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B L. Spadaccini  
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AN ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED BREVARD STUDENTS  
TO DROP OUT AND WHY THEY RETURNED TO EARN THEIR GENERAL  
EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT (GED) DIPLOMA

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Educational Research, Technology and Leadership  
in the College of Education  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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2011

Major Professor: Barbara A. Murray

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## ABSTRACT

Dropping out of high school almost guarantees a life of hardship. The absence of a diploma contributes to poverty, increased crime rates and weakens the economy. To that end, school districts have a moral and ethical responsibility to bring an end to the dropout epidemic.

This study was based on an analysis of more than 26,000 Brevard public school students. The researcher used 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 student data to determine the relationship between race, grade level, ESE status, ELL status, SES, type of promotion and dropping out of school. In addition, the researcher reviewed Student Exit Survey data and face-to-face interview data to determine why students dropped out and identified strategies students felt would have kept them in school. Finally, individual interview data were analyzed to understand the circumstances that encouraged participants to return to earn their diplomas.

The researcher recommended use of data management and tracking systems for early identification of potential dropouts so intervention could be delivered at the onset of failure, assignment of trained adult leaders to monitor and intervene for students; enforcement of compulsory school attendance; creation of mechanisms to reduce absenteeism that do not lead to school failure; required intervention for students who are truant; identification and assignment of highly effective teachers to at-risk youth; intervention in classrooms that have high rates of student failure; use of relevant curriculum and employment of instructional practices proven to increase engagement; alignment of intervention strategies with researched practices; gathering of input and feedback from students to determine program effectiveness;

creation of meaningful exit interview processes; utilization of survey data to identify and remove school-related barriers and collaboration with community agencies to find meaningful and genuine solutions for students in crisis.

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Dave, who endured many evenings as a single parent; to my son, Jack, who dealt with a mother who was chained to the computer on weekends and evenings; and to my mom, Louise, who stepped in to help out whenever she was needed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us. ~ Albert Schweitzer

Being a doctoral candidate is an intense experience; one simply cannot go it alone. I am eternally grateful to family and friends who upheld me throughout the process.

~To my husband, Dave, my deepest gratitude for your support and unconditional love; your understanding of my frequent absences at scouting events, church, soccer practices, etc. over the last three years made this possible.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At no other time in history has a high school diploma and post-secondary education been as critical to the success and productivity of a young person as it was in 2011. In the United States, the high school diploma is considered to be the minimum requirement for students to successfully enter the job force and to be accepted into post-secondary educational programs (Greene and Winters, 2005). Referencing the need for a high school diploma, John Habat (2009), senior fellow at Cleveland's Center for Community Solutions, declared,

The importance of a diploma is borne out in a comprehensive analysis of Cuyahoga County's work-force characteristics and demographics prepared by The Center for Community Solutions. The data paint a full picture of arguably the greatest challenge confronting work-force development in the county -- and, perhaps, the country.

To put it simply: High school dropouts and their dependents are more likely to face a life of poverty. Rather than making positive contributions to the region's economy, they frequently end up consuming a disproportionate share of government resources. And their legacy may be a multigenerational cycle of poverty that continues the pattern in perpetuity. (n.p.)

In spite of the educational thrust to produce more high school graduates, the dropout problem persists. According to the United States Department of Education (USDOE, 2008), about 9.3% of students aged 16 through 24 years dropped out of school in 2006, which represented a decline from 15% in 1972 (Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes, KewalRamani and Kemp, 2008). These researchers, commissioned by the USDOE, found that in 2006 approximately 5.8% of white students, 10.7% of black students, 22.1% of Hispanic students, 3.7% of Asian students and 14.7%

of American Indian/Alaska Native students dropped out of school. Planty, et al found that males represented 10.3% of the dropouts, compared to females at 8.3%. The 20-24 year old age bracket saw the greatest percentage of dropouts at 11.8% and 16-year-olds represented the smallest percentage of dropouts at 2.8%. However, Barton (2006) and Greene and Winters (2006) indicated that the officially-reported US graduation rates were far too high and that independent researchers estimated the true graduation rate somewhere between 66 and 71%. Greene and Winters placed the Class of 2003 graduation rate at 70% and calculated a larger gap than the USDOE report among white (78%), Asians (72%), blacks (55%) and Hispanics (53%). They further stated that less than half of the black and Hispanic cohort of males graduated from high school in 2003. According to the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), between 33% and 50% of our nation's low income and minority population does not graduate from high school (Tucker, 2007).

At the time of this study, USDOE advocated stricter guidelines for determining the dropout rate. Instead, Florida counted as graduates all diploma recipients, including standard diplomas, special diplomas and diplomas obtained through participation in the General Educational Development (GED) program. However, Florida would join a growing number of states that planned to incorporate a new graduate rate calculation system into its state accountability program. According to Juan Copa, Florida Bureau Chief of Evaluation and Reporting, for school years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 Florida's method of calculating the graduation rate would change to the more stringent National



Governors' Association (NGA) four-year cohort calculation (2009). Under this method, school districts would no longer count as graduates, students who had successfully completed the General Educational Development (GED) tests to earn their high school credential. In response to federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, starting in 2011-2012 Florida would calculate the graduation rate using the new federal uniform graduation rate criteria (Copa, 2009). These guidelines dictated that GED diplomas, Special Diplomas and transfers to Adult Education would be counted as non-graduates. During his session at the Florida Organization of Instructional Leaders Conference (FOIL), Copa cautioned participants that the federal calculation method was subject to change pending the looming reauthorization of NCLB (2009, Seminole County Florida).

Prior to the 2009-2010 school year, a Florida student who withdrew from school without transferring to another public school, home education, virtual school, private school, or adult education was considered a dropout. According to FLDOE (2008), Florida saw a decrease of 0.7% in the dropout rate from 2006 to 2008. Of the dropouts for 2007-2008, approximately 34% were white, 36% were black, 28% were Hispanic, nearly 1% was Asian and less than .3% was American Indian (FLDOE). Policy dictated that Florida school personnel interview every student who submitted the *Intent to Terminate* paperwork signifying the student's plan to drop out of school. High school guidance counselors were tasked with scheduling and conducting face-to-face interviews with students who submitted *Intent to Terminate* paperwork. This personal interview had the potential to bestow upon educators invaluable information regarding student motives for

leaving high school prior to earning a diploma. The interview survey asked that students respond to questions about home and school events and characteristics of schooling that might have increased their chances of staying in school. The information collected from these student response data gave school and school district personnel the opportunity to examine circumstances surrounding a student's choice to leave, allowing educators to ascertain the most common reasons students leave school. Analysis of the Exit Survey data further offered schools and local education agencies (LEA) critical information about the effectiveness of those interventions attempted on behalf of students. Such analysis would facilitate effective design of school programs and interventions that might deter or prevent future students from making the choice to dropout. Unfortunately, the data were often difficult to capture because students frequently did not forewarn school officials before leaving; they simply failed to return to school. In December 2008 FLDOE provided school districts with statistics reflecting the primary reasons students dropped out of school. The report showed that 613 of the 3,092 dropouts that were reported for the year were absentees. In fact, absenteeism was the most frequently reported reason Florida students dropped out of school. According to FLDOE, *absenteeism* reflected those students who stopped attending school and failed to enroll elsewhere. After absenteeism, *students failing school* (599) and students *who did not like school* (488) the next most common reasons students left (FLDOE, 2008). What was more disturbing from the 1,970 student responses to the survey question asking, "What would have improved your chances of staying at school?" was that most frequently students replied they left to

*explore opportunities for real-world learning*. Sadly, many who dreamed of exploration likely found that the *real world* was a considerable challenge for those who entered it without the benefit of a high school diploma.

### Problem Statement

Throughout the nation students are dropping out at alarming rates. Local school districts and schools have had relatively little success in reversing this mounting trend. According to the National Center on Education and the Economy, dropping out of high school in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century all but guarantees one to live life as a disadvantaged citizen (NCEE, 2007). State educational agencies, school districts and community organizations have the authority to make systemic changes in practices, policies and programs in an effort to keep students in school, yet have failed to do so (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007). School districts across the nation have established programs intended to decrease the number of students dropping out of school, but the problem has persisted. The challenge for educators is their ability to accurately identify interventions, actions or events with the power to motivate or encourage students to stay in school to earn their high school diplomas. Paramount to the discussion is a clear understanding of why students decided to leave school before finishing high school. In order to tackle the dropout epidemic, educators must first understand who is dropping out of school and why, and then eliminate identified barriers standing between the student and a diploma.

The dropout phenomenon has plagued school districts for decades. Dropout programming and funding have been dedicated to decreasing the incident of high school

students dropping out of school, yet the problem has persisted. Often, family or personal situations that schools are not equipped to address are major contributors to the problem. However, some of the barriers to student success reside within the structures of the school system and the schools themselves. Researchers such as Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) are steadfast in their belief that educators have the power to eradicate the dropout phenomenon. In response to the increasing dropout trends and the belief by researchers that schools can the information and tools to decrease the dropout rates, four primary problems are investigated in this study:

1. The impact of race/ethnicity, socio-economic status (SES), exceptional student education (ESE) program participation, English language learner (ELL) participation, retention and grade level assignment on dropping out of school;
2. Student rationale for dropping out of school;
3. Interventions students identified that would have encouraged them to remain in school through high school graduation and
4. Motivation for returning to school in pursuit of a General Education Development diploma.

#### Purpose of Study

The purposes of this study were to investigate the relationship between student characteristics and dropping out of school; identify barriers that impeded school success; pinpoint interventions having the potential to keep them in school and ascertain motivating factors that caused them to return to school in pursuit of a diploma. The study

was conducted to determine practices, programmatic shifts and policy changes having the potential to decrease the number of dropouts in Brevard. A review and analysis of student data in the Brevard student data system provided a profile of the school district's early school leavers and reported student exit survey responses that explained their reasons for leaving. Additionally, one-on-one interviews with former Brevard public school student dropouts enrolled in the General Education Development (GED) program would be conducted to gain an understanding of why these students left school before completion of their high school diploma, examine personal and school-related barriers and challenges the students faced while in school and explain their motivation for returning to school in pursuit of a diploma. It was essential to identify potential circumstances that put these students at risk; determine why these students made the decision to leave; understand the impetus for their return to an educational setting in quest of a diploma and pinpoint strategies, activities and events having the greatest potential to re-engage or redirect students before they made the decision to leave. The researcher also found it vital to determine the events that inspired or encouraged them to return to school in quest of a diploma. Conclusions from the findings would have significant implications for school district decision makers and would serve as recommendations for programmatic, organizational and policy change. Furthermore, the purpose of this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge on students dropping out of school and to identify dropout prevention strategies proven to be effective.

## Definition of Terms

Asian: Students who have been identified by their parent(s) or guardian(s) as being descended from Asia.

Black: Students identified by their parent(s) or guardian(s) as being of African-American descent.

Dropout: A student who withdrew from school without transferring to another public school, home education, virtual school, private school, or adult education (FLDOE, 2008).

English Language Learner (ELL): Students identified by their parent(s) or guardian(s) as not being a native speaker of the English language.

Exceptional Student Education (ESE): Program in which students received services and accommodations based on a disability that impacts their learning.

Exit Interview: Document used by high school guidance counselors, or other principal designee, to conduct interviews with students indicating their intent to drop out of school. The document includes the student's name, grade level, date of birth, student identification number and school. The interviewer asked respondents to identify their reasons for leaving school and attempted to ascertain what could have been done to make them stay in school. Also incorporated were the name of the interviewer and the date of the interview. During the exit interview the student must be informed of the following:

- Terminating school enrollment prior to graduation would likely reduce his/her potential earning and negatively affect career options;

- Termination of school enrollment would result in the revocation/denial of the student's driving privilege until age 18;
- Opportunities available to continue his/her in a different environment, including, but not limited to, adult education and GED test preparation; and
- Bright Future eligibility requirements for students planning to earn a GED included completion of high school credit requirements prior to taking the GED exam. (School Board of Brevard County, 2009, n.p.).

Exit Interview Student Survey: Written questionnaire used to survey high school students who have indicated they intended to drop out of high school. Included on the survey are questions concerning the students' reasons for leaving school and interventions that could have kept them from dropping out of school. Additionally included are demographic information such as the student's name, date of birth, school, grade level and the date the survey was completed.

Free and Reduced Lunch Status: Status of student eligibility for the federally funded or supplemented school lunch program that allowed students to receive school meals at a discounted price or free of charge. Free and reduced lunch rates were used to determine the socioeconomic status of students.

General Education Development (GED): Adult Education instructional program that prepared students to complete a GED Diploma.

General Education Development (GED) Diploma: Earned after successful completion of five content tests that certified the test taker was proficient in high school

academic skills. Test-takers must score at the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile to earn a GED diploma. To pass students must achieve a minimum score of 410 on each subtest with an overall average battery of 450 points (Williams, 2009).

Good Cause Exemption (GCE): Student promoted to a higher grade without meeting expected levels of performance for pupil progression (FLDOE, 2009).

Intent to Terminate: Form completed by Brevard Public School students to inform the school of their intent to leave school prior to graduation.

Hispanic: Students who were identified by their parent(s) or guardian(s) as being descended from Spain or Latin America.

Not Enrolled: Students who were no longer enrolled in the school district at the end of the school year (FLDOE, 2009).

Parent Notification of Intent to Terminate School Enrollment: Letter informing parents the school district received an *Intent to Terminate* from the student.

Poverty: Status of families that had little or no money, goods or means of support necessary to lead a proper existence (Dictionary.com, 2009). For the purposes of this study, poverty was defined by the income ranges within Table 1: Poverty Thresholds for 2008.



Table 1: Poverty Thresholds for 2008

Size of Family	No Children	One Child	Two Children	Three Children	Four Children	Five Children	Six Children	Seven Children	Eight + Children
Householder under age 65	11,201	14,840	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Three people	16,841	17,330	7,346	--	--	--	--	--	--
Four people	22,207	22,570	1,834	21,910	--	--	--	--	--
Five people	26,781	27,170	6,338	25,694	25,301	--	--	--	--
Six people	30,803	30,925	0,288	29,677	28,769	28,230	--	--	--
Seven people	35,442	35,664	4,901	34,369	33,379	32,223	30,955	--	--
Eight people	39,640	39,990	39,270	38,639	37,744	36,608	35,426	35,125	--

Adapted from the United States Bureau of the Census (2008). *Poverty Thresholds for 2008 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years*. Retrieved on July 7, 2009 from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/threshld/thresh08.html>

Remaining: Students who, after completing four years of high school, choosing to remain in school for one or more years in an attempt to remedy academic deficiencies.

Students in the ESE program had the right to a free and appropriate education through the year in which they turned 22 years of age. Students who are not in an ESE program had the opportunity to remain one additional year to remedy deficiencies (FLDOE, 2009).

Retention: The act of holding a student back to repeat a grade.

Socio-Economic Status (SES): Position within the social community based on wealth, residence, income, education and occupation (Dictionary.com, 2009). Within a school system, SES was typically determined by the student’s eligibility to receive a free or reduced-price lunch.

Student Data System: Data management system.

White: Students identified by their parent(s) or guardian(s) as being Caucasian, white/non-Hispanic.

### Delimitations

The sample for the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study was delimited to:

1. Brevard public high school students.
2. The sample for the quantitative portion of the study was delimited to Brevard high school students in attendance during the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years.
3. For research questions 6-7, the sample was further confined to individuals:
  - a. Between the ages of 18 and 24.
  - b. Who dropped out of a public school in Brevard County, Florida
  - c. Enrolled in Brevard Adult Education during the 2009-2010 school year to earn a diploma through the General Education Development (GED) program.

### Limitations

The study was limited by the following assumptions and expectations:

1. Students who dropped out of high school were accurately coded in Brevard's student data system.

2. Student demographics were accurately recorded by the school district and state.
3. All data and survey responses were input into the student data system.
4. The response data were input into the student data system accurately and honestly by school data clerks or other input personnel.
5. Participants recalled events accurately.
6. Students responded to the survey questions candidly.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis for the study stemmed from self-control experiments demonstrating a student's ability to delay gratification and researchers' abilities to identify behavioral patterns that ultimately governed action. Initial experiments in self control occurred in the early 1970s. Initial experiments occurred in the late 1960s with animals but quickly turned to use of human subjects. Stanford University Professor Walter Mischel began experiments in self-control using preschoolers at the Bing Nursery School located on the university campus (Shoda, Mischel and Peake, 1990). Mischel's experiments of delayed gratification illustrated such a conflict. Often referred to as the marshmallow experiment, Mischel gave each four-year-old child a marshmallow, and the child was promised another one if he or she could wait 20 minutes before eating it. In the event the child could not wait the full 20 minutes, he or she was to ring a bell for Mischel to return. They could then eat the marshmallow, but would not receive the second treat. Mischel found that most of the children lacked the ability to wait the full 20 minutes.

However he noticed that some, by focusing their attention elsewhere, were able to resist eating the marshmallow until his return.

Mischel stayed in contact with many of the families from the Bing Nursery and frequently made inquiries about the experiment participants. The reports from his own children indicated that students who were able to delay gratification as nursery school students were more successful than those students who were unable to delay gratification. In follow-up studies, Mischel discovered that as high school students, the preschoolers who were able to delay eating the marshmallow scored on the average 210 points higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), were better able to solve problems, got along better with peers and had lower body mass indexes than students who as preschoolers sought immediate gratification. Prior to Mischel's marshmallow experiments, psychologists believed the person's capacity to delay gratification was based on a person's degree of hunger or his or her desire for the reward (Lehrer, 2009). However, Mischel found that was not the case. In his observations it became apparent that each of the children had an equal longing to eat the candy, yet some of the preschoolers had developed strategies to take their minds off their urge to eat the marshmallow, allowing them to wait the full 20-minutes in order to earn the second treat. Their self-developed techniques allowed them to distract themselves so cravings would not guide their choices. Studies in the field of delayed gratification illustrated that conflict within the individual was created by the person's struggle whether to elect an immediate action that resulted in

a small desirable reward with short-term or minimal gratification, or to delay taking action in order to collect a more significant, longer-lasting reward.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study was guided by the research questions that follow. Hypotheses accompany the quantitative study questions.

1. What relationship existed between the ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>1: A relationship did not exist between ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

2. What relationship existed between the socioeconomic status of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>2: A relationship did not exist between the socioeconomic status (SES) of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

3. What relationship existed between student enrollment in an exceptional education program in the Brevard County public schools and dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>3: A relationship did not exist between Brevard student enrollment in an exceptional education program and their dropping out of high school.

4. What relationship existed between Brevard students as English Language Learners and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>4: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students classified as ELL and their dropping out of high school.

5. What relationship existed between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>5: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school.

6. What relationship existed between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>6: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

7. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, were the most significant reasons given for dropping out of high school?
8. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, might have made them stay in school?
9. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, caused them to return to earn a diploma by passing the General Education Development (GED) Test?

### Methodology

This study was based on analysis of two samples taken from the population of Brevard public high school students. Sample 1 consisted of former Brevard public high

school students enrolled in school between 2006 and 2009. Sample 2 was made up of former Brevard public school students, ages 18-24, who dropped out of school and had subsequently returned to earn their diploma through the General Education Development (GED) program during the 2009-2010 school year. Student demographics and Student Exit Survey data were collected from Brevard's student data system. Additional data were collected via one-on-one, face-to-face interview sessions conducted with former Brevard public school students, ages 18-24, who returned to the GED program in an effort to earn their high school diplomas. The analysis was conducted using descriptive and statistical procedures within the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Chi Square Tests of Independence were conducted on the student data found within the Brevard student data system to determine if relationships existed between ethnicity, SES, exceptional student education (ESE), English Language Learners (ELL) and previous grade retentions within Brevard's public high school population and their dropping out of high school and to determine if a relationship existed between the grade levels of students and their dropping out of high school. Further, demographic data were used to describe such relationships. The reasons for dropping out of high school, incentives for remaining in school and reasons for returning to earn a GED diploma were analyzed using qualitative analysis methods.

Table 2, *Questions, Subjects, Data and Analysis Methodology*, illustrated the data sources, data collection methods and analysis procedures used for this study.

Table 2: Questions, Subjects, Data and Analysis Methodology

Research Questions	Sample	Data Sources	Analysis Method
1. What relationship existed between the ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?	Brevard public high school students 2006-2007 through 2008-2009	Brevard Student Data Base	Chi Square Test and Cramer's V
2. What relationship existed between the socioeconomic status of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?	Brevard public high school students 2006-2007 through 2008-2009	Brevard Student Data Base	Chi Square Test and Phi
3. What relationship existed between student enrollment in an exceptional education program in the Brevard County public schools and dropping out of high school?	Brevard public high school students 2006-2007 through 2008-2009	Brevard Student Data Base	Chi Square Test and Phi
4. What relationship existed between Brevard students as English Language Learners and their dropping out of high school?	Brevard public high school students 2006-2007 through 2008-2009	Brevard Student Data Base	Chi Square Test and Phi
5. What relationship existed between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school?	Brevard public high school students 2006-2007 through 2008-2009	Brevard Student Data Base	Chi Square Test and Phi
6. To what extent do Brevard students within specific grade levels drop out of high school more than others?	Brevard public high school students 2006-2007 through 2008-2009	Brevard Student Data Base	Chi Square Test and Cramer's V
7. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, were the most significant reasons given for dropping out of high school?	Brevard public high school students 2006-2007 through 2008-2009	Brevard Student Data Base	Frequency
	Former Brevard public school dropouts, ages 18-24, enrolled in GED	One-on-one, Face-to-face Interview	Constant Comparative Analysis
8. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, might have made them stay in school?	Former Brevard public school dropouts, ages 18-24, enrolled in GED	FLDOE Student Exit Interview Survey	Frequency
	Former Brevard dropouts, ages 18-24, who returned to earn a GED	One-on-one, Face-to-face Interview	Constant Comparative Analysis
9. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, caused them to return to earn a diploma by passing the General Education Development (GED) Test?	Former Brevard public school dropouts, ages 18-24, enrolled in GED	One-on-one, Face-to-face Interview	Constant Comparative Analysis



### Organization of Dissertation

The study was organized into five chapters. Following a brief introduction in Chapter 1, Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study sections laid the foundation for the study. Also included in Chapter 1 are Definition of Terms, Delimitations, Limitations, Theoretical Framework, Research Questions, Hypotheses, a brief description of the methodology used to conduct the research and an overview of how the dissertation was organized. A comprehensive Review of Literature reviewed past research and set the stage for the current study. Specifically, Chapter 2 discussed the most recent dropout data; discussed the characteristics typical of students who dropped out of high school and reviewed research regarding promising strategies and interventions that inhibited students from dropping out of school. Chapter 3 described in detail the sample, methodology and analytical approach used to conduct the study, with Chapter 4 examining the results of the data analysis based on the research questions and their hypotheses. Finally, Chapter 5 revealed the findings, summarized them, provided implications of the research conclusions and offered recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review included studies and scholarly articles relative to the dropout crisis in the United States. First, a brief examination of the current status of dropouts illustrated the urgency with which states, school districts and schools must confront the issues and events that caused students to leave school before they graduated. Following an examination of the current status of dropouts, the review explored the theory of self-control in order to delay gratification, the theoretical basis for the study. Walter Mischel's experiments of self-control offered a foundation from which educators could identify behavioral patterns that governed action and therefore could conceivably effect changes in student habits resulting in improved outcomes. Next, the literature study focused on the attributes of students who dropped out of high school and the reasons they left. Fundamental to the research was the desire for early identification of students who could potentially become dropout candidates, to understand the challenges they faced causing them to drop out of school and to discover promising practices with the power to confront the dropout epidemic. Through the literature the researcher investigated various dropout prevention initiatives, including the General Education Development (GED) program. Rather than rely solely on theory and hypothetical studies, this review included a discussion of literature that examined the dropout crisis from the student's perspective. By tapping young people who dropped out of school, but returned to participate in a GED program, educators could ascertain the reasons students left school, determine the point at which they decided to leave school and were better able to identify interventions or

initiatives by teachers, parents, administrators, other students or counselors with the power to convince or encourage them to stay in school. This knowledge would better equip educators to intervene at a critical point in a student's life in order to adequately respond to the circumstances that led the student to make the fateful decision to drop out of school.

### High School Dropout Rates

Completion of high school and post-secondary education has become increasingly critical to the success and productivity of a young person. The United States Census Bureau (2006) estimated that the annual mean income for a high school dropout in 2005 was \$19,915 compared to \$29,448 for high school graduates, including those with General Education Development (GED) diplomas. In spite of the incessant educational push to produce more high school graduates, the dropout problem has persisted. According to the United States Department of Education (USDOE), about 9.3% of students aged 16 through 24 years dropped out of school in 2006, representing a decline from 15% in 1972 (Laird, Cataldi, KewalRamani and Chapman, 2006). These researchers commissioned by the USDOE found that approximately 5.8% of white students, 10.7% of black students, 22.1% of Hispanic students, 3.7% of Asian students and 14.7% of American Indian/Alaska Native students dropped out of school in 2006. Planty, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes, KewalRamani and Kemps observed that males represented 10.3% of the dropouts, compared to females at 8.3%. The 20-24 year age bracket saw the greatest percentage of dropouts at 11.8%; and 16-year-old students represented the

smallest percentage of dropouts at 2.8%. Neild and Balfanz (2006) found that most students dropped out of high school prior to or during their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year. In fact they found that ninth grade was a pivotal year and that middle school performance, specifically performance in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, significantly impacted success in high school.

To determine the national graduation rate the USDOE relied upon statistics supplied by individual states; however, independent researchers argued that the rate was inaccurate due to inconsistencies among state calculation methods (Greene and Winters, 2006; Barton, 2006; and Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004). Barton (2006), along with Greene and Winters (2006), indicated that the officially-reported US graduation rates were too high, proclaiming that independent researchers put the true graduation rate somewhere between 66% and 71%. Employing what they considered to be consistent and highly reliable methods of calculation, Greene and Winters placed the 2003 graduation rate at 70% and computed the gap among white (78%), Asian (72%), black (55%) and Hispanic (53%) students as much larger than reported previously by the USDOE. The researchers argued that until every state calculated the graduation rate using a consistent, reliable method and developed robust data systems to track individual students, independent estimates of the graduation rate would be imperative in order to “ensure progress toward improved official statistics” (Greene and Winters, 2006, p.4).

In Florida, a student who withdrew from school without transferring to another public school, home education, virtual school, private school or adult education was

considered a dropout (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2008). Florida schools were required to interview every student who submitted to school staff an *Intent to Terminate* document, indicating that they were going to drop out of school. The data from these surveys had the potential to provide educators with invaluable information regarding the reasons students left school before graduating. Not only did this student response data allow schools and school districts to examine why students chose to leave school, it offered critical information that could be used to inform policy and design interventions that might deter or prevent future dropouts. According to FLDOE (2008), Florida saw a decrease in the dropout rate from 2006 (3.3%) to 2008 (2.6%). Of the dropouts for 2007-2008, approximately 34% were white, 36% were black, 28% were Hispanic, nearly 1% was Asian and less than .3% was American Indian (FLDOE, 2008). Additionally, FLDOE reported that females (75.7%) graduated at a higher rate than did males (69.2%). However, the dropout rate was not part of the Florida accountability plan; instead school districts and schools were held accountable for their graduation rates. For the purposes of this study, therefore, it was important to consider the graduation rate calculation. The FLDOE (2008) guide for calculating the graduation rate provided the following definition:

Determining the denominator for the formula involves the following steps: determine the cohort of students who enrolled as first-time ninth-graders four years prior to the year for which the graduation rate is to be measured; add to this group any subsequent incoming transfer students who are on the same schedule to graduate; and subtract students who transfer out for various reasons, or who are deceased. The numerator simply consists of the number of graduates from this group [diploma recipients]. (p. 5)

Florida's graduation calculation formula, relying upon longitudinal tracking of individual student records, was accurate only if school districts employed precise methods to follow students and if the students within each cohort were accurately reported (Dorn, 2006).

Dorn asserted that Florida schools did not have a reliable method to check the precision of the data system codes that indicated the reason students left school. He also suggested that Florida public schools did not always place students who transferred into public high schools into the appropriate cohort. For these reasons, Florida's published graduation rates potentially reflected an erroneous accounting of the state's high school graduates.

Discussion of discrepancies among state graduation rate calculations would soon subside, as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) advocated stricter guidelines for determining the dropout rate and states were pressured to comply. At the time this literature review was prepared, Florida counted students who earned standard diplomas, special education diplomas and diplomas obtained through participation in the General Educational Development (GED) program as graduates. However, Florida would soon join a majority of other states by incorporating a new graduate rate calculation system into its state accountability program. According to Juan Copa, Florida Bureau Chief of Evaluation and Reporting (2009), during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, the method of calculating the Florida graduation rate would change to the more stringent National Governors' Association (NGA) four-year cohort calculation. Under this method, school districts would no longer consider students who successfully completed the General Educational Development (GED) tests to earn high school credentials as graduates. In

response to federal NCLB legislation, starting in 2011-2012 Florida would calculate the graduation rate using the new federal uniform graduation rate criteria which did not allow states to consider students who earned GEDs, special education diplomas or students who transferred to Adult Education as graduates.

### Delayed Gratification

In order to understand why students left school in spite of not having graduated, the researcher studied self-control in the form of delayed gratification. Rachlin (1995) posited that “self-control may be achieved through a commitment to the larger-later reinforcer...” (p.1). In the case of the Bing preschoolers studied by Mischel, those students who were able to wait to eat the first marshmallow exhibited self-control in order to receive a second (Shoda, Mischel, and Peake, 1990). Self control in the form of delayed gratification was a reflection of an individual’s choices and habits commonly exhibited through intrapersonal inconsistencies (Rachlin, 1995). Specifically, studies in delayed gratification illustrated that conflict within the individual was created by the person’s struggle to elect an immediate action resulting in a small reward with short-term or minimal gratification, or to delay action in order to collect a more significant longer-lasting reward. One displayed the ability to delay gratification when able to behave in an acceptable fashion in spite of a more immediate desire to behave in another way. For example, a child who made the decision to complete chores before going out to play or doing some other desirable activity had developed strategies to do what was expected before doing what he or she wished to do most. According to Martin Henley, education

professor at Westfield State College and director of the Pegasus Center for Education, many of today's youth have been handicapped by their lack of appropriate delay mechanisms (as cited in Hopkins, 2005). In this 2005 interview, Henley stated, "At a more basic level, those students were disabled by inadequacies in their emotional intelligence – shortcomings in their abilities to anticipate consequences, control impulses, manage stress and understand how their behavior affects others" (n.p.). Fantino and Stolarz-Fantino suggested Rachlin "makes a strong case that patterning is not only a mechanism for better understanding behavior but also offers a powerful technique for modifying behavior" (2002, p. 118). If one could learn to control their impulses and to delay gratification, they were better able to make decisions that were planned and intentional, rather than reactive and rash. Mischel suggested that methods existed to teach students how to extinguish an impulse (Lehrer, 2009). If that was the case, educators had the power to coach students so that they could control their impulses. The challenge then became the student's ability to establish as a habit, the newly-found strategies to maintain a sense of control.

If students could learn to delay gratification, they would be better able to make decisions that would help them reach long-term goals. The Bembenutty and Karabenick (2004) investigation posited that early studies focused mainly on material rewards and did not take into account the more distant nature of gratification necessary to succeed in educational situations. They studied delay of gratification as it affected student learning and attempted to associate it with a student's ability to self-regulate. They explained:



An ideal student who routinely goes home after school, has a snack, studies until dinner (i.e., stays on task), then continues studying until bedtime is likely more academically successful than one who is not as focused on his schoolwork. This goal-directed sequence of activities must often withstand a context that includes an array of attractive distractions, such as watching television or interacting with friends. Being a successful student, therefore, depends in large measure on resisting temptations that are immediately gratifying in order to increase the likelihood of accomplishing some temporally remote and presumably more important goal (p.35-36).

In their view, delay of gratification was a matter of self-regulation that students employed because they believed their accomplishment of an immediate task would ultimately result in the attainment of a greater, albeit more remote goal – successful performance in school.

Bembenutty and Karabenick offered instructional implications for the school setting, suggesting that educators should: (a) serve as a model for students in order to illustrate strategies for confronting tempting choices; (b) include classroom and out of school activities requiring students to practice delayed gratification; (c) provide students with activities and information that connected the delay of gratification to self-efficacy; (d) help students become aware of the positive and negative outcomes associated with their future goals and (e) help students manage their learning environment and use of time. “The action of successful delay of gratification merges the spectrum of the past, present, and the future associated with task selection, task implementation, and task completion” (2004, p.54). Ultimately, by learning strategies to delay gratification students had the ability to consider both the positive and negative outcomes of their choices prior to taking action.

### Status Risk Factors

A review of literature established no consistent profile of the high school dropout; they came from all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, research clearly identified demographic characteristics, family history and background, parental engagement and school-related factors that appeared to significantly increase the likelihood of dropping out of school (MacMillan, 1991; Rosenthal, 1998).

### Demographic Background of High School Dropouts

Particular demographic traits of students are extensively associated with their educational success and failure. The literature characterized demographic attributes as status variables, or variables that were unchangeable. While educators could not alter the demographic profile of a student, the sheer magnitude of the costs associated with leaving school before attaining a high school diploma provided a rationale for this discussion. Students from low socio-economic environments faced considerable challenges upon initial entry and as they progressed through school (Hart and Risley, 1995). While schools could not change a student's status, they had every opportunity to recognize the unique situations of individual students and establish protocols to prevent their failure. A substantial number of students who dropped out of high school came from impoverished homes and communities (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007; Jerald, 2006; Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum, 2005). In a widely respected study entitled "Meaningful Differences", Hart and Risley found profound differences existed in language acquisition for 3-year-old children from indigent, working-class and professional families. The study

suggested that young children entering school from impoverished families were at a significant disadvantage and remained so unless learning experiences somehow bridged the language gap. Alexander, Entwisle and Horsey (1997) found similarly that experiences occurring before children entered school had a powerful impact on their immediate and future success in school. Children from impoverished backgrounds often arrived at school with minimal learning experiences, putting them at a disadvantage compared to peers from enriched environments. While Alexander, Entwisle and Horsey stopped short of saying that children's experiences before and soon after entering school sentenced them to years of struggle and failure, they forewarned educators that

... prospects for 'reengagement' later are not good when children are plagued early in their school careers by self-doubt, are alienated from things academic, are overage for their grades, are relegated to remedial courses, are prone to 'problem' behaviors, are labeled troublemakers and have academic skills that are far lower than the standard at which the curriculum is keyed. (p. 98)

Follow-up studies conducted by Hart and Risley (1995) confirmed the continuing challenges that children from poverty had to overcome showing that the early language deficits of children in their study continued to impact achievement well into high school. The findings from these studies sent a compelling message of urgency to educators – identify effective strategies to help children from impoverished circumstances, do so at the onset of academic or behavioral difficulties and do whatever it takes to make them successful in their early years of schooling, or they may be destined to fail in school and may eventually drop out of school.

A number of studies explored student ethnicity, gender and the regions or areas in which students live to determine universal characteristics of students who dropped out of high school (Greene and Winters, 2006; Jerald, 2006; Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum, 2005). Dropout rates were typically higher among poor, minority and inner-city students (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Frey, 2005; NASP, 2003). Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes, KewalRamani and Kemp (2008), researchers commissioned by the USDOE to study the status of dropouts across the United States, found that approximately 5.8% of white students, 10.7% of black students, 22.1% of Hispanic students, 3.7% of Asian students and 14.7% of American Indian/Alaska Native students dropped out of school. Similar statistics were found by Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum (2005) in their study of young Boston high school dropouts, ages 16-24. Khatiwada and colleagues indicated that in Boston 10.4% of blacks, 22.7% of Hispanics and 4.2% of Asians in the study did not have a high school degree or its equivalent. Their statistic for whites was significantly lower, finding that only 2.7% of them did not graduate. In fact, 70% of the high school dropouts in their sample were either black or Hispanic. Rumberger (2008) found that 30% of California's dropouts were ELL students, yet they made up only 15% of California's high school students. Planty and his contemporaries found that males represented 10.3% of the dropouts, compared to females at 8.3%. The 20-24 year old age bracket saw the greatest percentage of dropouts at 11.8% and 16-year-olds represented the smallest percentage of dropouts at 2.8% (Planty, et al, 2008). However, the literature noted that minority students frequently tended to come from

impoverished urban areas, therefore uncertainty existed as to whether race or poverty was the best predictor of school failure. Bainbridge and Lasley (2006) state

... no legitimate, concrete evidence has ever been found that a characteristic such as race itself affects students' abilities. In fact, many studies of mixed-race children and children adopted by parents of another race suggest that "racial" differences in test performance were perhaps entirely environmental. (p. 423)

Green and Winters (2006) reported that less than half of the black and Hispanic cohort of males graduated from high school in 2003. However, when controlling for socioeconomic factors, Alexander, Entwisle and Horsey (1997) found that dropout rates were similar for whites and minority students. In general, the literature was inconsistent regarding the differences in graduation rates among males and females. According to the US Census Bureau (2006), the rates were nearly the same with 86% of females and 85% of males graduated in 2005. However, studies indicating that differences between genders do exist, and when they do, the literature consistently indicated that fewer males graduate from high school than females. For example, in the Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum study, about 9.1% of Boston males had not earned a diploma, while only 6.2% of females had no high school degree.

### Family Circumstances

Rumberger and Lim (2008) identified in the research, three family characteristics that impacted whether students stayed in school: structure, resources and practices.

Typically, coming from non-traditional family structures such as single parent families increased a student's chances of dropping out (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007; Jerald,

2006; Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum, 2005). Students exposed to stressful changes in family circumstances such as divorce, death and mobility of adults within the home dropped out more frequently than students who had intact family structures. High school students with a parent or sibling who dropped out of school were more likely to drop out of high school than peers with parents and siblings who finished high school (Jerald, 2006; Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007). Rumberger and Lim consistently found that student mobility, due to factors other than promotion, was a strong predictor of whether or not students graduated from high school.

Young people who had family and job obligations struggled to remain engaged in school. Work, marriage and parenthood placed students at great risk for dropping out of school (Jerald, 2006). Slightly more than a quarter of the student responders to the Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) study indicated they dropped out of school due to pregnancy or becoming a parent. More than 20% of the students in the study left school to care for a member of their family. Nearly a third of the students responding to the Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) survey wanted to leave school to get a job. Schargel, Thacker and Bell (2007) found students suffering from such psychological factors as low self esteem or an external locus of control, meaning they believed others' perceptions of their value to be true, had higher incidents of dropping out of school than did peers who felt good about themselves and believed in their self worth.

Few of these factors could be controlled by the school. What was worrisome to educators was that Rumberger and Palardy (2005) found that student demographics had a

much more profound effect on student achievement than did school-related effects.

Rumberger (2008) stated “family background remains the most powerful predictor of student achievement in schools; students from low-income households, students with less educated parents or students not living with both of their parents were all less likely to graduate from high school” (p.4). However, not all students who exhibited the predictive demographic characteristics dropped out of school. Some graduated from high school and became productive and successful citizens. Why, then did some students make what Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006), authors of *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, refer to as the dangerous decision to drop out of school?

#### Risk Factors Related to Schools

Demographics, family background and parental engagement did matter, and prudent school and school district leaders who were cognizant of the demographic profile of high school dropouts could design policies, create programs, provide resources and support and implement intervention strategies to keep these potentially at risk students in school. However the school culture and environment, school operations, policies and student experiences within the school also proved to contribute significantly to a school’s dropout rate. According to the Center for Public Education (CPE, 2007):

Dropouts are more than twice as likely to say they left for reasons related to school than because of family or personal circumstances. Students’ educational experiences are more accurate warning signs of whether they will drop out than demographic characteristics like gender, race, age, or poverty. (n.p)

Rumberger (2008) reported that disengagement from school proved a significant factor in the student's decision to leave high school. As he defined it, disengagement was related to both academic and social aspects of the school experience and encompassed three areas of motivation which include students': (a) beliefs about their own efficacy, (b) values and goals and (c) sense of belonging.

### Parental Disengagement

Research indicated that students were not successful in school without the support and help of their parents (Jimerson and Kaufman, 2003; USDOE, 1999). Children whose parents monitored school activities and remained involved in their schooling earned higher grades, had higher test scores, attended school more regularly and completed homework more often than students whose parents were uninvolved or uninterested (USDOE). According to Jimerson and Kaufman, students with involved parents were promoted more frequently as well. Rumberger and Lin (2008) contended that parenting routines such as holding high expectations for achievement, monitoring academic status and openly communicating with and about school reduced the likelihood that their child would drop out of school. Students whose parents were unsupportive of their learning (Jerald, 2006), who were permissive (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007) and who did not know the parents of their child's friends (Jerald) dropped out of school at a higher rate than those students with parents who kept abreast of people and events having the potential to influence their children.



### Problems in School

A history of poor academic achievement and behavior problems frequently proved to be precursors to students dropping out of school. According to their longitudinal study conducted in Philadelphia, Balfanz, Herzog and Mac Iver (2007) indicated that 60% of the high school dropouts in the study could have been identified as early as sixth grade. The researchers maintained that failing either an English or mathematics course, exhibiting poor school attendance or receiving a minimum of one suspension as middle school students proved to be accurate predictors for dropping out of school.

### Academics

Poor academic achievement manifested itself in a variety of ways. According to Jerald (2006), the educational experiences of students were often cited as the greatest reason for dropping out of school. These educational factors were most often related to academic performance and motivation or engagement in school. In the Education Commission of the States (ECS) study, *The Progress of Education Reform: Dropout Prevention*, (Dounay, 2007) summarized the findings of recent studies on dropouts and found that 60% of the student participants in the study dropped out of school due to failing an academic subject, poor school attendance or receiving a suspension from school. About 35% of the students in the Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) report stated they left school due to an inability to do the work. Students who were failing school or who had poor grades found it difficult to catch up to their classmates (Schargel,

Thacker and Bell, 2007; Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison; Jerald, 2006). In Florida, about 13% of the students reported their main reason for leaving was they could not keep up with their school work (FLDOE, 2008).

