides to combat the fading of its dominant economy based on the failing educational performance of American schools (Yeboah, Faulkner, & Appiah-Danquah, 2010). During the 2006-07 school year, over 22,000 students in grades 9-12 dropped out of school in North Carolina. Dropouts cost North Carolina millions of dollars each year. The cost includes at least \$169 million annually in taxes and public spending. North Carolina falls in the bottom 10 states for the percentage of students graduating (Yeboah, et al., 2010). The authors also explained, “Poverty and low socio-economic indicators have increased the dropout rate. Educators, policy makers, community and business leaders are attempting to address this issue by examining ways to reduce the number of dropouts in every county in North Carolina” (Yeboah, et al., 2010, p.1). In “the North Carolina High School Dropout Rates: n Economic Analysis,” Yeboah, Faulkner and Appiah-Danquah examine the economic and demographic factors that impact the number of dropouts in North Carolina High Schools.

Their conclusion was that a large percent of the minority population and its associated high poverty rates positively affect dropout rates. However, a county with a larger tax revenue base is more likely to have more dropouts than a county with a smaller tax revenue base. This result is consistent with the current trend in North Carolina. The number of dropouts is higher in urban counties than rural school systems (Yeboah, et al., 2010).

The dropout rate data has indicated that there is a significant correlation between high poverty rates, poor school attendance, poor academic performance, grade retention, and disengagement from school (Hammond, 2007). A student's socio-economic status has significant impact on his ability to achieve academically. The impact of the dropout rate on the individual students as well as the United States economy is tremendous. It has been estimated that if dropouts from the Class of 2009 had graduated, the nation's economy would benefit from nearly \$335 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes (Alliance for excellent education, 2009 fact sheet, 2009).

Dropout Factories

America's Promise Alliance is an organization that works with more than 400 national partner organizations and their affiliates, the Alliance is uniquely positioned to mobilize Americans to enhance the education of students and increase the graduation rate. They have made a top priority of ensuring that all young people graduate from high school ready for college, work and life through their Grad Nation movement. Their work involves raising awareness, encouraging action and engaging in advocacy to provide children the key supports they call the Five Promises which are caring adults, such as parents, teachers, mentors, coaches and neighbors; safe places that offer constructive

activities when young people are not in school; a healthy start and healthy development; an effective education that prepares young people for college and work and opportunities to help others through service. In their publication in March of 2011, they compiled data on the dropout rates in American Schools. This publication reported “America continues to make progress in meeting its high school dropout challenge. Leaders in education, government, nonprofits and business have awakened to the individual, social and economic costs of the dropout crisis and are working together to solve it” (Belfanz, Bridgeland, Fox, & Moore, 2011, p. 5).

In the previous year the America’s Promise Alliance reported that the number of dropout factories which were described as those high schools that graduate 60% or less of their students, had declined from 2,007 in 2002 to 1,746 in 2008. They have recently reported that the number of schools that were labeled as dropout factories has decreased an additional 112 schools. The report indicated that by 2009, approximately 580,000 fewer students attended a dropout factory high school compared to the beginning of the decade. The report also indicates that the progress of decreasing these schools and increasing the skill level of the students has been more than they expected, they indicated that they feel that the goal of having a 90% graduation rate by the graduating class 2020 is very feasible. In 2011, all states, districts, and schools are required by law to calculate high school graduation rates according to a common formula and reporting standards and, for the first time, be held accountable for setting goals and meeting annual targets. Forty states and the District of Columbia have raised their standards to help more students graduate with the skills they need to compete in the global economy. The federal government has made strategic investments in secondary education and has provided

states with incentives to enact reforms and fuel innovation that will help sustain growth. All the states have pledged to build longitudinal data systems to track student progress over time, and a growing number of states and school districts are using early warning data so that those students who exhibit the first signs of dropping out receive the academic and community-based supports they need (Belfanz, et al., 2011).

This report also broke down the graduation rates of the various states, regions, and the schools themselves into groups labeled as rural, urban, suburban or mid-size towns. The data for urban and rural schools indicate that these areas are having a significant impact on the success of the various programs and the success of the states and regions in which they reside (Belfanz, et al., 2011).

The region with the most schools labeled as a dropout factory is the Southeast with 861 schools and the region with the least amount of schools was the northeast, however the southeast did have the greatest decrease in schools being labeled as a dropout factory and the northeast had the smallest decrease of schools being labeled as a dropout factory (Belfanz, et al., 2011).

The change in schools being labeled as a dropout factory by region are: the northeast went from 252 schools to 245 or a decrease of 2.8%, the mid-west went from 269 schools to 247 or a decrease of 8.2%, the west went from 313 to 274 or a decrease of 12.5% and the southeast went from 912 schools to 868 or a decrease of 4.8%. The southeast had the most positive change of 45 schools from being labeled a dropout factory when compared to the other regions. However, 45 schools in the south, 25 of the schools are in South Carolina, which was tied for the most progress with California, which also had 25 schools make the switch. Other states in the southeast did have a

decrease in the number of dropout factories and in some cases the number of schools being labeled as a dropout factory increased (Belfanz, et al., 2011).

The states and the change in the number schools being labeled as a dropout factory in the southeast are South Carolina decreased by 25, North Carolina decreased by 16, Tennessee decreased by 10, Florida decreased by nine, Texas decreased by four, Alabama decreased by four, Kentucky decreased by three, Delaware decreased by two, Louisiana and West Virginia had no change, Oklahoma increased by two, Maryland increased by two, Mississippi increased by four, Virginia increased by four, Arkansas increased by six and Georgia which was tied with New York with the greatest increase in schools with 10 (Belfanz, et al., 2011).

The west region had the second greatest decrease in dropout factories with 39 schools being able to remove this label. In the west region California had the greatest decrease in the number of dropout factories at 25. The states in the west region and the increase or decrease in being labeled as a dropout factory is as follows: California decreased by 25 schools, Nevada decreased by six schools, Arizona decreased by three schools, Colorado decreased by three schools, New Mexico decreased by three schools, Oregon by one school, Idaho by one school, Wyoming had no change, Utah had no change, Hawaii had no change, Washington had an increase in one school, Alaska had an increase of one school and Montana had an increase in one school (Belfanz, et al., 2011).

The mid-west had the next greatest decrease in schools being labeled as a dropout factory at 22 schools. The states in the mid-west region and the increase or decrease in being labeled as a dropout factory is as follows: Illinois had a decrease of 20 schools, Missouri had a decrease of three schools, Kansas had a decrease of three

schools, Indiana had a decrease of two schools, South Dakota had a decrease of two schools, Minnesota had a decrease of two schools, Iowa had a decrease one school, North Dakota had no change, Nebraska had no change, Wisconsin had an increase of three schools, Michigan had an increase of three schools and Ohio had an increase of five schools (Belfanz, et al., 2011).

The region with least amount of decrease in schools being labeled as a dropout factory was the northeast, with seven schools losing the label. The states in the northeast region and the increase or decrease in being labeled as a dropout factory is as follows: Connecticut had a decrease of 13 schools, Pennsylvania had a decrease of six schools, New Jersey had a decrease of four schools, Rhode Island had no change, New Hampshire had an increase of one school, Vermont had an increase in one school, Massachusetts had an increase of three schools and New York had an increase of 10 schools (Belfanz, et al., 2011).

Rural v. Urban

The study's data on the comparison of rural and urban schools indicates that rural schools had the most statistically significant positive change with the number schools being labeled as a dropout factory decreasing from 349 to 295. This is a 15.5% decrease in the number of schools being labeled a dropout factory. The urban schools had the least significant change going from 879 schools being labeled as a dropout factory to 849, a 3.4% decrease. The entire data set indicated that there was a decrease of 112 dropout factories but there are still 1634 schools labeled as a dropout factory. The number of students throughout the country attending a dropout factory decreased from 2.6 million to 2.1 million (Belfanz, et al., 2011).

In the rural school setting, there are many factors that affect the graduation rate. One in five students attends rural schools and more than half of all school districts and one third of all public schools are in rural areas. As a whole, 20 percent of the nation's public school students are enrolled in rural schools (Current challenges and opportunities in preparing rural high school students for success in college and career: what federal policymakers need to know facts-at-a-glance, 2007). Overall, public school enrollment has increased by 1% (approximately 602,000 students) while enrollment in rural schools (communities with populations under 2,500) has increased by 15% (approximately 1.3 million students) (Johnson & Strange, 2007).

A larger percentage of public school students in rural areas (10%) attend very small schools (schools with fewer than two hundred students) compared with towns (4%), cities (2%), and suburbs (1%) (Provasnik, 2007). Only 6% of rural students were enrolled in private schools, less than the overall national rate of 11% (Current challenges and opportunities in preparing rural high school students for success in college and career: what federal policymakers need to know facts-at-a-glance, 2007). Only 2% of rural high schools were charter schools in the 2006-07 school year, compared to 13% of urban, 5% of suburban, and 3% of schools in towns. In 2006-07, just 1% of rural high school students attended a charter school (Current challenges and opportunities in preparing rural high school students for success in college and career: what federal policymakers need to know facts-at-a-glance, 2007). In 2003, 2.9% of rural students (compared to 2.2% nationwide) were homeschooled and 28% of the homeschooled population lived in rural areas (Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2003).

Although rural child poverty rates have recently declined, they remain significantly higher (21%) than poverty rates for urban children (18%) (Rodgers, 2005). Minority children are overrepresented in the count of poor children relative to their share of the population (Savage, 2008). The percentage of public school students in remote rural areas attending a moderate-to-high-poverty school (45%) was higher than the percentages in all other locales except large and midsize cities (Provasnik, 2007). The highest-need education regions are generally located in the Southwest, the Southeast, the Mid-South Delta, and Appalachia, due to a combination of poverty, fiscal challenges, and low levels of adult education and student achievement (Johnson & Strange, 2007). Minority students make up 25% or more of the student population in eleven states (Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia). These states serve 80% of all rural minority students in the nation (Current challenges and opportunities in preparing rural high school students for success in college and career: what federal policymakers need to know facts-at-a-glance, 2009).

Larger percentages of Black and American Indian/Alaska Native public school students in remote rural areas attended moderate-to-high-poverty schools (87% and 79%, respectively) than in large cities (78% and 62%, respectively) (Provasnik, 2007). In five states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, and New Mexico), there is no racial or ethnic majority group in rural schools (Johnson & Strange, 2007). The graduation rate for public high school students is higher in rural areas (73%) than in cities (59%) or towns (70%) but slightly lower than in suburban areas (74%) (Louvouezo, *Diplomas Count 2009*, 2009). Compared to the overall high school graduation rate for rural high school students

(73%) and the overall graduation rate for white rural high school students (75%), 51% of rural American Indian/Alaska Native students graduate from high school; 68% of Asian and Pacific Islanders graduate from high school; 61% of Hispanic students graduate from high school; and 54% of black students graduate from high school (Current challenges and opportunities in preparing rural high school students for success in college and career: what federal policymakers need to know facts-at-a-glance, 2007).