While some students dropped out of high school because they had academic difficulties, many dropouts were performing at an average or above average level in school could have succeeded in high school, and believed they had the potential to graduate. According to Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006), nearly half of the students surveyed reported they were bored and unengaged at school and found classes to be uninteresting. In Florida, about 7% of the students who dropped out during the 2006-2007 school year left primarily because they found classes uninteresting (FLDOE). Jerald (2006) and Schargel, Thacker and Bell (2007) found that disengaged students tended to develop disciplinary problems, absenteeism, poor relationships and were less involved in extracurricular pursuits. Student respondents said that teachers did not demand enough from them and they were not encouraged to work hard (Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison; Jerald). However, those same students reported that they would have worked harder if teachers had expected them to study and work hard to meet high academic standards.

According to Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006), students who struggled in school were likely to have exhibited poor reading and writing skills, low standardized test scores, failed courses, low grade point averages or completed fewer core academic courses than necessary to be on a trajectory to graduate from high school. Students who demonstrated poor academic functioning typically were placed in remedial classes, re-

took coursework and were often grade retained in school. It was estimated that approximately 30 to 50% of the nation's students had been retained prior to entering ninth grade (National Association for School Psychologists [NASP], 2003). Studies repeatedly showed that boys were more likely to be retained than girls (Frey, 2005; Jimerson and Kaufman, 2003) and students who were retained were more likely to drop out of school than students who had never been retained (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007; Jerald, 2006). The more times a student was retained, the greater probability the student would eventually drop out of school (Westchester Institute for Human Services [WIHS], 2008; Jimerson, 1999; Hauser, 1999). Students enrolled in exceptional education were more likely to be retained than their general education peers (Schargel, Thacker and Bell). To that end, students served in the exceptional education program dropped out more frequently than those served in the general education program.

#### Attendance

Rumberger and Lim (2008) in a review of more than 203 published studies found that absenteeism, a reflection of disengagement, was strongly associated with higher dropout rates. According to Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006), 59% or more of the students who participated in their study reported a pattern of absenteeism and skipping class. The Rodel scholars of Arizona State University found that attendance patterns of graduates differed significantly from those of dropouts and the differences could be seen as early as first grade (Hickman, Bartholomew and Mathwig, 2008). In fact, the mean days absent for high school graduates in the study were 8.96 days as compared to 12.06

days for students who eventually dropped out of school. According to the study, attendance patterns became “even more divergent during middle school as eighth-grade absenteeism was significantly higher for high school dropouts (M=19.49) than eighth-grade absenteeism for high school graduates (M=9.54)” (2008, p. 2). A pattern of absenteeism in grades 6-8 was a powerful dropout predictor (Neild and Balfanz 2006; Balfanz and Herzog, 2005). In fact, Balfanz indicated that a 6<sup>th</sup> grade middle school student who did not attend school regularly had only a 10% chance of graduating on time and a 20% chance of graduating one year later (2007).

#### School Organizational Factors

The Consortium on Chicago School Research found that dropout rates varied significantly across schools once researchers adjusted for student demographic data, illustrating the potential influence school characteristics had on students (Jerald, 2006). Rumberger and Lin suggested that approximately 20% of the variability in dropout rates “can be attributed to four characteristics of schools: (1) the composition of the student body, (2) resources, (3) structural features and (4) policies and practices” (2008, p. 2). Students who attended schools that were made up largely of families from low socioeconomic backgrounds had high proportions of minority or students with disabilities or who practiced segregation or tracking of students were more likely to drop out of school than students who came from schools with few minority or students with disabilities and who practiced heterogeneous grouping of students (Frue denberg and Ruglis, 2007). Students were less likely to drop out of school when the curriculum was rigorous and

students were given few remedial or nonacademic course options (Dounay, 2007). According to Lee and Burkam (2001) the structure of high schools was highly associated with keeping students on track to graduate. Specifically, these researchers found that limiting course offerings, establishing appropriate school size and helping students learn to appropriately socialize positively impacted the ability of the high school to hold students in school. Similar to school size, class size was an essential consideration, particularly with respect to student engagement and feelings of belonging. McNeal (1997) suggested that high pupil-teacher ratios decreased the interaction between teacher and student, impacting the student's sense of belonging. Relative to course offerings, students taking classes that were of a highly rigorous nature with minimal enrollment in nonacademic courses impacted achievement because doing so helped students focus on the important coursework necessary to graduate (Lee and Burkam, 2003).

According to the literature, the type of school a student attended effected whether or not students graduated (Rumberger and Lin, 2008). Students attending alternative schools and charter schools in California dropped out at alarming rates (Rumberger, 2008). Rumberger and Lin (2008) discovered the odds of students staying in school increased when students attended a private Catholic high school or attended public schools that served a large number of advantaged children, had small class sizes, particularly in the primary grades and promoted a strong academic, organized and disciplined environment. However, Lee and Burkam (2003) found that dropout rates did not differ among public, parochial and independent schools after controlling for

demographics, size and organization. Rumberger and Lin offered a clarification regarding private school attendance: research confirmed that private schools, particularly Catholic schools, lost just as many students as did public schools, but when these students left the private school they typically enrolled in a public school rather than dropping out of school entirely. Regardless of the type of school a student attended, Rumberger and Palardy (2005) established that students who attended effective high schools learned about two times as much as those students enrolled in less effective schools.

Research regarding the tributes of small school size was inconsistent (Rumberger and Lin, 2008). In their study, school size improved the chances a student would remain in school and graduate; however, size was not a direct prevention. Rather, a smaller size facilitated positive social features such as close relationships and interactions within the school between and among students and staff. Because they could more easily foster a culture of support for students, most researchers agreed that small schools were better at keeping students in school than were large schools (Dounay, 2007). Rumberger and Palardy (2005) disagreed, finding that large high schools were more successful than small high schools in improving student achievement; but the higher success rates of larger schools did not necessarily translate to increases in the schools' graduation rates. One possible explanation offered by Rumberger and Lin was that educators' concern over accountability requirements may have driven school personnel to push lower-performing students out of school, thereby resulting in perceived increases in student learning at the school (Lewin and Medina, 2003). Schargel, Thacker

and Bell (2007) found that schools with ineffective discipline programs, high incidents of violence and low expectations of student performance had a negative effect on student performance and ultimately yielded more high school dropouts. In the Education Commission of the States (ECS) report, *The Progress of Education Reform 2007: Dropout Prevention*, Dounay (2007) found

While a common assumption is that students drop out of school because of their social background and school behaviors, the findings from these studies demonstrate that schools can exert important organizational effects on students' decisions to drop out or stay in school. (p. 2)

The ECS report provided the following implications for policy reform: track student progress, monitor their performance and intervene immediately, prevent student disengagement, provide challenging courses and consider a small school structure for at-risk students.

### Consequences of Dropping Out of High School

According to Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006), dropouts commonly regretted the decision to drop out of school and given the opportunity to remake their decision, about three-fourths of the respondents in the study said they would have stayed in school and graduated. Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum (2005) found that dropouts had difficulty securing employment. Nearly half of the dropouts in the Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) study reported they could not find a job and acknowledged they should have heeded warnings about the consequences associated with dropping out of high school. Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison discovered that:

High school dropouts, on average, earn \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates, and about \$1 million less over a lifetime than college graduates. Students who drop out of high school are often unable to support themselves; high school dropouts are over three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed in 2004. They are twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty from one year to the next. (p. 2)

High school dropouts were more likely to receive public assistance, serve time in jail or prison and involve themselves in crime or drug use (Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum, 2005). According to the Alliance for Excellence in Education (2006), 75% of the inmates in state prisons and more than half of those in federal prisons were high school dropouts. In his policy committee report, *Solving California's Dropout Crisis*, Rumberger estimated that by 2020 California would have fewer college graduates than would be needed for the workforce, but would have “twice as many workers without a high school diploma (22%) as there would be jobs to support them (11%)” (2008, p. 4). In addition he cautioned that more than 66% of the high school dropout population would use food stamps; black male dropouts would be faced with a 60% chance they would be incarcerated at sometime during their lifetime and dropouts would pay approximately \$100,000 less in federal, state and local taxes than their graduating peers. Clearly, the dropout epidemic would impact the economic outlook of communities, states and the nation as a whole.

### Dropout Prevention

Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) suggested that the student voice was too often left out of the discussions concerning school improvement. In their study, *The*



*Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, they interviewed dropouts from across the United States and found that the decision to drop out of school happened gradually after a pattern of disengagement, poor attendance, boredom, failure or poor attendance (2006). About 45% of the dropouts who participated in the study indicated they fell behind in elementary or middle school and could not make up ground quickly enough to be successful in high school. In fact, Neild and Balfanz (2006) found that sixth and eighth grade students, who were absent 20% of the time, received poor behavior marks and who failed mathematics or English dropped out of school at higher proportions than peers. Tiblier (2007) found statistically significant relationships existed between dropping out of high school and a student's first grade reading performance as well as a student's third grade mathematics performance. Thirty-two percent of the respondents indicated they were retained or had to repeat a grade because they were lagging behind other students. Nearly half of the respondents said they left school because classes were not interesting and 69% of those interviewed said they were not motivated to work hard in school, but would have done so had they been encouraged. About 70% said they were confident they could have graduated but left to get a job (32%), care for a family member (22%) or had a child (26%). Many students, about 56% in the Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison study, did not feel that they could go to a staff member to discuss school related problems and expressed a desire to have had a strong relationship with an adult at the school. Students who performed poorly prior to high school doubted their ability to accomplish what was expected of them because they felt that educators were not

intervening appropriately to help them learn (Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison, 2006). Many felt they had too much freedom which presented them with engaging, albeit less productive, alternatives that proved to be more appealing than school coursework. Participants in the study also reported that their parents were less involved with their schooling than necessary. According to 68% of the respondents, parents were unaware that the student had considered dropping out of school until the student had already made the decision to leave. The student survey respondents offered these perceptions of what would have improved their chances of graduating: (a) courses that presented real-world, relevant learning in the form of internships and service learning; (b) effective teachers who made learning interesting; (c) small classes with personalized assistance; (d) more communication between home and school, with more engagement from parents and (e) increased monitoring and supervision to ensure students attended school and went to classes (Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison, 2006).

The Youth Transitions Task Force (YTTF), a coalition of non-profit organizations, surveyed Boston students, parents and teachers in their study, *Too Big to Be Seen: The Invisible Crisis in Boston and America* (Hamilton, Sullivan, Bundy and Fersh, 2006). Study participants told the researchers that relationships between and among caring adults and students significantly impacted their educational experiences and preferences for a positive school environment were frequently expressed. In fact, many students were considerably distracted by disruptive student behaviors and in some cases such behaviors made them feel unsafe at school. Students in the study indicated

they appreciated the support offered by dropout prevention programs, but with the level of academic deficit many of them faced sometimes the programs moved at an academic pace far too rigorous for them. Additionally, on occasion the support and intervention programs that student participants in the study needed were inaccessible due to high demand. The YTTF found that even when supports were in place to help students, personal or family problems prevented them from graduating (Hamilton, Sullivan, Bundy and Fersh, 2006). Some students were in the position of having to choose between work and school. In hard economic times work often became the priority.

A poll conducted by Music Television (MTV), the Gates Foundation and the National Governors Association (PR Newswire, 2005) revealed what the sponsors referred to as an “ambition gap”. The 2005 poll showed that 76% of young people indicated they believed a college degree was necessary to lead a productive life. That same poll reported that 87% of the nation’s youth reported their intentions to go to college. The Center for Public Education (CPE, 2007) found,

Today’s teenagers are the most academically ambitious generation in U.S. history. All but one percent of sophomores say they plan to graduate from high school, nearly ninety percent say they plan to continue their educations, and three in four say they plan to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher (n.p.).

The beliefs expressed by these young people were encouraging, yet the dropout problem persisted. In most instances dropouts blamed themselves for their decisions to leave school (Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison, 2006). However, the literature identified recurring themes that pointed to interventions that, once employed by the school or school district, could have encouraged and helped students stay in school and graduate.

### What States, School districts and Schools Can Do

Increased support for individual students was a recurring theme in the literature related to dropout prevention efforts. *Dropout Prevention*, commissioned by the National Center for Educational Evaluation (NCEE) was developed to guide educators in their efforts to design effective dropout prevention strategies and programs (Dynarski, Clarke, Cobb, Finn, Rumberger and Smink, 2008). Dynarski and colleagues, the authors and researchers of the study, offered six recommendations:

1. Assign trained, well-matched, invested adult advocates to support students at risk of dropping out of school. Caseloads should be low enough to enable the advocate to meet with students weekly.
2. Establish academic programs designed to support at-risk students and to improve their performance. Such programs should include strategies aimed at teaching how to study and take tests. Additionally, students should be afforded time to make up coursework or retake a course to get back on track for graduation.
3. Implement curriculum designed specifically to improve students' social and behavioral skills.
4. To increase student engagement, create small classes and learning communities.

5. Make the curriculum rigorous and relevant to students. Train teachers how to integrate content, provide opportunities for students to learn about careers and create experiences that connect students to the world of work.
6. Utilize robust student data systems that could identify and track data for students at-risk of dropping out of school. Indeed, Dounay (2007) maintained that teachers and administrators must monitor closely the progress of students as early as 6<sup>th</sup> grade and intervene at the onset of academic struggles. Attendance, behavior, retention and academic performance data should be easily accessible and monitored frequently.

While monitoring such behaviors as student attendance, engagement and behavior was important, doing so simply did not prove to be effective enough to keep students in school. Data was the starting point, but action must follow. Monitoring data provided a lens through which states, school districts and schools could identify problems, but monitoring did not always transfer into actions and interventions necessary to help students. Establishing school-wide reforms to address widespread student problems was a must (Dounay, 2006; Balfanz, Herzog and Mac Iver, 2007).

Bridgeland, Dilulio and Wulsin (2008) suggested that school districts consider service- learning as a tool for dropout prevention, "...service-learning involves applying classroom learning through investigation of a community problem, planning ways to solve it, action through service, reflection on the experience and what was learned and demonstration of results" (p.1). Many at-risk youth indicated a lack of connection to their

schools, as well as boredom in the classroom. Hands-on programs such as service-learning were considered rigorous, relevant and motivating enough to engage the student and had the added bonus of potentially leading participants to an unexpected career field.

Smink and Schargel (2007) identified 15 strategies widely recognized as the most effective for keeping students from dropping out of high school. The researchers categorized the strategies into four overarching themes: (a) basic core strategies, (b) early intervention, (c) effective instruction and (d) using the wider community. Smink and Schargel offered carefully-defined strategies so educators clearly understood their intent. According to their research, the most effective dropout prevention programs included: (a) one-on-one mentoring, (b) service learning, (c) alternative schools that attended to the special needs of the students in attendance, (d) after-school and summer programs, (e) early childhood education for children from birth to three, (f) family involvement, (g) early literacy intervention, (h) professional development specific to the needs of teachers who serve at risk youth, (i) active and engaging learning, (j) technology, (k) continuous improvement of the school, (l) collaboration with community groups, (m) career and technical education such as the School-to-Work program and (n) school-wide programs to address violence prevention, conflict resolution and attainment of beneficial social skills. While implementation of all 15 strategies provided a more dynamic program for at-risk youth, the researchers maintained these strategies would be effective for prevention, even if employed independently of one another.

The Youth Transitions Task Force developed recommendations to increase the number of dropouts that returned to school, while decreasing the number of students who left before graduation (Hamilton, Sullivan, Bundy and Fersh, 2006). Hamilton and his contemporaries challenged states, school districts and schools with:

1. Embracing the National Governors Association (NGA) method of calculating the graduation rate in an effort to improve the accuracy of Boston's dropout data.
2. Tasking educators to develop data-sharing agreements with community agencies in order to track students, so that all agencies had a better understanding of the student's status and welfare.
3. Establishing strategies for early intervention for at-risk youth and outreach programs for dropouts. As part of this effort instructional resources would be cataloged and distributed to agencies that work with the targeted group of students.
4. Providing a variety of alternative education options to better serve students and increase the ability of community organizations to address severe learning and emotional disabilities.

Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) advised educators that schools needed to provide better support for struggling students in the form of better teachers, smaller class sizes and individualization of instruction to focus on student needs. In the Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison study, a survey of dropouts illustrated that schools must improve

curricula and instruction to make learning more meaningful and engaging. It proved to be essential that educators created a school culture and climate that fostered learning by increasing supervision, improving discipline and by making students feel safe; and they must find ways to involve parents to a greater degree. Additional recommended supports included “literacy programs, attendance monitoring, tutoring, double class periods, internships, service-learning, summer school programs... adult advocates in the school who can help students find the support they need” (Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison, 2006).

Finally, Rumberger (2008) was resolute in his declaration that dropout prevention programs, even those that boasted a verified effectiveness rating, were inadequate to eradicate the dropout problem. The crisis he said was systemic and the solution would require a systemic response that combined financial, human and social resources with the ability and desire to take action. States, school districts and individual schools were encouraged to take actions designed to highlight the problem and to begin addressing it in effective ways. In order to do so states must: (a) revise accountability policies that placed a sense of urgency on the dropout problem and exerted pressure on schools and school districts to address it. According to Rumberger, it was imperative for school officials and the community to recognize that the problem cannot be fixed overnight; school districts must first (a) build capacity to effectively tackle challenges related to helping high school dropouts; (b) develop sophisticated data systems to accurately monitor the academic progress of students as well as the capacity-building progress of educators; (c) regulate



high school reform to include more stringent policies, practices, timelines, benchmarks and guidelines for school districts who do not meet graduation performance standards while giving flexibility to those that have been successful; (d) regulate middle school in similar fashion to the recommendations for high schools; (e) initiate proven dropout strategies such as prekindergarten, after-school child care, smaller class sizes and teacher incentives and (f) incorporate into graduation requirements non-academic courses necessary for the student to be successful in school and beyond (Rumberger, 2008).

According to Rumberger's review of research school districts that: (a) involved community resources, (b) adopted strategies that had a high probability of supporting students sufficiently to keep them in school, (c) implemented the strategies with fidelity, monitored and revised their plan if necessary and (d) enlisted outside agencies to assist school districts with strategy identification, monitoring and implementation of the plan had the best results. Because schools exerted the most direct impact on student outcomes, Rumberger (2008) identified school-based strategies that had the ability to quickly impact student performance. In his report, he advised school administrators to create small learning communities personalized to the needs of students, give academic and affective support to students who needed it and provide rigorous instruction that was relevant and had real-world applications.

#### Dropout Prevention in Florida

The Dropout Prevention and Academic Intervention Act (2008) provided for prevention and intervention programs designed to meet the needs of students who were

not effectively served in traditional programs in grades 1 - 12 in the public school system. Such programs could differ from traditional programs and schools in their philosophy, curriculum or setting and were required to employ different teaching methodologies, curricula, learning activities and assessment procedures than traditional schools. Florida's law allowed district school boards to assign disruptive students to an alternative program. Florida students in grades 1-12 were eligible for dropout prevention and academic intervention programs if they:

1. Were academically unsuccessful as evidenced by low test scores, grade retention, failing grades, low grade point average, falling behind in earning credits or not meeting state or school district proficiency levels in reading, mathematics or writing,
2. Exhibited a pattern of excessive absenteeism or were identified as a habitual truant, or
3. Had a history of disruptive behavior, or behavior that interfered with the student's own learning or the learning of others as evidenced by in-school disruptive behavior, committing an offense warranting out-of-school suspension or expulsion or exhibiting behaviors that threatened the welfare of students or others with whom the student came into contact, including acts of violence, possession of weapons or drugs and harassment of school personnel or other students.

According to the Dropout Prevention and Academic Intervention Act (2008), school district school boards had the authority to establish dropout prevention and academic intervention programs at the elementary, middle, junior high school, or high school level and were required to establish procedures for ensuring that teachers assigned to such programs possessed the affective, pedagogical and content-related skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of these students. An annual report was required to be submitted to the Department of Education's database documenting the extent to which each of the school district's dropout prevention and academic intervention programs had been successful in the areas of graduation rate, dropout rate, attendance rate and retention/promotion rate.

#### Brevard's Competency-Based Program

Anita Smith (personal communication, May 12, 2009), School Board of Brevard County (SBBC) Dropout Prevention Resource Teacher, indicated that most of the school district's high schools offer one of two primary dropout prevention programs: Competency-Based Diploma programs and Credit Retrieval programs. Schools could offer a Competency-Based Diploma Program, either a school-within-a-school or full-time program and a Credit Retrieval Program. As an example, high schools might have provided a Competency-Based Diploma Program (full-time program) for 11th and 12th graders and a Credit Retrieval Program for 9th and 10th graders. Smith indicated that Competency-Based Diploma (CBD) programs were secondary programs designed to keep at-risk senior high school students in school and provide them with an opportunity

to earn their high school diplomas. These programs were designed to help students meet graduation requirements by allowing them to earn credits in a non-traditional program, retrieve credits in classes where they were previously unsuccessful, improve their grade point averages and/or be better prepared for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). CBD programs offered an academic intervention, which included individualized competency-based instruction in math, English, social studies, science and FCAT remediation. Students worked at their own pace, primarily utilizing computer software, to master the standards in each academic course. Students also received one-on-one instruction from experienced academic instructors. In addition to academic interventions, Smith indicated that many of Brevard's CBD programs utilized one or more of the following additional interventions:

- Family outreach such as strategies that included frequent feedback to parents and supported parental involvement,
- Personal and affective strategies such as regularly-scheduled classroom-based discussion, activities related to goal setting, individual counseling, participation in an interpersonal relations class, etc., and
- Work related component that supported the student's employment or offered an internship (n.p., 2009).

Eligibility for the competency-based diploma (CBD) program required that students were in grades 9 – 12 and met two or more of the following criteria:

- Earned a GPA below 2.0

- Failed or in danger of failing the FCAT
- Received failing grades (two or more courses during a grading period)
- Accrued excessive absences
- Retained at least once.

### Brevard's Credit Retrieval Program

According to Smith (personal conversation, May 12 2009), the credit retrieval program provided students who had fallen behind in their credits and/or who had a grade point average (GPA) below 2.0, an opportunity to recover the missed credits and improve their GPA. Students were allowed to retake courses they failed, provided they had not failed them due to non-attendance. Students could also retake courses in which they earned a D in order to improve their GPAs. They were not permitted, however, to take new courses in this program. In order to be eligible for the CBD programs students must have scored at or above the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level in reading and in math on the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) or other approved achievement test. In addition to the academic interventions within the program, school coordinators were encouraged to include a family outreach component. Placing a guidance counselor as the coordinator of the program encouraged a strong counseling component for student enrollees. An emphasis on monitoring student progress and providing frequent feedback to students and parents was encouraged, as doing so proved beneficial in other school district programs. In contrast to the CBD Program, the Credit Retrieval Program was designed to address the

needs of students who were generally successful in traditional high school settings, but who needed a boost to make it through high school ready for postsecondary pursuits.

#### Brevard's Goal for Dropout Prevention Participants

It was anticipated that students who participated in Brevard's dropout prevention programs would graduate from high school adequately prepared to enter the workforce or postsecondary pursuits. For the cohort of students enrolled in one of the dropout prevention programs, the school district set objectives that specified 70% of the students would stay in school and earn a high school diploma, would improve their GPAs and would comply with the school district attendance policy.

#### Pursuit of a Diploma after Dropping Out

Brevard County had an extensive adult and community education program. According to the Brevard Adult and Community Education (BACE) website, the mission of this particular education community was “to provide comprehensive programs to improve the employability of the state's workforce through academic and community-based fee supported instruction for lifelong learning” (2009, n.p.). The goals of the program were to help adults become literate and productive citizens who had the skills necessary to successfully enter the workforce, to provide parents with the skills necessary to assist their own children in the educational process and to help adults graduate from high school or earn a high school equivalency diploma (BACE, 2009). A review of the website revealed a variety of programs offered, however for the purposes of this study,

the literature review included only those programs designed to aid students in pursuit of attaining a high school diploma or its equivalency.

The Adult Basic Education program was open to any adult functioning below a 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Administration of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) allowed appropriate placement for self-paced, individualized reading, writing and mathematics skills. Additionally, the program offered training to improve the participant's marketability in the work force. The program was often used as a prerequisite for very low functioning adults who wished to enroll in GED or adult high school courses (BACE, 2009).

Adult High School (AHS) offered two programs of study: co-enrollment and adult high school (BACE, 2009). The co-enrollment program was designed for students older than 16 years of age who were still enrolled in high school, but who wished to complete coursework in the adult education setting. People 16 years of age and older who had officially withdrawn from high school without earning a diploma were eligible to access AHS. According to the BACE website, AHS was free for participants functioning below a 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level on the TABE. Enrollees scoring at 9<sup>th</sup> grade and above, however, would be assessed a fee to participate in courses. In order to graduate from either of the AHS programs, students must have earned 24 credits, scored 300 on the reading and mathematics portions of FCAT and attained a GPA commensurate with the guidelines set forth by FLDOE (BACE, 2009).

The Basic Adult and Community Student Education website indicated the General Education Development (GED) Preparatory Program employed a self-paced program of education, computer-based instruction and performance-based evaluation (BACE, 2009). Like other adult programs, an assessment of individual needs was used to place students at the appropriate level of instruction. The program goal was to prepare students for successful completion of the GED Tests, which measured outcomes proportionate with four-year high school programs of study found within the United States and Canada. Core academic areas, including language arts, social studies, science and mathematics, were assessed on the GED and applicants would be required to compose a timed essay as part of the Writing Test. Use of the Casio fx-260 calculator, study, reference and test taking, workforce readiness and basic computer skills were also taught. Student participants were given the option of taking official GED Practice Tests, with minimum scores of 600 on each subtest as the recommended level of attainment before taking the Official GED Tests to earn a diploma.

*Space Coast Youth Build* was a program supported by the Brevard Adult and Community Education program. The program was maintained at Brevard Community College (BCC) as a result of an April 2004 agreement between BCC and School Board of Brevard County (SBBC). According to the agreement, Brevard Adult and Community Education provided funds to hire and provide training for the Youth Build teacher to teach basic skills (reading, writing and mathematics) and GED preparatory courses. In addition, the teacher had the flexibility to utilize creative teaching methodologies and was



required to incorporate vocational skills into the program. According to Michelle Raymond (2009), coordinator of *Youth Build*, a workforce orientation was a strong component of this program that served as an incentive for the students referred from the SBBC Basic Adult and Community Student Education programs. In fact, as an enticement to stay in the program, most of the students worked and were paid as teacher assistants while completing their high school education.

### Summary

Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) suggested that today's schools must provide differently for the diverse students who enter their halls by providing: (a) relevant curriculum that connects to real-life, (b) methods for parents to engage with the school, (c) early identification of potential dropouts with support and interventions that relate to the specific issue facing the student and (d) additional instructional assistance and interventions designed to help the struggling student to be successful in school. The Center for Public Education indicated that "the factors that contribute most to students' decision to drop out are 'alterable,' meaning there are things schools can do to change them" (n.p., 2006).

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Across the United States, students are dropping out at alarming rates. At a time when jobs not requiring a high school diploma are becoming scarce and no longer offer ample means for employment, graduating from high school has become even more essential in order to find gainful employment and lead productive lives. Although local school districts and schools have instituted dropout prevention programs for decades, they have been unable to reverse dropout trends. Educators must understand the challenges and obstacles facing modern-day youth as they attempt to complete high school and intervene sufficiently to get students back on track to graduate. State educational agencies, school districts and community organizations with the authority to make systemic changes in practices, policies and programs to keep students in school had failed to make the right kind of changes leading to a decreased dropout rate (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study were to investigate the relationship between student characteristics and dropping out of school; identify factors reported by Brevard County Florida high school students that led to their dropping out of school; determine interventions having the potential to keep them in school and identify their motivations for returning to earn a diploma. The information gleaned from the study could be used to spearhead prospective program and policy changes with the potential to decrease the

number of high school dropouts. Fundamental to the research were identification of school-related and personal circumstances that put these students at risk, determination of why these students made the decision to leave, understanding the impetus for their return to an educational setting in quest of a diploma and pinpointing strategies, activities and events having the greatest potential to re-engage or redirect students before they made the decision to leave. The results of this study would add to the body of knowledge related to dropouts by using the student's voice to provide guidance for policymakers and practitioners who bear responsibility for improving the educational policies and programs designed to keep at-risk student in school.

#### Study Approval

Prior to starting the qualitative portion of the study, a series of meetings were conducted with Brevard public school administrators including the Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, the Director of Testing and Accountability, the Director of Secondary Programs and the Director of Adult Education to garner their approval and full support of the research project. Upon receiving verbal agreement from administrative stakeholders, formal approval was sought according to School Board of Brevard County (SBBC) policy. The Director of Accountability, Testing and Evaluation for the SBBC was contacted to obtain approval to conduct a research study with students enrolled in Brevard's adult education programs. As part of the SBBC application process, the researcher contacted the Director of Adult Education Programs in Brevard, in order to obtain permission to access students enrolled in the General

Education Development (GED) program. He was informed that the researcher was pursuing a doctoral degree and that the study would analyze data relative to Brevard dropouts to identify measures and interventions that could have been initiated to prevent their leaving school. Purpose and methodology were explained and recruitment strategies were discussed. The Adult Education Director agreed to allow the researcher to access GED students and provided contact information for GED program administrators. Formal approval for the study was subsequently granted by the school district's Director of Testing and Accountability and Director of Brevard Public School Adult Education. Their signatures were obtained on the *School Board of Brevard County Application to Conduct Research Assurances* form in addition to that of the research advisor, Dr. Barbara A. Murray (Appendix A). Finally, approval was sought and granted through the University of Central Florida (UCF) Institutional Review Board (IRB) under IRB number SBE-09-06336 was (Appendix B).

The researcher also contacted Michelle Raymond, the teacher and program coordinator for *Youth Build* at Brevard Community College (BCC). *Youth Build* was administered jointly between School Board of Brevard County and Brevard Community College in accordance with an April 2004 agreement. According to the Brevard Adult and Community website, this General Education Development (GED) Preparatory Program employed a self-paced program of education, computer-based instruction and performance-based evaluation (BACE, 2009). Ms. Raymond was equally enthusiastic about the study and directed the researcher to another source to determine approval

protocols. After several inquiries, including contacting top administrators at the college, the researcher could not determine the process for research approval at BCC and was unable to include the Youth Build students from BCC in the study.

### Recruitment

Following approval through the IRB, a description of the study was disseminated to the four Adult Education site administrators and follow-up phone calls and e-mails were made to schedule visits to the GED sites for recruitment purposes. During initial visits to the GED sites the researcher explained the study to the site administrators in more detail. Then the researcher presented the research study intent and protocols to potential study participants. All GED students were eligible to participate in the study regardless of their gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity if they met the eligibility requirements of being 18 to 24 years of age and they left a Brevard public school prior to earning a diploma.

### Research Questions

This study was guided by the research questions that follow. Hypotheses accompany the quantitative study questions.

1. What relationship existed between the ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>1: A relationship did not exist between ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

2. What relationship existed between the socioeconomic status of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>2: A relationship did not exist between the socioeconomic status (SES) of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

3. What relationship existed between student enrollment in an exceptional education program in the Brevard County public schools and dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>3: A relationship did not exist between Brevard student enrollment in an exceptional education program and their dropping out of high school.

4. What relationship existed between Brevard students as English Language Learners and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>4: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students who were served in an ESOL program and their dropping out of high school.

5. What relationship existed between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>5: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school.

6. What relationship existed between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>6: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

Questions 1-5 addressed the scope of the dropout problem among the various student subgroups that research has identified as having the potential to be at risk for school success.

Question 6 was included in order to understand the point at which a student made the official declaration to leave high school. The findings served to identify the grades at which interventions became critical for students at risk for dropping out of school. The results of the analysis had the potential to impact interventions, support and student progression policy in ways that were favorable to vulnerable students.

7. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, were the most significant reasons given for dropping out of high school?
8. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, might have made them stay in school?

The purpose of asking Questions 7 and 8 was to determine the circumstances that caused them to leave school. The researcher attempted to determine how students' responses on the official Exit Interview Survey and/or the Exit Interviews compared with study participant responses given during face-to-face interviews. The comparison was important to ascertain the validity of the official state-required surveys.

9. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of high school, caused them to return to earn a diploma by passing the General Education Development (GED) Test?

This question presumed the reason students returned to earn a high school diploma or its equivalency was to improve their personal circumstances. Therefore, the question served to examine the effect dropping out of high school had on their lives and to understand the experiences leading to their return.

### Profile Brevard County Public Schools

Brevard County was one of the 10 largest school districts in Florida and among the 40 largest school districts in the nation. Brevard Public Schools (BPS), made up of 58 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, four junior-senior high schools, 11 high schools and nine charter schools, served nearly 74,000 students at the time of this study. In 2007 Brevard posted a graduation rate of 92.1%, the highest in Florida at that time. BPS was among the top 5 most affluent school districts in the state of Florida at the time of this study.

### Population

The population consisted of all high school students who attended a Brevard public high school. In this study the researcher analyzed data from the Brevard Public School student system as well as data from face-to-face interviews with former students who dropped out of a Brevard public school, with the intent to understand the intricacies of their decisions to leave, to determine how elementary, middle and high schools could have intervened to impact their actions and to recognize the driving force that made them return to school in quest of a high school diploma or its equivalency. The analysis of data



provided a foundation for making recommendations to Brevard Public School officials and other educational institutions in order to advance effective solutions

### Samples

The sample examined for the quantitative portion of the study included high school students who attended a Brevard public high school during the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. During these three years, the 25,166 students enrolled in a Brevard Public High School represented the following ethnic or racial subgroups: white (70.7%), black (15.7%), Hispanic (8.2%), multi-racial (3.1%), Asian (2.2%) and Indian (.3%). Data from this sample were used to run Chi Squared Tests of Independence to answer the first six study questions. The second population included all former Brevard public school students who returned to earn a high school diploma through the General Education Development (GED) program during the 2009-2010 school year. A sample from this population was recruited to participate in individual face-to-face interviews. Data from these interviews were analyzed qualitatively to answer the remaining questions: according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, what were the most significant reasons given for dropping out of high school; what might have made them stay in school; and what prompted their return to Brevard's Adult Education Program in order to earn a diploma by passing the General Education Development (GED) Test? The sample for the qualitative portion of the study consisted of seventeen (17) former Brevard public school students who left a Brevard public middle or high school before earning their high school diplomas and who had returned to

the Brevard Adult Education program to earn a diploma through GED. To expedite accessibility, only students who were of a legal age to sign the Informed Consent were recruited to participate in the interview portion of the study. Study participants ranged from 18 to 23 years of age, eight of which were female (47%) and nine of which were male (53%). Study participants represented four ethnic groups: nine white (53%), four black (24%), three Hispanic (18%) and one Asian (6%). Participants represented a mix of students from ten high schools and one middle school from across the Brevard school district. It was important to note that some study participants attended multiple high schools, so additional high school representation was possible. The student interview, however, required participants to report only the last school of attendance reflecting the school the student attended when enrollment was severed. Study participants resided in various parts of the school district; two reported living in the northern attendance zone of the school district (12%), nine lived in the central attendance zone (53%) and six resided in the southern end of the school district (35%).

### Design of the Study

Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted in order to paint a complete picture of the dropout trends within Brevard Public Schools and to establish an accurate account of the perceptions of former Brevard high school students who returned to school to earn a diploma. A quantitative approach was necessary to identify demographic characteristics of Brevard's high school dropouts.

### Analytical Procedures

To answer the first seven study questions, a data query from the Brevard student data system provided race/ethnic background, socioeconomic status, program participation, progression decisions and grade level demographics for students who dropped out of a Brevard public high school during the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. Chi Square Tests of Independence were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in order to determine if relationships existed between ethnicity, socioeconomic status, enrollment in exceptional education, English Language Learners (ELL), retention or grade level demographics and a student's decision to drop out of school. According to Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007), qualitative methodology offered the best approach for answering research Questions 7 through 9; therefore the researcher used the qualitative research approach, constant comparative analysis. Constant comparative analysis allowed the researcher to extrapolate recurring themes relative to the study based on the issues that emerged through participant responses (Hahs-Vaughn, 2009). In the case of the current study, face-to-face interviews were conducted to identify themes that emerged from participant responses. Leech and Onwuegbuzie identified these stages of constant comparative analysis:

1. Transcribing participant responses to the questions within the face-to-face survey,
2. Grouping the data into smaller bits of data and categorizing the data according to a descriptor or code, or open coding the data,

3. Refining the data categories by axial coding, categorizing the descriptors or codes identified during the open coding process and
4. Further refining until most of the data fit into a category or subcategory.

The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to present a detailed account and genuine understanding of participant perceptions related to the events leading up to the final decision and act of dropping out of school. As well, the face to face interview process revealed motivating factors that led them back to school in pursuit of a diploma. Implicit in the study was the need to be aware of the participant's thought processes and to understand how and why they made decisions associated with their personal circumstances. In the case of this particular study the researcher attempted to understand student perceptions. Constant comparative analysis was chosen for the study based on the rationale provided in the discourse within the scholarly article, *An Array of Qualitative Data Analysis Tools: A Call for Data Analysis Triangulation* (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007). According to Leech and Onwuegbuzie, "Constant comparative analysis is a method of choice when the researcher wants to answer general or overarching, questions of the data" (p. 576). As indicated, constant comparative analysis provided the researcher with an increased understanding of the dropout phenomena in Brevard and afforded the researcher the opportunity to collect data from individuals who were directly impacted by the experience of dropping out of school. Additionally, qualitative research yielded a more accurate and complete account of the dropout trends due to the nature of the study's questions. In the case of the current study, the constant comparative analysis approach

offered a comprehensive and authentic look at the perceptions of high school dropouts who chose to return to an educational setting than that which could have been portrayed by using quantitative methodologies alone.

### Recruitment and Selection Criteria

Data for the quantitative portion of the study were pulled from the student data system. These data reflected the sample of high school students enrolled in a Brevard public high school from July of 2006 through June of 2009 and were representative of all geographic locations within Brevard County. Because the population included all school students in Brevard's public high schools, it is assumed the sample closely reflected the ethnic and social economic make up of Brevard County.

For the qualitative portion of the study the researcher recruited participants from all geographical areas of Brevard (north, central and south) to ensure responses were representative of students throughout Brevard County. Students, ages 18-24, enrolled in the General Education Development (GED) program were invited to participate in the interview portion of the study. The researcher explained the study to participants and answered any questions potential study participants had prior to their agreement to become involved in the study. The researcher clarified that participants would receive no compensation and would not be penalized if they decided not to participate. As part of the discussion, the researcher explained the motivation behind the study, indicating the importance of hearing their voices as the school district sought to create a school system responsive to a diverse student population. Implications for the research were discussed

so that potential participants understood their input would serve a larger purpose in shaping policy and programs for future students. Additionally, the researcher informed students that their *Exit Interview Survey* responses would be accessed from Brevard's student data system. The researcher distributed and reviewed with potential participants the Informed Consent document and students were asked to submit the signed forms to their General Education Development (GED) teacher after the researcher left the classroom if they were interested in participating in the study. Students were asked to place the informed consent form in an envelope, seal it and give it to their teacher to be forwarded to the researcher. Without exception student recruits chose to sign the informed consent document while the researcher was still present in the room and submitted it in the presence of their peers directly to the researcher. All students indicating a desire to participant were accepted by the researcher once program administrators confirmed they met age restrictions for participation. One-on-one interviews were then scheduled with students who had consented to participate.

### Setting

Quantitative portions of the research required the researcher to analyze data that were housed within Brevard's student data system. For the qualitative portion of the study, students attending one of the GED programs administered by Brevard Public Schools participated in face-to-face interviews that were conducted at various Adult Education school sites. Site administrators indicated that transportation was a challenge for many of the students targeted for the study and suggested that the safest and most

reliable way to speak with study participants was scheduling appointment times through the school. In response to GED site administrator recommendations, interviews were conducted in empty classrooms at the site where the student attended GED classes.

### Interview Approach

The approach for the study was carefully considered prior to the start of the study. The intent of the study was to enable the researcher to understand the authentic feelings and experiences of high school dropouts. With that in mind, it was necessary to allow participants to discuss their thoughts and opinions freely so they could help the researcher gain a clear understanding of their thought processes and feelings as they navigated the school system and dropped out, and again as they came to the realization they wanted or needed a high school diploma. Establishing rapport, building trust with participants and helping them understand the importance of their involvement in the study was essential in order for the researcher to have the level of conversation necessary to learn about their experiences. To that end, the researcher attempted to establish a tone of genuine concern and interest for the participant, rather than employing matter-of-fact tactics to gather information.

Klaus Witz (2006) distinguished between interviewing for information and interviewing for feeling. According to Witz, interviewing for information left the study participant feeling as though the most important component in the interview process was the information that could be shared. When interviewing for information the researcher searched for objective answers devoid of feelings. However, the approach used for the

current study was interviewing for feeling, or what Witz termed *participant as ally and co-contemplator* (2006). The approach required a good deal of objective information, but also relied heavily on feelings and subjective responses. The key to this approach was the researcher's motivation for asking the questions (Witz, Goodwin, Hart and Thomas, 2001). The researcher attempted to approach participants in a way that made them feel as though the interviewer was an ally or friend. It was necessary that participants understood the researcher was genuinely interested in their feelings, ideas and attitudes. Because the researcher used the participant as ally approach, the interview process appeared to be less of a question and answer session than it was a conversation with the interviewer who empathized and encouraged the participant throughout the process. Witz (2006) described the participant as ally and co-contemplator approach in these terms.

If the participant is to become an ally in the research, the investigator needs to feel that the research topic is important in a larger scheme of things and to share with the participant from the very beginning the thrust of the research and the larger societal, disciplinary, or human concerns that motivate it. If the participant recognizes that the investigator is serving a larger cause to which the participant is at least somewhat sympathetic, the participant will feel that he or she can bring in freely whatever feelings, values, and past experience are important to the topic at hand..., and cooperation will tend to develop between them in a natural way.  
(p. 248)

Participant as ally and co-contemplator required cooperation and trust between the researcher (interviewer) and the participant, with an understanding that the two shared a common goal (Witz, et al., 2001).



## Data Collection

Data for the quantitative portion of the study were collected directly from the Brevard student data system. Student Exit Interview Survey data were collected from the Brevard student data system as well. Qualitative data were collected from one-on-one interview sessions conducted with former Brevard public school students, ages 18-24, enrolled in the GED program during the 2009-2010 school year. To operationalize Witz's participant as ally and co-contemplator approach to qualitative inquiries, the researcher necessarily spent a significant amount of time building rapport with each participant before beginning the interview process. The study was discussed in detail; the importance of listening to participants' experiences, thoughts and feelings was conveyed to participants and a desire to improve the circumstances for future generations of students was expressed. As was necessary in the informed consent process, the researcher reiterated the requirement to report any instances of abuse that emerged from the discussion so that the participants clearly understood the position of the researcher. Participants were given an e-mail address and the home telephone number of the researcher should they have questions or want further information about the study. In order to gather honest and accurate information about the students' school experiences, it was imperative that participants felt comfortable answering all questions in the absence of threat or at the risk of others accessing their comments. Participants were interviewed by the researcher to find out about school and life experiences that led them to leave school and then return to the GED program. Each interview was conducted privately and

responses were recorded using an audio tape recorder. Initially, the researcher sought to collect from the Brevard student data system the specific Student Exit Interview responses of the GED students who participated in face-to-face interviews in order to compare their responses on the written survey document with their oral responses from the face-to-face interview. However, during the recruitment process and subsequent interviews, the researcher discovered that none of the study participants had completed the Student Exit Interview. It is unclear why the interviews were not conducted prior to the students' exit from high school. However, during the interviews participants frequently indicated they left without alerting school officials or completing Intent to Terminate paperwork which provided a plausible explanation as to why interview participants did not have Student Exit Interview data on file in the Brevard student data system.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses of survey results were conducted. Quantitative statistical procedures and analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data within the student data system were collected to determine the extent to which specific subgroups within Brevard's population dropped out of high school at a rate greater than other subgroups; to identify differences in the grade levels of students who decided to drop out of school and to analyze Student Exit Interview responses in an effort to identify the primary and secondary reasons Brevard students dropped out of school. In addition to the quantitative design, the researcher used the qualitative methodology constant comparative analysis to interpret open-ended interview responses from individual face-to-face interviews with study participants. In constant comparative analysis the researcher open coded or chunked the response data into smaller segments and attached a descriptor to each chunk of data. Once data were open coded, they were axial coded or grouped into similar categories. Finally all data were reviewed, integrated and codes were refined using selective coding (Hahs-Vaughn, 2009).

### Problem Statement

The dropout phenomenon has plagued school districts for decades. Dropout programming and funding have been dedicated to decreasing the incident of high school students dropping out of school, yet the problem persists. Often, family or personal

situations that schools were not equipped to address were major contributors to the problem. However, some of the barriers to student success reside within the structures of the school system and the schools themselves. Researchers such as Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) were steadfast in their belief that educators have the power to eradicate the dropout phenomenon. In response to the increasing dropout trends and the belief by researchers that educators possess the information and tools necessary to decrease dropout rates, four primary problems were investigated in this study. The researcher explored:

- The impact of race/ethnicity, socio-economic status (SES), exceptional student education (ESE) program participation, English language learner (ELL) participation, retention and grade level assignment on dropping out of school;
- Student rationales for dropping out of school;
- Student-identified interventions that would have encouraged them to remain in school through high school graduation and
- Student motivations for returning to school in pursuit of a General Education Development diploma.

#### Purpose of the Study

This research study was conducted to understand the relationship between student characteristics and dropping out of school; identify reasons students left school and determine student-identified interventions they indicated would have helped them stay in school. Additionally, the researcher asked former dropouts why they returned to earn

their diploma in order to understand the circumstances these youth faced when they left high school and attempted to integrate into the community without the benefit of a high school diploma. Educators across the nation have implemented dropout prevention programs and have attempted to put safety nets in place for students at-risk of failing and dropping out with only cursory understanding of the complexities involved in the student's decision to leave school early. Conclusions from the findings would have significant implications for school district decision makers and could result in recommendations for programmatic, organizational and policy change.

#### Quantitative Analysis

This quantitative portion of the study was based on analysis of former Brevard public school students who attended a Brevard public high school during the 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years. Student demographics and Student Exit Survey data were collected from the Brevard student data system. The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to create an unduplicated sample in order to identify the status of students at the latest point in their public school education. Further, analysis was conducted using descriptive and statistical procedures available within the SPSS software package. Chi Squared Tests of Independence were conducted on student data within the Brevard student data system to determine the extent to which dropping out of school was reflected among various racial/ethnic, socio-economic, exceptional student education status, English Language Learners (ELL). The researcher also reviewed descriptive data to determine if previous grade retentions and the grade levels at which

students decided to drop out of school influenced their decision to leave school prior to completion.

Chi Square Tests of Independence were conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon the students' ethnicity, socio-economic status, participation in the exceptional student education program, qualification as an English language learner, being retained in school, or grade level in school. The Chi Square Test illustrated differences between expected and observed outcomes in order to determine if the differences were statistically significant. Cramer's V or phi was calculated to determine effect sizes. According to Seaman (2010) it was important to examine the proportions within the Chi Square crosstabulation table since small effect sizes could potentially correspond to large proportional differences between and among groups (Seaman, 2010). In tests of independence such as chi square, the proportions of the dependent variable should be equal. Seaman noted that an effect size in close proximity to zero can mislead the researcher and suggested that it was more reasonable to compare proportions than it was to focus solely on Cramer's V. In instances when the chi square statistic was significant and the effect size was small, post-hoc testing was conducted to calculate the standard residual which allowed the researcher to examine proportional differences in more detail.

### Qualitative Analysis

Additional data were collected via one-on-one, face-to-face interviews conducted with former Brevard public school students between the ages of 18 and 24, who dropped

out of a Brevard public school and later returned to the General Education Development (GED) program in an effort to earn their high school diplomas. Motives for dropping out of school, incentives for remaining in school and impetus for enrolling in Adult Education to earn a GED diploma were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis method constant comparative analysis. Comparative analysis, a grounded theory approach, was intended to unearth themes and patterns existing within the data rather than drawing themes from research and literature (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2008; Rodriquez, 1998). In order to accurately reflect participant responses it was important the researcher allow data categories to emerge from concepts and ideas expressed by the study participants rather than assigning codes based on literature and research. According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2008):

Qualitative content analysis involves a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation. This process uses inductive reasoning, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher's careful examination and constant comparison. (p.2)

The experiences that influenced research participants' decisions about leaving school, as well as those that led them back to school via the Adult Education program in quest of a General Education Development (GED) diploma were revealed in their own words through face to face interviews (Appendix C). The researcher recorded student interview responses and created verbatim transcriptions of each conversation. Transcriptions were used as the primary data source for qualitative analysis. After transcribing response data for the first study participant the transcription was placed into

an Excel spreadsheet separated by each interview question. The researcher reviewed the initial participant's reply to each question and developed preliminary categories for response data. Broad category labels were added to the Excel spreadsheet in the column directly to the right of each transcribed response. This process continued until the researcher had categorized all response data for the first participant. Then the procedure was repeated for responses from each of the remaining study participants. As additional response data were added new broad categories emerged and were included in the coding process. When assigning data to a category was difficult or fit was unclear, the datum was denoted as miscellaneous to allow for uninterrupted coding with the understanding that miscellaneous data would be reexamined when the initial coding process had been completed. Following initial categorization of each participant's dialogue, the data were reorganized within the Excel spreadsheet according to broad categories that emerged. After further examination of the data, subcategories emerged and data coding was refined within the context of the broad categories. Subcategory labels were then added to the Excel spreadsheet. Once all data were coded, miscellaneous responses were reviewed for placement. Because coding had been refined through the creation of subcategories, the researcher was able to incorporate miscellaneous data into existing categories. In the few instances when an original category had to be adjusted to accommodate a bit of data, the researcher reviewed other data existing within the category to determine if they continued to fit into the revised category. Once all response data were placed under broad category and subcategory labels, the entire data base was scrutinized to ensure appropriate coding



had taken place for each of the data bits. Data were rearranged in the Excel spreadsheet and reviewed once more to ensure they were placed appropriately under the assigned code. Through systematic classification of response data broad themes emerged allowing the researcher to begin making sense of the data. Immersion into the words of study participants proved to be telling, as the researcher was able extract themes relative to the dropout phenomenon in Brevard County. It was these themes that offered insight into elements of elementary, middle and high schools that were least desirable for study participants, as well as the schooling processes of Brevard's public schools that conceivably created barriers for the dropouts participating in the study. In addition, these themes presented a glimpse into the personal circumstances of study participants, illustrating the attitudes, beliefs, challenges and obstacles that made completing their education in a traditional public school a struggle. Finally, study participants offered insight into the personal and social conditions that eventually led them back to school in search of a diploma.

### Population

The population for the study was comprised of all students who attended a Brevard public high school. From the population, two samples were drawn in order to conduct the quantitative and qualitative analysis needed for the study.

## Sample

Two convenience samples were used for chi square analysis. The first sample reflected students who attended Brevard public high schools between school years 2006-2007 and 2008-2009. The second sample, used for the qualitative constant comparison analysis portion of the study, consisted of former Brevard public high school students who enrolled in the General Education Development (GED) program during the 2009-2010 school year. The sample was delimited to students who were 18-23 years of age to avoid inclusion of minors which would necessitate acquiring parental consent for participation.

## Analysis

### Research Question and Hypothesis # 1

*What relationship existed between the ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?*

H<sub>0</sub>1: A relationship did not exist between ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon the students' ethnicity. The chi square statistic illustrated the influence of ethnicity on dropping out of school. Chi Tests of Independence required a minimum of five subjects in the sample for analysis purposes. Table 3 reflects the sample for Research Question 1. In order to meet

the assumptions of the test, Hawaiian Pacific and Indian students were removed from the data base for this portion of the analysis because these samples were too small to consider in the data analysis. Table 4 displays the crosstabulation of dropouts by ethnicity.

Table 3: Sample for Research Question 1

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Dropout * Ethnicity	25088	100.0%	0	.0%	25088	100.0%

Table 4: Dropout \* Ethnicity Crosstabulation

		Ethnicity					
		Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multi-ethnic	White	Total
Dropout	N						
	Count	539	3733	1972	762	17306	24312
	Expected Count	537.8	3827.8	2001.1	757.8	17187.4	24312.0
	% within Dropout	2.2%	15.4%	8.1%	3.1%	71.2%	100.0%
	% within Ethnicity	97.1%	94.5%	95.5%	97.4%	97.6%	96.9%
	% of Total	2.1%	14.9%	7.9%	3.0%	69.0%	96.9%
	Std. Residual	.1	-1.5	-.7	.2	.9	
Y	N						
	Count	16	217	93	20	430	776
	Expected Count	17.2	122.2	63.9	24.2	548.6	776.0
	% within Dropout	2.1%	28.0%	12.0%	2.6%	55.4%	100.0%
	% within Ethnicity	2.9%	5.5%	4.5%	2.6%	2.4%	3.1%
	% of Total	.1%	.9%	.4%	.1%	1.7%	3.1%
	Std. Residual	-.3	8.6	3.6	-.9	-5.1	
Total	N						
	Count	555	3950	2065	782	17736	25088
	Expected Count	555.0	3950.0	2065.0	782.0	17736.0	25088.0
	% within Dropout	2.2%	15.7%	8.2%	3.1%	70.7%	100.0%
	% of Total	2.2%	15.7%	8.2%	3.1%	70.7%	100.0%

Table 5 displays results for the Chi Square Test of Independence which was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending

upon the students' ethnicity. The chi square statistic calculated a comparison of the observed or actual frequencies of dropouts within each race/ethnicity to expected frequencies. Dropping out of school was statistically significantly relative to the ethnicity of students, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (4, N = 25,088) = 116.933,  $p < .000$ , Cramer's V = .068.

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests Dropout \* Ethnicity

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	116.933 <sup>a</sup>	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	103.484	4	.000
N of Valid Cases	25088		

a. 0 cells (0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 17.17.

Table 6: Effect Size Dropout \* Ethnicity

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.068	.000
	Cramer's V	.068	.000
	Contingency Coefficient	.068	.000
N of Valid Cases		25088	

The Cramer's V statistic (Table 6) indicated a small effect, suggesting that only about 7% of the variance among high school dropouts could be predicted by ethnicity or race, meaning that one could predict only with about a 7% accuracy rate which student would drop out based on his or her ethnic or racial origin. Because the chi square statistic was significant and because Seaman (2010) suggested proportional differences should be considered when the effect size is small, post-hoc testing was conducted to examine the differences in group proportions in detail. The study sample consisted of 25,088 students reflective of ethnic or racial subgroups that included: white (70.7%), black (15.7%),

Hispanic (8.2%), multi-racial (3.1%) and Asian (2.2%). Approximately 3% of the sample (776 students) dropped out of school. About 2% of those students were of Asian descent, 28% were black, 12% were Hispanic, about 3% were multi-racial and more than 55% were white. Percentages within the ethnic/racial subgroups were also determined. There were 539 Asian students within the study sample and about 3% of them (16 students) dropped out of school before completion. Of the 3,950 black students within the study sample 5.5% of them (217 students) dropped out of school. However, the expected count for black students dropping out of school was 122 students (SR = 8.6). About 5% (93 students) of the 2,065 Hispanic compared to an expected count of 64 (SR = 3.6) and 3% of the 782 multi-racial students in the study dropped out prior to earning their diplomas. Finally, of the 17,736 white students in the study sample about 2% (430 students) dropped out of school, compared to an expected count of 549 (SR = -5.1).

#### Research Question and Hypothesis # 2

*What relationship existed between the socioeconomic status of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?*

H<sub>0</sub>2: A relationship did not exist between the socioeconomic status (SES) of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon the students' socio-economic status as illustrated by the student's eligibility for the free and reduced lunch price program. Chi square in this instance showed how socio-economic status

(SES) influenced dropping out of school. For the purposes of this study, free and reduced lunch status was analyzed to illustrate the relationship between socio-economic status and dropping out of school. The phi statistic was also calculated to determine the strength of association between SES and dropping out of school. Note the sample for this analysis included the Pacific-Hawaiian and Indian students who were removed from the previous analysis. As a result, the study sample reflected a total of 25,168 students (Table 7).

Table 8 shows the crosstabulation of dropouts by participation in the free and reduced lunch program.

Table 7: Sample for Research Question #2

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Dropout * Lunch Prog.	25168	100.0%	0	.0%	25168	100.0%

Table 8: Dropout \* Free or Reduced Lunch Program Crosstabulation

			Free and Reduced Lunch		
			N	Y	Total
Dropout	N	Count	24163	228	24391
		Expected Count	24167.1	223.9	24391.0
		% within Dropout	99.1%	.9%	100.0%
		% within Lunch Prog.	96.9%	98.7%	96.9%
Y		Count	774	3	777
		Expected Count	769.9	7.1	777.0
		% within Dropout	99.6%	.4%	100.0%
		% within Lunch Prog.	3.1%	1.3%	3.1%
Total		Count	24937	231	25168
		Expected Count	24937.0	231.0	25168.0
		% within Dropout	99.1%	.9%	100.0%
		% within Lunch Prog.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 9 displays the Chi Square results. Dropping out of school was not statistically significantly relative to the student's socio-economic status (SES), Pearson  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 25,168) = 2.493,  $p > .05$ ,  $\phi = -.01$ . The phi statistic indicated little or no association between SES and dropping out of school (Table 10).

Table 9: Chi-Square Tests Dropout \*Free and Reduced Lunch Program

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.493 <sup>a</sup>	1	.114		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	1.926	1	.165		
Likelihood Ratio	3.166	1	.075		
Fisher's Exact Test				.127	.071
N of Valid Cases	25168				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.13.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 10: Effect Size Dropout \* Free and Reduced Lunch Program

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	-.010	.114
	Cramer's V	.010	.114
N of Valid Cases	25168		

The Chi Square statistic indicated there was no association between socioeconomic status and dropping out of school. Of the 25,168 students in the study sample, less than 1% of study participants (231 students) qualified for free and reduced lunch. Of those 231 students, only three dropped out of school. These three students reflected only 1.3% of the sample being served by the free and reduced lunch program and represented only .4% of the total dropout sample. The minute effect indicated by phi suggested the experimental group (SES) performed on the average, the same as the

control group (non-SES). Because statistical significance was not found, post hoc tests were not conducted.

Research Question and Hypothesis # 3

*What relationship existed between student enrollment in an exceptional education program in the Brevard County public schools and dropping out of high school?*

H<sub>0</sub>3: A relationship did not exist between Brevard student enrollment in an exceptional education program and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon their being served in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program. The phi statistic was also calculated to determine the strength of association between ESE participation and dropping out of school. Tables 11 and 12 reflect the sample and crosstabulation of ESE by dropout status for Research Question 3.

Table 11: Sample for Research Question #3

	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Dropout * ESEYN	25168	100.0%	0	.0%	25168	100.0%



Table 12: Dropout \* ESE Crosstabulation

		ESEYN			
		N	Y	Total	
Dropout	N	Count	20763	3628	24391
		Expected Count	20636.6	3754.4	24391.0
		% within Dropout	85.1%	14.9%	100.0%
		% within ESEYN	97.5%	93.6%	96.9%
		Std. Residual	.9	-2.1	
Y		Count	531	246	777
		Expected Count	657.4	119.6	777.0
		% within Dropout	68.3%	31.7%	100.0%
		% within ESEYN	2.5%	6.4%	3.1%
		Std. Residual	-4.9	11.6	
Total		Count	21294	3874	25168
		Expected Count	21294.0	3874.0	25168.0
		% within Dropout	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%
		% within ESEYN	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi Square results were presented in Table 13. Dropping out of school was statistically significant relative to student participation in an ESE program, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 25,168) = 162.919,  $p < .001$ ,  $\phi = .080$ . The phi statistic indicated a small to effect (Table 14).

Table 13: Chi-Square Tests Dropout \* ESE

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	162.919 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	161.632	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	133.127	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	25168				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 119.60.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 14: Effect Size Dropout \* ESE

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.080	.000
	Cramer's V	.080	.000
N of Valid Cases		25168	

Chi Square signified the relationship between students being served in the ESE program and dropping out of school was significant, however the small effect indicated a weak relationship suggesting the experimental group (ESE) dropped out with nearly the same frequency as the control group (non-ESE). About 8% of the variance in dropping out of school could be predicted by a student's participation in an ESE program.

However, further examination of the standardized residual indicated there were significant differences between the observed data and expected counts for the ESE group, explaining why significance was found. Within the sample 15.4% of the students enrolled in a Brevard public high school were served in an ESE program other than gifted. However, nearly 32% of the 777 students who dropped out of school were served in an ESE program. Of the 3,874 students within the study sample served in an ESE program, 246 of them dropped out of school, while the expected count was about 120 (SR = 11.6). From the sample, 3628 students served in the ESE program stayed in school, yet the expected count was 3754 students (SR = -2.1). About 6% of Brevard's ESE students within the study sample dropped out prior to earning their diplomas, compared with 2.5% of the non-ESE sample.

Research Question and Hypothesis # 4

*What relationship existed between Brevard students as English Language Learners and their dropping out of high school?*

H<sub>0</sub>4: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students who were served in an ESOL program and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon whether or not English was the primary language spoken in the home. The phi statistic was also calculated to determine the strength of association between identification as English Language Learners (ELL) and dropping out of school. Tables 15 and 16 reflect the sample and crosstabulation for Research Question 4.

Table 15: Sample for Research Question #4

	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Dropout * ELLYN	25166	100.0%	0	.0%	25166	100.0%

Table 16: Dropout \* ELL Program Participation Crosstabulation

		ELLYN		Total	
		N	Y		
Dropout	N	Count	23513	876	24389
		Expected count	23472.2	916.8	24389.0
		% within Dropout	96.4%	3.6%	100.0%
		% within ELL Prog.	97.1%	92.6%	96.9%
		Std. Residual	.3	-1.5	
Y		Count	707	70	777
		Expected count	747.8	29.2	777.0
		% within Dropout	91.0%	9.0%	100.0%
		% within ELL Prog.	2.9%	7.4%	3.1%
		Std. Residual	-1.3	7.5	
Total		Count	24220	946	25166
		Expected count	24220.0	946.0	25166.0
		% within Dropout	96.2%	3.8%	100.0%
		% within ELL Prog.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi Square results are displayed in Table 17. Dropping out of school was statistically significant relative to a student's home language, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 25,168) = 61.083,  $p < .001$ ,  $\phi = .049$ . The phi statistic indicated a small effect (Table 18). Only about 5% of the variance in dropping out of school could be predicted by a student's participation in an ELL program.

Table 17: Chi-Square Tests Dropout \* ELL Program participation

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	61.083 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	59.594	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	44.964	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	25166				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 29.21.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 18: Effect Size Dropout \* ELL Program Participation

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.049	.000
	Cramer's V	.049	.000
N of Valid Cases		25166	

The Chi Square statistic indicated a statistically significant relationship existed between ELL and dropping out of school, however the effect size indicated by phi suggested the experimental group (ELL) dropped out with nearly the same frequency as the control group (non-ELL). About 5% of the variance in dropping out of school could be predicted by a student's participation in an ELL program.

However, further examination of the standardized residual reflected significant differences between the observed data and expected counts for the ELL group. Approximately 4% (946 students) of the study participants were identified as ELL, yet 9% of the 777 students from the sample who dropped out of school were identified as ELL students. Further, more than 7% of Brevard's ELL population within the sample left school prior to earning their diplomas, compared to only 2.9% of their non-ELL peers. While the expected count for ELL students who would drop out of school was about 29, the actual number of students who dropped out was significantly higher at 70 (SR = 7.5).

Research Question and Hypothesis # 5

*What relationship existed between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school?*

H<sub>05</sub>: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school.

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were defined in this section to facilitate reader understanding (FLDOE, 2009):

- “GCE” indicated the student was promoted to a higher grade without meeting expected levels of performance for pupil progression
- “Remaining” indicated those students who chose to remain in school for one or more years in an attempt to remedy academic deficiencies. General education students had the option to stay one additional year. Students in the Exceptional Student Education program were permitted to stay until age 22.
- “Not Enrolled” identified students who were no longer enrolled in the K-12 program in the school district at the end of the school year. Students who received a diploma, certificate of completion or who earned a diploma or certificate but withdrew prior to receiving them were not included in this category.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon whether or not the student was retained in high school. The Cramer’s V statistic was also calculated to determine the strength of association between retention and dropping out of school. After calculating the chi square statistic, the “Remaining” cell in the crosstabulation contained less than the minimum expected count; therefore students who chose to remain in school

for one or more years in an attempt to remedy academic deficiencies were removed from the data base in order to meet the assumptions of the chi square test. The sample size for Research Question 5 is reflected in Table 19.

Table 19: Sample for Research Question #5

	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Dropout * Progression	25130	100.0%	0	.0%	25130	100.0%

Table 20: Dropout \* Progression Crosstabulation

	N	Count	Progression				Total	
			GCE	Not Enrolled	Promoted	Retained		
Dropout		1144	215	5853	16130	1015	24357	
		Expected Count	1144.7	212.3	6100.4	15860.6	1039.0	24357.0
		% within Dropout	4.7%	.9%	24.0%	66.2%	4.2%	100.0%
		% within Progression	96.9%	98.2%	93.0%	98.6%	94.7%	96.9%
		Std. Residual	.0	.2	-3.2	2.1	-.7	
Y		37	4	441	234	57	773	
		Expected Count	36.3	6.7	193.6	503.4	33.0	773.0
		% within Dropout	4.8%	.5%	57.1%	30.3%	7.4%	100.0%
		% within Progression	3.1%	1.8%	7.0%	1.4%	5.3%	3.1%
		Std. Residual	.1	-1.1	17.8	-12.0	4.2	
Total		Count	1181	219	6294	16364	1072	25130
		Expected Count	1181.0	219.0	6294.0	16364.0	1072.0	25130.0
		% within Dropout	4.7%	.9%	25.0%	65.1%	4.3%	100.0%
		% within Progression	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The Chi Square results are displayed in Table 21. Dropping out of school was statistically significantly relative to the type of promotion (Good Cause Exemption,

remaining, not enrolled, promoted or retained) granted the student at the end of the school year, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (4, N = 25,130) = 494.101,  $p < .001$ , Cramer's V = .140.

Cramer's V suggested a small to moderate relationship existed between the progression code a student received and dropping out of school (Table 22). Cramer's V indicated that 14% of the variance in dropouts could be predicted by the type of progression code the student received at the end of the school year.

Table 21: Chi-Square Tests Dropout \* Progression

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	494.101	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	442.508	4	.000
N of Valid Cases	25130		

a. 0 cells (0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.74.

Table 22: Effect Size Dropout \* Progression

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.140	.000
	Cramer's V	.140	.000
N of Valid Cases		25130	

Post-hoc testing was conducted to examine differences in proportion more closely. Table 20 reflects counts and percentages of dropouts and non-dropouts by progression code. Approximately 3% (777 students) of the sample dropped out of school. Slightly over 7% of the students who dropped out of school (57 students) were retained sometime during high school within the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 school years. About 30% of the students who dropped out would have been promoted to the next



grade and about 1% (4 students) would have received a Good Cause Exemption (GCE) from mandatory retention, meaning they would have moved to the next grade level. A GCE indicated the student had not met the graduation requirement to achieve a passing score on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), yet provisions in Brevard Student Progression policy allowed them to be promoted based on other criteria including classroom performance (Brevard Public Schools, 2006). To more accurately reflect the relationship between retention and dropping out of school, the standardized residual was calculated and analyzed. The standardized residual illustrated the standard deviation between expected and observed counts. Of the students who were retained sometime during their high school years, 57 of them dropped out of school compared to an expected count of 33 (SR = 4.2). The data exposed a significant number of students who were not enrolled at the end of the year. Because they left before the end of the year these students did not receive a progression code. Of the 6294 students who were not enrolled at the end of the year, 441 of them dropped out of school compared with an expected count of about 194 (SR = 17.8). The 441 students represented slightly more than 57% of the total dropout sample. The data show that students who were retained or who left school prior to the end of the year dropped out in higher proportions than peers who successfully moved to the next grade level through promotion or GCE.

#### Research Question and Hypothesis # 6

*What relationship existed between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?*

H<sub>0</sub>6: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon the student's grade level. The sample size for Research Question 6 is reflected in Table 23.

Crosstabulation results for the study sample are displayed in Table 24.

Table 23: Sample for Research Question #6

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Dropout * Grade	25166	100.0%	0	.0%	25166	100.0%

Table 24: Dropout \* Grade Crosstabulation

		Grade				Total
		09	10	11	12	
Dropout	N Count	4595	2866	2249	14679	24389
	Expected Count	4590.7	2920.0	2312.3	14565.9	24389.0
	% within Dropout	18.8%	11.8%	9.2%	60.2%	100.0%
	% within Grade	97.0%	95.1%	94.3%	97.7%	96.9%
	Std. Residual	.1	-1.0	-1.3	.9	
	Y Count	142	147	137	351	777
	Expected Count	146.3	93.0	73.7	464.1	777.0
	% within Dropout	18.3%	18.9%	17.6%	45.2%	100.0%
	% within Grade	3.0%	4.9%	5.7%	2.3%	3.1%
	Std. Residual	-.4	5.6	7.4	-5.2	
Total	Count	4737	3013	2386	15030	25166
	Expected Count	4737.0	3013.0	2386.0	15030.0	25166.0
	% within Dropout	18.8%	12.0%	9.5%	59.7%	100.0%
	% within Grade	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The Chi Square results for Research Question 6, displayed in Table 25, indicated dropping out of school was statistically significant relative to the grade level of students,  $\text{Pearson } \chi^2 (5, N = 25,166) = 117.041, p < .000, \text{Cramer's } V = .068.$

Table 25: Chi-Square Tests Dropout \* Grade

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	117.041a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	103.758	3	.000
N of Valid Cases	25166		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 73.67.

Table 26: Effect Sizes Dropout \* Grade

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.068	.000
	Cramer's V	.068	.000
N of Valid Cases		25166	

While the Cramer's V statistic reflected a small positive effect (Table 26), further examination of the proportions was essential due to the statistically significant findings relative to chi square. During the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years approximately 45% (351 students) of the 777 students in the sample who dropped out of school did so during their senior year. It is important to note however that 60% of the study sample was made up of seniors due to non-duplication of students over the three year period. Fewer students in relatively equal percentages dropped out during their freshman (18%), sophomore (19%) and junior (18%) years. About 6% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students and nearly 5% of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students dropped out of school compared with 3%

of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and slightly over 2% of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. The percent of dropouts at 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades was more than double the percentage of dropouts who were in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. While in their 10<sup>th</sup> grade of high school, 147 students dropped out, yet a normal distribution would have resulted in only 93 students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade would have dropped out of school (SR = 5.6). Within the sample, 137 students dropped out of school while in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, compared with an expected dropout count of approximately 74 (SR = 7.4).

#### Research Question # 7

*What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, were the most significant reasons given for dropping out of high school?*

Due to the qualitative nature of Research Question #7, a hypothesis was not developed.

#### Quantitative Analysis of Exit Survey Responses

In order to analyze the results of Student Exit Survey responses, frequency tables were generated using SPSS. Frequency tables facilitated identification of the primary or most significant reasons students gave for dropping out of school based on survey responses. The Student Exit Survey asked that respondents to also identify a secondary reason for leaving school. Responses for these two questions are reflected in Table 27, Primary Reason for Dropping Out and Table 28, Secondary Reason for Dropping Out.

Table 27: Primary Reason for Dropping Out

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Classes uninteresting/boring	13	6.0	6.0	6.0
N =216	Missed too many days	66	30.6	30.6	36.6
	Did not like	24	11.1	11.1	47.7
	Failing	59	27.3	27.3	75.0
	Illness	7	3.2	3.2	78.2
	Parent/pregnancy	6	2.8	2.8	81.0
	Feeling of not belonging	3	1.4	1.4	82.4
	Suspended	4	1.9	1.9	84.3
	Expelled	2	.9	.9	85.2
	Student-teacher conflict	2	.9	.9	86.1
	Employment	2	.9	.9	87.0
	Failed FCAT	4	1.9	1.9	88.9
	Intimidated/threatened/bullied	1	.5	.5	89.4
	Migrant	1	.5	.5	89.8
	Family Problems	8	3.7	3.7	93.5
	Other	14	6.5	6.5	100.0
Total		216	100.0	100.0	

Student Exit Survey (2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009). Retrieved from data management system (2010).

Over a three year period, 216 dropouts completed the Student Exit Survey.

Missing too many days of school was the most common primary reason students gave for dropping out of school; nearly 31% of Exit Survey respondents (66 students) indicated they missed too many days of school to keep up with academics. Failing was the second most common primary reason for dropping out of school, with more than 27% (59 students) who reported failing in school as the main reason for leaving. The third most frequent reason students left was attributed to disliking school.

Table 28: Secondary Reason for Dropping Out

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid N = 216	Classes uninteresting/boring	11	5.1	5.1	5.1
	Missed too many days	34	15.7	15.7	20.8
	Did not like school	10	4.6	4.6	25.5
	Failing	23	10.6	10.6	36.1
	Illness	8	3.7	3.7	39.8
	Parent/pregnancy	2	.9	.9	40.7
	Feeling of not belonging	2	.9	.9	41.7
	Suspended	3	1.4	1.4	43.1
	Expelled	1	.5	.5	43.5
	Student-teacher conflict	4	1.9	1.9	45.4
	Employment	3	1.4	1.4	46.8
	Friends dropped out	1	.5	.5	47.2
	Failed FCAT	1	.5	.5	47.7
	Intimidated/threatened/bullied	2	.9	.9	48.6
	Family Problems	10	4.6	4.6	53.2
	Other	6	2.8	2.8	56.0
	Non applicable	95	44.0	44.0	100.0
Total	216	100.0	100.0		

Student Exit Survey (2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009). Retrieved from data management system (2009).

Ninety-nine respondents (44%) indicated there was no secondary reason for leaving school. However, of those who identified a secondary contributing factor for their decision to leave, nearly 16% (34 students) reported they missed too many days of school in order to keep up with their studies.

#### Qualitative Analysis of One-on-One Interview Responses

In order to provide a structure for discussion, interview responses were grouped to reflect answers to research questions within the study. The following responses from the Interview Questionnaire (Appendix D) were analyzed to answer research question 7:

- Why did you drop out of school?
- What other options were available to you at the time you decided to leave school?
- Discuss your educational experiences in elementary school.
- Discuss your educational experiences in middle school.
- Discuss your educational experiences in high school.
- Were you ever retained, and if so, how many times and in what grade(s)?
- What changes would you suggest to improve your situation?
- If you had it to do over again, would you drop out of school? Why or why not?
- Is there anything more you would like to say about dropping out of school?

For each of the study participants it was a combination of school related and personal challenges that resulted in a decision to leave their Brevard public school prior to earning a high school diploma. The factors that influenced the participant's decision to leave were categorized as academic challenges, school-related challenges, personal challenges and home environments.

#### Academic Challenges

While participants typically had no recollection of academic challenges while in elementary school, by the time they were in high school participants consistently reported making poor grades. Respondents, in general, recalled that school failure happened gradually. Typically, participants reported academic failure occurred as a result of

academic, behavioral and family-related challenges. However, participants also indicated they could not or did not receive sufficient help to support learning.

Conversations about their elementary schooling ranged from participants sharing specific events and activities about their elementary experiences to those who said they barely remembered anything about elementary school. Generally, participants related positive experiences and feelings about elementary school. They described nice elementary teachers who seemed to care about their success and who tried to help them.

One Hispanic male, age 19, summed up elementary school as follows:

Well, elementary school I felt like the teachers in elementary school are always pretty good, you know, like they always seemed to be nice to me and helped me. You know, I did pretty good in elementary school...elementary learning just kind of always came easy to me and I just felt like the teachers you know are doing a good job of presenting things in different ways and stuff, you know. Grades are good in elementary school. I used to make As and Bs all the time. I can't remember exactly. It seemed like the way that they uh...it is just the way that they, it almost seemed like they care more in elementary school sometimes, you know? It does. Maybe math was a challenge, but teachers helped me. (Participant Hm11, 2010)

For participants that recalled academic difficulties during their elementary years, they typically could not recall specific struggles, but could pinpoint the year when they started having academic trouble in school. However, Participant WM7 remembered not being able to read well in third grade. This particular participant reported severe family challenges such as drug, alcohol and physical abuse that negatively impacted learning. Another was home schooled during the elementary years and indicated his mom left him on his own to learn the academic content. The remaining two participants related trouble



learning from the very early elementary years, and could recall nothing teachers did to intervene. As Participant Bf1, a black female, age 23 put it:

It started off pretty easy... I'll say about 4th grade when I really started realizing okay, well maybe they are moving a lot quicker than you are. I have to be a lot quicker going to 5th grade. Because I believe that at that time I believe they had 5th and 6th or 6th grade was becoming middle school at that point or something like that. I'm not sure. Grades? They are pretty, back then it was like the Ss and the Ns and it was pretty okay. I'd say my grades probably started, when you started realizing, okay you're not making As, Bs, was 5th grade, 6th grade...I don't know. I haven't had the patience back then just me being, not even hyperactive, but so self-conscious with, okay you don't know this, or you don't know that and I could tell, you know. How will that look with so many students around, um? You know, like I'm the only one that doesn't know, so I never said anything so I just let the teachers talk and if I didn't know it I never was one to raise the hand and say, can I have help? (2010)

Once in middle school, more participants chronicled academic difficulties and poor grades; although there were those who indicated they made good grades throughout middle school. However, ParticipantWf5, a white 18 year old female indicated she did not know how she earned them and recalled,

Middle school was fun. I had good grades, but I don't know how. I got referrals every day...I was being mean to others and would throw stuff or not listen to the teacher and just be loud or leave school. (2010)

Participants remembered being motivated by special school programs such as ROPES, a challenging maze of beams and cables designed to develop confidence in students enrolled in the program (Dunn, B. personal conversation, August 9, 2010), or computer-based classes; others credited sports, positive interactions with teachers, extra-curricular activities and friends with motivating them to do well in school. While study participants indicated they liked middle school and thought it was fun, it appeared to be a pivotal year

for them. The beginnings of negative attitudes towards school and/or teachers, acting out, drug use and placing greater importance on friendships than school performance was evidenced during the interviews. Generally there appeared to be less parental involvement and monitoring of school performance. Developing friendships was cited as one of the most positive elements of their middle school experience. Ironically, it was their developing friendships and trying to fit in that contributed to poor academic performance, negative attitudes and disruptive behaviors relative to school. Participant Wm16, a 22-year old white male recalled:

But then when I started meeting people and started getting more popular with the bad crowd, that's when I... you know, skipping school, leaving, not showing up to school. I started out with Bs and Cs and then kind of made it down to Ds and Fs... Seriously, that's what my whole world revolved around was trying to either be really popular and have nice clothes, or just act a fool so everybody would laugh at you all the time. (2010)

By the time they reached high school, study participants commonly reported they were failing school and/or did not have enough credits to graduate. For some, academic failure was the end result of personal hardships over which the participant had no control; for others failure led the participant to make problematic choices leading to further failure and their eventual decision to leave school. Study Participant Bf2, a black 21-year-old female transferring from a private school reported various challenges during her high school experience:

I told my mom to transfer me to a public school so I could see a better scenery ... I wanted to try it and when I got there I met a lot of people, got in that crowd, and fell behind. I didn't know the work was going to be that hard, but it turned out to be that hard with me having a learning disability, you know. I couldn't really

finish all my work, you know, I was just not understanding, comprehending it well, so I felt like, you know, I couldn't do it, or whatever, so I was just like, got to the point where I dropped out and came to this school right here, Adult Ed. (High school) it was rough, I had like Fs, Ds. Um, no (additional help with academics)... More worried about having fun; couldn't play sports because of grades; could not do anything extra. (2010)

Participants ranged from qualifying for the Exceptional Student Education Program with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to those who said they were diagnosed with attention disorders which contributed to their struggles in school and finally to students who were consistently served in within the general education program. In general, none of the study participants reported they received the help they needed in order to do well in school. Insufficient assistance was reported more frequently when reflecting on secondary school experiences rather than elementary experiences. When discussing their academic struggles, blame typically was placed, not on teachers or the school, but on the participant's own inability to learn. In one instance a study participant relayed a discussion with a favored teacher in which she told the student she did not know how to help him. Participant Wm7, a 21-year old white male conveyed:

When I was in [name removed] High School I had a teacher named [name removed] and she was my math teacher, and there is one time where she was trying to teach me and, you know, every single teacher would try to teach me, but they just couldn't. I went up to Mrs. [name removed] one day... and I was asking her can you show me what's going on. Can you please help me? She tried everything, like she was sitting there with me about a good hour trying to teach me and she was like, 'look [name removed] it's not you, it's me. I can't teach you; I don't know how'. She said, 'it's not your fault, it's the lack of, it's my lack of um experience and I'm sorry but I don't know how to teach you.' So, it was that and I have a learning disability and I have ADHD. I'm not blaming my problems on that; it's just that you know... I don't know it just seems like every school I go to doesn't help that much. They did put me in special classes at [name

removed] and I was doing fairly okay, at least like somewhat understanding, but not fully. So, I don't know, I mean, I wasn't really learning anything. Nobody could really teach me and here it's practically the same thing. It's not their fault, but it's the fact that there's so many kids and there's, she doesn't have enough time. (2009)

Retention. Retention was commonplace among the students who participated in the qualitative portion of the study. Retention during the elementary years occurred due to failure or was done at their parent's request. Occasionally students who reported retention in middle school were also retained during their elementary school experience. Additionally, participants reported being retained in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of high school. Herlihy (2007) maintained disproportionate numbers of students retained in 9<sup>th</sup> grade dropped out of school. By the time they made the decision to leave high school, as a rule participants had been retained at least once within their elementary, middle and/or high school experiences. Students who indicated they were facing a potential retention at the time they decided to drop out of school reported that the anticipated retention propelled them to leave.

While academic challenges were cited frequently by study participants, other challenges compounded the academic issues faced by former Brevard students who participated in the study. Aside from academic failure, participants made the final decision to drop out for non-academic school-related challenges, personal challenges and challenges created by the home environment.

### School-Related Challenges

Study participants identified school-related barriers to their school success. These barriers were categorized as either school structures or school support.

School Structures. School policies and structures played a role in decisions to leave school before earning a high school diploma. Boring classes, a lack of school support systems, attitudes of school staff, school rules, inadequate guidance and inability to participate in sports left them frustrated and unhappy at school. Students cited frustration over expulsion, restrictive policies and boredom. Participant Bm8, a 19-year-old black male, indicated he was bored and did not like school. This particular participant made a point of saying teachers were too concerned about the dress code and unimportant behavior infractions like chewing gum, rather than focusing on interesting instruction. He, among others, cited boredom, school policies and lack of academic assistance as reasons they chose to leave school. Participants also indicated they were unable to pass the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and left high school with a Certificate of Completion instead of a high school diploma. Participant Wf17, a white 19-year-old female revealed:

I actually had a blast in high school. The four years I would like to go back to. I was an average student. I had fun, but it's the FCAT that held me back, so that's why I'm here because you can't get into any college with a Certificate of Completion. (2010).

Another student who did not pass FCAT said he wanted to stay in school, but had turned 18 and was told he would have to leave at the end of the year.

Study participants reported discouragement and frustration upon entering Brevard from out of state or from private high schools. Upon enrolling in Brevard they found they lacked enough credits to be placed at the appropriate grade level due to Brevard's rigorous high school requirements. In instances where students lacked sufficient credits to graduate with their cohort, participants said they had few choices other than entering Adult Education.

My other choices are to come here and get my GED because there were really no other choices when I left private school and my credits were very low, so my only choice was to come here and get my GED. (Participant Bf2, 2010)

When I left I didn't have no choice, for two reasons. I came down here; I mean it's kind of different from [name removed] from here. They told me when I showed up I had zero credits from last year so you don't have no way to pass. So they told me I was basically here for nothing. I made the decision to go; I mean they basically told me I was here for nothing. I had no choice. When I came back from Christmas break they told me ... they withdrew me because I didn't have any credits. And when I was there I did good, I got most of my credits there, I had more credits than zero, I'll tell you that. No pressures, you know what I'm saying? I was there for fun; you know what I'm saying? I was there to socialize over there. I felt like that's where my escape was, socializing. I wasn't really there for really much of an education. I didn't take it serious and then I realized what was going on and it was kind of too late to change. (Participant Wm6, 2010)

The physical layout of the campus presented challenges to Participant Hm14 who indicated his classes were located at extreme ends of the high school facility. Routinely being late to class resulted in frequent behavioral referrals. Referrals resulted, in his opinion, in unfair assignments to Saturday School and out of school suspensions.