College enrollment rates for 18-24 year-olds and 25-29 year-olds are generally lower in rural areas than in all other locales (Provasnik, 2007). Only 17% of rural adults age 25 and older had completed college in 2000, half the percentage of urban adults (Whitener & McGranahan, 2003). Based on a recent study, non-metro youth have lower expectations for future schooling than suburban and urban youth. Nearly one-half (47%) of non-metro youth reported “little chance they would be enrolled in regular school in five years” (Current challenges and opportunities in preparing rural high school students for success in college and career: what federal policymakers need to know facts-at-a-glance, 2007, p.2). Only one in five youth who were living in non-metro areas in 2000 were still living in a non-metro area in 2005. The rest migrated to either a suburban area about 50% or a central-city metro area about 29% (Provasnik). Regardless of educational attainment, persons in rural areas generally have higher median earnings than those in cities but lower median earnings than those in suburban areas, when adjusted to reflect local cost differences (Current challenges and opportunities in preparing rural high school students for success in college and career: what federal policymakers need to know facts-at-a-glance, 2007). In 2004, a larger percentage of teenagers in rural areas compared to suburban areas were neither enrolled in school nor employed (6% vs. 4%). The

unemployment rate for adults, ages 25 to 34, was lower in rural areas (7%) than in cities (8%) and towns (8%). The unemployment rate for adults, ages 35 to 64, was lower in rural areas (4.5%) than in all other locales 5–6% (Provasnik, 2007).

The council for Great City Schools is an organization that is made up of the largest 65 school districts in the United States and its mission is to promote the cause of urban schools and to advocate for inner-city students through legislation, research and media relations (Fact sheet, 2011). School districts eligible for membership must be located in cities with populations over 250,000 or student enrollment over 35,000. School districts located in the largest city of any state are also eligible for membership, regardless of size. The demographic make-up of urban schools is diverse and the percentages of students who represent the various racial and ethnic make-ups are as follows: Hispanic-36% African American-35%, White-20%, Asian /Pacific Islander-6%, and Alaskan/ Native American-1%. The total number of students in the school districts represented in this group is just over seven million. Other statistics that effect students achievement in this school setting are as follows: Free/Reduced lunch eligibility-60%, English Language Learners-15%, Students with Individualized Education Plans-12%, Number of teachers-424,786, Student-Teacher ratio-17:1, Total number of schools-11,686. These schools make up a large percentage of the United States population attending schools which are: African American-30%, Hispanic-25%, Free/Reduced lunch eligibility-21%, Students with an Individualized Education Plan-14%, English Language Learners-26%, Schools-10%, Teachers-13%, and total number of students-14% (Fact sheet, 2011).

The National Council for Education Statistics developed a list of the largest 100 school districts in the United States. They described and compared these school districts with the rest of the United States and developed the following statement: These 100 largest public school districts which represent less than 1% (0.6 %) of all school districts in the United States and jurisdictions, are responsible for the education of 22% of all public school students, employ 22% of full-time educators, have a higher average of school enrollment (687), 45% of these 100 districts were in, Texas (18 districts), Florida (14 districts) and California (13 districts) (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

School district leaders through the nation generally expect and accept a goal of a 90% high school completion rate (Hadre & Reeve, 2003). The most recent data places the current national high school dropout rate at just over 12%, though dropout rates for rural high school students are about 20% and as high as 40% in the most remote schools. External resources provide students with academic and social opportunities that contribute positively to their achievement and school retention, such as school– business partnerships, field trips, and secondary and higher education collaborations. When schools face severe limitations in external resources (e.g., socioeconomic constraints), as is common with geographically remote rural schools, they must rely on other kinds of resources to support the goals of achievement and persistence. Although some rural students have at-home resources to support positive academic outcomes, many face at-home and community resource deficits associated with low achievement and dropout risk (Hadre & Reeve, 2003).

Dropout Interventions and Preventions

The pressure from society for schools to be successful can be overwhelming for educators and students. The various laws and policies have forced the schools to implement dropout prevention and intervention programs. Each year more than half a million young people drop out of high school, and the rate at which they drop out has remained about the same for the last 30 years, even as spending on education has increased significantly (NCES fact sheet, 2010). The economic consequences of dropping out may continue to worsen as jobs for low-skilled workers dry up. Dropouts contribute only about half as much in taxes as do high school graduates. They draw larger government subsidies in the form of food stamps, housing assistance, and welfare payments. They have a dramatically increased chance of landing in prison, and they have worse health outcomes and lower life expectancies (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

An area that dropout rates have shown to have a significant impact is in this country's correctional facilities. There are about 2,304,115 inmates in the United States. That is equal to about 3.5% of all citizens. Seventy-five percent of state prison inmates and 59% of federal inmates are high-school dropouts. A high school dropout is 3.5 times more likely to go to jail than a student with a high school diploma. Family income also has an effect on the dropout rate. In 2005, the event dropout rate for students living in low-income families was approximately six times greater than the rate of their peers from high-income families (8.9% compared with 1.5%). Students from low-, middle-, and high-income families experienced an overall decline in event dropout rates during the three-decade period of the mid-1970s through 2005, including a downward trend during the first half of that period (1975 to 1990). From 1990 to 1995, students from low-income

families experienced an upward trend in rates, while their peers from middle- and high-income families experienced no significant change. In the decade, 1995–2005, the event rates for low-income groups trended downwards, a trend not found among students from middle- and high-income families. The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) provides an estimate of the percentage of public high school students who graduate on time, which is four years after starting ninth grade with a regular diploma (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

AFGR estimates are based on the Common Core of Data (CCD) State Non-fiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education, with ungraded enrollments distributed proportionally to reported enrollments by grade. AFGR estimates are presented for 48 states and the District of Columbia (NCES fact sheet, 2010). The AFGR among public school students in the United States for the class of 2003–04 was 75%. The AFGR for each state for the class of 2003–04 was from 57.4% in Nevada to 87.6% in Nebraska. Fifteen states had rates of 80% percent or higher: Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah, and Vermont. Eleven states and the District of Columbia had rates below 70%: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Nevada, South Carolina, and Tennessee (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

These statistics can be overwhelming, but the school leaders have a variety of strategies they can use to combat the dropout issue they are experiencing. In March of 2008, The Regional Educational Laboratory, which is a department in the United States Department of Education, compiled a searchable database of dropout prevention

programs in the Northeast and Islands region. Their goal was to generate and share knowledge on dropout programs and policies, this report details a project to create a searchable database with information on target audiences, prevention strategies, age ranges, in-school and out-of-school staff involvement, and whether programs were reviewed by the *What Works Clearinghouse*. Based on the dropout prevention literature, the database identifies nine service goals (such as increase school attachment and decrease truancy) and 17 core strategies (such as community learning curricula and tutoring/extra classes) and maps these across schools, districts, and programs and policies. Students drop out of school for a variety of reasons. In a recent study by Civic Enterprises, 47 percent of high school dropouts cited a lack of connection to school as the reason for their dropping out (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison, 2006).

Also linked to dropping out are poor academic performance, low school attendance, mobility, parenthood, experience with the juvenile justice system, low parental involvement, the need to care for a family member, emotional and behavioral challenges, poor learning conditions, and limited instructional support (Bridgeland, et al., 2006). Other studies find that dropout is often a long-term, cumulative process, with risk factors present as early as 6th grade predicting whether a student completes school. Nationwide, students living in families with incomes in the bottom 20% were about four times more likely to drop out of high school between 2003 and 2004 than peers from families with incomes in the top 20% (Neild, Belfanz, & Herzog, 2007).

Several states in the Northeast and Islands Region have among the highest average freshman graduation rates. But New York consistently ranks among the lowest, and only 60.9% of freshmen that started high school in fall 1999 are estimated to have

graduated on time (Neild, et al., 2007). Even in Connecticut, which has relatively high and improving graduation rates; getting a diploma remains challenging in districts that serve largely low-income minority families of color (Playbook for Prevention, 2008).

In districts such as Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven, where large proportions of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, the cumulative four-year dropout rates are 14–22%, compared with the state average of 7% (Playbook for Prevention, 2008). In Massachusetts the annual dropout rate in 2005/06 for low-income students was 5.5%, compared with 2.6% for non-low-income students (*Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*, 2010). By one estimate, African American students are up to 10 times more likely than White students to attend a high school with high dropout and low graduation rates (Neild, et al., 2007).

The *What Works Clearinghouse* conducted a rigorous review of how effectively dropout prevention programs help student's stay in school, progress in school, and complete school (Dynarski, Clarke, Cobb, Finn, Rumberger, Smink, 2008).

This study (Dynarski, et al., 2008) explained:

Dropout prevention can begin in the early grades, with literacy programs, for example. Among the programs that the *What Works Clearinghouse* has reviewed as having positive or potentially positive effects are those that use close monitoring strategies, increase partnerships with families, establish career-focused academies in schools, and offer additional support for academic and behavioral success and college entry. The dropout prevention programs, for which the *What Works Clearinghouse* has evaluated, used one or more specific strategies. Thus, the available

evidence relates to the effectiveness of specific bundles of strategies that constitute programs and not, strictly speaking, to the individual strategies or to other programs incorporating different combinations of strategies. (p. 4)

Dropout prevention initiatives can target individual students at high risk, defined groups of students, or whole schools and districts. Despite evidence that some programs can help students stay in school and progress, whether districts in the Northeast and Islands Region are using these evidence-based programs has not been documented. To generate and share knowledge on dropout programs and policies, this report details a project to create a searchable database with information on target audiences, prevention strategies, age ranges, in-school and out-of-school staff involvement, and whether programs were reviewed by *What Works Clearinghouse* (Myint-U, et al., 2008).

To generate and share knowledge on dropout programs and policies, the project created a searchable database with information on target audiences, prevention strategies, age ranges, in-school and out-of-school staff involvement, and whether programs were reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse. The hope is that over the long term the database will become a cumulative inventory of dropout prevention programs and policies in the Northeast and Islands Region and perhaps nationwide (Myint-U, et al., 2008).

Taken together, the selected school districts serve more than 200,000 students in more than 400 schools. Annual dropout rates range from about 4% to 10%, and cumulative four-year dropout rates range from 15% to 34%. Three states (Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont) and the Virgin Islands did not have mid-size cities that met

study criteria (high dropout rates and minority student populations and many children living under the poverty line) (Myint-U, et al., 2008).