A recurring theme for both male and female study participants was a desire to participate in school sports, but an ineligibility to participate in such activities due to poor

grades. Sports and related activities were the sources of pride and enthusiasm for school during the middle and high school years, and their inability to participate removed an enjoyable pursuit which might have led them to stay in school. While none indicated that an inability to participate in sports impacted their grades, participants pointed to sports as a motivating factor for doing well in school, mentioning having to keep grades up to participate. After an accident left him unable to play, one participant stated his attitude towards school and his grades began to suffer.

School Support System. Study participants implied that a culture absent of support and caring for students contributed to school failure. They expressed disillusionment when teachers and guidance counselors failed to intervene at the first sign of academic deficiency. Speculation that school personnel such as teachers, counselors and administrators were either unaware or unconcerned about student success and welfare was articulated repeatedly.

It was always just okay, let's just get rid of her instead of saying okay why can't you sit still, why can't you? I didn't get that. Maybe if that was offered I could have stuck around a lot longer. (Participant Bf1, 2010)

I mean, at high school, the counselor was one of the main ones that told me I have to leave, one of the counselors. Instead of trying to figure out a way to help me stay in school, they told me as soon as I turned 19 I *had* to leave, so, it didn't really seem like they wanted to help do anything . . . (Participant Wm3, 2009)

The teachers really didn't care and they were all [expletive deleted] all the time. Pardon me, they were all mad all the time, I mean they treated me like I was stupid... If you were just in there they tell you what to do and homework – they give you stuff to do or you need to know and they give you an F on it and then it puts you even further back because you didn't know it. It's, I mean, it's stupid. How do they expect you to do the homework and you don't even know the stuff

you're doing because they don't bother to teach you it? ... Counselors didn't care. (Participant Hm4, 2009)

... what they did is that they called HRS. You know HRS and they have a social worker come out, asked me a bunch of questions, stuff like that, and I just think the School Board should have kept it more confidential, kind of thing. I mean my mom obviously knew it was me and she got really mad once HRS like left, like she just beat the crap out of me... I went to school, you know and I told the guidance counselor what happened. She sent me to the nurse and the nurse made me strip and stuff and, you know and so, like the bruises and you know and stuff... and they had to report it and stuff like that, so... I know HRS, like they could keep in confidential when it's a child involved with a parent.... (Participant Wf13, 2010)

According to study participants, few educators noticed or responded to the path of gradual disengagement and academic failure that led to their leaving school before earning their high school diploma. Indeed, in many cases participants said no one at the school seemed willing to acknowledge or take into account the academic and/or personal challenges they faced, and therefore few attempts were made to intervene in an effort to alter the student's course. "I never really went to my counselor and I've never really got called in there. I think I talked to her once, but I don't really remember what we talked about." (Participant Wf5, 2010). In fact, no one tried to change the minds of students when they approached school officials about leaving school. When asked what other options were available to him Participant Bm8 replied, "Leave and go to work, coming here. No one tried to change my mind. I let them know," (2010). Out on his own with a full-time job, Participant Hm11, a 19-year-old Hispanic male, stated:

Teachers could be more understanding, giving me more leniency with my homework... If they just focused more of the learning and work in the actual class instead of bringing it all home with you, that would be great thing. We



already spend 8 hrs. in school, why do you need to spend the whole entire evening doing homework? (2009)

In the absence of guidance, students were left on their own to unearth alternatives and options available to them. Participant Wf17 who had not passed the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) stated that teachers or counselors should have alerted her concerning other academic choices before it was too late to act on options other than leaving high school:

Um, the only other choice that you have is to either pass the FCAT or take the ACT. They really didn't mention the ACT till it was like my 12th grade year and taking tests makes me really nervous, so it would have to take me a couple times to actually pass it. (2009)

### Personal Challenges

Study participants spoke openly about personal barriers to their school success. Personal challenges were discussed under behavior, disengagement and self-confidence subcategories.

Behavior. When asked about their behavior choices and whether they followed school rules, nearly all participants reported some type of behavior concern. Responses ranged from reporting a few minor behavior issues to being expelled for drugs and/or fighting. Students participating in the study reported having only minor infractions. Study participants suggested that behaviors such as using cell phones/texting, dress code violations, talking in class or chewing gum were considered insignificant. More severe

infractions reported by participants included being late to class, skipping class or acting in ways that were disrespectful to teachers and/or other students. In extreme cases, significant behavior problems such as fighting and involvement with drugs resulted in school suspensions or expulsions. Participant Hm14, a 19-year-old Hispanic male who was placed on probation for drug related charges explained:

Um freshman year I found it pretty straight and then when I got into, like a bunch of stuff happened and I ended up going to New York and took high school in New York and came back in 6 months and went to - actually I went to three high schools... It was after 9th grade that my grades started dropping... It was great when I first started like before everything started going downhill. I was getting along with everybody, you know. Just doing schoolwork, minding my own business, doing whatever a 14 year old does, a 15 year-old does. Just learning and you know all the other stuff that happened in my life. Personal. Deaths in the family and lots of other [expletive deleted]. (2010)

Fighting in school, drug use and arrests resulted in suspensions and expulsions from school. Ensuing absences, missing lessons and falling behind with studies eventually led to school failure. During the interview process it was impossible to discern if behavior issues were the cause of academic failure, however, there was no doubt that most participants who reported irresponsible or disruptive behaviors suffered academically.

Disengagement. Absenteeism, being tardy to school, concentrating on friendships rather than academic performance and lack of focus on their studies portrayed study participants' gradual disengagement from school. When asked what caused them to drop out of school, participants initially responded they left because they were failing in school. However, their conversations revealed that lack of focus and motivation,

preoccupation with friends and skipping school or classes contributed significantly to their academic difficulties. Only female study participants reported cutting classes and/or skipping school as a causative factor to school failure. Rather than attend school regularly, participants chose to spend time with boyfriends who were no longer in school or staying out late and partying which made it difficult for them to awaken in the morning and get to school on time. Instead they chose to sleep in and report to school late or not at all. Their absenteeism eventually led them to fail courses and they lacked the credits necessary to graduate. Participants admitted that school had not been as important to them as relationships were. Along with excessive focus on personal boy-girl relationships, trying to make friends and fitting in with peers sometimes prompted them to act in ways that resulted in being labeled as trouble-makers. Their actions, intended to gain acceptance, eventually led to disinterest in learning and academic success.

Self-Confidence. Lacked the self-confidence necessary to perform optimally in school resulted in participants decision to leave high school. Participant Bf1, an outgoing black 23-year old female, attributed her lack of confidence to being placed on an individualized education plan (IEP) and being served in special education classes while in high school. She conveyed feelings of embarrassment at friends witnessing her enter special education classrooms and consequently acted out in order to be removed from the class. Participant Am12, a reserved 19-year-old Asian male reported being placed in speech class during the elementary years to improve articulation. When in middle or high school, he was placed on an individualized education plan (IEP) for learning disabilities.

Additionally he stated he lacked concentration while in school, explaining he had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He reported performing well in middle school while on medication. However, once off medication he started having academic difficulties and became insecure and uncomfortable at school, “I don’t know, just couldn’t take it anymore. I didn’t like it; didn’t feel comfortable, just kind of paranoid” (2010).

### Home Environment

An overarching theme that emerged through the interview process is that these students lacked help and support from their home environments. Student success suffered from parents’ inability or unwillingness to help and support them schooling. Abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, impoverishment, mobility, death of parents and caring for young children contributed to academic failure according to study participants. Many of the interviewees talked about home environments that simply were not conducive to learning.

Family Structures. Various family configurations were discussed by study participants. Those living with both parents were in the minority. Those that no longer lived with both parents lived with their mother and a stepfather, their mothers, with a member of the extended family such as a grandmother, aunt or uncle and in some cases participants lived with someone other than family, either they lived in the home of a friend or were placed in foster care.

Education Level of the Parents. Within the face-to-face interview session, participants were asked to discuss the educational level attained by parents and siblings. Responses ranged from parents who did not graduate to those earning Bachelor's degrees. Table 29 illustrates the level of parental academic achievement of qualitative study participants.

Table 29: Educational Attainment of Parents

		Did Not Graduate	GED Diploma	High School Diploma	High School & Industry Certification	Some College	Bachelor's Degree	Did Not Know
N=17	Mother	2	1	8	0	3	1	2
	Father	2	2	6	1	2	0	4

Study Interview Questionnaire (2009-2010)

Of the 17 participants in this study, only six reported both parents having graduated from high school. Participant Bf1 recognized that her mother's lack of education may have contributed to her own academic failure:

She wasn't educated, she always had to work and at that point, when I'm getting to that age, when I know, okay, my mom had to start doing this 'cause she start having kids. I don't have kids, but I was afraid to say, well okay, well I'm losing my education. I need to leave work to help myself and seeing.... So I don't fall into a depression or anything, by just working, working, working. Um, maybe just a better, not a better mother, not a better family, just I don't know... if my family was a little more educated it would have helped a lot, honestly. (2010)

Poverty. Generally, study respondents were unable to report with certainty about their family income. However, Participant Bf1, a black female aged 23, stated the family was on food stamps while Participant Wf5 mentioned that her stepfather worked at NASA, further clarifying that they did not have any financial problems. Through

conversations, it was clear these students came from homes riddled with financial strife. Participants reported the need to work to help their families or that they needed to move out of the home to alleviate undue financial burden on their families. Participant Bf1 said that her family was poor and that her mother could barely afford to put food on the table. There was no money, she insisted, to pay for the academic tutoring she felt she needed to perform well in school (2010).

Family Hardship. Some students lived in nearly insurmountable situations. Deaths of parents, abuse, neglect and placement into foster care contributed to academic failure for five of the study participants. Parental alcoholism and drug abuse left three study participants to fend for themselves, some as early as while they attended elementary school. Participant Wm4, shared that he was removed from his home and placed into foster care while in fourth grade as a result of his mother having him and a brother in the car with her while driving under the influence of alcohol. Of his foster home placement, Participant Hm4 disclosed that the family with which he was placed did not care about him and did not help him with his school work. Therefore he bided his time until turning 18 at which time he chose to leave the foster family. Deaths of their custodial parent during their high school tenure resulted in being on their own after losing the parent. Participant Wf13 was left alone in her home with two younger brothers, while Participant Hm14 was left homeless after his custodial parent's death and referred to "couch hopping" until he could get through the GED program, get a job and afford a car and place to live.

Low Expectations for Academic Achievement. *Face-to-face* interviews revealed that encouragement and motivation to perform well in school were absent in the homes of most of the study participants. At no time did any participant discuss parental encouragement to do well in school. Amid failure and behavioral issues, discussions during the interview process were almost completely void of parental intervention. Yet, participants acknowledged parental influences could have made a difference. According to Participant Bf15, her mother teased her frequently about not being able to graduate, saying she would never make it through school. Of dropping out and returning to the General Education Development program, Participant Bf15 said she came back to school because she wanted to graduate to prove her mother wrong.

Mobility. Study participants recognized that moving from school to school made it hard on them for a variety of reasons. Lost friendships, acclimation to school and differences in high school credits created barriers to school success. While participants reported attending as many as three or more elementary schools and attending two or more middle schools, mobility was only discussed as a challenge by only one participant:

The first days here, I was in high school, and I was always going to a new school. I don't understand why I was always in a new school, you know what I'm saying? I never stayed in one area; I always moved and packed, you know what I'm saying? (Participant Wm6, 2010)

Table 30 reflects the number of schools each qualitative study participant attended during elementary, middle and high school years.

Table 30: Number of Schools Attended

	0	1	2	3	4+
Elementary		6	2	5	4
Middle		10	5	2	
High	1	12	2	2	

Study Interview Questionnaire (2009-2010)

Financial Responsibilities. As public school students, study participants held jobs in order to support themselves or lend financial support to their families. Some participants were living on their own at the time they dropped out of high school. Of those who no longer lived in the family home, one elected to live on her own, one was kicked out of the family home, another had turned 18 and was old enough to leave foster care and two had lost their parent caregivers and no family members were willing to take them into their homes. Participants who had moved out of the home expressed their need to work, but openly acknowledged that holding a job cut into time needed for studying and completing homework. Additionally, places of employment occasionally required them to work late into the evening, leaving participants too tired to awaken and get to school on time. Insufficient rest resulted in poor attendance as well poor academic performance.

Family Obligations. Having the responsibility to care for others while trying to complete high school created situations in which study participants had to choose between taking care of a loved one or themselves. After a meeting with the school



guidance counselor and her mother, Participant Wf10 learned she was too far behind in credits to graduate with her class. She was counseled to leave the traditional high school setting to attend night school. Attending class only two nights per week gave her ample time to spend with her boyfriend, which she says in the end was not in her best interest. She gave birth to a daughter before she could complete her high school diploma through night school. After her mother passed away, Participant Wf13, a 19-year-old white female, was left to care for herself as well as for two younger brothers until her grandmother intervened. She was only 16 years of age at the time of her mother's death.

I grew up with drug addiction, with an abusive home. My mother was addicted to drugs. She passed away two years ago. [name of stepfather removed] just disappeared. It was just me and my brothers left in the house and I had to take care of them, get them ready and off to school. I just couldn't keep up with everything. My grandmother told me I shouldn't be doing that by myself and she started helping. Then there was a custody hearing and my brothers went back to their biological father. (2010)

Priorities shifted for both female participants once they became caregivers and as a result, their performance in school was negatively impacted.

#### Research Question # 8

*What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, might have made them stay in school?*

Due to the qualitative nature of Research Question # 8, there a hypothesis was not given.

## Quantitative Analysis of Exit Surveys

Of the 216 survey respondent, only 74 responded to the question, *what would have improved your chances of staying in school?* As indicated by 10% of the survey respondents, the most frequent event having the potential to keep Brevard high school students in school was the opportunity for real world learning, followed by more individualized instruction (8%) and better teachers (5%). Table 31 displays survey responses.

Table 31: Improving Students' Chances of Staying in School

		Frequency	Percent
N = 74	Opportunity for real-world learning	22	10.2%
	More Individualized Instruction	17	7.9%
	Better Teachers	10	4.6%
	Smaller Classes	7	3.2%
	Less Freedom/More Supervision from Parents	4	1.9%
	Better Communication with Teachers	4	1.9%
	Better Communication with Parents	4	1.9%
	Increased Parental Involvement	3	1.4%
Less Freedom/More Supervision from School Officials	3	1.4%	

Student Exit Survey (2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009). Retrieved from data management system (2009).

## Qualitative Analysis of One-on-One Interview Responses

The following responses from the Interview Questionnaire (Appendix D) were analyzed to answer research question 8:

- What other options were available to you at the time you decided to leave school?
- Is there something the school could have done differently that would have made you stay?

- Is there something your family or friends could have done differently that would have made you stay?
- How long did you consider dropping out of school before you made the final decision to leave high school?
- What were the positive things about dropping out of school?
- What were the negatives about dropping out of school?

#### Academic Challenges

Based on interview responses, the participants in this study conveyed they lacked the support, motivation, encouragement, discipline and/or freedom they desired to successfully complete high school. Generally study participants accepted responsibility for their decisions to leave school. Often their conversations started with a statement claiming they did not blame the school for their decisions or inability to finish high school. However when probed, their conversations revealed policies and practices, personal challenges, attitudes and home environments that created barriers to their school success. Removing the barriers relative to academic challenges, school related challenges, personal challenges and home environments would have paved the way for school success.

Academic Assistance. Participants complained about ineffective instruction and inadequate academic assistance, both of which were paramount to their academic achievement. Rather than feeling direct pressure from school personnel to leave,

pressures from failure and an inability to learn pushed participants away from schools.

When discussing changes that could have helped, conversations turned to academic assistance, special class placement and placing students with effective teachers.

Participant Hm4 responded:

Better teachers. I mean I understand they don't have to put up with kids, but when I'm willing to do the work but just need extra help they ought to help me. I mean I'm a nice kid. I treat people nice; I treat them with respect and ... Like I said, when you don't know the stuff and when I came out of [name removed] I was in the 9th grade and when I went over there they put me in 10th which means higher classes to help me catch up; like I mean teachers just let me do my own thing. I tried learning, but I don't even know how I passed to be honest with you because I didn't know anything. Except when it came to tests I passed the tests. It's weird because I didn't do the work, but when it came to tests I knew the stuff. I mean I didn't do the homework, because I couldn't do it. In class, sometimes I would have a kid next to me that knew the stuff. Some teachers would help because they actually cared, but most of those teachers were when I was in the ESA (meaning ESE) program for special learning. (2009)

Finally, Participant Wm3 suggested he could have been successful had teachers taken the time to help, to make him understand what he was doing instead of assigning work and expecting him to know how to do it. He insightfully suggested that teachers should have used diagnostic assessments that could have explained why learning was so difficult for him (2009).

#### School-Related Challenges

Aside from academic challenges that plagued students, the message conveyed by study participants was that the school environment created barriers to their success in

school. Interview responses led the researcher to believe that had appropriate school structures and support been in place participants would have remained in school.

School Structures. Participants complained about lack of educators' caring and understanding, boring classes, strict codes of behavior and high stakes testing. Frequently they indicated there was no additional assistance for them when they were unable to learn or understand the content of their teachers' lessons. When placed in special classes participants reported they were more likely to be successful. Access to intervention or strategy classes was severely limited, as most participants reported no avenue to provide them with the extra help they needed. Schools did not appear to provide tutoring or homework support for students. According to study participants, irrelevant content and boring instructional approaches hindered their ability to learn. "I always find it so boring and tiring. Most of the teachers have voices that put you to sleep, one tone; they put you to sleep" (Participant Am12, 19-year-old Asian male, 2010). A 19-year-old black student suggested, "If they made the work more like something that we could like, get into, but the teachers, they were like boring and they just talked like boring and I wasn't really getting into it" (Participant Bm8, 2009). Another participant stated,

Like Social Studies, that's just a bunch of useless information, and science, I don't really care about science...I'm going to be a mechanic and I don't really need that stuff and what I need is metric and that's about it. I don't need to understand chemicals, but I understand levers and all that I need to be a mechanic... Here (GED) they teach you the stuff you need to know, not all that useless stuff. Depending if you want your high school diploma, then you have to learn that useless stuff. I really don't need calculus to work on cars. (Participant Hm4, 2010)

Students perceived that schools placed too much emphasis on rules and policies that participants considered unimportant by participation. Relaxing some of the rules might have motivated study participants to stay in school. Inability to use cell phones, rules against bringing drinks into their classrooms and dress code violations were cited as too insignificant to warrant punitive consequences such as suspension or Saturday School. Participant Bm8 stated, "... it's so, like straight. You get in trouble for anything, like the way you wear your clothes, or like the way your hair is, those kinds of things," (2010). Finally, inability to pass the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was the reason some left school before earning their diploma. The high stakes associated with FCAT left some study participants frustrated, as revealed in the comments of a 19-year-old white female participant,

I don't think they should focus on the FCAT because there's a lot of students out there that are really good at school and they pass all their classes, like me, and this test is holding them back because it is one of the things you have to have to graduate now. (Participant Wf17, 2010)

School Support System. A culture of support and caring at their schools could have contributed greatly to school success. Study participants repeatedly expressed frustration, and sometimes anger, that no one at the school actively intervened on their behalf when they began to fall behind in school. Participants felt strongly that personal circumstances should be considered when scheduling students into classes, assigning homework and establishing due dates for homework and class projects. When asked what could have been done to change their circumstances, study participants were of the

opinion that if school personnel had taken a true interest in them and attempted to understand the circumstances causing their academic struggles it could have altered their decision to leave school. Participants sincerely felt teachers often did not know or perhaps did not care about the personal hardships they faced. Study participants discussed measures that could have been taken by school personnel that would have helped them.

... teachers that would be on you like 24/7 when you're at school... anything just to stay on you to make sure you know. They just basically motivate you to get through, whatever the case is. Whatever the problem is to help you get to your destination, to help you finish your goal and accomplish it. (Counselors?) um, I would suggested them let me know when I was there to, you know, whatever I had to do to get up to that point to get to another grade... stuff I haven't done, you know, or miss to, you know, be better at it, which I haven't, you know, got from a counselor. I don't think I ever remember talking to a counselor about my grades or any of that. I just know I dropped out before I could talk to a counselor. (Participant Bf2, 2010)

The teachers - find teachers that care. Like every teacher says that they love kids. They may love kids, but actually caring about the kids, that's different. I understand that there can't be just one kid special, but I'm pretty sure that there's one kid in the class that doesn't get what they're teaching. I'm just trying to put that out there and most kids won't ask for help. So if you see them struggling, instead of just throwing them more Fs, and throwing them even further behind, how about just stopping and asking them if they need help because I'm pretty sure they'd say yes. Teachers should try teaching. (Participant Hm4, 2009)

I mean my mom obviously knew it was me and she got really mad once HRS like left, like she just beat the crap out of me... I went to school, you know and I told the guidance counselor what happened.... The guidance counselors could have called and talked to the parent and, you know, tell them, you know, this is your child's situation and it can't be in that kind of environment. I mean because it's true, you know, even though I'd probably get in trouble that way too, but you know my mom, she needed to know the kind of situation that, like the kind of environment that I was in wasn't right. (Participant Wf13, 2010)

Teachers could be more understanding, giving me more leniency with my homework. Allow me to do it on weekends, you know, just give me more of a chance, realize my situation and what I was going through. You know, and

worked with me and try to figure out a way that I could do something on weekends, maybe weekend classes. Maybe less homework.... Be more understanding. It was more what happened to me than the school. The school does a lot of good things, but I say it was more my life than the school, so it's hard for me to really pick on the school. They could have done a lot more definitely. (Participant Hm11, 2009)

Study participants conveyed that had teachers and administrators intervened when they started to fail, offered guidance to help them navigate through the system, provided additional time for completing homework assignments and/or made allowances for students with family obligations and financial responsibilities, they would have been able to meet graduation requirements and ultimately would have stayed in school to earn their high school diplomas.

#### Personal Challenges

Study participants accepted responsibility for the decisions and actions that eventually led them to drop out of school. Attitudes, behaviors and a desire to be free of the real or perceived constraints placed on them by the school ultimately pushed some to make the decision to leave. In many cases, the decision to leave school was made hastily in response to an incident or event that the participant felt was too overwhelming to overcome.

Behaviors. Histories of disengagement and/or disruptive behaviors often resulted in a decision by some study participants to leave school. For the most part, study participants realized that school failure was the result of choices they made and expressed



regret over fighting, being disrespectful to teachers, disengagement and skipping classes, citing these as reasons they failed classes, eventually leading them to leave school.

I was there for fun; you know what I'm saying? I was there to socialize over there. I felt like that's where my escape was, socializing. I wasn't really there for really much of an education. I didn't take it serious and then I realized what was going on and it was kind of too late to change. (Participant Wm6, 2010)

After being placed on probation, Participant Hm14 left almost immediately upon his return to school. He feared he would be unable to meet the strict rules placed upon him by the probation officer and that he would have gotten in deeper trouble. Rather than taking a chance, he chose to leave school (2010). Participant Wm9, a 20-year-old white male stated he made the decision to drop out of school the minute he got suspended from school for fighting. He said up to that point he had not planned on leaving. He clearly articulated, however, that he did not want to be around the students he insisted had initiated the fight but whom he believed had avoided punitive consequences (2010). He implied that if school administrators would have listened to him and treated everyone fairly he would not have left school. He expressed no sense of pressure to leave; however he added that no one tried to counsel him or stop him from leaving. Frequently friends influenced and encouraged their disruptive behaviors. Trying to fit in led some students to employ attention-getting behaviors such as being loud, joking and displaying disrespectful attitudes while in the classroom. Resulting office referrals caused them to be removed from the classroom repeatedly, causing them to miss critical instruction needed to pass their courses. Drug use, alcohol use, selling drugs and arrests resulted in long-

term removal from school which led to some participants' inability to complete coursework requirements for graduation. The interview transcripts revealed statements of remorse about their disruptive actions and lack of focus in school.

### Home Environment

Living situations that were undesirable and detrimental to the student made studying, sustaining passing grades and attending school difficult. Parental support and guidance would have made a difference according to study participants. In some cases, parents simply did not have the skill set necessary to help their child. Lack of education, inability to navigate school/social system, substance abuse and inattention to their child's academic, social and emotional well-being took a toll on study participants' academic success. A 23-year-old black female expressed that she might have had the help she needed had her mother been better educated:

Um, mother... could have helped me through it, but she didn't have the patience at the time. With her not being educated either, I think it's like I took the same path she did. I'm not blaming it on her, it's just you live, you see what's around you and sometimes when it's not always positive you don't, you don't get that. (Participant Bf1, 2010)

Expressions of encouragement, belief in the student's ability and high expectations for academic performance were missing in some families, but could have influenced study participants to stay in school through graduation. According to one study participant, her mother repeatedly told her she would not graduate.

I wanted to stay so bad because my mom and them always used to say, You ain't going to finish; you're not going to finish. And I was like, I'm going to show you

all. I'm going to show you. And that was why I really wanted to stay. That's why I decided to come back. (Participant Bf16, 2010)

Study participants living with parents who were substance abusers expressed the need for a responsible adult and/or community agency that could come to their aid. They talked openly about homes that lacked supervision and were plagued by physical abuse, giving the impression they were left at very young ages to care and fend for themselves.

Yeah, most definitely...um my mom could have like paid me attention. And I didn't really rely a whole lot on my stepdad, I didn't really know him, we didn't really get along. But yeah, my mom especially could have helped me more. (Participant Wm16, 2010)

My dad was arrested when I was living with him and like the lady I was staying with kicked me out because she wanted her ex-boyfriend back and me and him didn't get along, and that was my dad's ex-girlfriend. I mean it was just hard because I had no job, um schooling, finding rides to school, it was just difficult. I have a place down here staying with my grandparents, and I have a place here that I can actually finish my education. (Participant Hm4, 2010)

These students longed for stable environments, environments that would have been conducive to studying and learning rather than a life filled with constant danger, disappointment and disruption.

#### Research Question # 9

*What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of high school, caused them to return to earn a diploma by passing the General Education Development (GED) Test?*

## Interview Questionnaire Responses

The following responses from the Interview Questionnaire (Appendix D) were analyzed to answer research question 9:

- How has dropping out of school affected your family?
- How has dropping out affected your life?
- Why are you enrolled in the GED program?
- What made you decide to come back to earn a diploma?
- How do you believe earning a diploma will impact your life?

### Life without a Diploma

Years of school failure, disruptive behaviors and family dysfunction significantly impacted school performance and ultimately led to the final decision to leave school without a diploma. When asked how long they considered leaving school before making the final decision, most study participants indicated they made the decision relatively quickly and without considering a future devoid of a high school diploma. When probed about the impact of their decision to leave school prior to graduating, study participants expressed embarrassment, disappointment dissatisfaction with life and frustration at their inability to get a good job.

Uh, not depressing, but ah, just, I don't know, I kind of beat myself up a lot of the time. I don't open my mind as much as I should because I'm always doubting myself. You don't remember this or you don't know this, so it just kind of messes with me a little mentally because I'm not on the level that I know I could be. I could be a lot smarter than I am. (Participant Bf1, 2010)

It affect me because without a diploma you can't get further in what you want to do and, like me, I want to be a police officer, and I want to go into the army and all, college, and all the other and without that you can't pursue none of those dreams or anything. Can't get a job, a decent one that pays good money or whatever. I feel like with a GED or a high school diploma you can pursue whatever you desire. (Participant Bf2, 2010)

Um, I just wish I would be able to get graduate and walk with my class like my brother and my sister did and maybe it would end up making my parents proud of me whenever I'm walking to graduate, and now I won't really get to do that. My sister didn't ever live with me. (Participant Wm10, 2010)

Severely. Something that I think about all the time, you know. I never knew what it was like to go through high school and I remember I use to have a lot of fun in school. Looking back being in school I even have dreams about being in high school sometimes, you know? Just like wishing I could go back there, and it's weird I'll be like, oh maybe if I keep. I had a dream one time I was going through the whole thing again and it was like maybe if I keep asleep and keep dreaming like this I'll wake up and I'll actually be...Football games! (Participant Hm11, 2010)

Completely screwed it over. I mean I can't get a job, like a nice job without a high school diploma or a GED. I could have had my high school diploma two years ago. I could have had my GED two years ago. I could have had it before my high school diploma and I could have been already attending classes, have a place, have a car, be able to be something, be somebody instead of like I am now, couch-hopping. I just, I can't live like this, like I want to just get myself back in order. Because I also want to prove everyone else wrong. (Participant Hm14, 2010)

Conversations were peppered with sadness and regret when discussing their decisions to leave. The simple question, *do you have anything more to say about dropping out of school?* prompted many of them to offer sage advice to those that might consider following in their footsteps. "Don't advise anybody else to do it. Stay in school, get your education; get a life. No way, you're not going to make it in this world without a diploma or anything of some sort" (Participant Hm14, 2010). When asked if they would

make the same decision if they had it to do over, only two participants said they would again make the decision to drop out; they reasoned that staying in school would have resulted in the same outcome. However, most study participants said they would not again make the decision to leave if they could go back in time. Missing treasured high school experiences and the tribulations caused by their lack of schooling provided the rationale. Participant Wf10 (2010) responded, “No way, never. It was a big mistake because I could have been graduated and had my high school diploma and I don’t know. I wouldn’t be where I’m at right now. My whole life would probably be different.”

Participant Bf1 advised:

Don’t do it for anybody, just don’t do it. Talk to somebody, talk to a counselor, talk to somebody that has your best interest because you know they’re not going to tell you anything wrong, no matter how you’re feeling at that time. Do not make that mistake. Some things like gym and physical education, it may not be as important as your math, science, things like that. Don’t drop out or you’ll regret it. (2010)

### Why They Returned

The main reasons study participants returned to earn a diploma because they: (a) had an aspiration to meet personal goals, in many cases earning a high school diploma was a prerequisite to also meeting post-secondary education, military and career goals, (b) believed that a high school diploma increased opportunities for future success, (c) lost friendships, (d) were influenced by family and friends and (e) sought a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

### Personal Goals

Every one of the study participants had the personal goal of completing the GED program to earn their diplomas. Some dreams ended with finishing the GED program; others extended to attending medical school or owning their own businesses. All were optimistic they would be successful. Participant Wm6, who felt he was seen as a trouble maker, said he was enrolled in the GED program, “To get my second chance. There’s always a second chance. God believes in more than second chances. We get more than second chances, we still get that chance” (2010)

### Opportunities for Future

The persistent message delivered by study participants was that they saw earning a diploma as the key to their future. Study participants iterated that earning a high school diploma was their ticket to a life replete with comfort, security and fulfillment. They had experienced life on their own and had first-hand knowledge of homelessness, hunger and frustration with the job market. Finding and keeping a job that paid the bills was difficult; most employers, they said, required a diploma. Participant Wf10 said she returned for her diploma so that she could go to college and make a good life for her infant daughter (2010). Others said:

Um, because I’ve always depended on work and not education, and as of recently I’ve lost my job and I now know just how important it is for me to have moved on to me doing something else or me wanting to experience something else. I see not working, that’s all I can fall back on. Even if I was to find a job today or tomorrow, my education is put first. (Participant Bf1, 2010)

I know with it you can do whatever, you know, you want because that's what they ask now, do you have a high school diploma or do you have any diploma that shows that you have finished high school or anything? (Participant Bf2, 2010)

I kind of need a GED if I want to make anything of my life, at least a GED. My dad did crap working his whole life and I watched him do it. My dad is 47 years old and he has arthritis in his hands and can barely hold a hammer and I see him trying to hold up drywall and trying to put up roofs and that's just because he didn't get an education. He didn't do anything with his life. He wasn't going to. He lived from paycheck to paycheck. (Participant Hm4, 2010)

I think it's not just going to impact my life, it's going to impact others, you know what I'm saying? It's going to impact my life because, hey I did it. You know, I realize I did it. And I just doubted myself, but now I did it. So what's up with me doubting myself because I know I was right? Hey, I just like, I just don't want to only do it for me, you know what I'm saying? I want to do it for my people; you know what I'm saying? That's what keeps me motivated. I want to do it for my little brother. He's out there in [name removed] and everything with some other family. I want to prove that I can do something with my life; you know what I'm saying. Help my family out. I can be able to be supportive for my little brother. Be a mentor to him, you know what I'm saying. Say to him hey, you need to get this education, you know what I'm saying? You see where I'm at, right? (Participant Wm6, 2010)

The limited opportunities afforded to study participants illustrated for them the importance of earning a high school diploma. Further, more than half the participants acknowledged that a high school diploma was insufficient to provide them with the future they envisioned. Beyond completing the GED program, many had plans to enter college, the military or a technical school once their GED diploma was granted.

### Lost Friendships

Friendships and interaction with others during the school day in classes, at lunch and at social events frequented conversations relative to positive high school experiences.



Because having a network of friends was identified as a positive characteristic of their middle and high school experiences, it was not surprising to find that leaving the school setting left a void in their social networks. Participant Am12 lamented, “Yeah, I don’t have much contact with other people; I’m in contact with just like one or two. Being alone a lot” (2010). Participant Wf13 stated:

I miss my friends and I miss school. But it was kind of sad, you know. Kids think, oh it’s so fun to drop out of school you know, but you’re going to miss your friends. Because nobody is going to be home during the day, everyone else is going to be in school, you know. Any, yeah, you’re going to miss it. I miss it so much, but I need to get this done... (2010)

Female study participants overwhelmingly identified loss of friendships as one of the most negative outcomes of dropping out of school.

#### Influence of Family and Friends

Family and friends motivated study participants to return to school in order to earn their diplomas. In some instances, their influence was direct such as in the case of Participant Bf15, “My mother and my uncle and them throwing it up on my face, and ... (I) could have been somewhere by now in a college, had a job, had my own money, that kind of stuff, not come back here every day” (2010). Participant Wm6 wanted to prove to his friends he was capable of earning his diploma.

Well, really my dream had nothing to do with this. You know, I just wanted to prove I was smart, you know, to my other people. ‘Cause they know I’m smart, I just don’t feel like they just, I feel like sometimes they knew I wasn’t going to make it, sometimes. You know what I’m saying, my people, my kinfolks. My homies, and everything, they kept their faith. They were like hey bro, get real with yourself, you know. I know you can do it you just don’t got the mindset. I’m

talking true talk; you know what I'm saying? It's not like that; they want me to do better. They know I can do better. (2010)

Sometimes the influence of family and friends was indirect, yet proved to be equally powerful at motivating the respondent. Participant Hm14 compared his circumstances to younger peers who had already graduated from high school:

... when you're hanging around with people and they're talking about their diplomas, college classes and you're just sitting there on the sidelines. You say I didn't graduate; I feel like a loser. And they're like a year younger than you, two years younger, and they're already flaunting their almost associate degrees, or their associate degrees when they get out of high school because they go to dual enrollment and you just, you feel horrible. (2010)

#### Sense of Accomplishment

The stories shared by study participants differed in many ways, however there was one commonality; they expressed or implied that they wanted to feel a sense of accomplishment for something they believed was significant. Motivating factors for their return to school reflected an internal drive to accomplish personal goals. Proving to themselves and/or others they were capable of earning their high school diplomas would provide them with personal satisfaction and a sense of pride.

I got to prove it to myself. In [name removed] I was rapping, so I want to learn. I also want to learn, you know. So I also want to learn some new words, you know so I've got at home that big old GED book and one about history, you know and also I got this big old dictionary and a thesaurus and I can learn new words and put it on my lyrics sheet, you know what I'm saying, so I can do my thing on this rapping thing. Cause I know, people tell me hey bro, you got skills; you're going to make it on top, you know. It's like, I know. I feel like I'm just not going nowhere without this education, you know what I'm saying. There's always something that you need. So I want to get this over with so I can focus on what I

want to do in life, you know what I'm saying? Always what you want to do always takes effort, so effort's a big thing. (Participant Wm6, 2010)

I've already told you the jobs I've had before the one I was at before, Save-A-Lot, I mean most of them know me and if I pass the GED, I would come in the store and scream over the whole mike that I got it, I mean it would actually make me happy knowing that I got it. (Participant Wm3, 2009)

In the case of Participant Hm14 who dropped out of school after being placed on probation and fearing he would not be able to follow the strict rules under which he could return to school, earning a diploma would boost his esteem. He shared, "I just can't describe how horrible I feel about not having a diploma of any kind or anything to show for all those years I was at school" (2010).

### Summary

Data reflecting two samples of former Brevard public school students were analyzed in this study. Analysis of Sample 1, consisting of former Brevard public high school students enrolled in school over a three-year period between 2006 and 2009, was conducted to determine if relationships existed between ethnicity, SES, exceptional student education status, ELL and previous grade retentions within Brevard's public high school population and their dropping out of high school. Additionally, the data were analyzed to determine if a relationship existed between the grade levels of students and their dropping out of high school. The analysis was conducted using descriptive and statistical procedures within the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Chi Square and effect size analysis were conducted on the student data within

the Brevard Student Data System to determine if relationships existed between these variables and dropping out of school. Finally, a review of the standardized residual identified significant proportional differences between groups when ad hoc testing was warranted. Sample 2 included former Brevard public school students, ages 18-24, who dropped out of school and subsequently returned to earn their diploma through the General Education Development (GED) program during the 2009-2010 school year. Data from the second sample were collected via one-on-one, face-to-face interview sessions conducted to identify their reasons for dropping out of high school, incentives, circumstances and events that could have helped them remain in school and reasons for returning to earn a GED diploma were analyzed using qualitative analysis methods.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher investigated the relationship between student characteristics and dropping out of school; identified factors reported by Brevard County public high school students for dropping out of school; and ascertained prospective program and policy changes capable of decreasing the number of high school dropouts in Brevard. The desired outcomes of the study were to determine obstacles many Brevard youth faced in their quest to earn a high school diploma and identify interventions, actions and events with the potential to keep students in school through graduation. The study findings would assist educators in revising practices, making program modifications and instituting policy changes having the potential to decrease the number of dropouts in Brevard.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study was guided by the research questions that follow. Hypotheses accompany the quantitative study questions.

1. What relationship existed between the ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>1: A relationship did not exist between ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

2. What relationship existed between the socioeconomic status of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>2: A relationship did not exist between the socioeconomic status (SES) of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

3. What relationship existed between student enrollment in an exceptional education program in the Brevard County public schools and dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>3: A relationship did not exist between Brevard student enrollment in an exceptional education program and their dropping out of high school.

4. What relationship existed between Brevard students as English Language Learners and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>4: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students classified as ELL and their dropping out of high school.

5. What relationship existed between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>5: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school.

6. What relationship existed between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?

H<sub>0</sub>6: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

7. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, were the most significant reasons given for dropping out of high school?

8. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, might have made them stay in school?
9. What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, caused them to return to earn a diploma by passing the General Education Development (GED) Test?

### Summary of Results

Findings in this study were based on the nine research questions discussed in the previous section. Analysis of data was performed using the software package, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Chi Square, Cramer's V or phi analyses conducted to determine effect size and analysis of the standardized residual to identify significant proportional differences within the data led the researcher to reject or fail to reject the null hypotheses for questions 1-6. The first six questions explored the relationships between dropping out of school and race/ethnicity, participation in the exceptional student education program, participation in the English language learner program, socio economic status, type of promotion and student grade level. The remaining three questions were qualitative in nature and were included to ascertain reasons students dropped out of high school, barriers that kept them from staying in school and circumstances that led to their return to school. There were no hypotheses generated for research questions 7-9.

### Research Question 1

*What relationship existed between the ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?* H<sub>0</sub>1: A relationship did not exist between ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

H<sub>0</sub>1 was rejected. A statistically significant relationship existed between ethnicity of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

Dropping out of school was statistically significantly relative to the ethnicity of students, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (4, N = 25,088) = 116.933,  $p < .000$ , Cramer's V = .068. The Cramer's V statistic reflected a small effect, indicating one could predict only with about a 7% accuracy rate which student would drop out based on his or her ethnic or racial origin.

Seaman (2010) advised that small effect sizes frequently correspond to large proportional differences between groups, rendering effect sizes useless to the researcher. The Chi Square statistic suggested that a significant relationship existed between race/ethnicity and dropping out of school. Due to the chi square statistic significance and Seaman's indication that proportional differences should be considered when effect sizes were small; post-hoc testing was conducted to examine differences in proportion in more detail. Seaman suggested that it was more reasonable to compare proportions than it is to focus solely on Cramer's V. To further investigate these proportions in an effort to accurately reflect the relationship between ethnicity and dropping out of school, the



standardized residual was calculated and analyzed. The standardized residual calculated the standard deviation between expected and observed counts.

According to Witta (personal e-mail, December 1, 1010), “When the standardized residual is 2 or larger it is considered significant.” The standardized residual pinpoints the cells that contributed most to the chi square statistic and provides the researcher with data showing specific proportions that were based on expected versus observed counts.

Approximately 3% of the sample (776 students) dropped out of school. About 2% of those students were of Asian descent, 28% were black, 12% were Hispanic, about 3% were multi-racial and more than 55% were white. Standardized residuals, the standard deviation between observed and expected values, demonstrated that proportionally more black and Hispanic students dropped out of school than did students of other ethnicities. Specifically a higher proportion of dropouts existed among black and Hispanic subgroups than would be expected. The data show that 430 white students dropped out, yet the expected count was 549 (SR = -5.1); 217 black students dropped out of high school, with an expected count of 122 (SR = 8.6); and 93 Hispanic students dropped out, while a count of only 64 was expected (SR = 3.6). The observed incidence of multi-racial student dropouts was nearly equal to expected counts. That is to say that more black and Hispanic students in the sample dropped out than would have been expected while fewer white and Asian students dropped out than would have been expected.

### Finding 1: Connection to the Literature

The study findings were consistent with current literature and research. Students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds dropped out at a proportionately higher rate than white students (FLDOE, 2008; Greene and Winters, 2006). A number of studies explored student ethnicity relative to dropping out of high school. Dropout rates were typically higher among poor, minority and inner-city students (Lorence and Dworkin, 2006; Frey, 2005; NASP, 2003). Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes, KewalRamani and Kemp (2008), researchers commissioned by the USDOE to study the status of dropouts across the United States, found that approximately 5.8% of white students, 10.7% of black students, 22.1% of Hispanic students, 3.7% of Asian students and 14.7% of American Indian/Alaska Native students dropped out of school. Similar statistics were found by Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum (2005) in their study of young Boston high school dropouts, ages 16-24. Khatiwada and colleagues indicated that in Boston 10.4% of blacks, 22.7% of Hispanics and 4.2% of Asians in the study did not have a high school degree or its equivalent. Their statistic for whites was significantly lower, finding that only 2.7% of them did not graduate. In fact, 70% of the high school dropouts in their sample were either black or Hispanic. Laird, Cataldi, KewalRamani and Chapman, researchers commissioned by the USDOE, found that approximately 5.8% of white students, 10.7% of black students, 22.1% of Hispanic students, 3.7% of Asian students and 14.7% of American Indian/Alaska Native students dropped out of school (2006). Greene and Winters computed the gap among white (78%), Asian (72%), black

(55%) and Hispanic (53%) students as much larger than reported previously by the USDOE (2006).

### Research Question 2

*What relationship existed between the socioeconomic status of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?* H<sub>0</sub>2: A relationship did not exist between the socioeconomic status (SES) of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

H<sub>0</sub>2 is supported: A relationship did not exist between the socioeconomic status (SES) of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon the students' eligibility for free and reduced lunch prices. The chi square statistic in this instance showed how socio-economic status (SES) influenced dropping out of school. For the purposes of this study, analysis of free and reduced lunch status showed the relationship between socio-economic status and dropping out of school. The phi statistic was also calculated to determine the strength of association between SES and dropping out of school.

Dropping out of school was not statistically significantly relative to the student's socio-economic status, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 25,168) = 2.493,  $p > .05$ ,  $\phi = -.01$ . The phi statistic indicated a very small negative effect.

The Chi Square statistic indicated there was no association between socioeconomic status and dropping out of school. Of the 25,168 students in the study

sample, less than 1% of study participants (231 students) qualified for free and reduced lunch. Of those 231 students, only three dropped out of school. These three students reflected only 1.3% of the sample being served by the free and reduced lunch program and represented only .4% of the total dropouts within the sample. The small effect indicated by phi suggested the experimental group (SES) performed on the average, the same as the control group (non-SES). In the absence of statistical and practical significance, SES does not appear to be related dropping out of a Brevard public high school.

The evidence in this study did not indicate statistical significance when comparing students of low socio-economic status with peers in middle and high socio-economic categories. The data revealed inconsistencies. According to the 2007-2008 Florida School Indicators report, Brevard Public Schools had an overall free and reduced lunch rate of nearly 31% (FLDOE, 2008), yet the data from the sample reflected that less than 1% of Brevard high school students qualified for the free or reduced-price lunch program. These data served as evidence that the percentage of high school students on free or reduced lunch was likely under reported in Brevard high schools. The small percentage of high school students who participated in the free or reduced lunch program, as reflected in the study data, implied that high school students who could have qualified likely did not apply for the lunch assistance program. As a result, findings may not have been an accurate account of the relationship between poverty and dropping out of school.

## Finding 2: Connection to the Literature

The research illustrated that students from low socio-economic environments faced considerable challenges upon initial entry into school and as they progressed through school (Hart and Risley, 1995). A substantial number of students who dropped out of high school came from impoverished homes and communities (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007; Jerald, 2006; Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum, 2005). When controlling for socioeconomic factors, Alexander, Entwisle and Horsey found that dropout rates were similar for whites and minority students (1997).

Unlike the research, this study did not show statistical significance when comparing students of low socio-economic status with peers in middle and high socio-economic categories. Based on the 2007-2008 Florida School Indicators report, there was evidence that the percentage of high school students on free or reduced lunch was under reported in Brevard high schools. According to the report, Brevard Public Schools had an overall free and reduced lunch rate of nearly 31% (FLDOE, 2008). However, the data showed that less than 1% of Brevard high school students within the study sample qualified for free and reduced lunch. A discrepancy existed between Brevard's overall free and reduced lunch participation and the participation of high school students within the sample. The small percentage of high school students qualifying for the lunch program was likely due to high school students' reluctance, unawareness or inability to apply for free and reduced lunch status. In Brevard, high schools typically have lower percentages of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch than do surrounding middle and

elementary schools (personal conversation with W. Christy, July 8, 2009). The small percentage of Brevard public high school students who qualified for free or reduced lunch, as reflected in the study data, was an indication that high school students who could have qualified may not have applied for the lunch assistance program. Therefore, the findings of this study may not have been an accurate account of the relationship between poverty and dropping out of school.

### Research Question 3

*What relationship existed between student enrollment in an exceptional education program in the Brevard County public schools and dropping out of high school?* H<sub>03</sub>: A relationship did not exist between Brevard student enrollment in an exceptional education program and their dropping out of high school.

H<sub>03</sub> was rejected. There was evidence to suggest a relationship existed between Brevard student enrollment in an exceptional education program and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon their being served in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program. The phi statistic was also calculated to determine the strength of association between ESE participation and dropping out of school.

Dropping out of school was statistically significantly relative to the student's participation in an ESE program, Pearson  $\chi^2(1, N = 25,168) = 162.919, p < .001, \phi = .080$ . The phi statistic indicated a small effect.

The Chi Square statistic signified an association between being served in the ESE program and dropping out of school. During the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years 15.4% of the students enrolled in a Brevard public high school were served in an ESE program other than gifted. The standardized residual illustrated that proportionally more students who were being served in an ESE program (SR= 11.6) dropped out of school than would be expected. Similarly, fewer non-ESE peers (SR=-4.9) dropped out of school than would be expected. Nearly 32% of the 777 students who dropped out of school were served in an ESE program. Of the 3,874 students served in an ESE program, 246 of them dropped out of school. About 6% of Brevard's ESE students within the study sample dropped out prior to earning their diplomas, compared with 2.5% of the non-ESE sample. While phi suggested a small effect between ESE and dropping out of school, the standardized residual illustrated significant differences between observed and expected outcomes. These detail proportional data found within the crosstabulation demonstrated that former Brevard public school students served in ESE programs dropped out of school in higher proportions than their non-ESE peers during the three-year period of the study.

### Finding 3: Connection to the Literature

The literature support the findings of this study, students who qualified for exceptional student education (ESE) dropped out at a proportionately higher rate than non-ESE peers. Schargel, Thacker and Bell found that students served in the exceptional education program dropped out more frequently than those served in the general education program (2007).

### Research Question 4

*What relationship existed between Brevard students as English Language Learners (ELL) and their dropping out of high school?* H<sub>0</sub>4: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students classified as ELL and their dropping out of high school.

H<sub>0</sub>4 was rejected. Evidence suggested there was a relationship between Brevard ELL students and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon whether or not English was the primary language spoken in the home. The phi statistic was also calculated to determine the strength of association between ELL participation and dropping out of school.

Dropping out of school was found to be statistically significant relative to a student's home language, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (1, N = 25,168) = 61.083,  $p < .000$ ,  $\phi = .049$ . The phi statistic indicated a small effect.



The Chi Square statistic reflected a significant relationship between ELL and dropping out of school. While the small effect suggested a weak relationship between a student's home language and their dropping out of school, as discussed previously the statistic may be misleading when crosstabulation shows large proportional differences between groups. Due to the proportional differences found within the crosstabulation between ELL and dropping out of school, the researcher reviewed standardized residuals when statistical significance was found, but the effect size was small (Seaman, 2010).

The standardized residual, or the difference between observed values and those that would be statistically expected, demonstrated that significantly more students who qualified for ELL services (SR= 7.5) dropped out of school than would have been expected. Approximately 4% (946 students) of the entire study sample were identified as ELL. Further, 9% of the 777 students who dropped out of school were identified as ELL students. More than 7% of Brevard's ELL population within the sample (70 students) left school prior to earning their diplomas compared to 2.9% of their non-ELL peers. That is to say those students who were identified as ELL were proportionally more likely to drop out of school than peers who were not identified as ELL.

#### Finding 4: Connection to the Literature

Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum (2005) in their study of Boston dropouts found that 22.7% of Hispanics in the study did not have a high school degree or its equivalent. Their statistic for whites was significantly lower, finding that only 2.7% of them did not graduate. Hispanics, many of which were immigrants, accounted for about 45% of the

entire dropout population in Boston at the time of their study. Rumberger (2008) found that 30% of California's dropouts were ELL students, yet they made up only 15% of California's high school students. Similar results were found in the current study with ELL making up 9% of the dropouts from the sample, yet students served in an ELL program made up only 4% of the entire study sample.

#### Research Question 5

*What relationship existed between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school?* H<sub>05</sub>: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school.

H<sub>05</sub> was rejected. Statistical evidence suggested a relationship existed between Brevard students who were retained and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon whether or not the student was retained in high school. Cramer's V was calculated to determine the effect size.

Dropping out of school was statistically significantly relative to the type of promotion granted the student at the end of the school year, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (4, N = 25,130) = 494.101,  $p < .000$ , Cramer's V = .141. The Cramer's V statistic indicated a small to moderate effect.

Approximately 3% of the sample (773 students) dropped out of school. Over 7% of the students who dropped out of school (57 students) were retained while in high

school during the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2009-2010 school years. About 30% of the students who dropped out would have been promoted to the next grade and about 1% (4 students) would have received a Good Cause Exemption (GCE) from mandatory retention allowing them to move to the next grade level as well. A GCE indicated the student had not met the graduation requirement to achieve a passing score on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), but met other criteria necessary for progression to the next grade. Significantly more study participants who dropped out were observed in the “not enrolled” (SR=17.8) and the “retained” (SR = 4.2) categories than expected. The data show that 441 of the study sample (nearly 57%) who dropped out of school were not enrolled at the end of the school year; therefore these students did not receive any type of promotion code. There is no indication whether or not these students would have been retained or whether they would have progressed onto the next grade level. However, the data clearly showed that students who were retained or not enrolled at the end of the school year demonstrated proportionately higher incidents of dropping out of school than did students who remained in school for an additional year in order to graduate and those who advanced to the next grade level.

Determining the strength of association between promotion type and dropping out of school could not be determined with certainty because data regarding grade retentions prior to high school were not available. As a result, the findings were relative only to students retained during their high school years. However, eight of the seventeen study participants involved in one-on-one interviews reported being retained in elementary

school. Two of the study participants reporting elementary retention said they were retained twice in elementary school. Two of the participants indicated that the elementary retention was done at their parent's request. Six study participants reported being retained during their middle school years. Two participants reporting retention in middle school were also retained during their elementary school experience. Four participants reported being retained in their freshman year (9<sup>th</sup> grade) in high school. Of those retained in high school, one had also been retained during the elementary years and another had been retained in middle school. By the time participants made the decision to leave high school, all but four had been retained at least one time during their elementary, middle and/or high school experiences. Four study participants indicated they were facing a potential retention at the time they decided to drop out of school and stated that the upcoming retention propelled them to leave. Due to the significant number of students without promotion codes and the inability to gather promotion data for students prior to their high school years, it is likely the relationship between the type of promotion a student received and his or her dropping out of school was underestimated.

#### Finding 5: Connection to the Literature

In the current study the researcher found that students who were retained dropped out at a proportionately higher rate than students who were not retained. In fact, the relationship between retention and dropping out was likely underestimated due to the inability to collect retention statistics from the participants' elementary and middle school years. The research overwhelmingly points to a strong relationship between retention and

dropping out of school; students who were retained were more likely to drop out of school than students who had not been retained (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007; Jerald, 2006). With multiple retentions the probability the student would eventually drop out of school increased (Westchester Institute for Human Services, 2008; Jimerson, 1999; Hauser, 1999).

#### Research Question 6

*What relationship existed between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school?* H<sub>0</sub>6: A relationship did not exist between Brevard students between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

Reject H<sub>0</sub>6. A relationship does exist between the grade level of Brevard students and their dropping out of high school.

A Chi Square Test of Independence was conducted to evaluate whether the proportion of students who dropped out of school varied depending upon the student's grade level. Dropping out of school was statistically significant relative to the grade level of students, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (5, N = 25,166) = 117.041,  $p < .000$ , Cramer's V = .068. The Cramer's V statistic indicated a small effect.

During the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years approximately 45% (351 students) of the 777 students who dropped out of school did so during their senior year. It is important to note however that 60% of the study sample was made up of seniors due to non-duplication of students over the three year period. Fewer students in relatively equal percentages dropped out during their freshman (18%), sophomore (19%)

and junior (18%) years. However, proportionately more students in grades 10 and 11 dropped out of school than did 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students. About 6% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students and nearly 5% of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students dropped out of school compared with 3% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and slightly over 2% of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. The percentage of dropouts at 11<sup>th</sup> grade was nearly double the percentage of dropouts who were in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The standardized residuals illustrated that higher proportions of students in grades 10 and 11 dropped out of school than did students enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

#### Finding 6: Connection to the Literature

The current study was inconsistent with other research findings. Neild and Balfanz (2006) found that most students dropped out of high school prior to or during 10<sup>th</sup> grade. In the current study, the data illustrated that Brevard students dropped out at higher rates while in their 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade year. Herlihy (2007) found that the greatest numbers of retentions occurred at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level and consequently the largest portion of dropouts made the decision to do so during their freshman year.

The researcher was unable to unearth the root cause of the increased dropout rates at grades 10 and 11. However, it is possible that state accountability requirements relative to the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) contributed to the shift. In Florida 10<sup>th</sup> grade students were required to pass the FCAT in order to receive their high school diplomas. While students were provided additional opportunities to pass FCAT in grades 11 and 12, some were unable to do so. As a result students who otherwise would have stayed in school through graduation may have chosen to drop out of school instead.

### Research Question 7

*What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, were the most significant reasons given for dropping out of high school?*

Due to the qualitative nature of this research question, it was unnecessary to formulate a hypothesis. The study includes available results from both samples within the study.

### Exit Survey Responses

Exit Survey responses from the student data system were analyzed by creating frequency tables generated by SPSS. The Exit Survey (Appendix E) asked respondents to report the primary or most significant reasons for dropping out of school and prompted them to also identify a secondary reason for leaving school.

Over a three year period spanning from the 2006-2007 school year through the 2008-2009 school year 777 students dropped out of a Brevard public high school; however only 216 dropouts (approximately 28%) completed the Exit Survey. The Florida Department of Education required schools to survey students once they completed the *Intent to Terminate* document which served as the official notification the student had decided to terminate enrollment. According to Kim Rogers, former principal of the Brevard Central Area Adult Education Center, historically many students have not followed the protocol of informing the school of their intent to leave; therefore school personnel frequently missed the opportunity to survey a student before he or she dropped out of school (personal conversation, March23, 2009).

The survey solicited the primary reason students made the decision to leave school prior to graduation. The survey required participants to make a forced choice by asking they choose only one of 19 descriptors. The last descriptor offered respondents the choice of selecting *other*; however the survey did not provide a space for further explanation. According to survey results, *missing too many days of school* was the most common primary reason students dropped out of school; nearly 31% of Exit Survey respondents (66 students) indicated they had accrued too many absences and could not catch up. *Failing classes/couldn't keep up with school work* was the second most common primary reason for dropping out of school, with more than 27% (59 students) reported failing in school as the main reason for leaving. The third most frequent reason students left was attributed to disliking school.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the secondary causes for leaving school prior to graduation. Again, respondents had an option to choose one of 20 descriptors with the final choice of *not applicable*. Ninety-nine respondents (44%) indicated *not applicable*; there was no secondary reason for leaving school. Those who identified a secondary contributing factor for their decision to leave selected absenteeism; nearly 16% (34 students) reported they had missed too many days of school and could not catch up. Failing in school was third highest secondary indicator, with 23 respondents (11%) selecting *Failing classes/couldn't keep up with school work*.



## Qualitative One-on-One Interview Responses

Although study participants responded with an initial reason or main factor that led them to terminate their public school education, ultimately it was a combination of school related issues and personal challenges that contributed to their departure. Selecting one primary reason for school leaving amid the varied experiences and responses of the study participants simply could not be done. The dynamic factors influencing participants' early school departure were far too complex to enable identification of a solitary cause. However, commonalities and patterns arose throughout discussions and ultimately, participant discourse about leaving could be placed into four general categories: academic challenges, school-related challenges, personal challenges and home challenges.

Many elements contributed to early school departure. Accounts of academic failure and school retention were discussed by a majority of study participants. School structures in the form of rules and policies, along with a perceived lack of care contributed to their frustration and unhappiness at school. Study participants pointed to challenging personal circumstances that led to their decision to leave. Abuse, abandonment, neglect and low expectations held by family members left many participants vulnerable to a school system that was challenging to navigate. Another recurring theme that entered into interview discussions centered on the lack of support and encouragement by a parent or other family member. Finally, participants' own behaviors resulting in stereotyping, lack of focus and suspension from school contributed

to their departure. Because the following factors were identified multiple times during one-on-one interviews, each was considered to be equally important. Table 33 summarized study participant responses when asked their reasons for leaving school.

Table 32: Why They Dropped Out

Academic Failure	School Related Challenges	Personal Challenges	Home Environment
Insufficient High School Credits to Graduate	Absence of Personal Relationships with Teachers/Guidance Counselors	Disruptive Behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fighting</li> <li>• Stereotype as Trouble-Maker</li> </ul>	Alcohol and Drug Abuse by Parent
Lack of Appropriate and Effective Academic Assistance	Age of Student - Ability to Remain in School	Lack of Focus or Motivation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partying</li> <li>• Inattention</li> </ul>	Physical and/or Emotional Abuse of Student
Inability to Pass FCAT	Teachers Did Not Like Student	Lack of Confidence/Esteem	Lack of Support or Encouragement
Retention	Boredom/Dislike of School	Disrespectful Attitudes	Death of Custodial Parent
	Inability to Participate in Sports	Inability to Follow School Rules	Encourage/Support of Disruptive School Behaviors
	Punitive Actions for Minor Rule Infractions	Behaviors Leading to Arrests/Probation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using Drugs</li> <li>• Selling Drugs</li> </ul>	Lack of Adult Support System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster Care</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> </ul>
	Absence of Care for Student by School Personnel	Too Much Focus on Personal Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boyfriends/Girlfriends</li> <li>• Wrong Crowd</li> </ul>	Caring for Other Minors (siblings and/or infants)
	Ineffective Teaching	Impulsivity	Finances
	Promotion Without Mastery of Content	Wanted Independence	Mobility
	Lack of Appropriate Guidance Class Sizes too Large	Employment	Lack of Parent and Sibling Education

*Study Interview Questionnaire (2009-2010)*

The term “dropout” carried with it images and suppositions of delinquency, academic failure and irresponsibility on the parts of students and sometimes teachers. All too often it was the student whom society blamed for his or her unwillingness or inability to function successfully in the school system. However, this study revealed a combination of events and circumstances that led the student to make the decision to leave school.

Participant Wf13 offered the following commentary about leaving school:

...when kids drop out it's not always because they don't like school or they just like don't care. Some kids really do care, they don't have the choice. Sometimes it's not a choice. Sometimes they have a problem like this situation or like they, they have to take care of their family members, they have to do this, you know. There's other reasons why kids would drop out of school other than they didn't like it. (2010)

#### Comparison between Student Exit Survey Results and Face to Face Interviews

Comparisons between the Student Exit Survey and the personal interviews paint similar pictures, but Student Exit Survey data may be misleading. Because the primary concern identified in the Student Exit Survey was *missing too many days of school*, one might believe that skipping school or class was a significant reason that students dropped out of school. The individual interviews also identified missing too much school as a cause of school failure. The interviews, however, provided additional insight into why students may have missed too many days of school. Few study participants interviewed by the researcher reported missing school or skipping classes as routine. Interview respondents missed school due to caring for siblings, exhaustion from work, inability to arrive to class on time due to the physical layout of the high school campus and as a

result of school suspensions. Absence from school or class, according to the data collected during individual interviews, was not the root cause for school failure.

#### Finding 7: Connection to the Literature

Similar to this study, the literature pointed to a variety of reasons for dropping out of school. Significant reasons included:

- a. Academic failure – A history of poor academic achievement was an early warning sign for students who eventually dropped out of school. According to Balfanz, Herzog and Mac Iver 60% of the high school dropouts in the study could have been identified as early as sixth grade (2007).
- b. School-related challenges – Researchers found the school culture and environment, school operations, policies and student experiences within the school contributed significantly to a school’s dropout rate. According to the Center for Public Education (CPE), dropouts were more likely to leave for school related causes than from personal circumstances and suggested that educational experiences were better predictors of dropping out than demographic characteristics (2007).
- c. Personal challenges - Young people with family and job obligations faced barriers that led them to drop out of school. Work, marriage and parenthood placed students at great risk for dropping out of school (Jerald, 2006). In the Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) study about 25% of the participants dropped out of school due to pregnancy or becoming a parent. More than a

fifth of the students in that same study left school to care for a family member. Nearly 33% of the participants in the Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) survey wanted to leave school to get a job. Schargel, Thacker and Bell (2007) found students with low self esteem or who believed others' perceptions of their value dropped out more frequently than peers who were confident.

- d. Home environments - Researchers identified various family environments and characteristics that impacted whether students stayed in school. These could be described as family structures, resources and practices. Rumberger (2008) stated "family background remains the most powerful predictor of student achievement in schools. Coming from single parent families increased a student's chances of dropping out (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007; Jerald, 2006; Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum, 2005). Stressful changes in family circumstances such as divorce, death and mobility of adults within the home related to dropping out of school. Researchers found students needed the support and help of their parents in order to stay in school (Jimerson and Kaufman, 2003; USDOE, 1999). Monitoring of school activities and remaining involved yielded better grades, higher test scores, regular attendance and homework completion (USDOE). Jimerson and Kaufman found that students with involved parents were retained less frequently.
- e. Education Attainment of Parents – High school students with a parent or sibling who dropped out of school were more likely to drop out of high school

than family members who graduated (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007; Jerald, 2006). Rumberger and Lim consistently found that student mobility due to factors other than promotion was a strong predictor for dropping out of high school. Parents who held high expectations, monitored academic status and communicated with the school improved their child's chances of graduating from high school (Rumberger and Lin, 2008; Jerald, 2006). Herzog and Mac Iver noted that poor school attendance or receiving a suspension in middle school were accurate predictors for dropping out of school.

#### Research Question 8

*What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of school, might have made them stay in school?*

Due to the qualitative nature of this research question, it was unnecessary to formulate a hypothesis. Exit survey data and face-to-face interview responses were analyzed separately and comparisons were made between the two.

#### Exit Survey Responses

Exit Survey responses from the student data system were analyzed by creating frequency tables generated by SPSS. Over the three year period spanning from the 2006-2007 school year through the 2008-2009 school year there were 777 dropouts, however only 216 dropouts (approximately 28%) completed the Exit Survey. Of the survey respondents, only 60 students (about 28%) provided an answer. The Exit Survey

(Appendix E) asked that respondents determine influences that would have improved their chances of staying in school. Respondents were required to make a forced choice among one of nine descriptors, which included: (a) opportunities for real learning; (b) better teachers; (c) smaller classes; (d) more individualized instruction; (e) better communication with teachers; (f) better communication with parents; (g) increased parental involvement; (h) less freedom/more supervision from parents and (i) less freedom/more supervision from school officials. According to survey results, *opportunities for real world learning* would have improved their chances of staying in school; nearly 37% of Exit Survey respondents that answered the question (22 students) wanted meaningful learning experiences. *More individualized instruction* was the second most common change that would have improved their chances of staying in school, with more than 28% (59 students) of the responders to the question indicating they needed additional help. Finally, 17% of the students who answered the question suggested that *better teachers* would have kept them in school. Respondents to this question primarily identified school-related factors as having the potential to keep them in school. Unfortunately response rates for the survey as a whole were poor, with only about 8% of the entire dropout sample responding.

#### Qualitative One-on-One Interview Responses

Study participants revealed school-related and personal factors that could have contributed to their school success. The participants in this study conveyed they lacked the support, guidance, motivation, encouragement, discipline and/or freedom they

required to successfully complete high school. Generally study participants accepted responsibility for their decisions to leave school; frequently they said they were to fault for their decisions, inability to learn or failure to finish high school. When probed however, they revealed policies and practices, personal challenges, attitudes and home environments that created barriers to their school success. Removing the barriers relative to academic challenges, school related challenges, personal challenges and home environments would have paved the way for school success.

Unlike their responses relative the decision to leave school, which were vast and diverse, recommendations to improve their circumstances focused largely on school-related concerns. Responses were far less varied when asked for proposed changes that might have resulted in their staying in school. While conversations touched on a variety of ideas, the theme of intervention permeated the discussion. Foremost in participants' dialogues was the need for someone at the school to recognize the problem and take action to help the student. The types of intervention or guidance needed by study participants were denoted as: (a) academic assistance at the onset of failure; (b) guidance to help students meet rigorous high school coursework requirements; (c) offering or suggesting options and alternatives available when students were unable to pass FCAT or coursework and (d) encouragement to stay in school when they began contemplating and discussing school departure. According to study participants, such intervention would have contributed to their academic success. Timely and effective intervention would have also conveyed that teachers and guidance counselors cared about them, wanted to help



them be successful and wanted them to stay in school. Study participants wanted school officials to understand them, expect the best, rethink instructional practices to make them more engaging and relevant, reconsider the type and amount of homework assigned to students and put much less emphasis on minor rule infractions.

Study participants revealed that had teachers, guidance counselors and/or administrators taken intervening actions when they started to fail; offered guidance to help them navigate the school system; provided additional time for completing homework assignments and/or made allowances for students with family obligations and financial responsibilities, they would have been able to meet graduation requirements and ultimately would have stayed in school to earn their high school diplomas. Removing school related barriers and increasing their own engagement in school were frequently cited by participants when asked what would have helped them stay in school. Participants said they shouldered much of the blame for leaving school, but offered recommendations for school personnel as well as parents and caregivers. Table 34 reflected strategies that would have kept study participants in school through graduation.

Table 33: Strategies/Intervention to Help Students Stay in School

Academic Intervention	School-Related Intervention	Personal Challenges	Home Environment
Close Monitoring of student performance and assistance at the onset of failure	Understand Extreme Personal Hardships and Make Accommodations	Worry About Yourself instead of friends and boy- or girlfriends	Pay Attention to and Care for Your Child
Tutors and special classes designed to help students with academic deficiencies	Communicate Options/Alternatives Early	Take Learning Seriously	Be an advocate for your child
More Effective Teachers	Encouragement and Motivation to Stay in School	Follow Rules	Stay Engaged

Academic Intervention	School-Related Intervention	Personal Challenges	Home Environment
Help with Class Work	Guidance to Ensure Students Are On Track to Graduate	Pay Attention in Class	
More Effective Instruction	Start with a Clean Slate Do Not Judge Avoid Stereotyping	Keep Positive Attitude	
		Attend School	

Study Qualitative Interview Questionnaire (2009-2010)

Students who participated in the interview portion of the study realized that changes in their own behaviors, choices and home environments would have been of significant benefit, but also pointed to specific actions the school could have taken to help them.

#### Comparison between Student Exit Survey Results and Face to Face Interviews

Student Exit Survey responses regarding what would have improved their chances of staying in school heavily suggested that *opportunities for real world learning* would have influenced their decision significantly with nearly 37% of the respondents wanting more meaningful learning experiences. *More individualized instruction* was the second most common response. Similar to Student Exit Survey responses, face-to-face interview respondents also suggested changes to curriculum and instruction. Interview participants identified a combination of school-related, personal and family-related factors as having the potential to keep them in school.

### Finding 8: Connection to the Literature

Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison provided insight as to what would have kept students in school. Similar to the current study, they found that students wanted and needed: (a) real-world, relevant learning; (b) effective teachers who made learning interesting; (c) small classes with personalized support and intervention; (d) better communication between home and school; (e) more engagement from parents and (f) increased monitoring and supervision (2006).

### Research Question 9

*What, according to former Brevard students who dropped out of high school, caused them to return to earn a diploma by passing the General Education Development (GED) Test?*

Due to the qualitative nature of this research question, it was unnecessary to formulate a hypothesis.

When asked about the impact of their decision to leave school prior to graduating, study participants expressed embarrassment, dissatisfaction with life and frustration at the inability to get a good job. Expressions of disappointment, sadness, remorse and even embarrassment were common. When asked if they would have made the same decision again, nearly all participants said they would not make the decision to drop out a second time. Given another chance, remaining study participants were quick to say they would not leave. In fact, they added that they would go back to high school at the present time if presented with that option.

The motives for student's return to school, illustrated in Table 34, were varied. However, all of participants expressed: (a) a desire to meet personal goals; in many cases earning a high school diploma was a prerequisite to also meeting post-secondary education, military and career goals, (b) acknowledgement that a high school diploma increased opportunities for future success, (c) a wish to help or please family and friends and (d) the need to feel a sense of accomplishment.

Table 34: Rationale for Entering GED Program to Earn a Diploma

Personal Goals	Future Success	Help or Please Others	Sense of Accomplishment
Earn a Diploma	Do not want to live paycheck to paycheck	Enrollment in school helps parent get needed health care	Feel Good About Self
Lead a good life	College	Friends believe in me	Prove to Self and Others
Desire for Knowledge	Join Military	Role model for younger siblings	
Live Independently	Career	Provide for others	

Study Qualitative Interview Questionnaire (2009-2010)

Every study participant shared the personal goal of completing the GED program in order to earn their diplomas. For some the ultimate goal was to earn a diploma, but others saw the diploma as a stepping stone to post secondary education, attending graduate or medical school or owning their own businesses. All were confident that their lives would be easier once they earned their diplomas.

### Personal Goals

The participants in the study who dropped out of school were no different than students who had finished high school – all of them wanted to earn their diplomas. Having a diploma was seen as a springboard to enriched futures. Study participants had come to realize that earning a diploma was important and necessary in order to lead a productive life. While the diploma was seen as a catalyst to success and the good life, some acknowledged their thirst for learning and shared a desire to contribute in meaningful ways to the lives of family members and peers. Study participants iterated that earning a high school diploma is their ticket to a life replete with comfort, security and fulfillment.

### Opportunities for Future

The persistent message delivered by study participants was that they viewed earning a diploma as the key to their future. They had experienced life on their own and had experienced the hardships of homelessness, hunger and frustration with the job market. Finding and keeping a job that paid the bills was difficult, even for those who had graduated from high school. Most employers, they said, required a diploma and would not consider hiring them even when they had the skills necessary to do the job. Study participants were plagued by limited opportunities in the job market. Participants acknowledged that a high school diploma was insufficient to provide them with the future they desired and stated plans to enter college, the military or a technical school once their GED diplomas were granted.

### Influence of Family and Friends

Family and friends motivated study participants to return to school in order to earn their diplomas. In some instances influence of family and friends was felt directly through encouragement and supportive words. In other cases the influence of family and friends was indirect. Participants voiced their sadness and frustration and recognized that had they stayed in school they too would have achieved or have been closer to realizing their goals. The fact that friends and family members, who were perceived by participants to be unintelligent or less capable, had finished high school and held respectable jobs or opened their own businesses proved to be equally powerful in motivating the respondent to complete their diplomas.

### Sense of Accomplishment

Nearly all study participants expressed or implied that they wanted to feel a sense of accomplishment for something they believed was significant. Motivating factors for their return to school reflected an internal drive to accomplish personal goals. Proving to themselves and/or others they were capable of earning a high school diploma would provide them with personal satisfaction and a sense of pride.

### Finding 9: Connection to the Literature

Study participants said that if they had been provided with interventions, students would have stayed in school. This finding is consistent with current scholarly literature and research. According to Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006), dropouts commonly

regretted the decision to drop out of school and given the opportunity to decide again, about 75% would have stayed in school and graduated. Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum (2005) found that dropouts had difficulty securing employment. Nearly half of the dropouts in the Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison study reported they could not find a job and admitted they should have considered the consequences of leaving school without earning a diploma.

### Summary of Findings

The findings in this study were consistent with much of the literature and research relative to high school dropouts. Like this study, a majority of the research found that students who were black and/or Hispanic dropped out more frequently than their white and Asian counterparts (FLDOE, 2008; Greene and Winters, 2006; Lorence and Dworkin, 2006; Frey, 2005; NASP, 2003; Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Provasnik, Kena, Dinkes, KewalRamani and Kemp, 2008; Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum, 2005; Laird, Cataldi, KewalRamani and Chapman, 2006). Data analysis illustrated that students served in ESE programs dropped out in higher proportions than non-ESE students (Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007). Another finding consistent with research was that students identified as ELL were proportionally more likely to drop out of school than peers who were not identified as ELL (Khatiwada, McLaughlin and Sum, 2005; Rumberger, 2008). Data analysis within the study clearly showed that students who were retained or not enrolled at the end of the school year demonstrated proportionately higher incidents of dropping out of school than did those who advanced to the next grade level

(Schargel, Thacker and Bell, 2007; Jerald, 2006; Westchester Institute for Human Services, 2008; Jimerson, 1999; Hauser, 1999).

The current study was not consistent with research findings relative to the relationship between grade level and dropping out of school. For example, in the current study higher proportions of students in grades 10 and 11 dropped out of school than did students enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Previous research found that most students dropped out of high school prior to 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Neild and Balfanz; 2006). Unlike the findings in most research studies, the evidence in this study did not show significance when comparing students of low socio-economic status with peers in middle and high socio-economic categories. However, considerable evidence suggested that the percentage of Brevard high school students on free or reduced lunch was likely under reported in Brevard high schools. As a result, findings may not have been an accurate account of the relationship between poverty and dropping out of school.

In Florida, students who made the decision to drop out of school were required to complete an exit survey identifying primary and secondary reasons for leaving. According to the survey results for the sample students, *missing too many days of school* was the most common primary reason students dropped out of school while *failing classes/inability to keep up with school work* was the second most common primary reason for dropping out of school. More than 44% of the students did not identify a secondary reason for dropping out of school. However, those who identified a secondary contributing factor for their decision to leave selected *absenteeism*. *Failing in school* was



next highest secondary factor for leaving school prior to graduation. Comparisons between the Student Exit Survey and the personal one-one-one interviews paint similar pictures, but Student Exit Survey data offered potentially misleading information. The primary reason for leaving identified in the Student Exit Survey was *missing too many days of school*, and as a result one might believe that skipping school or class was a significant reason that students dropped out of school. The individual interviews also identified missing too much school as a cause of school failure; however the interviews offered additional insight into why students may have missed too many days of school. Few study participants interviewed by the researcher reported missing school or skipping classes as routine. Interview respondents missed school due to caring for siblings, exhaustion from work, inability to arrive to class on time due to the physical layout of the high school campus and from school suspensions. Absence from school or class, according to the data collected during face-to-face interviews, was not the root cause for school failure. The interview process did not yield a sole reason for early departure from school. The transcripts indicated that a number of school related issues and personal challenges led to their departure. Participants' explanations of what led to their departure were far too complex to facilitate identification of a solitary cause. However, it was clear that study participants faltered due to family circumstances, personal choices, failure to receive intervention at critical points and school structures that stood in the way of graduation. Over the course of time, students felt they had few choices and decided to leave school.

According to survey results, *opportunities for real world learning, more individualized instruction* and *better teachers* would have improved their chances of staying in school. As a matter of course, respondents identified school-related factors as having the greatest potential to keep them in school. Similar to Exit Survey results, individual interview recommendations to improve their circumstances primarily yielded school-related concerns. Responses centered on the need for someone at the school to intervene when they started to fail or disengage in school. Study participants stated they needed: (a) academic assistance at the onset of failure; (b) guidance to help them meet the high school coursework requirements; (c) information about options and alternatives available to them when they were unable to pass FCAT or coursework and (d) encouragement to stay in school when they contemplated school departure.

Much of the literature on high school dropouts focused on student characteristics and demographics, reasons they chose to leave school and identified personal or school characteristics that could have persuaded them to stay in school. This study's inclusion of the rationale for the students' return to school offered a unique perspective not commonly included in dropout studies. The researcher explicitly decided to offer young people who were typically deemed ill-suited for schooling the opportunity to refute existing assumptions about their dreams and aspirations. The discussion provided fresh insights into various factors that motivated students. Participants described an assortment of reasons that prompted their return to school, including: (a) a desire to meet personal goals; in many cases earning a high school diploma was a prerequisite to also meeting

post-secondary education, military and career goals, (b) acknowledgement that a high school diploma increased opportunities for future success, (c) a wish to help or please family and friends and (d) the need to feel a sense of accomplishment. Throughout the conversation, study participants were pensive and communicated motivational factors that continued to play a role in their continued matriculation.

### Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings in this study offered compelling evidence that school and school district personnel had the power to intervene in ways that could have remedied the problems at risk students faced. Educators, through policy and practice, have inadvertently created barriers for students; and they have the opportunity to remove them. In order to retain more students in school through high school graduation the following recommendations were evident after detailed analysis of data.

1. Starting in elementary school, make use of student data management and tracking system that provides data relative to school attendance, behavior, progression and academic performance to promote early identification of potential dropouts so that intervention can be delivered at the onset of failure.
2. Once a student is identified as at risk of school failure, assign adult leaders to monitor academics, attendance and behaviors of these at-risk students on a daily basis and intervene at the onset of academic, behavior and/or attendance problems.

3. Identify, train and assign adult mentors to monitor, support and advocate for students at risk of dropping out of school.
4. Give school leaders authority and resources to enforce compulsory school attendance other than through punitive measures resulting in school failure.
5. Create policy and define practices to reduce student absenteeism; then collaborate with court and law enforcement officials to enforce anti-truancy policies.
6. In the absence of information about the nature of student absences, require school officials to make home phone calls and home visits to students who have stopped attending school in an effort to encourage their return.
7. Collect data at the classroom level to identify teachers who have proven successful with at-risk youth and assign the most effective teachers to the most at-risk students.
8. Remove contract barriers that prohibit transferring teachers with proven ability to work successfully with at-risk youth and place them in the most challenging teaching assignments.
9. Acknowledge and reward teachers proven to be successful with at-risk youth
10. Require administrators to monitor, identify and intervene in classrooms that have high rates of student failure. Remove any contract barriers or policies that would impede their taking action.

11. Make the curriculum relevant to students, particularly those at risk of failing, and employ instructional practices proven to increase student engagement. Monitor the level of student engagement in all classrooms routinely.
12. Implement curriculum and support programs for at-risk students at all levels of schooling. Align such programs with researched practices known to be effective for the at-risk youth who access them.
13. Provide avenues to gather input and feedback from students to determine if instructional programs were meeting their needs. Make revisions to programs and policies based on student performance as well as student feedback.
14. Create meaningful exit interview processes in order to gain insight into the issues relative to early high school departure. Utilize survey data to gather information and take immediate action to address school-related barriers.
15. Finally, it is recommended that the school district connect and collaborate with community agencies to consider the problems of at-risk youth from a systemic perspective in order to find meaningful and genuine solutions for students in crisis.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Conducting this study led the researcher to recommend future study of the following topics.

1. Conduct an analysis of high school graduation rates and dropout trends across the state or school district based on the new NCLB graduation rate requirements.

2. This interview portion of the study was delimited to students who had dropped out, but had subsequently enrolled in the General Education Development (GED) program. As a result the study failed to capture the experiences of all populations of dropouts. Expanding the study to students who dropped out of school but did not enter GED to earn a diploma may yield different results. Including the responses from dropouts that did not return to earn a diploma in addition to the responses from those who did would be of value to educators and policy makers.
3. Students discussed engagement in activities that competed with time spent studying, completing homework and attending school. Short-term gratification won out over the long-term goal of graduating from high school. In order to understand how gratification affects a student's ability to display self-control when confronted with temptations, conduct research to identify students who chose immediate gratification as well as those with the ability to delay gratification, track their performance over time and compare student outcomes and compare student outcomes in order to understand implications for educators.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of high school dropout prevention and outreach programs through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to identify highly effective programs that should be replicated, as well as ineffective programs that should be discontinued, revised or replaced.
5. Evaluate alternative and choice programs at all levels of schooling to determine their availability and effectiveness for non-traditional and/or at-risk students.

## Summary

As prevalent as the dropout issue is, one would expect to find in place rock-solid solutions to eliminate the problem. Yet, even in high performing school districts such as Brevard that boast a 95% graduation rate and a dropout rate of less than 1% (Brevard Public Schools, November 18, 2010), a solution to keep all students in school through graduation continues to elude school, school district and state officials. Failure to significantly reduce dropout rates may be due, in part, to the intense focus placed on problems with the learner that extend beyond the scope of the schoolhouse. Indeed, research has demonstrated that demographic, circumstantial and other student-focused variables were profoundly reflected in those students who made the decision to drop out of school. Based on the literature one could identify with a fair amount of confidence specific student characteristics and circumstances that served as valid justification for students opting to leave school prior to graduation. However, while student-related factors have offered reliable factors for identifying students at risk of dropping out, over-reliance on them may have caused officials to overlook those school-related factors that have been instrumental in influencing the student's decision.

While it is true that some barriers standing in the path of graduation were beyond a school's control; other impediments fall squarely within the decision-making purview of school leaders. The Center for Public Education maintained that schools have the power to change the dropout trends; contending that many school attributes known to cause students to drop out could be altered (2006). Doing so, however, would require

school districts to identify and remove practices, programs and policies that have created barriers for students. It would also require adequate training and resources in order for educators to intervene at the onset of disengagement and school failure. Today's schools must provide differently for diverse student populations by offering them: (a) relevant and meaningful curriculum, (b) opportunities and structures for parents to engage with the school, (c) early warning systems to identify potential dropouts and offer at risk students support and interventions that relate to the specific issues they face and (d) additional instructional assistance and interventions designed to help students who were at risk of failure (Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison, 2006).

In his keynote speech at the America's Promise Alliance Education event, Barack Obama, President of the United States, underscored the implications of dropping out of high school and called for stakeholders to unite in their efforts to end the dropout crisis in America.