Graduation Coaches

There are many interventions and prevention plans that many different states use to address this issue and there have been mixed results. In the state of Georgia, they have implemented a program that has been making progress in combating dropout rates in their schools. In 2006, Governor Sonny Perdue of Georgia established a new program that placed a graduation coach in each of the state's public high schools. If Georgia's students were going to reach the No Child Left Behind mandate of a 100% graduation rate by the year 2014, the Governor was going to have to make major changes (Georgia graduation coach initiative, 2008). The state of Georgia indicated that they budgeted 15 billion dollars for the 2006-2007 school year to pay full-time employees on staff to identify the at-risk students in schools and devise plans to help students graduate from high school. The Georgia Department of Education partnered with the group, Communities in Schools (CIS), to assist the graduation coaches in the state with support and professional development programs to enhance the effectiveness of the intervention. CIS of Georgia is focused and dedicated on addressing and eliminating the dropout issue that their schools are facing. Their plan is to attack this issue of school dropouts by streamlining their resources of the school's community to address educational hurdles changes (Georgia graduation coach initiative, 2008). The services provided by the CIS of Georgia include providing initiatives for the whole school, sustaining services for students needing ongoing support to help them succeed in school, and providing short term services for students with immediate needs changes. Georgia's graduation rate rose

to 72.3% for the 2006-2007 school year, which was up from 70.8% for the 2005-2006 school year. The state's number of dropouts fell from 23,000 to 21,000 students statewide, which was a 10% decrease. This occurred even after the 2006-2007 school year saw a population increase of 9,000 students, which brought the Georgia student population up to 446,500 students (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

Following the initial success of the intervention the governor of Georgia decided he would place a graduation coach in every middle school by the 2008-2009 school year. In 2006, The Georgia Department of Education developed the following mission statement for the High School Graduation Coach Initiative: The mission of the Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative is to ensure the successful transition of all students from middle to high school and from high school into post-secondary education or the workforce. Graduation coaches provide a comprehensive prevention and intervention program for students at risk of grade retention, and/or dropping out. The role of the graduation coach is to identify students in need of additional support and work with them to achieve academic success. Coaches work to ensure that all identified students receive the resources and services needed to guide them on the path to graduation changes (*Georgia graduation coach initiative, 2008*). The idea that unresponsive students could be effectively reached when a specified adult was assigned to them has shown to have a positive impact on the graduation rate. This specific adult would be responsible for providing the support needed by the students by checking on them daily, building a positive relationship with the students, and give the students the tools to become more successful and become more engaged in school. The graduation coach is not normally expected to be involved with disciplinary issues; however, they should have a proactive

approach to any student who has a prior pattern of negative behavior (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

The graduation coach may also use guiding techniques with the students who have prior behavior problems through the use of a behavioral checklist each day and reward them for positive behavior changes (Georgia graduation coach initiative, 2008). The graduation coaches who employ an open-door policy between the student and graduation coach may lead to a more positive relationship and help the students solve emotionally-charged situations (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*). The Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative indicated that students found success in controlling and correcting their behavior when they have met consistently with the graduation coach. For a graduation coach to be successful in his or her task to increase graduation rate and develop a student who is well adjusted, academically as well as emotionally, he or she must build a positive relationship with his or her students. These students who need that social support from their teachers can develop their academic and social skills in a positive way. By having a reliable positive role model in their life, the students who possess the risk factors that make them more likely to dropout can have success in school and life (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*). When graduation coaches and students have mutual respect for each other and the student feels that the teacher has his or her best interest at the forefront of the decisions being made, then he or she is more likely to follow the teachers' direction and become more successful. If a graduation coach ensures that he or she takes the time to get to know his or her students in a positive, professional, and calm manner all while keeping a sense of humor, he or she can make an impact on the success of the student's changes (Georgia graduation coach initiative,

2008). Graduation coaches have reported that they impact students by being encouragers, role models, and giving the students an example of how to behave in a professional manner.

A graduation coach has to be able to relate to the students and the students have to feel the same way about the graduation coach. The opportunity to mentor students will present itself in many different ways in a school setting. From interacting with students in the halls or at extracurricular activities or through one-on-one meetings, the graduation coach should never pass up an opportunity to impact his or her students. The Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative (2008) stated that a large part of the graduation coach's time was spent tutoring students who were in danger of academic failure. Graduation coaches reported that they spent between 93% and 97% of their time assisting students in the classes where they were currently experiencing difficulty. Course work failure is one of the most difficult areas for a graduation coach to remedy because of the variety of factors that impact a student's success. These students who have been identified as being at-risk are more likely to fall under the guidance of a graduation coach. The state of Georgia has assessments that these students will be required to pass in-order to be promoted and the graduation coaches will spend a significant amount of time tutoring and mentoring their students to help them have success on these assessments (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

The graduation coaches worked with students in individual sessions to help keep them academically focused, while monitoring students' progress and performance. These students will benefit from learning the necessary study skills and strategies for completing assignments and tests as well as note-taking techniques and other social skills

that can be related to the everyday life of the student. The middle school graduation coach will have the issue of working with the elementary schools that their students attended. This is to ensure that the strategies and programs the student needs to be successful are in place prior to the student getting there and to help the new student transition into the middle school more smoothly. If a student does not receive these pre-services the students may have a more difficult time assimilating into the culture of the new school and increase their academic interests and achievement. The graduation coach can address some of these transition difficulties by using strategies such as student-to-student mentoring, advisory sessions, study skills groups, and orientation guides changes (Georgia graduation coach initiative, 2008).

The graduation coach will have an opportunity to discuss class schedules, extracurricular activities, teacher meetings, teacher pleasing behavior and tours through regular transition meetings. The graduation coach at the middle school also assists his or her students who are transitioning to high school. A high school transition program is essential for these students to ensure their success in high school as well as build that relationship with the graduation coach at the high school level. This type of transition could include activities to help provide social support for the students, provide parents and students with information about the high school, and bring the high school and middle school personnel together to become familiar with each other's curriculum and requirements (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*). The state of Georgia has maintained that students who are involved in high school transition program are more likely to pass their ninth grade school year, which is an indicator that the student will

graduate on time. Seventy-five percent of all 9th graders who pass will graduate from high school (NCES Fact Sheet, 2010).

Helpful transition activities that the middle school graduation coach use to help prepare individual students for the high school transition, such as having the student shadow a high school student, setting up visits for the student and their family, and helping them understand the courses they wish to take and how this will affect them in the future is a huge asset for them and these techniques have shown to be most effective with transition (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

The Georgia Graduation Coach Training Manual explained that a person's ability to reach goals, both long and short was dependent on the strength of that individual's coping skills. Currently there are approximately 800 graduation coaches in Georgia's middle and high schools. During the 2007-2008 school year, the graduation coaches had documented almost 11 million hours spent working with students and 282,400 interventions had been put into. The graduation coach has become a symbol for communities as a person who cares about children and their wellbeing (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

Graduation coaching is an intervention in multicultural, urban high schools and small rural communities for students who are not passing core courses and who are at-risk for dropping out of school. Such structural supports are a step toward overcoming not only the difficult adjustments necessary from the middle to high school environments, but also the social and behavioral challenges that students will address as they get older and transition out of education. The graduation coaches, who are the structural supports, deliberately facilitate academic success for at-risk students (NCES fact sheet, 2010).

The graduation coaches build on the academic case management model in middle schools, graduation coaches serve as a clearinghouse, connecting students to the supports they need as they face the challenges presented in their high school careers. There are a variety of social challenges for these students but the graduation coach can give them the tools to be successful and the understanding of what to do in the case they find themselves in a difficult position in their life. Since many of the social issues surrounding students in high school become more complicated than the issues of middle school, it is important to connect students with adult mentors who can help students adjust to the new realities of the high school environment. Therefore, the overall goal of the graduation coach is to improve students and their academic, social and personal behavior. The graduation coach is the instrument that school use to encourage their students to learn how to navigate the world of education. The Graduation Coach model helps students navigate the connections between their lives and the school environment in order to make learning personally meaning (NCES fact sheet, 2010). Chapter III discusses the methodology of the study including the design of the study, selection of the site and subjects, and procedures that will be used in the data analysis.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter details the data collecting methods proposed. This chapter consists of the method description, description of participating schools, details of the survey being sent to the 50 chosen principals, and the data collection methods and proposed analysis. This chapter also describes the tool used to collect data and sources for archival data.

The data collected provided the information needed to identify if the setting, rural or urban, had an impact on the success of the graduation coach intervention and if the opinion of the principals' effectiveness and leadership ability impacted the success of the intervention. Schools, school districts and state boards of education are interested in finding any money saving research that can impact the graduation rate in their schools. This study investigated the significance the setting and it's impact on this dropout prevention intervention by examining the graduation rates in each setting.

Research Design

To evaluate the effectiveness of the graduation coach dropout prevention intervention in rural and urban school districts, archival data and a leadership effectiveness survey was used to gather the data. The information in the literature has shown that there is a trend in education that schools and districts are willing to spend the necessary amount of money to increase their student achievement and graduation rate. The issue that some school administrators are facing is what program or intervention should they use and how do they know if it will work in their schools. The various

financial hardships in education and the ways schools are combating the dropout rate lead to the development of these questions that archival data was analyzed to answer:

1. Is there a difference in the success of this intervention in rural or urban schools, when measured by graduation rates, which is reported in state archival data?
2. Are there any ancillary findings that could also impact the success of the intervention based on race or gender?

The issues and trends in education and the effectiveness of leadership in schools lead to the development of the forty survey statements and two open ended questions that were given to the participants.

Participants

The participants in this study are high school principals in the state of Georgia, who were selected randomly to receive the survey of statements. Fifty principals were chosen for the study and they were divided evenly by the school settings of rural and urban. The principals were then sent the survey and a cover letter that asked them to respond truthfully about the written statements and their level of agreement with the statements as well as their opinion on two open-ended questions that addressed the training and success level of the graduation coach at their school.

The schools in this study had a wide range of ethnicities and socio-economic ranges in their student population. However, through matching, the researcher was able to ensure that the comparison of the schools and the effectiveness of the graduation coach were not hindered by the limitations. The school information was acquired through the use of archival data provided by the state of Georgia Department of Education.

Every rural and urban high school's graduation data in the state of Georgia was analyzed for the archival data section of this study, the data collected was then separated on the following specific criteria, which are:

1. The schools must utilize a graduation coach as a dropout intervention program.
2. The schools will have similar gender, racial/ethnic and level of free/reduced lunch eligibility make-up of the students.
3. They will have a similar amount in per pupil spending.
4. The Graduation Coaches will have similar position duties.
5. There will be an even number of rural and urban schools used in the study.

They gave their level of agreement with the statements by marking the box next to the statement, which coincided with the Likert Scale that was provided in the survey.

Instrumentation

This study was divided into two parts. The first part of the study included the collection and analyzing of archival data to determine if the setting, rural or urban, has an impact on the effectiveness of the graduation coach intervention. The second part included a self-reported survey of principals and their opinion about the statements provided (Appendix A and B). These statements identified which type of leadership style the principal used in his or her school. The archival data was downloaded from the Georgia Department of Education and then analyzed in Excel format. This data was then entered into SPSS (version 20) and a t-test was used to compare the graduation rate of the high schools with the graduation coach intervention. This was done to identify if the setting, rural or urban, had any significant impact on the success of the graduation coach

intervention, as measured by the various graduation rates. Demographic information was added into SPSS and analyzed for descriptive information and ancillary findings. This data addressed the null hypothesis, which states:

H1: The setting, rural or urban, in which the Graduation Coach intervention is used will not have a significant impact on the graduation rate as measured by the differences in graduation rates before and after the intervention.

The next part of the study investigated the level of administrative support in these various schools. This data was gathered by surveying the principals and asking them to self-identify their leadership style, as well as their opinion on the support level for the training the graduation coach received and the effectiveness of the Graduation Coach intervention. This section of the study addressed RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, which read:

RQ1: Did the opinion given by the principals about their leadership style indicate a significant impact on the success of the intervention program?

RQ2: Did the opinion given by the principals on the success of intervention have a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate at their school?

RQ3: Did the opinions given by the principals about the level of training the Graduation Coaches received indicate a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate?

RQ4: Did the opinions given by the principals about the expectations of their Graduation Coaches indicate a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate?

The questions were in written in random order and the respondents were asked to respond on a 6-point Likert Scale. The Likert Scale ranged from 0, which indicated they

totally disagreed with the statement, to 5 that indicated they totally agreed with the statement. The principals answered the final two questions by writing their opinion on the lines provided. The first 35 statements coincide with identifying the leadership style of the principals, which were autocratic, democratic or laissez faire. Statements 36-40 identify the level of support the principal has towards the Graduation Coach intervention. The two open-ended questions allowed the principals to give their opinion on the level of training their Graduation Coach received and their opinion on the success of the Graduation Coach intervention.

Table 1

Identification of Questions

 Section One: Principal Self-Reflected Leadership Style

Autocratic 1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 15, 19, 24, 27, 28, 31

Democratic 3, 7, 13, 16, 17, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30

Laissez Faire 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 20, 21, 22

Section Two: Principal Motivation and Graduation Coach Support

Autocratic Motivation 32, 34

Democratic Motivation 33

Laissez Faire Motivation 35

Graduation Coach Support Level 36, 37, 38, 39, 40

A pilot study was conducted by sending the survey to 20 principals whose responses were used to evaluate the validity and reliability of the instrument. The surveys were returned to the researcher and the data was analyzed using correlation techniques to determine if changes were needed to the instrument prior to the distribution to the principals.

The frequency scan did not indicate any irregularities in question responses. The reliability statistics for the pilot study can be found in Table 2. A few pilot study respondents suggested changes to the study but their suggestions were mainly focused on expanding the demographic questions. Prior to the distribution of the survey the changes were made to the demographic information section of the survey.

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha & Validity Percentage

Questions	Cronbach's Alpha	Validity Percentage
Autocratic	.730	93%
Democratic	.639	98%
Laissez Faire	.235	93%

The two archival data driven research questions addressed the null hypothesis, which was:

H1: The setting, rural or urban, in which the Graduation Coach intervention is used will not have a significant impact on the graduation rate as measured by the differences in graduation rates before and after the intervention.

Procedures

Upon approval by the dissertation committee members and the University of Southern Mississippi's Internal Review Board (Appendix A), the researcher used archival data from the selected schools. The specific data area used in the study was the graduation rates from the various high schools for the 2010-2011 school year. This data was imported to an excel spread sheet for evaluation and coding. The coded data was then entered into SPSS (version 20) for analysis using a t-test.

The qualitative section investigated the effectiveness of the leadership in the various schools and this information was attained through the use of a survey. Once the principals were chosen through the various matching categories of their respective schools, a survey was mailed to them. In addition to the survey, a letter explaining the purpose of the study, directions for filling out the survey and a return-addressed envelope was mailed. This data was collected and the researcher entered the data into an excel spreadsheet and then analyzed it, grouped it by theme and then coded the themes. Once the data was coded it was uploaded into SPSS (version 20) and analyzed for descriptive data and patterns.

Following this analysis the researcher reported the findings and the identifying information was destroyed to safeguard against any violation of the procedures. The researcher did not write down any identifying information except for the respondents' assigned numbers, which was matched to their school, which was given the same number. The corresponding information with the numbers is not known by anyone other than the researcher. Once this was completed, general demographic data was collected

from the surveys. The data was coded, uploaded into SPSS (version 20) and analyzed for descriptive data patterns.

Limitations

There were few limitations to the study that could have threatened its internal validity. However, one of these limitations was that the researcher only used the graduation rate to identify if a school's intervention was successful. The literature does indicate that this piece of data is crucial to the effectiveness of the intervention; however, there are other pieces of data that could have illustrated, with greater detail, the success level of the intervention. Another limitation of the study is the number of respondents to the survey, which was 38. This might have been too low to accurately compare the self-reported leadership style, support for the graduation coach and the success of the intervention as measured by the reported graduation rate. One limitation of the study is that the researcher chose which school to use in the study based on a set of parameters, which could threaten some validity of the study. The final limitation is that the researcher has chosen only to survey the principal. This only allowed for the principal to give their opinion about their own leadership style. The researcher recognized that there were limitations to this study, which were normal, but they did everything in their power to ensure that the study that was conducted was being done so with the purest intentions and the pursuit of scholarly excellence.

Data Analysis

The archival data collected was analyzed through the use of t-tests to determine the success rate of the various schools when compared to each other based on the setting, rural or urban, in which the school resided. The data collected from the qualitative

interview was compared based on the setting of the school and the level of success they have with the graduation coach intervention, which was measured by the graduation rate of the various schools.

Once this data was analyzed and compared, various tables showing significance were generated and organized. These tables illustrated factors such as school setting, administrative support, graduation rates and success rates of the graduation coach intervention, the setting of the school and the opinions of the principals.

Summary

The improvement of the graduation rate is significant to the success of the entire educational school system. This study investigated the graduation coach intervention program in both rural and urban school districts and the comparison of these settings and their levels of success as measured by the graduation rate, as well as the perceptions and opinions of the principals about the leadership style and the overall effectiveness of the intervention at their various schools.

The data collection was done through the use of archival data and principal surveys. These two data collecting techniques allowed the researcher to develop a mixed-method approach to investigating the differences in the success of this intervention and the level of administrative support at the various schools. The researcher then put the collected data into graphical form, analyzed it and addressed the hypothesis and research questions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate if the setting, rural or urban, in which a school resides, has a significant impact on the success of the Graduation Coach intervention, as measured by the graduation rate which was provided by the Georgia Department of Education. The analysis procedure for the archival section of the study was the use of a t-test. This was done to compare the graduation rate mean score of the two settings in which the school resides for 2010 and 2011. In addition to the archival data, the leadership style and support for the Graduation Coach intervention would be examined to identify any effect these factors have on the success of the intervention as measured by the graduation rate and the survey instrument. The three different leadership styles (autocratic, democratic, and laissez faire) were determined the leadership scores given by the principals on the first 30 statements on the survey. The motivation levels and the levels of support were based on the opinions of the principals were also supplied by the survey answers. The data collected from the survey was analyzed by using SPSS (version 20) to conduct a two-tailed test to determine if there are relationships between the variables. The schools in Georgia were divided into two groups, rural and urban, based on the definitions provided, and 50 schools were chosen to receive the survey. The 50 chosen schools were from both school settings (25 Rural and 25 Urban). Of the 50 surveys, 38 were returned, which is a return rate of 76%. There was one survey that was unusable because the identification number was torn off and a portion of the final page was missing, therefore lowering the return rate to 74%.

Description of the Sample

Graduation data from 2010 and 2011 was collected from the Georgia Department of Education from every high school that was identified as rural and urban. The analysis of this data addressed the null hypothesis which states: H1: The setting, rural or urban, in which the Graduation Coach intervention is used will not have a significant impact on the graduation rate as measured by the differences in graduation rates before and after the intervention.

The respondents to the provided survey were the principals from 37 high schools in the state of Georgia. The data collected from this survey answered the research questions that were:

RQ1: Did the opinion given by the principals about their leadership style indicate a significant impact on the success of the intervention program?

RQ2: Did the opinion given by the principals on the success of intervention have a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate at their school?

RQ3: Did the opinions given by the principals about the level of training the Graduation Coaches received indicate a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate?

RQ4: Did the opinions given by the principals about the expectations of their Graduation Coaches indicate a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate?

The number of respondents from urban schools was 13, which was 35% of the total. The number of respondents from rural schools was 24, which was 65% of the total.

The participating principals participated at an abnormally high rate (92.5%). The general demographic descriptive statistics can be found in Table 3. Of the 37 principals, 86.5% were male and 13.5% were female. 56.8% of the respondents were under the age of 45 and 29.7% of the respondents were over the age of 50. The only two race indicators that were received were White and African-American, with 83.8% of the respondents indicating they were White.

Table 3

General Demographics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	32	86.5%
Female	5	13.5%
Age		
31-35	1	2.7%
36-40	12	32.5%
41-45	8	21.6%
46-50	5	13.5%
50+	11	29.7%
Race		
White	31	83.8%
African American	6	16.2%

The respondents indicated the level they taught when they were employed as teachers, as well as, the subject they taught. The level with the highest frequency represented 64.9% of the respondents in which they indicated they taught in a high school setting. The lowest frequency was represented in the two areas, which were elementary school and K-12 schools, both with 2% indicating they taught in that setting. The subject area with the highest frequency response was Mathematics with 35.1%. The subject area with the lowest frequency response was Language Arts with 1%. The data collected about the level and subject in which the respondent worked is located in Table 4.

Table 4

Teaching Information For Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Level Taught		
High School	24	64.9%
Middle School	4	10.8%
Elementary School	2	5.4%
K-12	2	5.4%
7-12	5	13.5%

Table 4 (continued).

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Subject Taught		
Mathematics	13	35.1%
Language Arts	1	2.7%
History	6	16.2%
Science	5	13.5%
P.E./ Health	7	18.9%
Other	5	13.5%

The level of experience for the respondents was represented by the years of experience they indicated in three the different areas of the number of years as a teacher, years in their current principal role and total years as an administrator. This data set is located in Table 5. The majority (59.4%) had 10 years or less as a teacher. Only 8.1% of the respondents indicated they had more than 20 years of experience as a teacher. Seventy-three percent of the respondents indicated they were in their current position for five years or less. The lowest response rate was 2.7% of the respondents, which indicated they had 20 or more years of experience in their current position. Eighty-one and one tenth percent of the respondents indicated they had less than 10 years of experience as a principal and 5.4% indicated that they had 20+ years of experience as a principal. The respondents indicated that 43.2% had 10 years or less as an administrator and 56.8% of the respondents indicated they had at least 11 years of experience as an administrator.

Table 5

Respondents Experience Levels

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Years as a Teacher		
0-5	10	27%
6-10	12	32.4%
11-15	6	16.2%
16-20	6	16.2%
20+	3	8.1%
Years in Current Position		
0-5	27	73%
6-10	7	18.9%
11-15	2	5.4%
16-20	1	2.7%
Total Years as a Principal		
0-5	19	51.4%
6-10	11	29.7%
11-15	5	13.5%
20+	2	5.4%

Table 5 (continued).