... For America to compete and to win in the 21st century, we know that we will need a highly educated workforce that is second to none. And we know that the success of every American will be tied more closely than ever before to the level of education that they achieve. The jobs will go to the people with the knowledge and the skills to do them—it's that simple. In this kind of knowledge economy, giving up on your education and dropping out of school means not only giving up on your future, but it's also giving up on your family's future and giving up on your country's future.

And yet, that's what too many of America's children are doing today. Over one million students don't finish high school each year—nearly one in three. Over half are African American and Latino. The graduation gap in some places between white students and classmates of color is 40 or 50 percent. And in cities like Detroit and Indianapolis and Baltimore, graduation rates hover around 30, 40 percent—roughly half the national average.



Now, it's true that not long ago, you could drop out of high school and reasonably expect to find a blue-collar job that would pay the bills and help support your family. That's just not the case anymore. In recent years, a high school dropout has made, on average, about \$10,000 less per year than a high school graduate. In fact, during this recession, a high school dropout has been more than three times as likely to be out of work as someone with at least a college degree.

Graduating from high school is an economic imperative. That might be the best reason to get a diploma, but it's not the only reason to get a high school diploma. As Alma (Powell) mentioned, high school dropouts are more likely to be teen parents, more likely to commit crime, more likely to rely on public assistance, more likely to lead shattered lives. What's more, they cost our economy hundreds of billions of dollars over the course of a lifetime in lower wages and higher public expenses.

So this is a problem we cannot afford to accept and we cannot afford to ignore. The stakes are too high—for our children, for our economy and for our country. It's time for all of us to come together—parents, students, principals and teachers, business leaders and elected officials from across the political spectrum—to end America's dropout crisis...(March 1, 2010)

Clearly, the nation's leaders viewed dropping out of high school as a crisis of monumental proportions and contended that solutions were a matter of national urgency. The comments of our 44<sup>th</sup> president illustrated a renewed commitment to reversing ever-increasing dropout trends. It was his belief that eradicating the dropout crisis in America was essential for the well-being of United States citizens.

Brevard dropouts were no different than dropouts across the nation. They faced similar barriers and hardships as did those students who participated in countless previous research studies. Brevard dropouts, at least those who participated in the face-to-face interview portion of the study, also had personal goals. They expected to earn a diploma, choose a rewarding career path and live as productive citizens. The findings of this study

suggested that educators and community agencies must achieve a richer understanding of students who dropped out of school in order to provide effective mechanisms to assist them well in advance of their ability to exercise the option to drop out of school. Brevard policy makers would do well to tap into the reservoir of ideas and opinions of at-risk youth to gain greater insights into how school and community may better support and sustain their engagement in school in order to help them become contributing members of society. Finally, regardless of influencing outside factors, research has offered educators the information and tools to improve the circumstances for at-risk youth. It is imperative that educators turn their focus to that which is in their power to change, rather than fret over factors that are beyond the purview of the school and classroom.

APPENDIX A: BREVARD PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD APPROVAL

**School Board of Brevard County  
Application to Conduct Research  
Assurances Form**

I understand that I am requesting permission to engage in a research Project, and I am not requesting information pursuant to Open Records Legislation. If my research project requires participation with students, I understand that I may be subject to the appropriate School Board policy regarding background investigations, as well as any applicable costs associated. Additionally, if my request is granted, I agree to abide by all policies, rules and regulations of the District, INCLUDING THE SECURING OF WRITTEN PARENT PERMISSION PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION OF MY PROJECT.

Signed: *Betsy Spadaccini* 7-8-09  
Researcher Date

I have read the procedures for Research Projects in the Brevard County Public School System and understand that supervision of this project and responsibility for an outcome report rests with me. I also understand that the privileges of conducting future studies in the Brevard County Public School System is conditioned upon the fulfillment of such obligations.

Signed: *Barbara A. Murray* 7/12/09  
Sponsor/Advisor of Research Project Date  
(signature required for student research)

Approval of Office of Testing and Evaluation\*:

*Karen Schaefer* 7/9/09  
Signature Date

\*Approval of the study at the district level does not obligate principals to participate in the proposed research.

Approval of Principal\*:

*John W. Gale* 7/13/09  
Signature Date

\*The principal's signature suggests that the research project has been reviewed and that the school will participate, subject to the researcher's compliance with District policies.

APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Approval of Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Becky L. Spadaccini and Co-PI: Barbara A. Murray

Date: November 03, 2009

Dear Researcher:

On 11/03/2009, the IRB approved the requested modification to human participant research until 08/04/2010 inclusive:

Type of Review: IRB Addendum and Modification Request Form  
Modification Type: Change to study title and addition of a question to survey  
Project Title: An Analysis of Factors that Influenced Brevard Students to Drop Out and Why Returned to School Earn a General Education Development (GED) Diploma  
Investigator: Becky L. Spadaccini  
IRB Number: SBE-09-06336  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

The Continuing Review Progress Report must be submitted 2 – 4 weeks prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 8 weeks prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form cannot be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 08/04/2010, approval of this research expires on that date.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

## PARTICIPANT BF1

### DEMOGRAPHICS

Date of Birth: 4-26-87

Ethnicity: Black

Gender: Female

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 3

Middle: 2

High: 1

High School Attended: Southern Area

Year participant left high school: January 2002

Age at dropping out: 16

### FAMILY

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL: Mother, Grandmother, 4 brothers, 2 cousins, self

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: Did not graduate

Father: Did not graduate

Siblings: Older Brother – High School

Younger Brother 1 – High School

Younger Brother 2 – Dropped Out, has not entered GED

Younger Brother 3 – Doing well, in dual enrollment

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know, but mom had food stamps

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I left high school because my mother finally decided to step up to the plate. Um, I've been needing help at school. I never got it in elementary and middle school I acted out, behavioral wise. It's because I couldn't make up in class. Then when I get to high school she finally wants to get the help that I need, but at this point, I'm popular, not just for being, you know, pretty, kind, and everything. So the classes they are going to put me in was just a little like, okay, I've never experienced this. Maybe I'm not on the same level as these kids, you know. I don't know; I didn't know what to expect. It was kind of like no, I don't want to do this. I can't do this, uh. I don't know, it caused like a little depression, just say. Now I see the level that I'm on, but now I'm getting, almost grown and I'm almost experienced in high school. But it was just, I was embarrassed. After all this time, I'm finally getting the help, but I didn't want to accept it because of the class that it was in. It was, you know, recognized to be; okay you're not on your level as everyone else that you went to school with for so many years. You're hanging in there,*



*you know, maybe not doing as good, but you're still being passed on, you're still on that level, until you get to high school and you see the problem.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*Okay, it was my mother always say, well if you don't go, if you don't finish at XXX High, go to adult ed. I went to Adult Ed. in Melbourne, um, I think it was called, I'm not sure of the name of it, the South Area, across from Mel Hi, some Adult Education. Um, me being the only 16 thinking, okay now these people allow you to go in. It's not school, you don't see the 8 hrs., or you don't go through each period, you come as you please. They was like, okay, I don't have the patience for this. I never had the patience for it and the person in front of me doesn't really care if I do or if it don't. This is on my, now I see the responsibility of being an adult. I either make the right decision or I make the wrong decision, and I made the wrong decision by saying, okay, you know what? Um, not on my level here, I'm not being helped the way I need to, so you know what, just start working. That's the second thing that came up. Okay, when your education is going down the drain, but get somewhere, get in somewhere before it's too late, and that's what I focused on, just working and trying to survive and bring in money, and school was after that, the last thing on my mind for 7 years.*

*Changing your mind? No, not school authorities or anyone like that. No, not at all. They are fully aware. Pressures? Yes, feeling like, okay maybe I could be on my grade and level, just the way things happen, they happen so quickly. It's as I was being punished for the way I use to act out for not learning how to accept the learning. So it was kind of like, um, I really don't know how to describe it. It's just... I don't know, I don't know what to say.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Um, honestly, probably go, now the counselors. I never, not once, spoken with, you know, someone, or just to say, hey maybe if I do it this way... it was like not a second chance for me. Once I got in it and they put me in the class they did, it was like that was my final chance, when I knew that once I was in that class, no. I am smarter than this. I can do it, it's just that I was being, you know, I was being out in different ways, but, I don't know, maybe having a counselor that said, this is what you need to do, this is what you need to focus on to complete, but, I mean, I blame myself. I don't blame anyone else.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Um, mother, my mother could have. She could have helped me through. Yes, she could have helped me through it, but she didn't have the patience at the time. With her not being educated either, I think it's like I took the same path she did. I'm not blaming it on her, it's just you live, you see what's around you and sometimes when it's not always*

*positive you don't, you don't get that. So it was. She wasn't educated, she always had to work and at that point, when I'm getting to that age, when I know, okay, my mom had to start doing this 'cause she start having kids. I don't have kids, but I was afraid to say, well okay, well I'm losing my education. I need to leave work to help myself and seeing.... So I don't fall into a depression or anything, by just working, working, working. Um, maybe just a better, not a better mother, not a better family, just I don't know... if my family was a little more educated it would have helped a lot, honestly. Friends – I have some friends that are pretty smart, but it was my decision that I made to not continue to go. They couldn't do anything.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*It started off pretty easy. Um, but I know that um, because my mother looked into getting me help, but I don't know if it was due to financially wise, or what. It wasn't that I was crazy, it wasn't that I was just a little not as smart as others at the age that I was when I should have been on a certain level. Um, I'll say about 4<sup>th</sup> grade when I really started realizing okay, well maybe they are moving a lot quicker than you are. I have to be a lot quicker going to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Because I believe that at that time I believe they had 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade was becoming middle school at that point, or something like that. I'm not sure. Grades? They are pretty, back then it was like the Ss and the Ns and it was pretty okay. I'd say my grade probably started, when you started realizing, okay you're not making As, Bs, was 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The positives? Um, just waking up having an activity to do. Having somewhere to go, really. I mean, having somewhere when you wake up in the morning, even being young like that, having something to do, having somewhere to go. Challenges, um...I don't know. I haven't had the patience back then just me being, not even hyperactive, but so self conscious with, okay you don't know this, or you don't know that and I could tell, you know. How will that look with so many students around, um? You know, like I'm the only one that doesn't know, so I never said anything so I just let the teachers talk and if I didn't know it I never was one to raise the hand and say, can I have help?*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*Middle school, with the environment that I grew up in, much more difficult. Um, it was. I grew up in the Cocoa area. I went to XXX, which was a middle school. Mostly black community, um, a lot of trouble. When I was going to middle school, it was a lot of fighting, um...a lot of even disrespecting the teachers because I wasn't picking up quick enough what, I was going to make an excuse so I could get the heck out of this classroom because I have no idea what's going on. Um, I use to fight, uh, just, I don't know. You change, I tell you. After a while you change. Leaving high school, I changed completely when I realized the mistakes I made, I did. Middle school, um Cs, Bs. I was never an A student at all. The positive things about middle school, even though this may sound terrible. When I got to XXX Middle School, okay, my mother did kind of recognize at Stone, that I was having a little problem. It was behavior, but she kind of understood,*

*okay well maybe it's because you're around so many students. Maybe it's because, you know, it's so much pressure in a classroom like that I was involved in the ROPES program at XXX Middle School, but it was only a certain amount of students and that year I think I did the best I had ever done in middle school. I mean it was a little kind of one-on-one, but I learned at a certain pace. That's when I start teaching myself, okay this is how you do this, at a slower pace that I needed, but it worked. Challenges? Acting out, just, I don't know, my challenges, I don't even know how to answer that. So much, not even involving school, just having the responsibility of saying okay, well maybe you may be on your own sooner than you think. You know, maybe which, me and my mother have a history, but we really don't. I left the house at 16; I left the house during middle school. So, I think it was my 8<sup>th</sup> grade year when I decided. Well I was going to school. I did my 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but at my age, I was starting to say, hey are you ready to take on high school or do you need to work. You know, it was... um, track, which I was really excited and focused about. Um, it just, it lasted for only a certain period of time, just another curricular activity, nothing guaranteed about it, just something to be a part of, which it helped. It made me calm down. It made me say to myself if you really want to do something, you got to be a little more patient. That's why you got on the track team. But, it's the environment you grow up in and that you're around that really affects, that really affected everything. Other students? Popular, popular, not for all the wrong reasons. Even with the teachers and the students, I mean everybody thought, oh she, she got it. She has this in the bag, and it wasn't the case at all. Everybody thought, you know, you put that smile on, come in with your books, sitting there, taking notes. Everybody thought it was okay. The teachers knew, grades aren't so good, but hey they're passable, you know. Let's move her on.*

#### 7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*High school was crazy to begin with. Um, because I started off taking regular, general classes with all the other people I went to school with the whole time I was here in Melbourne. Um, it was pretty okay my first year. My first year I'm like, okay I'm understanding this, it's taking off pretty smoothly. Maybe second semester of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, I'm thinking okay, maybe this is out of my league. I am not keeping up my grades are dropping, but at that point it was like, working and school. I was working and I was going to school – and when work called I would say, okay, maybe I won't go to school today, maybe I'll just go to work and from there I had no one encouraging me, hey XXXX go school. This is what you're going to need. I ended up, I came back I think, after my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. I started my 10<sup>th</sup> grade year. That's when they put me in this uh, spec, I don't even know how to phrase it. It's not even lower advance classes where the classes they put you in are a small group and they teach you, I don't want to say handicapped. I don't want to say it like that, it's like special education. When I get in there I literally got sick to my stomach, and it wasn't me being judgmental. I was really going through, like I don't know my mine was really in, it was outside. What is going on outside this classroom? Why am I not out there? Why am I in this when I am not in this position,*

*when I can be way smarter than I am, when I can, I don't know. If just felt like that was not the class for me. I should have been still given the opportunity like everyone else and I feel like I got punished for my behavior, honestly.*

*My grades, um, not, um, I'd say Cs, Bs, Ds, almost at the end, it was even in those classes I skipped class, I wouldn't show up. I would wait to the other students went to class and I would finally go, but the last one to leave out. It was, I don't know, just worried about what everyone else would have to say, just from peers and them not looking down on me, because I was in those classes. Even being put in those classes, I didn't get extra help. I didn't. Positives? I wouldn't know I didn't get to experience high school. I hate to say it, but it's the truth. I just had a year of it, which I thought was an okay year, but I didn't get to experience high school. Challenges, getting up every morning, coming. Just getting up every morning, coming to high school was a challenge for me. I was involved in ROTC and that was it. Um, I was like, I got along with other kids fine. I got into an altercation here, which I was suspended for. It was a fight, it wasn't provoked by me, it was by a group of girls just being judgmental. Um, and that was the end of about everything. I got suspended, um. I got suspended after that fight, that's when I came back and that's when I felt like I was being punished because immediately after that I think I was placed into that class. So it wasn't okay your grades are really bad, or anything. I was put in there just for behavior. School rules? I did. Following the school rules, when I say I used to. I did not like the principal here because I felt like she could have helped also, but she didn't. She did not want to help, so I used to give her a lot of trouble. I used to dress inappropriate, um I use to act out, I use to give them a run for their money when I came here. And I went to XXX High. That's why everyone knows me. But I used to just do things because I felt like they are punishing me and didn't give me a second try, a second chance, so while I'm here, I'm going to act out 'cause that's what I knew to do.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?

*Um huh. I think my mother kept me back, my mother kept me back in 5<sup>th</sup> grade when I started having problems. I think that's the grade that I failed and I had to repeat.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*Um, it was after my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. I was moving to the 10<sup>th</sup> still knowing I was going to be returning to the same class I got out of. So right then and there I was thinking no way, XXX. You have to do something and work. Go get your GED, that's what somebody told me and I was a fool to fall for it. At the age of 23 I'm finding out, no, no, no.*

*Um, I came back after the summer I came back for a month, but during that summer and the time that I was going I was thinking uh-uh. No, you can't do this. You're, I had during that time, cause once I did that month I knew for sure I was not going back.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*The positive things that I thought are positive at that time was I was making money. For me not to have the proper education that I needed. I ended up leaving school. I worked for a surf shop for about a year. A year after that, no education, no anything, that's when I figure well okay, try to get your GED while you're working at the surf shop. Ended up not happening. I started working for a mortgage company, answering telephones and just taking notes. They advanced me to their star loan officer I started refinancing homes for these people, making good money. That gave me confidence, but it was still okay maybe this is looking, maybe I don't have an education but I'm still winning*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*In my eyes I was still winning, not knowing okay, this was just by luck. To be able to advance from here and if you are to move to another company you're going to need something to back you up, and I didn't have that. Um, yes, not being educated right now, I'm not even educated enough to know what I want to do in college, what will be my steps to even get into college, if I would even still be... you know, if I could still even do that. But I mean, I just, it was just, I realized I was not as smart as I put on to be. Most people I talk to are like, if I tell them I didn't graduate, they are like, what? You didn't? I cannot believe that. So I put on a pretense for a very long time, 7 years.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*Um, I would say, honestly, it was negative at first. It was really negative, um, just because I felt like my brothers are seeing this and you know, maybe it's going to give them the idea that they don't have to do it, and it really did kind of hit home when one of my brothers, the one that didn't graduate, when he didn't go through with it. The positive thing though was they learned, because once I put it in my head this was the dumbest mistake you've made in your life, the biggest mistake, I started enforcing it on them. Hey you've got to finish, because if you don't, I'm telling you how it's going to be. It's going to be a lot tougher. You're going to struggle. And they picked up on it. Like I said, my brother just graduated, my young brother is going to BCC. That encouraged me to come back today.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*Uh, not depressing, but ah, just, I don't know, I kind of beat myself up a lot of the time. I don't open my mind as much as I should because I'm always doubting myself. You don't remember this or you don't know this, so it just kind of messes with me a little mentally because I'm not on the level that I know I could be. I could be a lot smarter than I am.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*What I'm doing now. Going back, not being ashamed, going back knowing that I do still have the opportunity um, even with this amount of time. Knowing that there's a possibility for a change, and there still is and it's not too late. I know I can't get the time back that has already gone, but I can change my future, which is what I'm trying to do*

*now and being back at school. I think here at XXX High, if someone would have just noticed, okay it's more behavioral than it is with her getting her education because I went to, I came to class on time, I tried, I put in effort. Um, instead of realizing that it was maybe a slow learning disability that I had and not just me acting out behavioral wise. It was always just okay, let's just get rid of her instead of saying okay why can't you sit still, why can't you? I didn't get that. Maybe if that was offered I could have stuck around a lot longer.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*No, not at all because it's a lot tougher without an education. It's so much tougher. Job opportunity wise, living and learning things, just having friends, it's a part of life. The education takes you a very long, long way and without it you're going to struggle, you're going to run into a lot of things to discourage you.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*Don't do it. Don't do it for anybody, just don't do it. Talk to somebody, talk to a counselor, talk to somebody that has your best interest because you know they're not going to tell you anything wrong, no matter how you're feeling at that time. Do not make that mistake. Some things like gym and physical education, it may not be as important as your math, science, things like that. Don't drop out or you'll regret it.*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*Um, because I've always depended on work and not education, and as of recently I've lost my job and I now know just how important it is for me to have moved on to me doing something else or me wanting to experience something else. I see not working, that's all I can fall back on. Even if I was to find a job today or tomorrow, my education is put first.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*My gosh. Honestly, my goal is to get my GED. I regret, I don't even know how. Honestly if you like looked at my school records, I don't know, I don't even believe that I have like one or two credits. I don't have any credits, I don't believe. I don't even know. I want to pick up on something that's going to give me a career. I want a career. I don't know; I don't know what I want to do. People say, hey you could be in marketing or either in social work or things like that, but I don't know because it think it's probably so much that I didn't learn that I would be interested in at this point in my life that I'm just now taking baby steps and finding out what I really want to do. And when you're out of school that long it kind of gets like, do you even have, you know, a future for a career? I don't know it's crazy. I like to just get my life back into order.*

*I do, I do because I know what I need to do. I may be a little late, I may be a little behind now, but once I get back into the groove of everything I'm good to do.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*It will change my life completely because now I'll have something to say, even though it's a GED and not my high school diploma, I at least worked for it. I at least put the time out so now I'll get it and this is what I have to show you instead of writing down on a job application last year – will how many years you completed, I can at least say now I have my GED or I am in the process of learning more and more.*

## **PARTICIPANT BF2**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

DATE OF BIRTH: 10-05-89

ETHNICITY: Black

GENDER: Female

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Elementary: 1

Middle: 1 – Private school through 8<sup>th</sup> grade

High: 1

HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDED: Central Area

YEAR PARTICIPANT LEFT HIGH SCHOOL: 2004 or 2005

AGE AT DROPPING OUT: 9<sup>th</sup> grade at age 17

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL:

Mother, Stepfather, Sister, and Brother

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY:

Mother: Do not know

Father: Do not know; lives with stepdad

Siblings: Sister – 11<sup>th</sup> grade; Brother – 4<sup>th</sup> grade

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Reason why I dropped out of school, I wasn't, like it was hard for me to learn, basically. I have a learning disability and I was following the wrong crowd at that time. And when I left private school I, you know, I get mixed up because the credits in private school are different, so it kind of mixed me up and back-tracked me a little bit, so I got really behind*

*and didn't really finish none of my work or whatever at XXX High and that's when I came here to Adult Ed.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*My other choices are to come here and get my GED because there are really no other choices when I left private school and my credits are very low, so my only choice was to come here and get my GED.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*No one tried to change my mind. No pressures to make me leave. Um, I would prefer if they was to help me, you know, because I would rather stay in high school to, you know, to catch up, you know, to go through school the whole year to 12<sup>th</sup> grade to graduate, you know, be around go to prom and homecoming, and all that other stuff, and play sports.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Others could motive me; push me to do what I have to do.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*As I can remember, I had speech class. It wasn't really hard because I had people on me to get me to pass. I didn't ever take the FCAT it elementary but I remember that I passed most of my um classes to get to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Grades, up mostly like I get Cs. Um, I don't know, just friends. At that age, you know, it's more fun, you know, because you're a kid and there's so much you can do as a kid. Um, none that I can remember (challenges).*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL.

*I was doing good there (private school), let's see, when I got there I left 6<sup>th</sup> grade and I was attending 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and afterward I was attending XXX. So I was doing pretty good that's the thing I left private school wanting to be in public school and that's where messed me up. So I was getting good grade there, so the program there was very different. They wasn't going by credits, they was going by something else and I guess grades and whatever and stuff, and I was getting mostly like Cs and Bs. (In private school) I was playing sports, sports and my favorite sport was basketball, so and that sport I always got an A+ and so, I was always number 1 on the team and that's the thing I liked about the school 'cause it was similar to, you know, when I got to high school.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*I couldn't really play sports because of my grades and whatever and I was like right behind. Volleyball at private school. I got along with a lot of people, you know, I'm a friendly person when it comes to people. U, high school when I got there, um high school*



*was, it was very different because I wanted to do something ever since I've been in private school since I was in 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, or whatever, I told my mom to transfer me to a public school so I could see a better scenery, or whatever, and see how it is because it's a big school, you know, and I wanted to try it and when I got there I met a lot of people, got in that crowd, and fell behind. I didn't know the work was going to be that hard, but it turned out to be that hard with me having a learning disability, you know. I couldn't really finish all my work, you know, I was just not understanding, comprehending it well, so I felt like, you know, I couldn't do it, or whatever, so I was just like, got to the point where I dropped out and came to this school right here, Adult Ed. (High school) it was rough, I had like Fs, Ds. Um, no (additional help with academics). (positives) um, just being around people, friends, you know, talking laughing, that's the thing I got too close learning about other stuff, you know, and not learning about my school work and I just pushed away from it, which I could have, you know, changed it, the whole outcome to make it better, but... More worried about having fun. Couldn't play sports because of grades, could not do anything extra. I got along good (with others). Um, no (difficulty following school rules).*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*Yeah, I'm going to say 9<sup>th</sup> grade.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?  
*Last minute.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*It was nothing positive I could say, you know, I wish I could have finished, stayed in high school.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*Um . . . that I wouldn't probably get my diploma. That's like a scary thing and to this day I'm still trying to work and get my diploma.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?  
*It affect my family, not in a way.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?  
*I want to say it affect my family, but it affect me. It affect me because without a diploma you can't get further in what you want to do and, like me, I want to be a police officer, and I want to go into the army and all, college, and all the other and without that you can't pursue none of those dreams or anything. Can't get a job, a decent one that pays good money or whatever. I feel like with a GED or a high school diploma you can pursue whatever you desire.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*People, or I would say like teachers that would be on you like 24/7 when you're at school, just so when you like, you know, even if it's just anything just to stay on you to make sure you know. They just basically motivate you to get through, whatever the case is. Whatever the problem is to help you get to your destination, to help you finish your goal and accomplish it. (Counselors?) um, I would suggested them let me know when I was there to, you know, whatever I had to do to get up to that point to get to another grade, to you know, stuff I haven't done, you know, or miss to, you know, be better at it, which I haven't, you know, got from a counselor. I don't think I ever remember talking to a counselor about my grades or any of that. I just know I dropped out before I could talk to a counselor. Which I probably could of, you know, went up to a counselor to talk to a counselor, if there is anything I could change.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*You know, I just liked school, but it was just, you know, I couldn't comprehend and then I guess with the learning. I guess, you know, I wish I was smarter or I could comprehend a little bit better to where, you know, I won't have, you know, these grades that I look at, you know. Thinking, okay I probably had a B or a, you know, or a A, or whatever, but I turn out to have a grade I didn't want. I would not make the decision leave again, because I look at it as just more things you can do in high school – sports, homecoming, math, a lot of things you can run for. Being around positive things.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*That's it.*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*So I can get my diploma. I know I cannot go nowhere without it.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*I know with it you can do whatever, you know, you want because that's what they ask now, do you have a high school diploma or do you have any diploma that shows that you have finished high school or anything?*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*Um, my goals are to either go to college and play basketball or join the Army or become a police officer. Yes, I don't have no doubt. I have faith and belief that I will be something because that's why I'm here today to get my diploma so I can go out and, you know, make something out of it, out of my life. (Diploma) I can't even get the words out, um, what do I believe? It's going to affect me in a good way. It's going to be something,*

*you know, lifted off my shoulder that I don't have to worry about, you know, coming back and trying to get it and I already know that I got it and I finished so I can move to my next goal.*

## **PARTICIPANT WM3**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

DATE OF BIRTH: 1-2-87

ETHNICITY: White

GENDER: Male

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Elementary: 1

Middle: 1

High: 1

HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDED: Central Area; forced to leave in 2006 because he did not graduate by age 19

YEAR PARTICIPANT LEFT HIGH SCHOOL: 2006

AGE AT DROPPING OUT: 19

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL:

Mother, Father, Brother and two Sisters

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY:

Mother: High School

Father: GED

Siblings: Sister – attends XXX High,

Sister High School

Brother at Adult Education

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*They told me once I turned 19 I could no longer be at the high school. I guess some age reason, so since I couldn't be there I had to leave.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*They told me I could either do, um, Omega through XXX High or I could come here. Omega is when you are in the school, but you go from 8:00 to 10:00 and you work on a computer and stuff all day. I mean you get your credits through the school and you have to actually have a job to be in Omega. You have to get 20 hours or something like that. Whenever you take a paper to work with you to get them to fill it out and say you worked 20 hrs. or whatever. I mean you can work more if you want to, but you have to have them put a minimum of 20 hrs. on there. I considered it, but you have to take a placement test, and it was, and half the time she told me it was and after a while it wasn't going to work out anyways.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*I don't know. My mom felt that they could have actually taken a test on what I was actually really wrong with me, like what parts of the subjects I really couldn't do and help me with that and put me in a little special class that would help me and work with me in those certain subjects. They had the smaller classes there, but they seen that I understood what I was doing, I just didn't read it correctly and I just couldn't figure out how to do the problems or whatever.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*I mean most of my friends did basically the same thing I did. They had to leave. As you can see, I still wear the XXX (colors), and every Friday if it's not raining I go to the game. I normally don't go without the girlfriend. I won't go without her.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*Well, I went to XXX, but when I went there it was called XXX. And when I was there, I mean the only reason I had to leave high school early was just because I got too old. And like, elementary and middle school, well middle school I messed up a little bit. I failed some classes, so I didn't get up to the certain level and with elementary school, I didn't fail or nothing, but my mother felt I was not ready to go to the next grade up or anything. All the teachers are nice, and I can actually go up to XXX and see one of the old teachers I did have, and so...*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL.

*With the teachers, I mean, with some of the teachers I had they would just give you the book and expect you to read it and find the answers and actually know what you are doing yourself instead of just explaining it, then getting you to do it. I mean that was really the only challenge that got a lot of kids and me that instead of having the teacher sit there and explain what you have to do to get the answers and where you could find it in the book and everything, they just expected you to go through the chapters you already read and expect you to find it yourself. Grades are so-so. Certain classes, the grades are*

*not up there. I had most of my friend there with me, and there are certain teachers that did actually that I talk to. When I went to XXX, the gym teacher that was there, I can still go there and talk to him and stuff like that. Due to grades and stuff like that, you have to have a certain amount of high grades and GPA to do stuff, so . . . I mean, as long as you kept to yourself and hung with your own friends you didn't have any problems. I mean there are other kids in there that did want to bully you around and stuff like that, but most of them knew that I was not; I mean I'm not a person that's going to fight with anybody. I'm just going to warn you and leave you alone, but I mean if I do have to get into a fight with somebody over some little thing, I'm just not going to hit you, I'm going to. I mean I have some power to just put you on the ground. If I do that one time, I mean, hopefully that teaches you not to get up and come right back again, because if you do you're going right back on the ground, right back where you came from, again.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*About the same as middle school. I mean certain classes are harder than others and stuff like that. I mean one class I did have some problems with was math, so . . . I mean, that's what it was, my momma tried to get them to give me a test to tell them where I was in math and then when I did take the test they just seen that I already knew a lot of what I was doing, so they felt that I just wasn't reading it correctly and not learning to do the work. I mean, we had lunch time, having fun with your friends, and then we every other Friday we always had a pep rally or something like that for the football team and we would have little carnivals or something like that. I mean when it was halfway through the year we have little carnivals or little (pep rallies). I mean you just go in the gym and sit with your friends. You have to pay to get a ticket and stuff, but you and your friends go in and whatever grades you are in you sit with your class inside the bleachers and you cheer. It was a little pep rally and after that they everybody goes out of the gym out to the driving range out there and they have little like bond fires. So you get to, at that time, you get to do whatever you want, play around, run around, wrestle or stuff like that, as long as nothing gets too violent. At a certain time they had the fire department come and put the fire out. They said, you know, you go to leave we're at the school and stuff. I wanted to participate in sports, but with the grades and stuff. I mean, I'm pretty sure that if I did try I could have got on the football team and stuff like that, but with the grades, I'm sure I wouldn't have stayed long.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?

*My mother held me back in elementary school. Middle school I didn't pass certain classes and I had to stay back to redo them.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*I mean I wanted to stay there as long as I could to finish all four years of high school, so...*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I mean, the fact that I was able to come back to school, so...*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I mean, knowing the fact that you aren't able to go back to your high school and actually be with your friends and stuff like that, and do the activities that the school offered to do for the whole school and stuff like that. That's the only thing I do miss, like when they have the pep rallies and stuff like that and would like to actually roll up to the school and go to the pep rallies and just sit with the seniors and stuff like that and . . .*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*It hasn't really; I mean before I left school I had a job anyways, so . . .*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*I mean, I'm back in school and stuff like that, but I just wish I could have finished my four years of school and got my diploma and stuff like that, so . . . I mean, I'm getting my GED, but it would have been better to have it say XXX High on there. Once we graduate and stuff like that we go to XXX High, so it says XXX on it. I mean I'm hoping that I can get it where they can do that for me, that it says XXX High. I'm going to wait until I get my paper in the mail that says I have me GED, has it in there, then bring it up to talk to them to see what they say, to see if they can work that for me.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*I mean if I actually would have, if the teachers would have actually taken the time to sit down and help me, to make me understand what I was doing then just given me the work and just walking away and stuff like that, so. I mean cause here the class that I am actually in now I can actually, there's like a little box I sit in to keep me away from everyone else and the teacher comes in and helps me actually, sits there with me and shows me what I actually did wrong and most the time it's just simple things I just missed, didn't read correctly or didn't follow through and stuff like that. I mean, at high school, the counselor was one of the main ones that told me I have to leave, one of the counselors. Instead of trying to figure out a way to help me stay in school, they told me as soon as I turned 19 I **had** to leave, so, it didn't really seem like they wanted to help do anything, so . . .*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*No*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*I mean, not really, I mean it's just the fact that I wish I could have stayed and finished and stuff like that, but I'm glad I was able to come back somewhere to actually do school work and stuff like that, so....*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*Well, see, I came here back in '06 and was here long enough and passed all the classes I had to and then went up and paid the money to do the GED. Took the whole test, and then after I took the test I stayed out of school and got the results and I was working every day of the week, so I couldn't come back. It was more or less, I lost my job, I figured the best I can do is not sit at home, come back to school and get my GED and it helped my dad out, too. He has medical problems and stuff like that, I mean he goes to the Brevard Health Alliance and they're saying to us that if I was back in school it would help with his medications and stuff like that, get them for less price and stuff like that, so ...*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*I want to get my GED and actually get a good job and help my family and stuff. Once I get my GED and help my family and stuff, I'm going to try to put money away to get out on my own and stuff too. I mean like the fact that I have the GED and the GED will help me attain things that I cannot achieve without that, I mean like the only work experience I actually have is like working in grocery stores and that is like stocking and stuff like that, so. I mean that if I could actually go somewhere that could actually get me to achieve something better than just stocking groceries all the time, it would help me out to get more money and help the family out at the same time, so...*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*I mean it would actually make my mom and dad happy, and I've already told you the jobs I've had before the one I was at before, Save-A-Lot, I mean most of them know me and if I pass the GED, I would come in the store and scream over the whole mike that I got it, I mean it would actually make me happy knowing that I got it.*

## **PARTICIPANT HM4**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

DATE OF BIRTH: 4-7-91

ETHNICITY: Puerto Rican

GENDER: Male

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Elementary: 3

Middle: 1

High: 2

HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDED: Central Area

YEAR PARTICIPANT LEFT HIGH SCHOOL: during 11th grade, I got kicked out in 2009

AGE AT DROPPING OUT: 18

### FAMILY

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL: No one, I was living with a friend.

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY:

Mother: 1.5 years of college

Father: Kicked out in middle school

Siblings: Brother – Currently attending BCC

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I got kicked out of XXX for fighting and from that I moved in with my dad just to get away from all the drama down here and I went to getting arrested and put on probation and then from that got caught fighting again in school and they kicked me out and then let me back in and then that's about it. I wanted to come back down here because there was no way I could finish. I slacked off and I just didn't do any credits because there was no reason for me to go to school. The teachers really didn't care and they are all pissy all the time, pardon me, they are all mad all the time, I mean they treated me like I was stupid. At least here I get to do my own thing and they try and help me and I wish I would have done this like a while ago. Nicer teachers, I mean just the teachers show that they care. If you are just in there they tell you what to do and why homework – they give you stuff to do or you need to know and they give you and F on it and then it puts you even further back because you didn't know it it's, I mean, it's stupid. How do they expect you to do the homework and you don't even know the stuff you're doing because they don't bother to teach you it.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*Um, nothing, just here. I mean I could either go here or BCC, but I needed a GED first. No one tried to make me change my mind about leaving.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Better teachers. I mean I understand they don't have to put up with kids, but when I'm willing to do the work but just need extra help they ought to help me. I mean I'm a nice kid. I treat people nice; I treat them with respect and ... Like I said, when you*



*don't know the stuff and when I came out of XXX I was in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and when I went over there they put me in 10<sup>th</sup> which means higher classes to help me catch up; like I mean teachers just let me do my own thing. I tried learning, but I don't even know how I passed to be honest with you because I didn't know anything. Except when it came to tests I passed the tests. It's weird because I didn't do the work, but when it came to tests I knew the stuff. I mean I didn't do the homework, because I couldn't do it. In class, sometimes I would have a kid next to me that knew the stuff, but most the teachers, some teachers would help because they actually cared, but most of those teachers are when I was in the ESA (meaning ESE) program for special learning.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*No, like I had my mind set on it, 'cause even now I'm going for my GED because I wouldn't finish high school for another like three years. Except here I have like 16 credits I have to make up. I would be here for another year and a half.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*Not good. I mean I didn't learn how to read until like the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and that was just because I came from an oddball family. I was taken away when I was young and elementary school I didn't have to go to school because my mom was always passed out and my dad was always gone doing his own thing. My brother he buckled down when he was young, but I was just, I didn't care about it, just wasn't a thing I was into. When I got older I was in a car crash because my mom was drunk and I got taken away when I was 7 and went to foster care and finally my grandparents adopted me and my brother both, my mom's mom. And that was just, it helped. They actually cared and started teaching me how to read, I couldn't read no matter how much they got pissed off at me. I tried but I just didn't know how. After I moved in with them they started actually teaching me (to read). Depending on the learning, like elementary school was kind of easy, like well not really. When I moved it was kind of hard, but I was just more into the friends and all that; I never was into learning. I never was into learning, and my grandmother she had to teach me trying to read every night and trying to write her an essay and I ended up getting smart. I bought a whole bunch of Goosebump books and just wrote the back summary and she thought I was a really good writer. Then I felt bad about it and I told her like recently and she said, well I thought you are such a good writer and I was like no Grandma. I told her they are like cliffhangers. Reading and math: reading comprehension came to me kind of easy because I had to do it myself, but when it came to someone else having to teach me it was hard because I am not good at math. I still to this day don't know my multiplication tables. In elementary school the teachers did care. I had a teacher named Mrs. XXX, she was an amazing teacher and she cared a lot and actually taught me a lot of math and she lived close by me and would teach me off-hand and*

*told me if I ever needed any help to come on over and like she would help me and she did, a lot. She actually gave me a part-time job like doing her yard and stuff when I was little too. She's the only one who really stuck with me.*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL.

*Um, it was alright, but that was like when I got into smoking weed and that messed me up 'cause I was good until like 8<sup>th</sup> grade and in 8<sup>th</sup> grade I got into the wrong crowd, started doing stupid stuff and continued doing stupid stuff through 9<sup>th</sup> grade. That's why I never learned anything. Grades are actually decent, but iffy depending upon the class. Friends (positives). Challenges – the work. The coach wanted me for track real bad because I would get off the bus every day and run across the campus to this convenience store and then I would run back and he said that every day, it was Mr. Reed, and every day he would like bother me about it and said, Man just join the track team, join the track team. I said like no, no. Every day I would have to jump over fences and stuff like that to so he said I would be good in hurdles and sprint. I didn't want to, but I probably should have. Actually it probably would have helped me stay out of trouble. I know everyone here already. There's always these kids that have a mouth and they try to pick on you and stuff and I am like- I was raised a fighter pretty much. My mom and my dad are okay if I fought. My mom said that if someone picked on you in school and if they started it you better make sure you ended it or finished it because when you got home you get twice the whooping. If you start the fight and if they win you are definitely going to get a whooping because that means I started it and I didn't finish it. That's like a disgrace in the family type thing.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*Learning was difficult. I had an Individual Education Plan (IEP). In the beginning my grades are good and, I don't know, they kept going lower and lower because I didn't do the homework. I had other stuff to do, job; I was working and helped support my family. They always give you stuff you don't know, they always do, and then when you get it and it's not done or finished then they like yell at you for not doing it. It's like how in the heck am I supposed to do it if I don't know it and you don't even bother trying to teach me it. They go, well we tried to teach you, and I'm just sitting here not doing anything and I'm staring at you listening to you and I don't understand it, that's not me trying to learn it. I got help in a learning class. It kind of helped. I had three math classes, I went to one class and didn't know it, went to the next class and didn't know it and then there would be the lady trying to teach me another type of math when I was trying to learn them to. So I had three different kinds of math classes I was trying to learn at once. I had geometry, algebra, and learning strategies math. Learning strategies math was completely different. It kind of helped me. I didn't try on the FCAT; I just went and I fell asleep. What happened I fell asleep? I was writing and had my head down and the teacher didn't bother waking me up until 20 minutes right before the test was over. I actually have 4 or 5 friends*

*that would actually reimburse me on that. She taps me and says 20 minutes, and I said, seriously? And I was supposed to have extended time and I didn't get that extended time. I played football for Apopka. The coach gave me lenience on it. He would let me play every now and then, but when my grades are going bad, he said I couldn't play anymore. Like, everyone's grades are good at the beginning of the year. I tried keeping them up, but I couldn't. Meeting new people. I had trouble following school rules. I mean, I respect the school, didn't do anything to the school, but when there are kids disrespecting me, you know. I'm a big person on respect. I mean I don't just go around asking people for respect but when people come around and they spit in your face for no reason, that's not respect at all.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*In kindergarten, I guess I was coloring inside the lines when everyone else was coloring outside the lines.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*I was thinking about it in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but I want an education though. No, it was actually like the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> grade because like just every teacher I ever had coming from middle school didn't really even care. To me it was pointless to even try and go on because I would learn one thing and they would try to reimburse (?) me about other things and then I would forget the thing I actually learned. Like Social Studies, that's just a bunch of useless information and science, I don't really care about science. Well, I mean some things are fun in it, but for me, I'm going to be a mechanic and I don't really need that stuff and what I need is metric and that's about it. I don't need to understand chemicals, but I understand levers and all that I need to be a mechanic. My dad was arrested when I was living with him and like the lady I was staying with kicked me out because she wanted her ex-boyfriend back and me and him didn't get along, and that was my dad's ex-girlfriend. I mean it was just hard because I had no job, um schooling, finding rides to school, it was just difficult. I have a place down here staying with my grandparents, and I have a place here that I can actually finish my education. Here they teach you the stuff you need to know, not all that useless stuff. Depending if you want your high school diploma, then you have to learn that useless stuff. I really don't need calculus to work on cars.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Um, not going. You didn't have to worry about all that stuff, there's no drama, but it was also really boring.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I didn't get an education. Since I didn't have a job I was just sitting at the house and I was trying to find a job, like I did side work like mowing people's yard and cutting down trees.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*Nothing really.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*I didn't get an education. Since I didn't have a job I was just sitting at the house and I was trying to find a job, like I did side work like mowing people's yard and cutting down trees.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*Never experiment with drugs. The teachers - find teachers that care. Like every teacher says that they love kids. They may love kids, but actually caring about the kids, that's different. I understand that there can't be just one kid special, but I'm pretty sure that there's one kid in the class that doesn't get what they're teaching. I'm just trying to put that out there and most kids won't ask for help. So if you see them struggling, instead of just throwing them more Fs, and throwing them even further behind, how about just stopping and asking them if they need help because I'm pretty sure they'd say yes. Teachers should try teaching. Counselors didn't care.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*Yep, because I would still be here in the same situation.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*No*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*I kind of need a GED if I want to make anything of my life, at least a GED. My dad did crap working his whole life and I watched him do it. My dad is 47 years old and he has arthritis in his hands and can barely hold a hammer and I see him trying to hold up drywall and trying to put up roofs and that's just because he didn't get an education. He didn't do anything with his life. He wasn't going to. He lived from paycheck to paycheck.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*I want to be a mechanic. First I'm going into the Navy and they're going to pay for my college. From college, I'm going to get my welding degree and go in there and learn more about automotive repair, automotive basics, and all that. And because I'm*

*going to be a mechanic I'm going to have my own shop, hopefully, when I get older. Yes, I'll be successful because I have always loved cars and worked on cars even when I was young. I mean kids are going to school and I was out there fixing bikes and stuff.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*I can actually do something, speaking which I have to work from about 6:00 to 2:00 tonight. I have to be here at 8:00 am. I don't get to bed until about 3:30. I can't do night classes because I work. But, I mean, I'm not going to be here too much longer. I'm just learning. I'm trying to reimburse myself on knowledge. I told myself I was going to come in here and earn my GED.*

## **PARTICIPANT WF5**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 12-2-91

Ethnicity: White

GENDER: Female

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 1

Middle: 1

High: 1

High school attended: Northern Area

Year participant left high school: 2009

Age at dropping out: 17

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL: 4- my mom, brother, sister and me

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: High school diploma

Father: High school diploma

Brother: Private school – 7<sup>th</sup> grade

Sister: BCC (Community College)

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Um, I was partying too much. I partied every day, and . . . even during the weekdays, so I was too tired, I fell asleep during school. I'd get caught using my phone so I decided to quit so I could use my phone and so I could sleep.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*Not really, there was no other options. My friends, a few of my friends did try to make me stay.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

4.  
*No.*

5. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*My friends, a few of my friends did.*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*It was good for a while, but as I got higher they (grades) got worse. Positives: All my friends that I like, that I seen every day at lunch. Challenges: Um, uh, getting made fun of. That was about it. Everybody was doing it; I wasn't just like the main target. It was just the words.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL.