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Total Years as an Administrator		
0-5	6	16.2%
6-10	10	27%
11-15	13	35.1%
16-20	5	13.5%
20+	3	8.1%

In Table 6 the data is from the demographic section of the survey which asked the respondents to indicate the position they had prior to becoming a principal, the highest level of education, if they ever held a non-teaching position such as a counselor, and if they had coached a sport. Eighty-six and one-half percent of the respondents indicated that they were an administrator, and 2.7% indicated they were neither an administrator nor a teacher prior to becoming a principal. Seventy-Eight and four-tenths percent of respondents indicated that they had not held a non-teaching position and none of the respondents indicated they were a counselor. Seventy-eight and four tenths percent of the respondents indicated that they had coached a sport before and 21.6% indicated they had not coached.

Table 6

Respondents Prior Positions and Education

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Position Prior to Becoming a Principal		
Administrator	32	86.5%
Teacher	4	10.8%
Other	1	2.7%
Highest Degree Earned		
Bachelors	1	2.7%
Masters	5	13.5%
Specialist	19	51.4%
Doctorate	12	32.4%
Non-Teaching Position		
None	29	78.4%
Other	8	21.6%
Coaching		
Did Coach	29	78.4%
Did Not Coach	8	21.6%

The respondents who indicated that they had coached prior to becoming a principal were asked to identify the sports they coached. Table 7 identifies the sports that were identified as being coached by the respondents as well as the number of sports they coached. Of all the sports that were listed as being coached, football had the greatest

percentage at 56.7. The sport that had the fewest responses was soccer with 2.7%. The responses that identified the principals as only coaching one sport was 18%. The responses indicated that 59% of the principals coached at least two sports. The responses also indicated that more people coached four sports, which were 15%, rather than three sports, which was 12%. The highest single category was the two sports category with 32% of the respondents falling in this category.

Table 7

Respondents Coaching Experience

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Sports Coached		
Football	21	56.7%
Basketball	10	27%
Baseball	11	29.7%
Soccer	1	2.7%
Softball	4	10.8%
Other	17	45.9%
None	8	21.6%

Table 7 (continued).

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Number of Sports Coached		
1 Only	6	18%
2 Only	11	32%
3 Only	4	12%
4 Only	5	15%
None	8	23%

The range, mean and SD from the survey statements are located in Table 8a, Table 8b, Table 8c and Table 8d. The data gathered from these statements answered Research Question 1, which reads: Will the opinion given by the principals about their leadership style indicate a significant impact on the success of the intervention program? Statements 1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 15, 19, 24, 27, 28, 31, 32, and 34 are all used to identify the Autocratic leadership style. Statements 3, 7, 13, 16, 17, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30, and 33 are all used to identify the Democratic leadership style. Statements 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 20, 21, 22 and 35 are all used to identify the Laissez Faire leadership style.

The statements for the Autocratic leadership style with the highest mean score was statement 24 with 4.46 and a Standard Deviation score of .65. The statement with the lowest mean score was statement 31 with a mean score of .86 and a Standard Deviation score of 1.16. The statements for the Democratic leadership style with the highest mean score was statement 26 with 4.73 and a Standard Deviation score of .65. The statement

with the lowest mean score was statement 33 with a mean score of 3.35 and a Standard Deviation score of 1.42. The statements for the Laissez Faire leadership style with the highest mean score was statement 5 with 4.49 and a Standard Deviation score of .84. The statement with the lowest mean score was statement 12 with a mean score of 1.51 and a Standard Deviation score of 1.19. The first 35 statements were used to identify the leadership style the respondent most likely would be identified with based on their agreement level with the statements. The leadership style that the respondents mostly identified with was the Democratic leadership style and the leadership style with the least amount of respondents was the Laissez Faire leadership style.

Table 8a

Descriptive Statistics

Survey Statements	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Accomplishing a goal is the most important thing.	2	5	4.22	.79
2. I closely monitor schedules to ensure that tasks are completed on time.	1	5	3.84	.90
3. I encourage teachers to participate in decision making and try to implement their suggestions.	3	5	4.59	.55
4. During staff discussion I neither agree nor disagree with other staff members.	0	4	2.57	1.30

Table 8b

Descriptive Statistics

Survey Statements	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
5. There is a need for on-going staff development and the implementation of new ideas.	2	5	4.49	.84
6. I like to control every detail of daily tasks.	0	4	1.62	1.21
7. I enjoy coaching and encouraging others on new tasks and projects.	3	5	4.41	.64
8. I worry about relationships when correcting a teacher's mistakes.	0	5	2.92	1.21
9. I am concerned about meeting deadlines.	1	5	4.00	1.08
10. I will inform teachers on new decisions without asking their input or suggestions.	0	4	1.73	1.12
11. I emphasize the maintenance of definite standards of performance.	1	5	3.92	1.09
12. My opinion is misinterpreted on many issues.	0	5	1.51	1.19
13. I encourage teachers to develop new ideas and be creative in their jobs.	2	5	4.43	.80

Table 8c

Descriptive Statistics

Survey Statements	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
14. I usually put decisions to a vote and go with the final decision.	0	4	2.46	1.15
15. I am willing to change my leadership approach.	1	5	3.51	.99
16. I tend to delegate some of my work to qualified staff members.	1	5	3.97	1.04
17. I value the importance of working as a team.	3	5	4.68	.53
18. Before deciding on major issues I must have everyone's opinion prior to finalizing the decision.	0	5	2.68	1.42
19. I always make the final decision, making my authority known.	0	5	2.22	1.38
20. I tend to send out information to the staff via: email, memos, or voicemails rather than staff meetings.	0	5	3.22	1.14
21. I depend on my staff to determine what needs to be done and how to accomplish these items.	1	4	3.19	.91
22. I tend to feel my employees can lead themselves just as well as I can.	0	5	2.49	1.19

Table 8d

Descriptive Statistics

Survey Statements	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
23. I find time to listen to a teacher's issues if there is an issue.	3	5	4.62	.55
24. I ask teachers for their input on ideas and I do not make time to discuss issues with them.	3	5	4.46	.65
25. I try to include at least one employee on all decisions.	0	5	4.03	1.01
26. I strive to create a team oriented environment.	2	5	4.73	.65
27. I tend to tell teachers what needs to be done and how to do it.	0	4	1.54	1.04
28. I closely monitor employees to ensure tasks are being done correctly.	1	5	2.97	1.14
29. I use my leadership power to help teachers grow professionally.	1	5	4.00	1.06
30. I work with teachers when there are differences in expectations and performance abilities.	2	5	4.19	.74
31. I feel that teachers and staff must be directed or threatened with punishment in order to get them to achieve the desired objectives.	0	5	0.86	1.16

Table 8d (continued).

Survey Statements	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
32. I am highly motivated to do be recognized as one of the best in my district or state.	0	5	3.08	1.71
33. I am motivated by people who take the time to listen to what I have to say.	0	5	3.35	1.42
34. I am motivated by people who tell me exactly how to accomplish a goal.	0	5	2.00	1.58
35. I am motivated by the emphasis of teamwork.	1	5	4.38	.80

Note: Respondents were asked to respond to question 1-35 on a Likert-type scale of 0 to 5, with 0 equaling disagree and 5 equaling agree.

The statements 36-40 identify the support the respondents indicated for the graduation coach intervention. These statements provide the data needed to answer research question 2, which reads: Did the opinion given by the principals on the success of intervention have a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate at their school? Table 9 shows the range, mean and standard deviation of the responses. The statement with the highest mean score, which was 3.97, was number 38. The statement with the lowest mean score, which was 1.74, was number 37. The overall mean score for all five statements indicated that there was not a strong agreement with the statements and the graduation coach intervention.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics

Survey Statements	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
36. The graduation coach intervention is important to the overall success of the school.	0	5	3.71	1.64
37. The graduation coach intervention was a directive from the school district that I was forced to implement.	0	5	1.74	1.86
38. The graduation coach intervention has little impact on the over student achievement of my school.	0	5	3.97	1.50
39. The graduation coach is highly motivated and qualified to perform the duties of the position.	0	5	3.90	1.64
40. My students would me more successful without the graduation coach intervention.	0	5	3.39	1.86

Note: Respondents were asked to respond to question 36-40 on a Likert-type scale of 0 to 5, with 0 equaling disagree and 5 equaling to agree.

Table 10 shows the mean scores and standard deviation for the leadership styles that the respondents agreed with in their responses. The Democratic leadership style had the highest level of agreement with a mean score of 4.40. The Laissez Faire leadership style had the lowest mean score with 2.33. This data was also used to address research question 1.

Table 10

Respondents Leadership Style

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Autocratic	2.64	.58
Democratic	4.40	.41
Laissez Faire	2.33	.46

Note: Respondents were asked to respond to question 1-35 on a Likert-type scale of 0 to 5, with 0 equaling disagree and 5 equaling agree.

Table 11 shows the mean and standard deviation of the respondent's perception of the Graduation Coach Intervention. A mean score of 3.34 was found from the data collected on a 0 to 5 Likert Scale.

Table 11

Respondents Perception of the Graduation Coach Intervention

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Respondents Perception	3.34	1.23

Note: Respondents were asked to respond to question 36-40 on a Likert-type scale of 0 to 5, with 0 equaling disagree and 5 equaling agree.

Table 12 is the data used to address the null hypothesis which reads: H1: The setting, rural or urban, in which the Graduation Coach intervention is used will not have a significant impact on the graduation rate as measured by the differences in graduation rates before and after the intervention. The data collected indicated that the graduation

rate was not impacted significantly by the setting in which the school resided and the null hypothesis was accepted. The mean scores for urban did increase from 2010-2011, from 80.38 to 80.39 and the mean scores for rural setting did decrease from 2010-2011, from 80.87 to 80.6. The graduation rate for rural schools were higher for both years however the significance level was not high enough to impact the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

Table 12

Setting and Graduation Rates

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
2011		
Rural	80.60	8.84
Urban	80.39	14.96
2010		
Rural	80.87	14.57
Urban	80.38	11.66

The data from Table 13 shows the correlation between the identified leadership style and the graduation rate affiliated with that identified leadership style. The table showed that there was no significant relationship between the two variables. This data was also used in answering research question 1. The significance level for all three leadership styles was above the critical value, which was .025. The correlation between the Autocratic leadership style and the graduation rate for 2010 was .13. The correlation between the Democratic leadership style and the graduation rate for 2010 was -.01. The

correlation between the Laissez Faire leadership style and the graduation rate for 2010 was .19. The correlation between the Autocratic leadership style and the graduation rate for 2011 was .01. The correlation between the Democratic leadership style and the graduation rate for 2011 was -.04. The correlation between the Laissez Faire leadership style and the graduation rate for 2011 was .16.

Table 13

Pearson Correlation between Leadership Style and Graduation Rate (N=37)

	Autocratic	Democratic	Laissez Faire
2010			
r	.13	-.01	.19
Sig. (2 Tailed)	.43	.97	.26
2011			
r	.01	-.04	.16
Sig. (2 Tailed)	.94	.84	.36

Table 14 was a Pearson Correlation that was used to identify if there was a significant relationship between the graduation rates and the success level as indicated by the principals. This data shows that the relationship between the variables was not significant and did not have an impact on the graduation rate. This data was used in determining if the relationship was significant and if there was a correlation between the two variables.