*Middle school was fun, but I had good grades, but I don't know how. I got referrals every day. Um, I got in trouble a lot, but it was fun, but I still passed with flying colors. Um, I was being mean to others and I would throw stuff or not listen to the teacher and just be loud or leave school (cutting classes). No extra-curricular activities. All my friends and I was pretty cool in middle school. I don't know, I guess because I was being mean to others and I looked better than I did in elementary school. Challenges: The work, geography was tough and all the projects I had to do with it. And PE, I hated running. Others: I got along with some. Teachers: Some of them loved me and some didn't like me at all.*

8. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*Learning: At first it was easy but then it got a little more difficult. Um, I would be on my own and it would be easier, or if I was in the whole big class trying to learn with everybody at once with all sorts of people it was harder. I don't know, I think I'm kind of like slow in my own little way. Grades: They aren't all that great. I, every once in a while I would get a B or a C and then I would get lower grades. And then I got in the (computer) program and I did get all Bs, not like As. Bs and Cs and then sometimes I would get As. I left because I was tired. I got help when I was in the regular classes.*

*Sometimes learning was easier then. Positives: the only positives I can really think of are friends and lunch. Challenges: getting up to go 8 hrs. to learn when I would rather sleep. I woke up, didn't want to go, and there was the work, I didn't want to do it. I didn't get made fun of or anything. I kept to myself and others kept to themselves. Some of them I got a good, some of them not so good. Rules: Sometimes, yeah. Not as much as middle school, but I did get in trouble. I would just be really loud and dance around the class and dance on tables, talk when I'm not supposed to, those things. I don't know, it was just fun. I was just trying to make fun out of the day and everybody laughed and....*

9. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. I wasn't really held back in high school but I was always a little behind with my work.*

10. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?  
*I thought about it for a few months. The decision was not made quickly. I thought about where I would go when I dropped out.*

11. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*I didn't have to stay until 3:30 and I didn't have any rules to follow, as much at least.*

12. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*I left my friends and the program I was in. I miss it. I was on the computer the whole day and the teacher was there to help when I needed it.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?  
*I don't think it has affected them*

14. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?  
*Um, I sleep more (laugh). I don't do as much so I'm more lazy. I have more time for myself, that's about it.*

15. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?  
*I don't know; it was my fault. I had too much fun every night and didn't sleep so I was too tired at school. It wasn't, it was my fault. I was physically tired and just didn't want to go. If they allowed us to have drinks when we wanted, it would have kept me awake. Or use phones 'cause most people say phones distract them, but it helps me do work. I text. I never really went to my counselor and I've never really got called in there. I think I talked to her once, but I don't really remember what we talked about...*

16. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*No, I kind of miss it. All my friends and the routine of waking up early and going class to class, meeting my friends in the middle of the hallways.*

17. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
PLEASE DISCUSS.

*I don't think so*

18. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*So I can get my GED.*

19. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*Cause I don't want to not get anything, not go anywhere, and I want to go to college. I want to be a pediatrician, I love kids, mainly babies, but I like kids and I like taking care of them. I'm going to try.*

20. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*I don't really know, like, I know it's going to make me smart, get where I need to be, 'cause without it I wouldn't be going anywhere, going to college. I'm not going to give up.*

## **PARTICIPANT WM6**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 9-24-91

Ethnicity: White

GENDER: Male

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: Don't remember, probably more than one and I was homeschooled too.

Middle: Too Many

High: Around about my approximate guess would be 3

High school attended: Northern Area

Year participant left high school: 2009

Age at dropping out: 18

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL: 3 (Aunt, Uncle, student)

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: High school diploma, 1 semester of college

Father: Don't know him



Brother: Currently in high school in [name removed]  
FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Uh, not having enough credits. It wasn't where my heart was, you know, what I'm saying, and I was too busy getting in trouble. I was playing around I wasn't serious, you dig?*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*When I left I didn't have no choice, for two reasons. I came down here; I mean it's kind of different from [name removed] from here. They told me when I showed up I had zero credits from last year so you don't have no way to pass. So you, and they told me I was basically here for nothing. I made the decision to go; I mean they basically told me I was here for nothing. I had no choice. When I came back from Christmas break they told me ... they withdrew me because I didn't have any credits. And when I was there I did good, I got most of my credits there, I had more credits than zero, I'll tell you that. No pressures, you know what I'm saying? I was there for fun; you know what I'm saying? I was there to socialize over there. I felt like that's where my escape was, socializing. I wasn't really there for really much of an education. I didn't take it serious and then I realized what was going on and it was kind of too late to change.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*I think the school could have like gave me a chance, you know, instead of looking at my past. They don't even know me.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*My family wanted what's best for me. It just wasn't me, at the time. It was basically my fault because I wasn't serious in [name removed] and all that trouble and stuff caught up with me. Here I am. I don't really believe in friends, you know what I'm saying? I believe in acquaintances, you know. I didn't really care I was just angry. They are doing their thing; your friends just wouldn't do that. Friends help me through high school, and family. Friends, they just add a thing to it like, like, I don't know like, basically they was just like homies you know what I'm saying. They are just like real you know what I'm saying, they was just like to be there to socialize. Homies got real close to me, they help me through a lot of family issues. I haven't met anyone yet.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*All I remember was Kindergarten, and all I did was sleep and play. I don't know how I passed it. I was homeschooled. That was way back in the day, you know?*

#### 6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*Middle school was a whole different story. It's a very important thing. School's a very important thing; you know what I'm saying? I think I was still playing around, you know what I'm saying, I think it was like people over there in middle school kind of like motivated me. They helped me. All I needed was a little help, most of my life I never had no help, you know what I'm saying. Some teachers are there to help, some teachers are there to get paid and really I don't blame them. They are trying to teach me, to help me. Some teachers just would be there I don't blame them trying to teach hard-headed me. I know that for sure, I know that I am very capable of what I can do when my mind is set correct at what I'm doing at the time. I thank God that I was given a second chance. Learning, man, it was hard man 'cause all I remember is 8<sup>th</sup> grade was one of my best years, you know, 7 and 6. Well 6<sup>th</sup> I failed and then I came back and passed. And then 7<sup>th</sup> I just played football, you know, and that was what motivated me and I had to have good grades to be on the team, you know what I'm saying. And I was still getting in trouble, you know what I'm saying, I was fighting. Most of the fights I was in I didn't get caught, thank God, you know. I think I wasn't a very good person, you know what I'm saying, and ... Well, I mean, I'm a good person, you know what I'm saying, but I was just kind of, I was just hard headed, you know what I'm saying? I kept on head busting. Seventh was football year, so that was motivating me. I love football; I played until I got injured. I tried to keep to myself; you know what I'm saying I just kept getting into fights. I ain't wanting nobody to fear me, I wanted everybody to love me, you know what I'm saying? I just fear brings respect. I didn't fail middle school.*

#### 7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*I don't know if I failed. I went into 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>. I failed a couple subjects from 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and while I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade originally I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade classes too. I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade history, US History, this is confusing stuff. When I came here it was just a waste of time in XXX, but, you know. English I was still 10<sup>th</sup> grade and then I had a 9<sup>th</sup> grade science. I got the same assistance as everybody else. No extra. Positives: I like to chill with my people; you know what I'm saying? I have some kin folks come down every once in a while. That's it. Challenges: Getting along with teachers, I argued with my math teacher, getting on my nerves. I'm real good at math, you know, I just failed every test on Friday. 'Cause I was too busy playing around, you know what I'm saying? I'm a class clown, I ain't afraid to admit it. Well the thing is I never paid attention, so I didn't know what I was doing. If I knew what I was doing I would have passed it. I just don't fail something that I want to fail. I don't want to fail. Thing is, I just wasn't so serious enough to pass, you know what I'm saying? There was times I thought school was just a game. I was a chill out person, I just chilled. The first days here, I was in high school, and I was always going to a new school. I don't understand why I was always in a new school, you*

*know what I'm saying? I never stayed in one area; I always moved and packed, you know what I'm saying. Rules: yeah, in middle school you could always catch me in the office; high school was the same thing. Couple fights in high school; I had more fights in middle school than anywhere. Fighting, disrespecting the teachers, you know what I'm saying, like I ain't happening, just skipping, all these simple things, you know what I'm saying, that I'm going to change. But you know, I just, at that time I didn't even care, I was just, you know the teachers they came at me incorrect. You know, and people are just scared to just, hey I want to talk to you, you know what I'm saying. I wasn't scared, I just didn't keep my mouth shut. I would speak what I felt. My mom had taught me, you know what I'm saying, just speak what you feel; you know what I'm saying. Don't be afraid to hold (inaudible). Don't start nothing, but you cannot take nothing. When I'm afraid, I don't really care. Teachers do things, bothering me and everything, and it's not just helping me. They are like, XXXX, you need to chill. XXXX be quiet. I won't even be saying nothing, you know what I'm saying, but they always think it's me, you know what I'm saying because I'm just a put out there person right there, you know what I'm saying, because I'm always in trouble. They know me as a trouble maker; you know what I'm saying? I didn't want that description; you know what I'm saying. I didn't get a fair appearance. Um, I was discriminated against. They always assumed it was me and they kept on moving me from other people that I socialized with you know what I'm saying? They think I'm just a bad person, you know what I'm saying? I, maybe I was bad, you know what I'm saying? I still had those bad behaviors inside of me, but you know I've got to realize, you know this is my last chance. If I blow this, it's over. O-V-E-R and I just got nothing. My life and I don't want that in my life, you know what I'm saying. I want to be known as a successful person, you know what I'm saying? Everybody got dreams and I'm going to get mine.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*6<sup>th</sup> grade and I failed some courses in high school. I was all over the place. I'm not surprised and I'm not mad, I'm just realizing my situation and I got to try to deal with it, you know what I'm saying, I got to try to solve it. XXX didn't give me that chance; you know what I'm saying? I mean there's certain level of age you have to be in high school, you know what I'm saying? Alright that's cool. But in [name removed] they ain't even care. You've got to go till you pass, you know, 30, 40. I'm still 18; you know what I'm saying?*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*Well I told my cousin. She wanted me to stay in high school in [name removed]. I was considering GED in the first. You know, being in high school is just a waste of time you know what I'm saying? That's what I feel like. I mean it's like I like the people I socialize with but I'm too busy socializing with these people and I'm not even worrying about my own damn self you know what I'm saying? When I left I came here. I was staying through*

*12 you know what I'm saying? This is where I needed to be at, I'm going to stay in high school as long as possible, but it's harder you know what I'm saying? I heard GED is easier, know what I'm saying? All you got to do, you know you get more help, you get more assistance. And you know I just don't get no help like that; you know what I'm saying? There's a whole bunch of teachers that do nothing, you dig? So it's just a waste of time, you know what I'm saying? I'm a grown person, I'm a grown man to realize it, you know what I'm saying?*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I didn't even really drop out of high school; I just dropped out and came here. I'm still going to school; you know what I'm saying? I don't think I dropped out, I was just dropped. I was considering dropping out, you know. I considered it. I dropped out before but I just went back, but you know, I did my thing. But I'm here and I'm trying to make up for what I did.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*The people I socialize with.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*Well it didn't really affect them, it just showed more hope. They always looking at the positive side, this is my chance. My chance to shine, man, to get my rhyme, you know what I'm saying?*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*I'm doing all right man, trying to maintain.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

15.

*You know what I'm saying. I feel like I could have got more help in high school. And then when I brought homework, you know what I'm saying, I would try to ask my mom for help and she didn't even know what it is. So I stopped doing my homework. Yeah, I didn't know how to do it and nobody in my home knew how to do it. I mean homework is home work; teachers can't help you on homework. I think I made my choice, you know. I was so used to nobody giving me any help, you know, that I just accepted it.*

16. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*Stop worrying about these females, you know, they ain't going to do nothing for you, you know what I'm saying. You need to focus on your education; you know what I'm saying. They just think world not's going to fall apart, females can always come later.*

17. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

PLEASE DISCUSS.

*I think it's working for the best, you know. I believe things can always change. Sometimes God, God changes. God's just moving us around, you know what I'm saying, for the good. They always try to block your shine; you know what I'm saying? You got to just keep your faith.*

18. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*To get my second chance. There's always there's a second chance. God believes in more than second chances. We get more than second chances, we still get that chance.*

19. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*Well, really my dream had nothing to do with this. You know, I just wanted to prove I was smart, you know, to my other people. 'Cause they know I'm smart, I just don't feel like they just, I feel like sometimes they knew I wasn't going to make it, sometimes. You know what I'm saying, my people, my kinfolks, my homies, and everything, they kept their faith. They are like hey bro, get real with yourself, you know. I know you can do it you just don't got the mindset. I'm talking true talk; you know what I'm saying. It's not like that; they want me to do better. They know I can do better; I got to prove it to myself. In [name removed] I was rapping, so I want to learn. I also want to learn, you know. So I also want to learn some new words, you know so I've got at home that big old GED book and one about history, you know and also I got this big old dictionary and a thesaurus and I can learn new words and put it on my lyrics sheet, you know what I'm saying, so I can do my thing on this rapping thing. "Cause I know, people tell me hey bro, you got skills; you're going to make it on top, you know. It's like, I know. I feel like I'm just not going nowhere without this education, you know what I'm saying. There's always something that you need. So I want to get this over with so I can focus on what I want to do in life, you know what I'm saying? Always what you want to do always takes effort, so effort's a big thing.*

20. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*I think it's not just going to impact my life, it's going to impact others, you know what I'm saying. It's going to impact my life because, hey I did it. You know, I realize I did it. And I just doubted myself, but now I did it. So what's up with me doubting myself because I know I was right? Hey, I just like, I just don't want to only do it for me, you know what I'm saying? I want to do it for my people; you know what I'm saying? That's what keeps me motivated. I want to do it for my little brother. He's out there in [name removed] and everything with some other family. I want to prove that I can do something with my life; you know what I'm saying. Help my family out. I can be able to be supportive for my little brother. Be a mentor to him, you know what I'm saying. Say to him hey, you need to get this education, you know what I'm saying. You see where I'm at, right? Trying to be.*

## PARTICIPANT WM7

### DEMOGRAPHICS

Date of Birth: 11-12-89

Ethnicity: White

GENDER: Male

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 3-4

Middle: 1-2

High: 2

High school attended: Southern Area

Year participant left high school: 2008

Age at dropping out: 18

### FAMILY

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL: None, placed in foster care while in 4<sup>th</sup> grade

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: High school diploma

Father: Does not know – thinks GED but doesn't have much information

Siblings: Older sister – never met; little brother working on GED; two stepsisters too young for school

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Well, um, when I was in XXX High School I had a teacher named Mrs. XXXX and she was my math teacher, and there is one time where she was trying to teach me and, you know, every single teacher would try to teach me, but they just couldn't. I went up to Mrs. XXXX one day, and math is my worst subject and there is a lot of cases for a lot of people my age these days, but um I went up to her and I was asking her can you show me what's going on. Can you please help me? She tried everything, like she was sitting there with me about a good hour trying to teach me and she was like, "look XXXX it's not you, it's me. I can't teach you; I don't know how". She said it's not your fault, it's the lack of, it's my lack of um experience and I'm sorry but I don't know how to teach you. So, it was that and I have a learning disability and I have ADHD. I'm not blaming my problems on that, it's just that you know, I have a lot of, I don't know how to, It's very hard for me to learn. But that was one reason, and I don't know it just seems like every school I go to doesn't help that much. They did put me in special classes at XXX and I was doing fairly okay, at least like somewhat*

*understanding, but not fully. So, I don't know, I mean, I wasn't really learning anything. Nobody could really teach me and here it's practically the same thing. It's not their fault, but it's the fact that there's so many kids and there's, she doesn't have enough time. Even with Mrs. XXXX there's been times when I don't understand her. Um, I usually ask for help during class because usually she wants to go when she wants to go, and they don't offer tutoring here, so I'm going to try to take tutoring lessons. My girlfriend's sister, actually, she's a tutor. Mainly math, I am understanding language a little bit now, it's mainly math.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*Well I could have left and just went to a full-time job, um I could have came back here, which is what I did and I was still working with Jimmy on a handy-man service. Those are my main two options.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Um, well it wasn't the teachers. It really wasn't their fault. It was really it's really nobody's fault the reason why I left, it's just I didn't understand. As far as saying anything they can do to, I mean. I don't know; the only thing I can say is that... I don't know, I can't really think of anything.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*No, cause really foster care doesn't really do much (laughed).*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*Elementary? Um, in elementary school I remember in kindergarten I did very well, and you know first grade I passed first grade, second grade I think I might have failed second or third grade. Fourth grade, I don't even remember because that's when I was taken away for foster care. The day I was taken away for foster care I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and I wasn't in school, so I don't know if I passed 4<sup>th</sup> grade or not, I really can't remember. Um, third grade, I think I failed, no, I passed third grade, somehow I passed, but I really don't know how. Um, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> I don't really remember. I remember being in 5<sup>th</sup>, um there's one year I think I failed 5<sup>th</sup>. I think I failed 5<sup>th</sup>, I'm not really too sure, but I think I did pass after that, I think. I'm not really too sure, I can't remember. I wasn't in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> cause I was in a place where they wouldn't allow you to go to the public schools, so I wasn't in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, and the work that they gave us there, it was the same thing. There was nothing different. They really aren't teaching you anything, so it's one reason why I'm so far behind. Challenges? History, I loved history, um I was really good at history. Mainly math, even in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade the teacher, she had like flash cards and stuff and they always had to line us up, I don't*

*know if they did that when you are in school, but they lined us in rows and they played a little game where they versed each other. I was, there was like maybe one, maybe a few times where I actually got it first and that was because like I watched other people and if the card already came up or I already knew it and I just said it really quick, but very few times. I was always one of the ones to go to the back first cause I was always one of the ones to sit out because I always lost (laughed). Multiplication tables, cause I'm not really good with like off the top of my head like when I'm doing multiplication I'll even count on my fingers, like I have to count on my fingers and with division, like I always have to have a piece of paper and a pencil and will have to write down, you know, I'll add the numbers up. Like say 7 goes into 21 3 times, yeah I know that, but like 7 goes into maybe 50 how many times? I will have to sit there and uh, say well I already know that 7 times 3 is 21 so I'll put 21 down and I'll put 3 on the side so that way I know that, and then I'll add 7 to 21, and add 7 to whatever that number is until I get 50 and I'll sit there and do that on a piece of paper and that takes up a lot of time. Um, kindergarten I did well, I actually think I passed in 2<sup>nd</sup>. I moved around. I think the reason why I failed is 'cause I moved around, cause I moved, now remembering back.*

#### 6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*Um, 8<sup>th</sup> I think I somehow passed. I really don't know how, but I somehow did. I was back in public school in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade; I was in Fort Lauderdale then. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade I don't know how, but somehow I passed. I think that they kind of like passed me just for the hell of it, sorry for the language, but . . . Grades? I wasn't in 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>, so I can't remember those. Eighth, I didn't do well in 8<sup>th</sup>. I didn't do well. History I did well. Um, oh, I had a few friendships, but it wasn't really like close friendships, it was more like - well I had close friendships but I was, it didn't really last 'cause I was always moving, so, you know, nothing really lasted long. Um, well for some reason I have a weird, it's hard for me to have a drive for school because, I guess because of everything, so I don't really have that much of a drive for school. I want to learn and I want to be able to understand it, be able to get my GED or get a high school diploma and get out of here, but, I, I don't know, it's just I don't think I have enough drive. I want to, but it's just that when I get the paperwork in front of me it's just hard. I was always very athletic, always had an A in PE. Um no, I didn't really play sports, I did, I'm a mixed martial artist, but that's it. I tried to get into wrestling, but they wouldn't let me because of my, because of the skill I had with jujitsu, so . . . it's kind of different. Um, I was always very well; I've always got along with others very well. I never really have a problem with it. Um, I mean there's a few times, you know how it is, you get into disagreements whatever, whatever you want to call them, but um. Well there's a few time it almost stood out, but didn't.*

#### 7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.



*Ninth grade I was XXX and 9<sup>th</sup> grade I now I failed. High school, not good. Um, history I didn't really have history. (Additional assistance?) No, I didn't really get additional assistance. Um, (special classes) not really, like they did, but they didn't, so no really. Mainly friends, I met a lot of, I met some friends there, um but I was more concerned about getting out foster care. It (foster care) was a challenge. The work, definitely the work, um, it was hard for me to focus, like It's always been very hard for me to focus, like I always get distracted very easily. I seem to have more of a social life than an academic life. I did well; I did very well, like I said I was always very athletic. I was going to play football, but because of my grades I couldn't. I did try wrestling there, but also because of my grades they wouldn't let me. Following school rules, no I never really had a problem like that.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*I think it was 2<sup>nd</sup> grade because I moved. I remember in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> they had us go to this thing and I think they passed me. High school? Um, well I know for sure I didn't pass; at least I'm pretty sure they didn't pass me in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. If they did, I'm just going to go back and get them to pass me again.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?  
*I never really thought about dropping out; I didn't really want to drop out. They mean when I got out of XXX I came straight here. I mean the day that I got out of XXX the next day I was over here 'cause I just, I just needed the papers and came over here. So, I never really dropped out, I just transitioned to another school. That's the way I look at it. I thought it might be easier, plus there was another situation that was going on at the time, so . . . but um . . . I want to end up with a diploma, but it doesn't seem like it's going to happen (laugh). It's not like I got close to anybody, I mean real close to anybody. I mean I did, but not really. Um, it was practically whatever, I mean I didn't really there wasn't really anything special there and there wasn't anything really special about being out, being away from it.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*Um, it was practically whatever, I mean I didn't really there wasn't really anything special there and there wasn't anything really special about being out, being away from it. Still no change, I'm trying to get better now, but...*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
(See above)

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?  
(Not connected with family)

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*Um, I never really thought much about that. I don't, it constantly affects me because I don't have what I need. I mean I think it has affected me in trying to get jobs too, I would say that – trying to get a job, um that's really how it affects my future, obviously.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*Well I think they should offer tutoring here. I think they should offer special teachers here for like, you know, people like me. I think they should have more teachers because it seems like, you know, whenever you go into a class you have to wait in a line for all these people to get help and she doesn't really spend time with you. She says like, "Well here you go and go back to your desk or go back to the table you're sitting at". It kind of seems like; you know the kind of line that we get is that they don't care. But it's not really that, it's the fact of they have so many kids and there's so many teachers and so little time. Um, I think that they could actually sit down with you and teach instead of giving a pamphlet (module). I mean, I'm doing well on the pamphlet, I'm learning from the pamphlet, I do admit that. But also, think that there should be, you know, someone there to actually explain. You know, someone who can actually sit there and explain it to people like me so that way they could actually get it and understand it, and then move on. Um, I don't know, I just think that there should be more help, there should be more help and more, I don't know, I guess that's really all.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

16.

*No, I wouldn't have left school because I want to pass and I never would have completely dropped out.*

17. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

18.

*Um, I'll never try to leave; I'll never really leave school. I mean I want to be in school, I want to be able to get out and you know; I want to be able to get my GED and go to college and whatever. I already know that by the time I get into college, I'm going to be like 25. Even if I get my GED now, I know as far behind as I am I'm not going to be able to get into college. I mean I could get into college, but as far as me passing college, I, know that's just not going to happen. I know that for a fact, I'm pretty sure. For me to actually be academically ready for college, I'll probably be around 25.*

19. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*To try to get a GED and get out, at least try – key word.*

20. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*The reason why I came here because I was told it was quicker, but as you can see I've been here for 4 years and I'm still in the same class. So it's kind of a little ... I mean, the thing about me is, for instance, like I've always been a fighter. So if you put math in front of me I, it's going to beat me. But if you put me in a ring with some other guy I'll 9 times out of 10 because of my skill I'll come out on top. I've always been more of, more athletic rather than academic. So I know for a fact I'm pretty sure if I got into UFC, or whatever, I would make it. But as far as academically, I would like to think so. I mean I know I can do it, I just need the right help, I just need the right help and the drive for it. I need a lot of things, I need to focus more. You know, I've tried to, I'm now sitting at a table by myself at least trying to, but people keep on coming to it, but you know I listen to music to try to block everybody out so that way I turn it up all the way so I don't hear anybody and people are tapping on the table trying to get my attention. Focus and understanding.*

21. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*Well for once, I can actually get out and not have to worry about school and just get a job and um, you know, try to go to a vocational school, try to go to a vocational school for business or something so that way I can when I get out of whatever um competition I'm going to be in I can just start my own martial arts academy. That's my goal.*

## **PARTICIPANT BM8**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 2-22-91

Ethnicity: Black

GENDER: Male

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 3

Middle: 3

High: 1

High school attended: Southern Area

Year participant left high school: 2009

Age at dropping out: 17

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL:

Mom, 2 Sisters, and Cousin.

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: High school diploma, in school for nursing

Father: High School

Siblings: Older sister still in high school; Young sister still in elementary school,

Cousin finished high school and attends BCC

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Um, it was getting boring and the teachers they are not, some of them they would help me, others, they are like they didn't care what you did. I wasn't really feeling the whole school vibe, I was bored. I felt like it wasn't worth the time, like it was kind of a waste of time to be there.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*Leave and go to work, coming here. No one tried to change my mind. I let them know.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Um, try to interact more with the students; it's so, like straight. You get in trouble for anything, like the way you wear your clothes, or like the way your hair is, those kinds of things.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Um, not really.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*I don't remember too much. It was easy in elementary school for me. Grades are alright. Um, the teachers are nice, the teacher like paid more attention to you and tried to help you. Science and history (challenging).*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*Learning was kind of difficult, um it was more you had to do more stuff on your own, and stuff got a little bit harder, getting distracted. (grades) um, in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade it wasn't all that good, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade it got a little better. My attitude. Positive things- can't remember. (Challenges) work, I didn't like to do it and history and science and reading are not really my thing. Reading is no longer challenging for me. Track, sprint, high jump, long jump. (Getting along with others) good.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*Honestly, after I left middle school I started doing good. My grades started improving a lot because I was more focused in school. But other than that, history and science, once again, aren't good. My grades are going up and down. Math was good, language arts was good; the teachers are good. I only got extra assistance in elementary. High school was more fun, like games, and I was going to say parties, but not parties, dances and stuff. I didn't get along with some of my teachers. Um, my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year I did track and football and wrestling. 10<sup>th</sup> grade year, I did wrestling. 11<sup>th</sup> grade I left. Well, I didn't have no problems with none of the other students. I knew a lot of people. No (trouble following school rules).*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*Yes, 7<sup>th</sup> and I think my mom said kindergarten or 1<sup>st</sup> grade.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?  
*About a year and a couple months. Um, the teachers acted kind of mean or whatnot, you know I guess they get agitated with a lot of the students. And the new principal and like the rules, he tried to make it like middle school.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*Um, I have more time so I can get a job. I was working, but I had to come back here.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*Honestly, I don't see anything bad; I still see everybody, I still do my work, still get my work done.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?  
*It didn't affect my family at all. What's funny about that, my cousins are now going to Adult Ed. also. They are down south, um in Miami.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?  
*Um, I don't really think it did.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?  
*If I would have paid attention more. If they made the work more like something that we could like, get into, but the teachers, they are like boring and they just talked like boring and I wasn't really getting into it. The counselors was, they are good; I liked my counselor.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?  
*No, um I don't know, I really was into sports.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

PLEASE DISCUSS.

*Um, think about it before you do it.*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*Um, because I failed twice and I want to get it done and over with. I can get out quicker*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*So I can get an education; so I could get my degree. Um, my goals are to be a veterinarian, I feel that I love animals. But right now I want to go to BCC and then probably take some; they have these classes where you can, um, go for your nursing degree. I am looking for something in the medical field.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*How it will impact my life? I will get into college and get a job.*

## **PARTICIPANT WM9**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 9-9-90

Ethnicity: White

GENDER: Male

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 3

Middle: 2

High: 1

High school attended: Central Area

Year participant left high school: 2009, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade

Age at dropping out: 17

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL: 6

Mother, Father, 2 Sisters, 1 Brother, himself

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: High School Graduate

Father: High School Graduate

Siblings: Older sister – Currently at BCC

Younger sister – High School Graduate

Brother – currently in high school

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I actually left school 'cause I got in a big fight with a bunch of black kids. I was asked to leave. I was suspended 10 days pending expulsion and they said I could come back and I already failed so I just left and came here.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*I could have stayed there, but it would have just been drama with a lot of people there. I didn't get along with a lot of kids.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*No one could have done anything differently to make me stay. No one tried to make me stay, no guidance counselors. No pressure to leave, just my choice. I shouldn't have left though. I regret it now.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*No.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*Learning was pretty easy; the work wasn't so hard, and I got along with everybody and it was fun. Grades are pretty fair, Bs, Cs. The teachers are real nice. No challenges I remember, but it was a while back.*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*It was pretty difficult. The classes got harder; um... the teaching was pretty different. Grades are Bs, Cs, Ds. I had some Fs but I brought them up; I passed. Um...I don't know about positives, nothing. Challenges, um... probably the FCAT. It was pretty hard. Football and basketball. Well not really football in middle school, I played football in high school. I had a lot of friends.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*It was pretty hard. I didn't pay much attention in middle school; I wanted to hang out with my friends and ... Grades are pretty good; I mean I passed 9<sup>th</sup> and I was going to pass 10<sup>th</sup> grade but I left. Um... I really don't know about positives. The sports, the activities are fun. We went undefeated all year. Football, and played basketball in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, half of 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I got in an accident. Challenges, um... the fight; some of the teachers, I just didn't get along with some of 'um. I played on the golf team in 9<sup>th</sup> grade*

*and ran track. I got along good with other students, except for all them black kids. No difficult following rules.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*4<sup>th</sup> grade, that's it.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?  
*That year, 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Just right when I got suspended. I didn't plan on leaving; I didn't want to leave, just didn't want to be around them people.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*A job, I could work all day instead of being in school, and there really aren't any other positives.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*I lost a lot of my friends and I could have had my high school diploma then graduated..*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?  
*I mean it really hasn't.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?  
*Well... um it hasn't except for not being able to get the job I wanted to get. It was a job out there at the Port, and I just couldn't get it without my diploma so I started coming back to school.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?  
*I mean may some of the other kids who, um... no, nothing. If some of the other kids would have gotten in trouble for what had happened. It would have been much better for the ones who got in trouble. Some got in trouble and some did not; the ones who started everything. The ones who started it did not get in trouble. No one asked; they ended up getting some other kids in trouble who are in the fight too....and the kids who started the fight didn't get in trouble because they left and they didn't catch them.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?  
*No, um, just cause I miss everybody. I don't know I really wish I would have stayed.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.  
*No.*



17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*To get my GED.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*So I can get a decent job and do something with my life, go to BCC or something. I'm not sure, maybe an electrician or something. I think I will be successful. Um, I don't know. I'm doing well here. I might be able to take my first test.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*It's going to help a lot. I'll be able to get a job and at least I'll be able to say I have it instead of not having one.*

## **PARTICIPANT WF10**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 11-11-90

Ethnicity: White

GENDER: Female

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 2

Middle: 2

High: 1

High school attended: Central Area

Year participant left high school: 2006

Age at dropping out: 16

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL:

Mother, brother, and self

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: College - bachelor's degree

Father: High School

Siblings: High School

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I missed too many days and I was going to fail otherwise, so I just dropped out.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*Adult Ed.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*My mom tried to talk me out of leaving. Boyfriend had graduated year before and I would skip school and go hang out with him because he wanted me to. I wouldn't do my homework so that's why I wasn't making good grades. Yes, he influenced me a lot.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*School could not have done anything differently to make me stay. Friends could not either.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*Learning was easy; everything was just simple. The teachers are really nice. Grades are good, As and Bs, Os and Ss, whatever. (Positives) recess, snack time, nap time, learning was always easy. They had games and songs to help you learn and stuff, so it was easier. (challenges) I didn't really have any. No (extra-curricular)*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*Learning was difficult for me. Um, because I guess I was getting into the middle school and my first one was a middle school and a high school, so there was older people there and you try to be friends with the cooler people, I guess. And then the grades started slipping so I didn't have good grades and got kicked out of that school and then once I went to an easier school it was pretty easy for me. It was a school of choice and you had to have a certain grade point average and make certain grades to stay there. So when the 7<sup>th</sup> grade was over I didn't make the cut to be there again. Well, it's only really been math; I've always had a hard time in math. My grades are always failing in math and that was hard for me. I don't know, in middle school I was bad sometimes. No, like I got into trouble a lot and got an attitude problem because of my parents got divorced and my mom was with a new man, so I had an attitude problem and I wasn't nice to the teachers so I ended up in trouble a lot....but I passed. (Other grades) They are pretty good, mostly Cs (Positives) I met a lot of new friends there. Um, nothing else. (Challenges) Staying out of trouble because I had a bad attitude problem and I would not get along with my teachers very well. Some of them I did, but most of them no, not really. (Extra-curricular) I played a sport outside of middle school. I played softball for little league when I was in middle school. I had a lot of friends; I'm very social and talkative. I got in trouble a lot for talking.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*Well, let's see. I got my boyfriend for high school the day before school started. He was a senior and I was a freshman, so again that me trying to fit in with the crowd and everything like that, my grades are not very good towards the end of the year. Sometimes learning was difficult; I wasn't struggling I just didn't do it. It might have been easy. I didn't try as hard. Um, some part of the year, toward the end, the (grades) are pretty bad in all of them. ...And my attendance was not good because I would skip a lot with the boy, which is not good. I don't recommend it to anybody. It does not make it good in the long run. Um, sometimes I would go to an afterschool math help thing at XXX High. It was by choice. (Positives) I had a lot of friends there. Yeah, lunches are good, they are so good. (challenges) getting my work done, really, and my attendance, being there. Um, no extra-curricular activities. Got along good, lots of friends. Um, staying in class, pretty much that was all. It wasn't as bad, I didn't have as bad of an attitude, so it was really just being in school or being on time. I mean, I was a little bit better; I was a lot better than I was in middle school. I was nicer to teachers than I was before.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*Yes, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, my first year 7<sup>th</sup> grade. That was because of math.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?  
*I didn't. I had to meet, had a meeting with my mom and the counselor for school and they gave me an ultimatum-what I had to do. Well they told me if I didn't go to Adult Ed. that I was going to be held back in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and I was already considered a 9<sup>th</sup> grader because of my grades because I didn't pass math. So, I was already considered a 9<sup>th</sup> grader in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, so I didn't want to be in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade again, so I chose Adult Ed. to get my GED. Decision was made quickly.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*There really wasn't at all. I got to do whatever I wanted to do during the day because I only had to go to school two nights a week, so I got to hang out with my boyfriend more, which was not good in the end.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*I didn't get to graduate with the rest of my class, although the people, my closest friends really, a lot of them, dropped out at the same time, or around the same time as I did. But my friends aren't really going there, but I wish I would have stayed in school because now I have a baby and I could be graduating high school this year and not have a baby, but I chose to take care of her. I was just very busy with my boyfriend, because I dated him all my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year and then into my 10<sup>th</sup> grade year until I dropped out I was still dating him, so it was all because of that, really.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*It hasn't. Maybe my family now.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*Um, I just wish I would be able to get graduate and walk with my class like my brother and my sister did and maybe it would end up making my parents proud of me whenever I'm walking to graduate, and now I won't really get to do that. My sister didn't ever live with me.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*Um, I don't think the school system could have done anything differently. I ultimately made my own decision at the time I did something. So I could have just not skipped school as much and paid more attention and worried more about myself in the long run, instead of making someone happy.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*No. No way, never. It was a big mistake because I could have been graduated and had my high school diploma and I don't know. I wouldn't be where I'm at right now. My whole life would probably be different.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*Not a good choice.*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*Because I want to get my GED so I can go to college and make a good life for my baby, but her mainly*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*I want to get my GED so I can get into a college so I can do something. (Success?) Yeah because I have my mind set that I'm going to be and I need to be.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*I will have a good job so that she can have nice things in life and not, I don't want her life to be difficult. I want it to be as easy as I can make it.*

## **PARTICIPANT HM11**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 7-31-89

Ethnicity: Hispanic

GENDER: Male  
Number of Schools Attended  
Elementary: 3-4  
Middle: home schooled  
High: 1  
High school attended: Central Area  
Year participant left high school: 2005; 10<sup>th</sup> grade  
Age at dropping out: 15

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL: 5

Mom, dad, brother, sister, self

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: GED  
Father: High school and electronics degree – certified electrician  
Siblings: Sister – XXX Middle  
Brother – XXX Elementary

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Well, I was uh. My dad kicked me out when I was really young, started around 13, 14 kind of thing, and he kicked me out at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade right before summer, and um, I got a job in the summer and I was working at that in order to be able to live and make it, and I actually did really good at 9<sup>th</sup> grade and had a 4.0 and I came back to 10<sup>th</sup> and I was in all Honors classes and, you know, I was kind of young and naïve about the whole thing and thought that I would be able to handle, you know working that job and doing my honors classes too and just... They would work me more hours than they legally could at this place and it was, I was a dish washer. I would get out of school at 3:15 and go to work at 5:00 and get off work at 2:00 in the morning and, you know, I couldn't really change my hours; I would kind of lose my job kind of thing, so it just kind of ended up all falling apart and my grades slowly diminished and you know, I just eventually kind of gave up on it.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*Not at that point. My friends wanted me to stay in there, you know, and still try to keep at it, but my grades had just gotten so behind I felt like I had lost it all. I just gave up, you know? No pressures to leave.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Maybe more lenient with me on homework or let me do homework on the weekends, or you know, just give me more of a chance and be more understanding of my situation, but it's like ... you know how that is in school ... they don't really, they got so many students there and stuff, you know they can't really be on top of everything like that, you know. I told one of my teachers, but they are just kind of like, "aw, you can do it or you can't. These are honors classes, you know, when you take them you accept responsibility and you got to be able to do your homework." You know there's like 4 hours of homework a night for each class.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Yes, he could have not kicked me out at such a young age when I was a teenager and be more of a responsible adult, but um ... you know and that would have made a big difference. I think I would be in a lot different place than I am right now, but.... I am back home right now, but I've got to get out of there, that's for sure.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*Well, elementary school I felt like the teachers in elementary school are always pretty good, you know, like they always seemed to be nice to me and helped me. You know, I did pretty good in elementary school. I would say learning was easy just because at that point I was like there's difficulty down the road, but I started to build my way up and it's just um... elementary learning just kind of always came easy to me and I just felt like the teachers you know are doing a good job of presenting things in different ways and stuff, you know. Grades are good in elementary school. I used to make As and Bs all the time. I can't remember exactly. It seemed like the way that they uh... it is just the way that they, it almost seemed like they care more in elementary school sometimes, you know? It does. Maybe math was a challenge, but teachers helped me. I got kicked out right at the end of the year in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and went to the other elementary, XXX.*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*Learning was difficult for me because I was home schooled during that time and my mom was the one that mostly home schooled me. But she was more like just handing me the books and say, here go do this section, go do this. And you know, and kind of, don't come back down until you do your work. So that was, that's when I really fell behind because I wasn't really learning anything I was supposed to. I felt that that really set me back a lot. She said that public schools are too secular and stuff, and the people and the stuff they do. Which it really is, but you can still have your kid in school, you just got to talk to them and help them through it. I got tested; I was supposed to get tested at the end of each year. I can't really remember the score of*