Table 14

Pearson Correlation between Graduation Rate and the Success Level of the Graduation Coach Intervention as reported by the Principals (N= 37)

	2010	2011
Perception of Graduation Coach Success	.25	.10
r		
Sig. (2 Tailed)	.18	.61

Research questions 3 and 4 focus on the last 2 questions of the survey, which were open-ended. The open-ended survey questions were written as follows: 1. Did your Graduation Coach receive any specialized training? If so, how effective was it? This question answered research question 3. 2. What is the primary role of your graduation coach in your school? The data gathered answered question 4. The data gathered from the responses were kept in narrative form to preserve the content of the statements provided. They were divided up by positive answered and negative answers. Of the 37 surveys returned, 14 indicated that they did receive training. The other 23 remaining, 12 answered that they did not receive training and the other 11 did not answer the question. The effectiveness was also gauged on these narrative responses, which indicated that the training they received did not have a high interest or effectiveness level.

The last research question, which is RQ4, was answered by the open-ended question. What is the primary role of your graduation coach in your school? The respondents' answers were focused on the role of the Graduation Coach at their individual school. The answers were then coded for mainstreaming. There were several

answers that were provided by the respondents, which indicated that the role of the graduation coach was to track ninth grade at-risk. There were many statements about the role of the graduation.

Statistical Test Results

H1: The setting, rural or urban, in which the Graduation Coach intervention is used will not have a significant impact on the graduation rate as measured by the differences in graduation rates before and after the intervention. To determine the significance of this null hypothesis, an Anova was conducted to identify if there was a significant relationship between the graduation rates of 2010 and 2011, the setting in which that school resides, which is rural or urban. A one-way between subjects Anova was conducted to compare the effect the setting (rural or urban) had on the graduation rate for the indicated schools. There was no significant effect on the graduation rate when compared to the setting, rural or urban, in which the school resided at the $p < .05$ level for the indicated conditions [$F(1, 300) = .090, p = .764$]. These results indicated that the null hypothesis (H_0) was accepted. Table 11 indicates that there was no significant impact on the graduation rates for both years in both settings. It also indicated that there was not a significant change in the overall mean scores for both years in both settings. The mean score for the rural setting decreased slightly from 80.87% in 2010 to 80.6% in 2011. The mean score for the urban setting increased slightly from 80.38% in 2010 to 80.39% in 2011.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the leadership style and the impact it has on the success of the intervention program as measured by the graduation rates for 2010 and 2011. The results

for the correlation between the graduation rates for 2010 and 2011, and the self-identified leadership styles of autocratic, democratic and laissez faire were identified in Table 12. This data was collected from the surveys that was mailed to 50 respondents which were equally divided based on the setting in which their school resided. Statements 1-35 provided the data needed to address RQ1.

There was no significant correlation between the autocratic leadership style and the 2010 graduation rate [$r = .133$, $n = 37$, $p = .433$]. There was no significant correlation between the democratic leadership style and the 2010 graduation rate [$r = -.006$, $n = 37$, $p = .970$]. There was no significant correlation between the Laissez Faire leadership style and the 2010 graduation rate [$r = .190$, $n = 37$, $p = .261$]. There was no significant correlation between the autocratic leadership style and the 2011 graduation rate [$r = .012$, $n = 37$, $p = .943$]. There was no significant correlation between the democratic leadership style and the 2011 graduation rate [$r = -.034$, $n = 37$, $p = .842$]. There was no significant correlation between the Laissez Faire leadership style and the 2011 graduation rate [$r = .157$, $n = 37$, $p = .355$]. Overall, the data collected and analyzed from the survey to answer RQ1 showed no correlation.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was also computed to assess the relationship between the graduation rates for 2010 and 2011 and the success level of the Graduation Coach intervention as indicated by the respondents. The results for the correlation between the graduation rates for 2010 and 2011, and the success level of the Graduation Coach intervention as indicated by the respondents were identified in Table 13. This data was collected from the surveys that was mailed to 50 respondents which were equally divided based on the setting in which their school resided. Statements 36-40

provided the data needed to address RQ2. There was no significant correlation between the success level and the 2010 graduation rate [$r = .250$, $n = 31$, $p = .176$]. There was no significant correlation between the success level and the 2011 graduation rate [$r = .095$, $n = 31$, $p = .612$]. Overall, the data collected and analyzed from the survey to answer RQ2 showed no correlation between the variables computed.

The data collected to address RQ3 and RQ4 were collected in narrative form from the surveys, which were mailed to the 50 respondents. Of the 50 surveys, 37 were used to answer RQ3 and RQ4. Of the 37 surveys, 27 respondents or 73% answered the open-ended questions and respondents 10 or 27% did not answer the open-ended questions. The returned surveys indicated that of the 27 respondents, 14 or 52% indicated that their Graduation Coach did receive training and 13 or 48% indicated their Graduation Coach did not receive any training. The 14 respondents who indicated that their Graduation Coach received training were split evenly as it related to the setting in which their school operated (7 Rural and 7 Urban). The 13 respondents who indicated that their Graduation Coach did not receive training were separated by the setting in which they operated, with eight responses coming from rural schools and five coming from urban schools. In Figure 1, the average graduation rate for each year is separated by the training level.

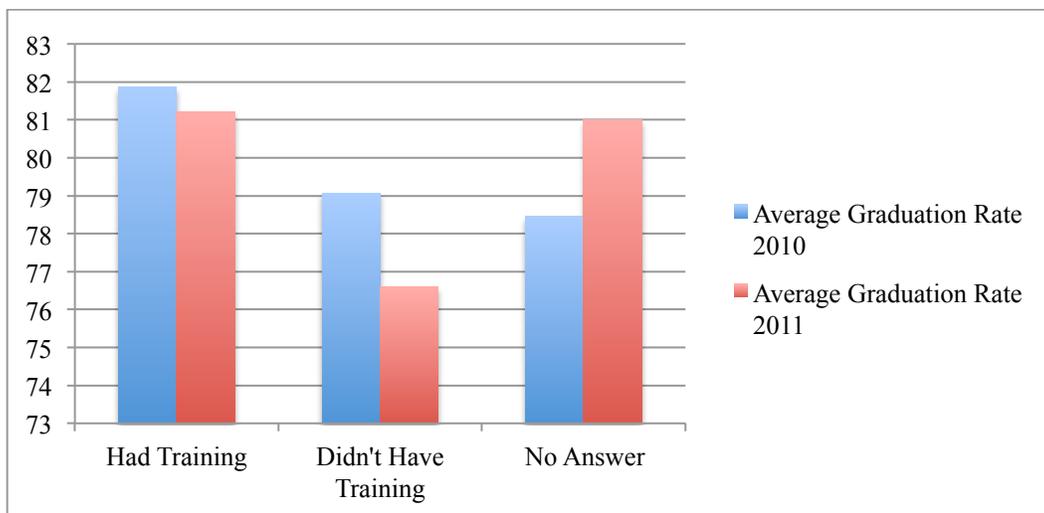


Figure 1. Training Level and Graduation Rate

The data collected from the last open-ended question was used to address RQ4, which states: Did the opinions given by the principals about the expectations of their Graduation Coaches indicate a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate? The responses collected from the surveys were coded based on their content. The answer coding process produced five different answer categories. These categories were based upon the responses that contained certain key words. The five categories for the reported role of the Graduation Coach are: Remediation of At-Risk Students, Foster Relationships with Students, Increase Graduation Rates, and Counselor Duties. The last category was found based on grouped responses that indicated the Graduation Coach position was no longer available at their school because of budget cuts. The percentage of the grouped responses can be found in Figure 2.

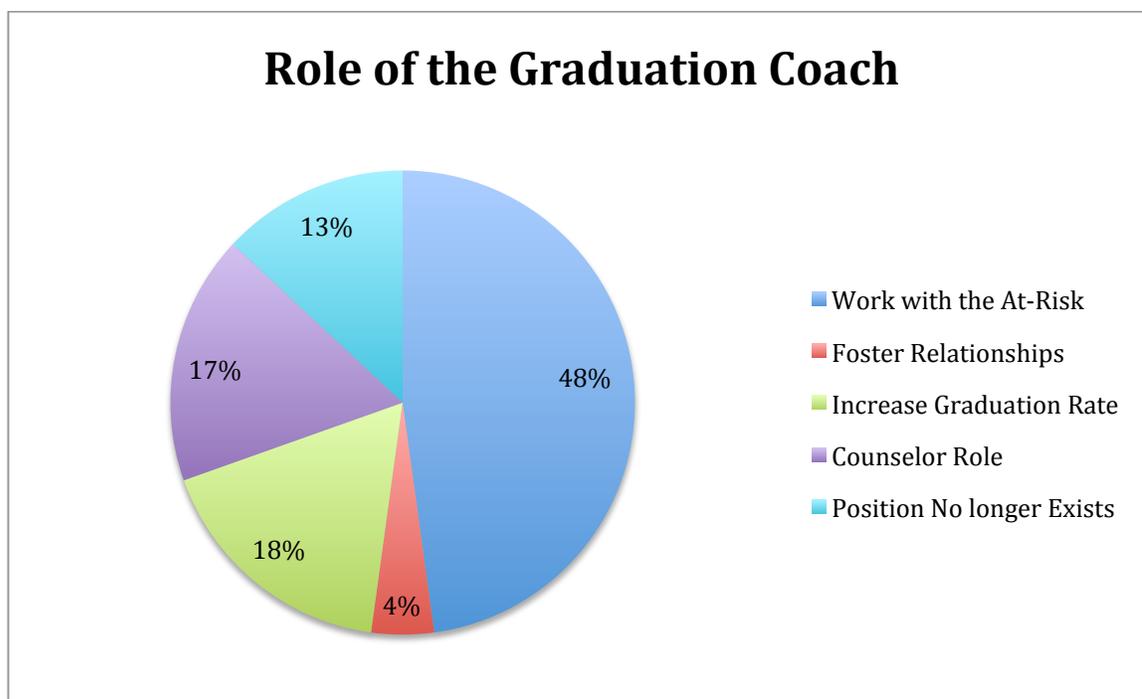


Figure 2. Indicated Role of the Graduation Coach

Summary of Findings

Graduation rates from high schools in the state of Georgia, that were identified as either rural or urban, were compared to each other to identify if the setting in which the school operates has a significant impact on the graduation rate of the various schools. The results of the analyzed data lead to the acceptance of the null hypothesis (H1). The research questions: RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, were answered by analyzing the collected survey data. The survey responses indicated that the leadership style of the principal did not significantly impact the graduation rate. The survey responses indicated that the level of support for the graduation coach intervention did not have a significant impact on the success of the intervention as measured by the graduation rate. The first open-ended question and responses, which were answered in narrative form and answered RQ3, indicated that 52% of the graduation coaches received training and the other 48% did not.

When the graduation rates of the graduation coaches who received training was compared to the graduation coaches who did not receive training, the results indicated that the graduation coaches who did not receive training had a higher average graduation rate. The results also indicated that the graduation rate decreased from 2010 to 2011 regardless of the level of training. In addition to this, the defined role of the graduation coach, as indicated by the responding principals, fell into five different categories and answered RQ4. The variety of roles differs from the defined role, which is given by the Georgia Department of Education, which indicated that the graduation coach is a blend of the first four grouping categories. The categories that were established based on grouping are as follows: Remediation of at-risk students, Foster Relationships with Students, Increase Graduation Rates and Counselor Duties. None of the responding schools fell into more than one category when responding to RQ4.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The ability for schools and school districts to educate citizens that can be productive and impact society in a positive way is critical to the success of the educational system in the United States. One of the many key factors that impact the success of the educational system is the graduation rate. The setting in which a school resides is a topic that also impacts the success of a school. Another factor that affects the success of schools is the impact school leadership has on the student achievement. These factors are the basis for this study. The study that was conducted investigated the impact the setting in which a school resided had on the success of the graduation coach intervention as measured by the graduation rate. Chapter II of this study explained the various dropout prevention interventions and gives examples of programs that are successful. This study gathered graduation data from high schools in Georgia that were identified as either rural or urban and analyzed them to see if there was any significance.

Data about leadership style and support level for the graduation coach intervention of selected principals from the schools in the study was also collected and analyzed. This chapter will discuss some of the findings from the study, as well as, the limitations, the ancillary findings, and the recommendations for future research.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study found that the setting in which the school resides does not impact the graduation coach intervention as measured by the graduation rate. The hypothesis, H1, reads as follows: the setting, rural or urban, in which the Graduation Coach intervention

is used will not have a significant impact on the graduation rate as measured by the differences in graduation rates before and after the intervention. The data collected showed that this null hypothesis was accepted. The graduation rates for both years in both settings did not show any significant correlation. When each setting was compared to each other there was no significant difference in both sets of graduation rates. The information from Chapter II indicated the dropout rate in the United States is 8.7%. Males were more likely to dropout (9.8%) than females (7.7%) and dropout rates by race and ethnicity are: White-5.3%, Asian/Pacific Islander-6.1%, Black-8.4%, Hispanic-21.4% (NCES fact sheet, 2010). The data collected from the study indicated that the state of Georgia has a graduation rate of 80.43% and a dropout rate of 7.8%. This increase of the graduation rate can be attributed to the success of the graduation coach intervention as well as the consistency within the state of Georgia and their policies. Georgia's graduation rate rose to 72.3% for the 2006-2007 school year, which was up from 70.8%, for the 2005-2006 school year. The state's number of dropouts fell from 23,000 to 21,000 students statewide, which was a 10% decrease. This occurred even after the 2006-2007 school year saw a population increase of 9,000 students, which brought the Georgia student population up to 446,500 students. The goal for the Georgia Department of Education is to have the graduation rate reach 100% by the year 2014 (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

Research questions 1-4, which are mentioned throughout this study, were also answered by analyzing the data collected from the survey, which was sent to 50 principals (25 rural and 25 urban). Research question 1, RQ1, reads: Did the opinion given by the principals about their leadership style indicate a significant impact on the

success of the intervention program? The principal's responses were collected and analyzed and showed that there was no significant correlation between the leadership style and the graduation rate. This research question did show that most of the respondents indicated their leadership style was the Democratic leadership style. The Laissez Faire leadership style was the least indicated leadership style. The respondent with the highest raw score for the Laissez Faire leadership style had a lower graduation rate for both years (2010: 76.2, 2011: 76.5) than the graduation rates for both years (2010: 92.8, 2011: 93.1) of the respondent with the highest score in the Democratic leadership style. Effective educational leadership makes a difference in improving learning; there is nothing new or heavily controversial about that concept, however the results of this study showed that the leadership style does not impact the Graduation Coach intervention. As the role of administrators evolved, the idea of instructional leadership emerged as a way to define the responsibilities of the principal to include classroom instruction (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). The data collected from this study did not support this claim however the limitations of the study could have impacted the validity of this claim.

RQ2 was: Did the opinion given by the principals on the success of intervention have a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate at their school? The responses from the principals were collected and analyzed from statements 36-40 on the survey. The results showed that there was no significant correlation between the graduation rate and the level of support from the principals for the intervention. The respondent with the highest support level for the intervention had a graduation rate of 96.1% for both years. The respondent with the lowest support level for the intervention

had a graduation rate of 80% in 2010 and 79.3% in 2011. Information from Chapter II explained that the state of Georgia mandated this intervention. It did not however, discuss the expectation from the principals for the Graduation Coach intervention. The state of Georgia did develop a set of standards that every school with a Graduation Coach should follow. A principal's leadership support for the intervention was not in the developed standards.

RQ3 was: Did the opinions given by the principals about the level of training the Graduation Coaches received indicate a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate? The data collected to answer this question came from the first open-ended statement. The answers were then grouped together by the level they of training they indicated their Graduation Coaches received. The respondents indicated that 14 of their graduation coaches received training, 13 did not receive training and 10 did not answer the question. Seven of the respondents who indicated there was training were from a rural school and seven were from an urban school. There were five rural schools that indicated they did not receive training and eight were from urban schools. The average graduation rate for rural schools that received training was 81.9% and the average graduation rate for urban schools that received training was 81.22%. The average graduation rate for rural schools that did not receive training was 79.1% and the graduation rate for urban schools that did not receive training was 76.6%. The state of Georgia did sanction some training and the respondents confirmed this fact; however, the respondents indicated that the training was mediocre at best. In Chapter II of this study, the success of many other dropout prevention interventions have founded their success on proper training and teacher enrichment but not focused on one intervention. Also in

Chapter II of this study the researcher said, “Thus, the available evidence relates to the effectiveness of specific bundles of strategies that constitute programs and not, strictly speaking, to the individual strategies or to other programs incorporating different combinations of strategies” (Dynarski et al., p.4). There are many other studies that find dropout is often a long-term, cumulative process, with risk factors present as early as 6th grade predicting whether a student completes school. Nationwide, students living in families with incomes in the bottom 20 percent were about four times more likely to drop out of high school between 2003 and 2004 than peers from families with incomes in the top 20% (Neild, et al., 2007).

The Georgia Department of Education partnered with the group, Communities in Schools (CIS), to assist the graduation coaches in the state with support and professional development programs to enhance the effectiveness of the intervention. CIS of Georgia is focused and dedicated on addressing and eliminating the dropout issue that their schools are facing. Their plan is to attack this issue of school dropouts by streamlining their resources of the school’s community to address educational hurdles changes (Georgia graduation coach initiative, 2008). The services provided by the CIS of Georgia include: providing initiatives for the whole school, sustaining services for students needing ongoing support to help them succeed in school, and providing short term services for students with immediate needs changes. Georgia’s graduation rate rose to 72.3% for the 2006-2007 school year, which was up from 70.8% for the 2005-2006 school year. The state’s number of dropouts fell from 23,000 to 21,000 students statewide, which was a 10% decrease. This occurred even after the 2006-2007 school year saw a population

increase of 9,000 students, which brought the Georgia student population up to 446,500 students (*Georgia Department of Education, 2009*).

RQ4 was: Did the opinions given by the principals about the expectations of their Graduation Coaches indicate a significant impact when compared to the graduation rate? This data was collected through the respondents answering the final open-ended of the survey. The responses were then grouped based on the main content of the statement. These grouped responses about the expectations were: student remediation, tracking students 9th-12th grade, monitoring instruction, foster relationships, follow-up with students and teachers, counselor role, increase graduation rate, and lost graduation coach position to funding. The principals' expectations were as follows: student remediation-19%, tracking students 9th -12th grade-37%, monitoring instruction-11%, foster relationship-7%, follow-up with students and teachers-4%, counselor role-4%, increase graduation rate-7%, and lost graduation coach position to funding-11%. The expectations of the state of Georgia for the Graduation Coach are a combination of most of these responses but the main idea is that the Graduation Coach is needed to help increase the graduation rate, decrease the dropout rate and help students transition from high school to post secondary education and/ or work force. The three respondents who indicated that the position was lost due to funding had an average graduation rate of 75.1%. Two of the respondents in this category were from rural schools and one was from an urban school. The respondents who indicated that tracking students was the main expectation had an average graduation rate of 77.7%. The ten respondents were distributed evenly, five from rural schools and five from urban schools. This category contained the respondent with the highest graduation rate (100%) and the respondent with the lowest graduation rate

(47.7%). The two respondents were both in the urban category. The information provided in Chapter II of this study explained that the state of Georgia has a set of guidelines for being a Graduation Coach. The principals' responses indicated some knowledge about the expectations of the Graduation Coach; however, they did not indicate the complete knowledge because most of them limited their Graduation Coach's responsibility. The state of Georgia indicated that they budgeted \$15 billion dollars for the 2006-2007 school year to pay full-time employees on staff to identify the at-risk students in schools and devise plans to help students graduate from high school. The Georgia Department of Education partnered with the group, Communities in Schools (CIS), to assist the graduation coaches in the state with support and professional development programs to enhance the effectiveness of the intervention. CIS of Georgia is focused and dedicated on addressing and eliminating the dropout issue that their schools are facing. Their plan is to attack this issue of school dropouts by streamlining their resources of the school's community to address educational hurdles changes (Georgia graduation coach initiative, 2008).

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The graduation rate in the United States is a topic that impacts many schools and school districts. Combating this is critical to a school's success as well as the overall student achievement which is associated not only with the school in general but with the leadership which set the policies and procedures to ensure the success of the students. Deciding on how to combat the dropout rate is critical to the fiscal responsibility of the schools and districts. The results of this study supports the use of graduation coaches but does not necessarily rule-out other interventions that could be more appropriate for the

specific setting. The results of this study also showed that the leadership style of the principals does not have a significant impact on the success of the graduation coach intervention. This is contrary to what some universities and colleges are teaching to future principals and policy makers. There has been a push to show that school leadership has a significant impact on the school as a whole. If the graduation coach intervention is the key component to combating the graduation rate and the leadership does not impact the intervention, then it could be said that the leadership style of the principal does not impact the graduation rate in general.

Future policies about leadership in education should be developed at many different levels. When it concerns the success of the Graduation Coach, the development of policies should start at the school level. This study helps school leaders use the data collected to increase many important factors that have a direct impact on the success of the students. Using this information at the school district level is also important. If a school district can use this study to help decide which dropout prevention intervention is most appropriate for each individual school. The data collected from this study could also be used at the university level to help future principals learn new leadership styles and dropout prevention interventions. These different levels of education are important in their own right and are significant to the success of schools and districts. The results of this study could also be used by school districts and universities to help decide if the Graduation Coach intervention is the most appropriate for their district or schools and if the leadership component of this study impacts best practice and what the universities are teaching in their principal preparation programs.

Limitations

The limitations for this study were more than what was originally anticipated. One of these limitations was that the researcher only used the graduation rate to identify if a school's intervention was successful. The literature does indicate that this piece of data is crucial to the effectiveness of the intervention however there are other pieces of data that could have illustrated, with greater detail, the success level of the intervention. Another limitation of the study is the number of respondents to the survey, which was 38. This might have been too low to accurately compare the self-reported leadership style, support for the graduation coach and the success of the intervention as measured by the reported graduation rate. One limitation of the study is that the researcher chose which school to use in the study based on a set of parameters, which could threaten some validity of the study. The final limitation is that the researcher has chosen only to survey the principal. This only allowed for the principal to give their opinion about their own leadership style. An unexpected limitation was the low number of responses from women and minorities. Only 16% of the respondents indicated that they were African American and 14% indicated that they were female. This made it difficult to make any correlation regarding race or gender with student achievement as measured by the graduation rate. Another unforeseen limitation was the number of respondents that indicated they had coached a sport. The last unforeseen limitation was the hiring procedure for becoming a principal, which, based on the data, was different between districts. Some districts required the principal to have prior administrative experience while others would promote a teacher directly to the principal role. The researcher recognized that there were limitations to this study, which were normal, but they did everything in their power to

ensure that the study that was conducted was being done so with the purest intentions and the pursuit of scholarly excellence.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although the data collected was robust the findings did not show any significant impact or significant correlations. This study did, however, reveal some interesting patterns in leadership in the state of Georgia. A topic that could be investigated in the future is the relationship between student achievement, leadership quality and coaching. Another area that could be investigated is similar to this study, but would include all graduation interventions and include suburban schools in the study. Another topic for future research is to investigate the relationship between the level a principal taught and the level in which they are a principal as measured by the success of their school and the effectiveness of their leadership abilities as measured by their teachers. These topics for future research could reveal a more in-depth look into which type of principals make the most effective school leader and which dropout prevention interventions are the most appropriate and effective and in what setting are they the most appropriate. A study investigating this data set and the leadership perceptions given by the Graduation Coach, would also be a benefit to schools, state boards of education and universities.

These type of studies could impact the way universities choose future students, teach future students and change the content that is presented as best practice, and empower school districts to choose the most appropriate dropout prevention intervention for their individual schools.

Summary

School districts throughout the United States are under an enormous amount of pressure to increase test scores, produce more competitive students for the global markets and increase their graduation rates, all while cutting budgets during this downturn in the economy. This task seems almost impossible however school districts across the country are excelling in all these areas. Graduation rates and dropout rates have made improvements but in recent years they have been affected negatively. The dropout rate in the United States in 2010 is 8.7%, which is slightly lower than last year. Males were more likely to drop out (9.8%) than females (7.7%) and dropout rates by race and ethnicity were: White-5.3%, Asian/Pacific Islander-6.1%, Black-8.4%, Hispanic-21.4% (NCES fact sheet, 2010). These dropout rates have an effect on the local and global economies and expenditures for uninsured healthcare over the course of those young people's lives. If the average dropout earns an income of \$18,000 annually which is significantly lower than the median income for people who earn a diploma, which is \$40,000 annually, than over the life of the average worker there is a difference of \$1,034,000. That money that is not earned has an effect on local and global markets. Dropouts from the Class of 2008 alone will cost the nation more than \$319 billion in lost wages over the course of their lifetimes (Alliance for excellent education, 2009 fact sheet, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to investigate if the setting, rural or urban, in which a school resides, has a significant impact on the success of the Graduation Coach intervention, as measured by the graduation rate which was provided by the Georgia Department of Education. The analysis procedure for the archival section of the study

was the use of a t-test. This was done to compare the graduation rate mean score of the two settings in which the school resides for 2010 and 2011. In addition to the archival data, the leadership style and support for the Graduation Coach intervention would be examined to identify any effect these factors have on the success of the intervention as measured by the graduation rate and the survey instrument. The three different leadership styles (autocratic, democratic and laissez faire) were determined the leadership scores given by the principals on the first 30 statements on the survey. The motivation levels and the levels of support were based on the opinions of the principals were also supplied by the survey answers. The data collected from the survey was analyzed by using SPSS (version 20) to conduct a two-tailed test to determine if there are relationships between the variables. The schools in Georgia were divided into two groups, rural and urban, based on the definitions provided, and 50 schools were chosen to receive the survey. The 50 chosen schools were from both school settings (25 Rural and 25 Urban. Of the 50 surveys, 38 were returned, which is a return rate of 76%.

The results of the analyzed data lead to the acceptance of the null hypothesis (Ho1). The research questions: RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, were answered by analyzing the collected survey data. The survey responses indicated that the leadership style of the principal did not significantly impact the graduation rate. The survey responses indicated that the level of support for the graduation coach intervention did not have a significant impact on the success of the intervention as measured by the graduation rate. The first open-ended question and responses, which were answered in narrative form and answered RQ3, indicated that 52% of the graduation coaches received training and the other 48% did not. When the graduation rates of the graduation coaches who received

training was compared to the graduation coaches who did not receive training, the results indicated that the graduation coaches who did not receive training had a higher average graduation rate than the graduation coaches who did. The results also indicated that the graduation rate decreased from 2010 to 2011 regardless of the level of training. In addition to this, the defined role of the graduation coach, as indicated by the responding principals, fell into five different categories and answered RQ4. The variety of roles differs from the defined role, which is given by the Georgia Department of Education, which indicated that the graduation coach is a blend of the first four grouping categories. The categories that were established based on grouping are as follows: Remediation of at-risk students, Foster Relationships with Students, Increase Graduation Rates and Counselor Duties. None of the responding schools fell into more than one category when responding to RQ4.

When a student chooses to leave school before graduation or dropout, they usually have had a pattern of negative experiences in school. The state of Georgia has decided to combat this by placing a Graduation Coach in every middle school and high school. The Georgia Department of Education explained that the Graduation Coach program places a “caring adult in the building” (Georgia Department of Education, 2008, p. 17). The belief that this person can make the necessary relationships to impact the graduation rate is the cornerstone for the reason of the program. It is clear that the program is making a positive impact on the overall success of their schools.

APPENDIX A

IRB FORM

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board 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: **11110501**

PROJECT TITLE: **The Relationship Between School Leadership and the Graduation Coach in Rural and Urban Settings**

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**

RESEARCHER/S: **Christopher Amos**

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

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & School Counseling**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: **12/13/2011 to 12/12/2012**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

APPENDIX B

PRINCIPAL INTRODUCTION LETTER

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi as well as the principal at Westminster Academy in Gulfport, Mississippi. My dissertation will be to investigate the relationship between school leadership and graduation coach interventions in rural and urban schools. This study will involve the completion of the developed coded survey. The survey will consist of basic demographic information as well as questions that look at your own view of leadership, motivation and their impact on the success of the graduation coach intervention. I am requesting that you complete the survey at your earliest convenience. Your participation in this study may offer a better understanding of the impact leadership has on the graduation coach intervention. In addition, it might offer some information that can be used in principal training programs. As the researcher I plan to share the results with any participants who request the findings.

There will be no risk by your participation in this study. All information will be kept completely confidential to the extent of the law. This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about the rights as a research subject should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Dr. #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-001, (601) 266-6820. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and appreciated. Please return the completed survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me (228) 731-4377. Thank you for your time and I look forward to reviewing your responses.

Sincerely,

Christopher Amos
Principal
Westminster Academy

APPENDIX C

PRINCIPAL’S SELF-REPORTED LEADERSHIP STYLE & GRADUATION COACH
MOTIVATION

Directions: After Completing the General Demographics section, read the following questions. Place an “X” in the box that most appropriately represents your feeling toward the question.

<i>General Demographics</i>	
Gender:	
Age:	
Race:	
Subjects and grade level taught as a teacher (if applicable):	
Number of years as a teacher (if applicable):	
Number of years as a principal in current position:	
Number of total years as a principal:	
Number of total years as a school and/or district administrator:	
Position prior to becoming a principal (i.e. Assistant Principal):	
Highest degree attained (i.e. Bachelors):	
List any non-teaching positions you have held in schools (i.e. Counselor):	
Did you coach any sport as a teacher? If so, list them please?	

		Disagree.....					
	Agree					
Principal’s Leadership Style		0	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Accomplishing a goal is the most important thing.						
2.	I closely monitor schedules to ensure that tasks are completed on time.						
3.	I encourage teachers to participate in decision-making and try to implement their suggestions.						
4.	During staff discussion I neither agree nor disagree with other staff members.						

		Disagree.....Agree					
Principal's Leadership Style		0	1	2	3	4	5
5.	There is a need for on-going staff development or the implementation of new ideas.						
6.	I like to control every detail of daily tasks						
7.	I enjoy coaching and encouraging others on new tasks and projects.						
8.	I worry about relationships when correcting a teacher's mistakes.						
9.	I am concerned about meeting deadlines.						
10.	I will inform teachers on new decisions without asking for their input or suggestions.						
11.	I emphasize the maintenance of definite standards of performance.						
12.	My opinion is misinterpreted on many issues.						
13.	I encourage teachers to develop new ideas and be creative in their jobs.						
14.	I usually put decisions to a vote and go with the final decision.						
15.	I am willing to change my leadership approach.						
16.	I tend to delegate some of my work to qualified staff members.						
17.	I value the importance of working as a team.						

		Disagree.....Agree					
Principal's Leadership Style		0	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Before deciding on major issues I must have everyone's opinion prior to finalizing the decision.						
19.	I always make the final decision, making my authority known.						
20.	I tend to send out information to the staff via: email, memos, or voicemails rather than staff meetings.						
21.	I depend on my staff to determine what needs to be done and how to accomplish these items.						
22.	I tend to feel my employees can lead themselves just as well as I can.						
23.	I find time to listen to a teacher's issues if there is an issue.						
24.	I ask teachers for their input on ideas and I do not make time to discuss issues with them.						
25.	I try to include at least one employee on all decisions.						
26.	I strive to create a team-oriented environment.						
27.	I tend to tell teachers what needs to be done and how to do it.						
28.	I closely monitor employees to ensure tasks are being done correctly.						
29.	I use my leadership power to help teachers grow professionally.						
30.	I work with teachers when there are differences in expectations and performance abilities.						

		Disagree.....Agree					
Principal's Leadership Style		0	1	2	3	4	5
31.	I feel that teachers and staff must be directed or threatened with punishment in order to get them to achieve the desired objectives.						
32.	I am highly motivated to do be recognized as one of the best in my district or state.						
33.	I am motivated by people who take the time to listen to what I have to say.						
34.	I am motivated by people who tell me exactly how to accomplish a goal.						
35.	I am motivated by the emphasis of teamwork.						
36.	The graduation coach intervention is important to the overall success of the school.						
37.	The graduation coach intervention was a directive from the school district that I was forced to implement.						
38.	The graduation coach intervention has little impact on the over student achievement of my school.						
39.	The graduation coach is highly motivated and qualified to perform the duties of the position.						
40.	My students would me more successful without the graduation coach intervention.						

Did your Graduation Coach receive any specialized training? If so, how effective was it?

What is the primary role of your graduation coach in your school?

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