*the test, but I mean it was more just like you paid somebody to give you a test. I cannot remember how I did, but I never really got grades or anything like that. Well the fact that you can work alone is kind of a good thing and not have to deal with everything else in school. I think home school would be a great thing if they just had like a real teacher. But that was about it; that was the only really positive thing. There was more downfalls. Another one of the challenges was trying to figure everything out by myself and know what exactly to do in the book and what not to do, exactly what I should be learning, and, you know, for other tests they give you. Go do this section and write down this. My mom would check it; she would tell me what to do sometimes, and then. But sometime, most of the time s she said, oh you know what to do.*

#### 7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*Right, I went to XXX, got placed at XXX Jr./Sr. High and they gave me a placement test there, and you know, I was really, really behind there at that point and I really didn't qualify to get in the high school, but um.. the lady there actually, I was doing fine in everything except the math. She actually erased a lot of those answers and picked the right answers just so I could make it in high school. Yeah, she did, I remember that. And uh, that's the only reason I really got to go, you know? I was thinking about that earlier. Just went to XXX to take the test to get into XXX High. That's where XXX ... I hope that doesn't come back on her. She kind of realized that I was kind of smarter and I could catch up. Like I said, she realized I was smart enough probably to catch up quick and she probably felt bad for me too. Learning was difficult because I was so behind and I felt like I had just missed lots of steps, you know. Like the only thing that was really difficult for me was math. Everything else I did fine in, but the math it was just like, it's like, math is something where they kind of fill it up over the years. You can't just miss a couple years and jump in and like, oh well. You know what I mean? Grades are like a 3.8, 4.0 in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In 10<sup>th</sup>, all Fs. I just couldn't do any of my work. No additional help. I would ask the teacher for help and stuff and he would help. The teachers would help me. But I could say if I had somebody else on the side that would help me with 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I didn't. Um, I thought that the extra-curricular activities and, you know, some of the Bright Futures Scholarships stuff like that you know scholarships they offered and especially their honor programs, all that's great stuff, you know. I really think that's the good parts of it and you've got a ceramics class, and they got a lot of good classes in there. I wish I was better at it. I really do like art, but it kind of makes me mad cause I feel like I'm no good at it, you know? Challenges for me was just mostly math and to be able to keep up with everybody else because I always felt like I was behind and everybody was so ahead of me. You know? And plus, I was like, I didn't go all the way through elementary. I got thrown out in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, that's what happened to me. And because there was such a gap with me not talking to anybody or having interaction, I didn't know how to socially interact with people. It caused me to have lots of confrontations*

*and not be able to get along. Definitely had trouble getting along. Nobody liked me at all and it was really hard for me to figure out exactly what was going on, why nobody liked me, and if it really mattered, and that kind of thing. It matters to you, but in the big scheme of things it really doesn't because you're not there for that. Teachers are always nice. I did Chess Club and I don't think I ever got involved with track, but I wanted to. I just think I did Chess Club and I think there's something else, but I can't remember what it is. It was the way that I was. It was like I always said the wrong things to people. I mean, you know, I was rude or more, I didn't really have a lot of nice clothes like everybody else had, you know. And um... a lot of people always called me weird and stuff, like, "that kid's weird". I think it was just I was mean to people I think. You know? And my dad was always really mean to me so I just kind of felt that that was just the normal way. I was verbally abused a lot, so I think I was kind of verbally abusive to other people and wasn't really realizing what I was doing. So, just basically not knowing how to interact or talk to people in a normal way like, you know, like you and me are talking. I probably couldn't have even done that back then. It's strange, I want from somebody that really couldn't interact at all and now everybody loves me. I get along fine with everybody. It was really hard for me; I got bullied a lot. Well, I guess I would do stuff like, you know, I would smoke cigarettes at the school, stuff like that. Or sometimes I'd be disrespectful to teachers and just to people or to staff, you know. And it was just that kind of thing, but I didn't' really do that a lot because I was in ROTC too. I mean I can't really think of much except for the cigarette thing. I don't know; I sold drugs there for a while in school too, so. Year, a lot of kids do that now in school. They look at that as kind of a place to do it at and I just had a locker that wasn't in my name. And I did it that way. Yeah, that's a big problem right there. But with the way that I was and the way people didn't like me I got more robbed than I would be making money.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*Um, no I don't think so. I think maybe I was but I caught up.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?  
*I'd say a couple weeks and then an incident happened at the end of the couple weeks that really pushed me. I got suspended for 4 or 5 days right before I was just, all my grades are failing and I was just about to drop out and then to get suspended... And I was just like, all right, well, you know, I'm getting all zeros now and they are already at all zeros.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*I don't think there was any.*



11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I was really depressed for years and years after all that, and even now I get really upset about it, but I'm more in control now. I never got to go to prom; I never got to have high school friends; I never actually, you know, learned the things I wanted to learn or do any of the extra-curricular classes; or you know, I never got to get involved, you know with the school. There was another big one I was going to say, but I forgot what it was. Yeah, I never got to get my actual high school diploma and I really wanted it. And I, being here getting my GED is just like... because I was really going to still go and come here and try to get my high school diploma, but they said even if I worked every day that the fastest I could get it was a year and a half. I knew, the day that I found out I wasn't really going to get my high school diploma was a really sad day for me because, you know, I kind of feel like it got taken away from me. Like a lot of other things have too. But that's alright, it's just ... you can't give up.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*I don't think that my dad really cared. I think it was more of an advantage to him than anything cause then he could have me work for him and didn't have to pay me enough. He took advantage of me for being a young kid. But my mom, I would say that it probably made her really depressed. Things just got worse for her. I would say it would have affected my dad more positively and my mom negatively.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*Severely. Something that I think about all the time, you know. I never knew what it was like to go through high school and I remember I use to have a lot of fun in school. Looking back being in school I even have dreams about being in high school sometimes, you know? Just like wishing I could go back there, and it's weird I'll be like, oh maybe if I keep. I had a dream one time I was going through the whole thing again and it was like maybe if I keep asleep and keep dreaming like this I'll wake up and I'll actually be . . . Football games!*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*Back then when I was going through all that? Teachers could be more understanding, giving me more leniency with my homework. Allow me to do it on weekends, you know, just give me more of a chance, realize my situation and what I was going through. You know, and worked with me and try to figure out a way that I could do something on weekends, maybe weekend classes. Maybe less homework. If they just focused more of the learning and work in the actual class instead of bringing it all home with you that would be a great thing. We already spend 8 hrs. in school, why do you need to spend the whole entire evening doing homework? I mean, I understand the point of it, you know, but I just think more of the studies should be in school. There's more hands-on then, too. Homework is independent stuff, so there's*

*an advantage to that too, so... you can't ask for too much stuff. There's got to be some sort ... I was going to go to my counselor to ask them to put me in regular classes; that would have helped. It's just that, um, it's not like the school can provide you with a place to live. So there's nothing like that. Um, that's about it. Be more understanding. It was more what happened to me than the school. The school does a lot of good things, but I say it was more my life than the school, so it's hard for me to really pick on the school. They could have done a lot more definitely.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*Oh, no. For all those reasons and it would probably been a lot easier for me to get a scholarship. You know, I can still do that now, but I feel like I would have just gained a lot. Learned a lot more; gained more knowledge than I'm going to get from this, and been able to do a lot more extra-curricular activities and stuff. Use those to my advantage to get a scholarship. All that stuff that you don't have here.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*That it's a bad decision, that's it. It's not the right choice at all. You've got to stay in school and they will work with you.*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*I want to get my GED. I mean, in the end it just ends up biting you anyway because you got to get college credits if you want to go in the Army or the military. I might do that, but I don't know.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*I'd say definitely go straight to college. Once I get in college, make really good grades and get a scholarship to go to a better college.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*Success? Yes, I have confidence in myself. I'm not working as much now, but I'm not making any money. I could work, because the two nights a week thing doesn't really*

...

## **PARTICIPANT AM12**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: November 15, 1990

Ethnicity: Asian

GENDER: Male

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 2

Middle: 1

High: 1

High school attended: Southern Area

Year participant left high school: 2009

Age at dropping out: 18

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL:

Mom, Dad, brother and self

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: Did not know

Father: High School

Siblings: Twin, currently in GED Program

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Personal, but uh... it's hard for me to concentrate. I like, kind of like insecurity issues I guess you would say. That's all I want to say.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*I could finish here, or continue high school here and receive all the credits. (Staying in high school) I just couldn't take it.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*I don't think so; there are no pressures to leave.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*No. My family tried to make me stay.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*I don't even remember anything about elementary. Learning was a little difficult. I was put in like speech classes because I had a hard time communicating. People just couldn't understand me when I spoke. Grades are not that good. Well in elementary school I don't think they are that bad, probably Ds and Cs. I hardly remember it.*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*Learning was not that difficult. I just... grades are pretty bad; I got a lot of Fs and Ds. I couldn't do it, I just ... I never did try. Positives? A couple of friends I had, that's about it. Challenges? Got in trouble a couple times. No extra-curricular activities or sports. Got along well good with others.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*Learning? Kind of hard, yeah, mostly math. I'm not good at all in math. I had good math teachers in high school. That helped out a lot. Like in another class, I don't know it's not the same. Next year, different, different teacher and math was harder. Grades? Kind of like bad and good, I guess. As, Bs, Cs, Ds, & Fs. I actually did good in math one year, Bs. I had a good teacher. I had some kind of class for that (extra help). I forgot what it was. I was in some kind of program thing that if I needed extra time or help I could get it. (Was it to address an IEP?) Yes, I had a specific learning disability. Positives? Just friends, I guess. Challenges? It was hard to concentrate. I was always thinking about some other things. Extra-curricular/sports? No. I got along with others just fine. No trouble following rules except for the cell phone thing.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?

*Oh, yeah. I think it was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*How long was I thinking about it? Well, my friend dropped out and it was about 5 or 6 months after he dropped out then I did. Then in a few months my brother did. It was, I don't know, just couldn't take it anymore. I didn't like it; didn't feel comfortable, just kind of paranoid.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Not having to get up every morning. Get up on my own time, do whatever I want.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Yeah, I don't have much contact with other people; I'm in contact with just like one or two. Being along a lot.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*They kind of don't like it, but support me no matter what, so... I have a good family.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*Nothing much has changed since I did. Every day was like the same. I started to think that everything was going to be like this for a long time, so... I might as well do something. I can't get anywhere without an education.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*Nothing really. I always find it so boring and tiring. Most of the teachers have voices that put you to sleep, one tone; they put you to sleep.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*I don't really know. I don't know if it would be different this time.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*There's not much to talk about. Do you have more questions?*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*Mainly to get a job, get out. I still live with my parents. The rest of my family is out.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*I want to get a job to get some money. I want to play guitar, play my music. My brother plays the drums, so... Someday.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*Get some money and do something for myself.*

## **PARTICIPANT WF13**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 5-15-91

Ethnicity: White

GENDER: Female

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 5

Middle: 1

High: 1

High school attended: Central Area

Year participant left high school: 2008

Age at dropping out: 18

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL:

Mom, Stepfather, two brothers, self

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: High school

Father: Does not know – never met  
Siblings: Brother currently in 5<sup>th</sup> grade  
                  Brother currently in 8<sup>th</sup> grade

FAMILY INCOME: between \$10,000 and \$50,000

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Lots of reasons. I grew up with drug addiction, with an abusive home. My mother was addicted to drugs. She passed away two years ago. XXXX just disappeared. It was just me and my brothers left in the house and I had to take care of them, get them ready and off to school. I just couldn't keep up with everything. My grandmother told me I shouldn't be doing that by myself and she started helping. Then there was a custody hearing and my brothers went back to their biological father. We do not have the same father.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*I made good grades and did not get into trouble. I got behind and felt like I would never be able to finish high school. I am all about moving forward. I want to get moving and the GED is the fastest way. It's not the same thing as getting a high school diploma, but it counts the same so it's just as good.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*XXX is a good school and it has good teacher and good guidance counselors. In my situation the school couldn't have done any more. I had too much to juggle. I was a good student, played sports at XXX.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*No. My family is behind me 100%. I have aunts and uncles, lots of family. They tried to do the best they could.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*Elementary school depended on the subject. I was good at reading and social studies. When I was at XXX I took a test that said I learned best when I could see and do something rather than just listening. I did art, and entered the Drug Calendar contest. I remember doing that, and like art shows when they had them in the Melbourne Square Mall and stuff. Stuff like that. Art, and then chorus was fun. I remember we would go to, we went to Disney World for like a chorus concert trip and that was like really fun. I liked that, and I remember me and my best friend went on this ride, Space Mountain, at*

*Disney World and I remember we lost our voice like we are screaming so loud, which was like screaming to death right before a performance. It was so funny. Go on a roller coaster and scream really loud. Math is hard, it's my worse subject. Mom was on top of me, which was good. She pushed me to get my homework done or else I would not have done it. I was good, there was no acting out. I was in a play in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. I think I played salt and pepper, I remember that. I was in the talent show. School was fun. I played competitive soccer in 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I traveled all around. My brothers played baseball in XXX when I was in junior high. I worked in the concession stand. It was fun. I didn't get paid or anything, but we got free food. Free hot dogs, free nachos - everything. It was fun. Challenges? Paying attention. I am easily distracted. If someone is tapping a pencil or something like that, I cannot concentrate.*

#### 6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*XXX was fun. It's a good school, good guidance counselors, good teachers. I did have a horrible math teacher though. Don't tell her I said that, it's all good. My mom was bad at math too and she couldn't help me. I got good grades in science and social studies, usually As and Bs. Those are my favorite subjects. I liked studying about the different wars, and about space and the earth. Good things are the talent show. I was really good at writing. I got a 5 on the Florida Writes! – do they still take that? Well I got a 5. What is the highest score you can get? I did really well. Challenges? I got Cs, Ds, and Fs in math. I never really got in trouble, but once I did and got suspended for three days. A black girl called me a bad “white” name, so I called her a bad “black” name. I now it wasn't right, and I was so sorry I did it. My mom was furious with me. I got in so much trouble. Fitting in. There is a lot of peer pressure. There are different cliques and you have to do the things they want you to do in order to get in. I will never do drugs or anything like that. I have seen what that does to you. I had lots of friend and got along good with others, but sometimes to do the right thing you have to stay alone. I was never bad. I played basketball. It was fun and it was a good “get away”. I also was a peer mediator. Do you know what that is? It is sort of like a student guidance counselor. The counselors had to handle the really bad stuff, but if it wasn't too bad, the students handled it. We had to take a class before we could be a peer mediator. I was able to see some of my friends from my other elementary school like XXX when I got to XXX.*

#### 7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*Freshman year was hard. It was totally different. We are stepping into a bowl of fish, but like bigger fish, not like you know in middle school you felt like you are big and like ha ha, “I'm an 8<sup>th</sup> grader and you're a 7<sup>th</sup> grader. Then it's, “oh my gosh, a 9<sup>th</sup> grader!” The seniors are really big and a lot older. XXX was a good school, but learning would sometimes be hard because I got caught up in the gossip. You have to be very consistent to be productive. It's easier to focus the longer you stay in high school. By the next year, I learned from the first you and you know I would say it looks like my time to, you know, learn who to hang out with and who to avoid. It taught me a lot. Math was still a*

*problem. I got extra help if I was bad in a class. I had to get pulled out of my elective and go to a remedial class. That sucked - no more Spanish, nothing to look forward to. Language arts was my second worst subject. I didn't get any special help because I didn't need it. Language arts was so boring. I love writing stories and stuff; I mean I'm kind of good at writing. I love doing it. It would be cool to write your own book. But the grammar part was kind of boring. I just don't remember the definitions because I didn't care. But I know how to do it. I didn't like it. In high school I never took an art class. I got along well with everybody. If someone was rude, I just ignored them and walked away. It's not worth it. I learned quickly you can get in trouble just like that. I had a good time in high school, but there was lots of issues. Do you remember the time we had a lock down? Some girl got raped in the bathroom, it was scary. I felt like high school was a period in my life when I learned for "real life". I made lots of friends and having friends in high school was very important. I saw these people that didn't have friends and you have to have them because you needed someone to talk to when you are feeling low or having a bad day. They helped raise my spirits. I was in the talent show in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, singing. I did sing the national anthem from the floor at basketball games. It was really fun. I did a lot of fun stuff. I miss it so much just talking about it. I wish I could go back to high school. It's kind of sad when you leave it. I loved Mrs. XXX, my science teacher. Is she still around? She was a good teacher. I don't know, she was comfortable, she was always there. I did not smoke or anything. Some of my friends did. Challenges? Integrity: doing the right thing when no one is looking. No cheating, you really shouldn't do that. I tried once, but then I realized the teacher changed the order of the test, so it didn't help me. I sometimes got in trouble because of the dress code. I wore flip flops all the time and sometimes my straps aren't wide enough and I wore short shorts. I was always getting in trouble, they made you go home. I got in trouble for gum chewing also. I skipped class sometimes. I would just go to the library and read Harry Potter. Once I almost got caught for it. A teacher asked why I wasn't in class and I just told him I was at the library and he let me go. I was surprised too. He was so... he had no problem giving you a detention. He was just big and bad. I will never do drugs, smoke or drink. My brother is autistic, but I was tested and I don't have any learning disabilities or anything.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?

*Yes in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and in kindergarten. People always ask how I got retained in kindergarten, but my mom thought it would be good for me to stay there another year.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*Not too long, probably about a week or two weeks. It wasn't long, a long decision. No one else in my family got a GED; everyone in my family has actually graduated from the same high school. I was the only one who went to a different high school. You know like everyone went to XXX except my mom went to a Brevard Christian school. I mean,*



*everyone got a high school diploma, but I figured I just wanted the easy way out. I don't know why, but I just felt like it would be just too hard to go back to high school and, I don't know, it was just a period in life where you just kind of, kind of like not depressed, but you feel like nothing can go back to the same as it was, you know. Cause when you lose a parent I think that's very hard and I don't know how my brothers went through it because they are very, still at a young age when that happened. Of course they're a year older now, cause this happened December 5, 2007, so it was just about a year ago, so... I mean I don't know how they went through it, they are pretty young. I never thought I would be 19 years old and not have a mom. It's just crazy. You got to be strong for other people.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*The positive thing was, I don't know. There was really no positives about it. I didn't have to go through the whole diploma thing and I didn't have to take the FCAT. I took the FCAT before, I remember you had to take it in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and 4<sup>th</sup>, grade, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but when I was going to school they didn't make us take it in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. I don't know if they do now, but I remember I never took the FCAT in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Um, you didn't have to get up early every morning and you didn't have to stay out until 4:00.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I miss my friends and I miss school. But it was kind of sad, you know. Kids think, oh it's so fun to drop out of school you know, but you're going to miss your friends. Because nobody is going to be home during the day, everyone else is going to be in school, you know. Any, yeah, you're going to miss it. I miss it so much, but I need to get this done, you know? And, the thing is it took me forever to get this done cause this happened in 2008 and it's 2010. I've been doing this for over a year when I should have gotten it done in less than a few months, but I never did. No, I went to XXX and I've taken all my tests, passed all of them above 500. Do you know about the GED? You have to make a 410 to pass, between a 410 and 450 and you have to make a 2500, I think that's the score you have to have. Math is the only one, but the good thing is, I have to tell you about this. I took the practice math GED and I got a 430 on it, which is passing. So I'm scheduled to take the test on the 21<sup>st</sup>. I know, I pass it and I'm done. And I've already taken the acupuncture (is that how you say it?). There's test you have to take for BCC if you ... I can't say it, but it's a placement test. I've already taken it and I did good on that. Um, the math part I do have to take a remedial test, which is only \$300 more, which isn't that bad, right? If you get a 500 it proves you are a high enough level that you don't need remedial classes. Hopefully, I'm good at everything else, reading – awesome. Reading is so easy for me. You have to have your transcript, you have to have your scores, but you can take the placement test, but can't have slots filled in the classroom yet until you have it. I was going through a lot of things at that time, you know with my brothers. I'm not saying it gives me a good excuse, cause your education should be the number one thing, your number one priority. Forget friends, friends come and go. Your*

*education, especially in this economy right now, you've got to have a job. You have to try your hardest and keep telling yourself you can do it.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*I mean, it was hard for them, too, to not feel good and not see themselves coming to a graduation at an actual high school graduation, but they understood what was going on. Because after my mom died, about two months after she died it was just me and my brothers in that house, you know. And it was all me driving them to school, making sure they got to school, making sure I got to school. And then my grandparents are like, you can't do this anymore. You have to get this done. We'll take your brothers and you get this done. And so, about two months later after my mom died, I guess their biological father, which what I have heard from him he was a good dad but he gave up his rights to his two boys when they are probably around five or six because he didn't want to be with my mom. My mom was very, when she died she wasn't on drugs when she died, but probably in middle school, elementary school she was very much a drug addict. She was never home, always drinking and, I mean it was just like a bunch of crazy stuff. I don't know, but they definitely understood. Then two months later they, their dad got custody of them and they went back to their father and it was just me. I'm actually...that house that XXXX had, XXXX disappeared when my mom died, which is really weird. I'll tell you this. I didn't know that you could look up, um... Did you know you could look up people's records on the computer? And I guess there was so many domestic violence reports from him, from my mom to him that the police investigated him and then he disappeared for like about, I don't know, for about like four months, and so I moved out of that house. I moved in with my grandparents and my brothers and my aunt lives there too 'cause her husband just left for Afghanistan like last year. She didn't want to live by herself with her three kids. And the house is pretty big. It's like a three-bedroom house and it's got an outhouse and stuff. So I mean, I'm just living with them now, getting this done and then going to BCC in August, hopefully. You've got to have your family.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*You don't get that high school experience, you know. You don't get to go to prom, and you don't get to, you know, take prom pictures, stuff you see on movies and TV shows. Like you kind of like, man I wish that was me, I wish I got that experience, but...it's for the better, you know? I wish I was in high school now that I look at it, but... I mean if I was to give anyone advice to drop out of high school...if anyone asked me if you think I should do this, I would say really think about it. Really think about it, think about what you're going to miss. So, I mean, just make sure it's worth it.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*Um... I think the school definitely... I remember um in 7<sup>th</sup> grade I went to the nurse and I told the nurse about how with my mom's husband he, he has a felony charge from me for child abuse when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. It's almost like, if you go to the circuit court you*

*can look up people's records, I thought it was pretty neat. I just realized that, but um the School Board, what they did, is that they called HRS. You know HRS and they have a social worker come out, asked me a bunch of questions, stuff like that, and I just think the School Board should have kept it more confidential, kind of thing. I mean my mom obviously knew it was me and she got really mad once HRS like left, like she just beat the crap out of me. She was really mad, I mean... I don't know. She wasn't too happy. I mean, I understand the policy that they have to report it, but like they could have kept it confidential where they could have said, "oh I don't know who, you know, made the call". 'Cause, I mean, like the thing is, the thing is that my mom had past records of HRS calling the house, not from me, and that was the first time I went to school, you know and I told the guidance counselor what happened. She sent me to the nurse and the nurse made me strip and stuff and, you know and so, like the bruises and you know and stuff... and they had to report it and stuff like that, so... I know HRS, like they could keep in confidential when it's a child involved with a parent, like, I mean, I don't know, but.... I think the guidance counselors, I mean they could have like talked to the parent maybe. They never talked to my mom. The guidance counselors, like my mom never came to the school before. The guidance counselors could have called and talked to the parent and, you know, tell them, you know, this is your child's situation and it can't be in that kind of environment. I mean because it's true, you know, even though I'd probably get in trouble that way too, but you know my mom, she needed to know the kind of situation that, like the kind of environment that I was in wasn't right. There's no one in my family that, like... they are always scared of what would happen if my mom found out. Like they are scared that oh she would never let my grandparents or like her sisters, my mom's sisters, or her brothers have any contact with us, you know. I mean no one's ever stood up to her and said, "Hey you know, what you're doing is wrong." You know? "Cause no one, no kid should ever be in a situation where they see their parents getting beat up by the other parent, or them themselves, or, you know. They don't need to see drugs, you know. I mean, I don't know, but things I've seen I've kind of learned from. I learned from other people's mistakes because you don't get anywhere in life, like my mom was 34 when she died. She had me when she was 15. She was very young, you know. I mean, I mean, I don't know... They had an idea. They knew my mom did drugs. Like, I mean you know, like my grandparents told her, like you're welcome here any time you want. But we're not going to enable you. You can lose your house, that's your own problem. We love our grandchildren but I'm not going to enable you to where, oh you can come back here anytime you want. But then again, my grandparents, they told 'them, like, we're not going to do drugs, we're not going to let that be around involved with our family, our side of the family, you know. 'Cause my mom, I think the problem with her is that her cousin, which is her daughter is my cousin, I think her cousin and her, they just followed in the wrong path and started doing drugs and her mom still does drugs. I mean her mom does drugs and has been arrested and has been in jail for possession of marijuana and coke and stuff. I mean . . .*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*No. I would advise others against it because the decision, that decision affects the rest of your life. Like, you know, any decision is going to affect the rest of your life, but it might sound fun and cool – oh I'm not going to have to go to school, but then again, you're not going to get your education on time, you know. You're not going to have friends because your friends are going to be in school, you know. And the friends that aren't in school are probably doing things that you shouldn't be doing, you know. Drugs or drinking, or you know, being stupid.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*No. I mean my history didn't give me an excuse. Like the thing is when people say, "Oh when kids drop out it's not always because they don't like school or they just like don't care. Some kids really do care, they don't have the choice. Sometimes it's not a choice. Sometimes they have a problem like this situation or like they, they have to take care of their family members, they have to do this, you know. There's other reasons why kids would drop out of school other than they didn't like it. I don't know many kids that I know these days that are younger than I am that would want to drop out of school. All these 16- and 15-year-olds in here getting their diploma. I mean it's fine you're getting your education, it's good, but not good kids go to this school. I've seen, I mean you kind of have a sense of feeling you know. There's not a lot of good kids that come here, so, I don't know. Most the kids that come here they've gotten in trouble in school and they're not allowed back. They come here, and it's like, you know.*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*Because I think GED it's quicker than a high school diploma, a lot quicker. I have a lot of credits that I need to make up, um, so it was just a quicker way and even though it's not considered a high school diploma; to me it's the same thing. I've read in the newspaper they've done studies where most high school graduates can't pass the GED. I mean, I just took it because it's a quicker way.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*Um, I'm doing the GED. What made me decide to finish it? Because I realize that I'm not getting any younger, I'm just getting older and I don't want to be 20 years old doing GED. I want to be done with that and I want to be started on college, started on the next step.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*I'm not getting any younger, I'm getting older and that scares me. I want to be successful in life and make something of myself and be proud. I want to be like 40 years old and look at myself and go, man I'm proud of myself, you know a big pat on the back.*

## **PARTICIPANT HM14**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 10-23-90

Ethnicity: Hispanic

GENDER: Male

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 1

Middle: 1

High: 3

High school attended: Southern Area

Year participant left high school: 2007

Age at dropping out: 18

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL:

Four: mother, father, brother, self

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: High School

Father: High School

Siblings: Brother – High School, attending Kaiser College

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*I was on probation and uh, they are telling me that I couldn't miss any days, get in trouble, or make any low grades and I guess I was just young and naïve and I didn't want to take on the responsibility of failing and violating my probation, so I dropped out and went to Adult Education because it was late and night and I knew I could, you know, get up there, attend it. I never violated it; I dropped out of high school so I didn't violate probation, which was stupid, but I should have just stayed. I didn't want to violate it because I would have gotten in trouble.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*Just Adult Ed, and I wanted to be on my own, because I thought it was like, I thought it was a cool thing to be on my own. But three years have gone by and it's not really something I like.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?  
*I just turned 18 and I did my GED test and I thought I passed, so I was like going to adult Ed. Then I realized I didn't pass. I was in Adult Ed. High School and then they switched me to the GED Program. It wasn't the school, it was just the fact that I was on probation and I guess I was just afraid. Stupid, but you know...*
4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?  
*Um, I don't know of anything.*
5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.  
*I don't really remember. I think I made good grades. I can't honestly remember. They had me on medication that helped me concentrate. I guess I was ADHD and when I took the medication my grades went up.*
6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL  
*I think I made good grades in middle school too. I took medicine in middle school too for 7th grade. I think I stopped taking it in the 8th grade. It was alright. I think I was struggling in math for a bit, you know. It was just in 8th grade. I don't really remember. Everyone was young and nobody had any beef with each other or, it was just the middle stages of growing up. It was a bunch of students in middle school, that's about it, really. Uh... not anything I can recall. I don't think I had a challenge, very much of a challenge in middle school. I think I got along with others fairly easy. I didn't really talk that much about anybody.*
7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.  
*Um freshman year I found it pretty challenging, pretty straight and then when I got into like a bunch of stuff happened and I ended up going to New York and took high school in New York and came back in 6 months and went to - actually I went to three high schools. I moved back and I guess they messed up my transcripts in New York, so I was still in the 9th grade. I was in the 10th grade when I got there and I was supposed to be in the 11th, and that's when I was on probation, and I just. I couldn't do it anymore. All I know is they messed up my transcripts. It was after 9th grade that my grades started dropping. Like, I had speech and some kind of tutoring class at XXX Elementary and I haven't had any other tutoring classes. It was great when I first started like before everything started going downhill. I was getting along with everybody, you know. Just doing schoolwork, minding my own business, doing whatever a 14 year old does, a 15 year-old does. Challenges? Just learning and you know all the other stuff that happened in my life. Personal. Deaths in the family and lots of other shit. I just got along, I have the personality that I don't really mess with anybody, start any drama. I just kept to myself. If I was paired up with someone we*

*just ended up talking. Rules? Before I dropped out, before I was on probation I had one of my classes in 900 building, which was near the end of the school and I had another class that was like way over yonder and I would always be late because they wouldn't want you running to class so I'd walk and I'd walk to class and every time I was about to get up the stairs and walk into my class the bell would ring. So instead of them writing up, they expected me to go to the dean's office, like every other day. I don't know. I got in trouble a lot in 9th grade, too, but that didn't affect my school.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?

*Well, technically, I call it a failed transcript, it's not really held back. So in 10th grade because of transcript issues. It was just the moving and the transcripts and people not knowing how to do their own job.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*As soon as I was on probation and as soon as they told me all of these rules about missing school, coming in late, getting in trouble, getting like under a C, violates probation. They are just giving me all these rules and it was like, I can't follow these rules. I already make bad grades I ended up having a tough time making good grades and I'm always getting in trouble, and I'm always getting to school late. It was pretty much a quick decision. It was like I got arrested and like they held my case for like 6-7 months and they are going to put me on the PAY Program, but my mom is a drunk and she went there intoxicated and got the person at the PAY Program mad at me so they put me on probation instead, and I pretty much blame my mother for me dropping out, for putting me on probation. I blame myself for getting arrested because it wasn't my stuff. I was just at the wrong place and the wrong time and took the fall because I thought, you know, what could happen? I'm young and, you know, I didn't realize having an alcoholic for a mother would [expletive deleted] up my life. Um, like after they put me on probation, DCF was involved and they are telling, like they offered me rides to school at times they could and they are telling me about all the other rules and I just thought about it quickly because I didn't want to violate it; I didn't want to go to jail. although I don't think I would really have gone to jail, I would have just got a higher probation sentence or something, but I just I really don't know what I was thinking. I think it was a couple days. Like as soon as I heard the rules I couldn't do it. I was moving too much because I wanted to get away from my mom and like everywhere I was moving to didn't have transportation or the buses didn't run that way, or ... I don't know. There was just so much in my life that, and I'm taking the time now, before it gets too late, to try to better myself because I don't want to end up like my mother.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Nothing. There was no positive for me dropping out. Like I thought that I had a positive just hanging out with people and going to Adult Education, but I ended up accomplishing nothing.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Like I had a job, I had a job at Cracker Barrel, I lost that too. There was just no positives for me, just nothing at all because I realize as the years went on it just kept on getting worse, and worse, and worse, and worse.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*Um, well, um, life didn't change none at all. Um, I don't really talk to my family. Uh... I talk to my brother every day, every other day. We just... I haven't lived at my house since I was 16 years old or 17. I know it was one of the worse mistakes, but I didn't want to stay with my mom because my dad died and that's why I went to New York and everything [expletive deleted] up from there.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*Completely screwed it over. I mean I can't get a job, like a nice job without a high school diploma or a GED. I could have had my high school diploma two years ago. I could have had my GED two years ago. I could have had it before my high school diploma and I could have been already attending classes, have a place, have a car, be able to be something, be somebody instead of like I am now, couch-hopping. I just, I can't live like this, like I want to just get myself back in order. Because I also want to prove everyone else wrong.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*Um, getting my GED, trying to attend college, trying to get a second job or get a better job and quit my old job because it's not really a job. Like it isn't a job that they would cancel shifts and there's no way to make a living off of it. So I'd rather get my GED attend college courses, get like a Bachelor's or something for veterinarian or Master's, or whatever it takes to be a vet, or a doctor. Um get a car so I can at least drive places and get from A to B, go to work, school, and get my own place whether it's an apartment, trailer or house. Not getting arrested, or not taking the fall. DCR tried helping me but I refused.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*No because I would have been smart enough not to take the rap for one of my friends and I would have been smart enough not to bring my mom with me to my meeting my PAY Program dude, to where I would have just met him, been on PAY Program, still been in high school. Got out to the PAY Program like it was nothing and instead of being on probation and going through everything I have been going through now. It's*



*been 2 to 3 years. What I was going to be doing I think it was like probation, but it wasn't like strict like probation. I think it was just money, probably some classes, and a little bit of community service hours instead of being like, oh and drug testing, but instead of being like watched and having a curfew and a lot of community service hours and a lot of court fines and more core dates, and I think it was just like a simple thing and you just write an essay apologizing to your office, or the courts, or yourself, or your parents. I don't know, if I was in the PAY Program it would have been a piece of cake. I'm done with probation. I've been done with probation since I was 18.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*Don't advise anybody else to do it. Stay in school, get your education, get a life. No way, you're not going to make it in this world without a diploma or anything of some sort.*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*Just want to get a diploma so I can feel good about myself too. I have no self esteem; I feel like I'm a loser.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*I don't know. Like before I went to high school and everything, I used to draw a lot. I used to be very good at it and that was like my second choice besides being a vet was an artist, and uh... (success?) I sure hope so, that's all I'm saying. I sure hope so.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*Well I will make something of myself instead of just, you know, going around applying at places, no diploma, or going around and talking when you're hanging around with people and they're talking about their diplomas, college classes and you're just sitting there on the sidelines. You say I didn't graduate; I feel like a loser. And they're like a year younger than you, two years younger, and they're already flaunting their almost associate's degrees, or their associate's degrees when they get out of high school because they go to dual enrollment and you just, you feel horrible. I just can't describe how horrible I feel about not having a diploma of any kind or anything to show for all those years I was at school.*

## **PARTICIPANT BF15**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 3-18-90

Ethnicity: Black

GENDER: Female

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 1

Middle: 1

High: 1

High school attended: Southern Area

Year participant left high school: 2007

Age at dropping out: 18

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL:

Grandma, Sister, Brother, Self

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: High School

Father: Does not know

Siblings: Sister – High School

Brother – Currently attends High School

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Um, well I was with my boyfriend and I don't know. I didn't like gym though. Gym was like third period and I hated going to gym. Every time I just leave when gym started. I went to first and second period but then, as it went along I just stopped coming. I just wanted to be home, I guess, with my boyfriend.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*Yes, I wanted to stay so bad because my mom and them always used to say, you ain't going to finish; you're not going to finish. And I was like, I'm going to show you all. I'm going to show you. And that was a why I really wanted to stay. That's why I decided to come back. My boyfriend used to always say, go to school, go to school, go to school, why you ain't going to school? ...and my mom and them... No, no pressures...just being stupid at the time.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*No, cause I blame myself, nobody else. I guess I needed the credit (for gym)*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*No, cause they was the reason I wanted to go to school, but I just got trapped. Um...in a relationship and wanted to be there 24/7.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*I think it was easy cause I got good grades all the way up to 6th grade. I never got an F all the way through middle school either. It was easy, I guess. I probably had difficulty most in reading. Reading is not a challenge today because I passed FCAT reading already. Grades? As, Bs, Cs. The teachers are kinder, friends, I guess that's it. The challenges? Just to get through the day. People bothering you, messing with you, doing stuff to get on your nerves.*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*It was somewhat, cause I brought home some Ds. In the middle. I liked middle school though; it was fun. Grades: Bs and Cs mainly. I liked the math and social studies was my best two subjects, and science, I liked science too, all those hands-on... I liked, I don't know, all the school feeling, I liked it. It was fun, the people was fun to be with, the teachers was good. I liked it. Challenges? No, not really. I was a cheerleader, but it wasn't for...it was for Palm Bay Youth. I think I got along with people well, unless they came at me with a problem. That's when I just snapped.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*Difficult. Well in 9th and 10th grade I think it was easy, but after it went along, in 11th and 12th, I think because I was behind on my credits and I was trying to go to night class and then go to regular school then. I didn't like night class, so I decided I'm not going to night class and regular school. It's like I had to do everything to get those credits. Night school, it wasn't for me. That's what made it hard and then I go to the counselor to see what I could do. She was like, there's no way you can graduate by 12th grade because you only have so and so credits, so you don't have to stay in school. Grades? I got an F one year in science, but I don't know where I messed up. I got an F one year and, maybe Bs and Cs. I probably got an A in like gym or something. Twelfth grade I did not like gym. I never understood how I got the F because I did all my work and stuff. I don't know... I talked to the teacher about it. I don't really remember what she said, but I know I talked to her about it. I think that year everybody in her class got like Fs. Um, me just wanting to get through, get my diploma, so I could show my mom and them. I'm not really a talking person, I'm not really a talking personality, I was just like go to class, do my work... Challenges? Mostly my mom and them cause they said I couldn't do it. I failed. Other students? Good. I did get into a fight one year. It was over something dumb. I think it was 11th grade. That was the only problem I had. Sometimes I used to be late, but other than that, no. I never caused a problem. I was late. Yes, you get detention, detentions lead to Saturday School, Saturday School leads to OSS (out of school suspension).*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?  
*No, never.*
9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?  
*Um, well I really didn't think to be honest with you. I just did it. Well, you know what? One day I had went back to class and they said I wasn't on the roster any more. So then I went to the dean and she just started telling me all this stuff and I just walked out. I was like, well.... and that was the last day I went to school. I was gone it seems like a week. I asked her (the dean) if there was anything I could do. I don't remember what she said. I think she told me to wait to the next year, but I was like I don't want to be... I'm supposed to graduate this year, I really don't want to be here next year, you know. But then, thinking back, it was like dang, I should have just went and finished. I made the decision the same day. I didn't go back after that.*
10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*Being there with my boyfriend and didn't have to wake up early, and that was about it.*
11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
*My mother and my uncle and them throwing it up on my face, and ... could have been somewhere by now in a college, had a job, had my own money, that kind of stuff, not come back here every day.*
12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?  
*I don't think... I wish I could help when somebody needs stuff. That's like the only problem, I think. I don't know. Nobody really expressed any of those things, but I just.... Help financially. My sister just had a little boy; I wish I could just give him the world. I don't have no kids.*
13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?  
*Oh, well I just want to be successful, money, car, clothes, a house, everything. I think I could have had it already.*
14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?  
*My GED, I need my diploma. Maybe if I would have stayed home, cause I used to go stay at my boyfriend's. If I would have been home, got up early, go to school, do what I had to do. No, I have my own mind. Maybe if there was somebody close to me, maybe so.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?  
*No. Because I would have probably been somewhere else, I don't know, successful. I want to be there.*
16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.  
*I always tell my sister and them whatever you do, don't drop out of school. It's hard, it's very hard.*
17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?  
*To be successful. Above all, not depending on no one but yourself.*
18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?  
*I want to be something in life, be somebody. I was looking at an x-ray tech. I was saying an RN, that's not for me; I don't think I would like that. I plan to go to college. I have the mind; I know I can do it. I was going to take the test July 22. I just took the language. I'm doing pre-GED. I think I'm moving along good.*
19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?  
*It will open up doors, hopefully a lot of doors. That's all.*

## **PARTICIPANT WM16**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 12-22-98  
Ethnicity: White  
GENDER: Male  
Number of Schools Attended  
    Elementary: 5  
    Middle: 1  
    High: 0  
High school attended: Central Area  
Year participant left high school: 2003  
Age at dropping out: 15

### **FAMILY**

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHEN YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL:  
Mother, stepfather, self  
EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY  
    Mother: 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

Father: College Degree

Siblings: Sister – GED

Brother – College Graduate

Brother – College Graduate

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know, but stepfather worked at NASA, so had good income.

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*There's a lot of reasons. The main reason was just 'cause I was discouraged and I could never get any help doing anything.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*..um, Job Core and um, GED program. I did, but I didn't realize it was going to be so hard. No one tried to change my mind. Not direct pressures, but my teachers they didn't like me. I was a trouble-maker, and what really was going on was just that I didn't understand what I was doing, like work-wise, and they wouldn't help me. They didn't have time to. So, I kind of felt a little pressure to leave, but no direct comments or anything.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Yeah, just back to the teachers. If they would spend more time explaining things to people instead of expecting them to know it, then ...*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*Yeah, most definitely. Yeah...um my Mom could have like paid me attention. And I didn't really rely a whole lot on my stepdad, I didn't really know him, we didn't really get along. But yeah, my mom especially could have helped me more.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*I barely remember it, but I do... my mom said that I did really good. I mean basic learning, shapes and colors and stuff like that; I did really good at it. They are like Ss, satisfactories until I got to middle school and I started doing drugs. Positives? I don't really remember. Challenges? Family situations.*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*When I first got there I was doing really good and then I hit the 7th grade and I started meeting people. Um, like well when I first got there I was a new student, I didn't know anybody and I stayed to myself so I focused on my work more. But then when I started*

*meeting people and started getting more popular with the bad crowd, that's when I, you know, skipping school, leaving, not showing up to school. Grades? I started out with Bs and Cs and then kind of made it down to Ds and Fs. Positives? I guess, well it was a down side, but it was a positive as well, meeting people. Challenges? Getting people to like me. And, seriously that's what my whole world revolved around, was trying to either be really popular and have nice clothes or just act a fool so everybody would laugh at you all the time. There's a lot of, well at the time when I was going there was pills are just becoming popular. I mean, people bring them to school and then, like, then you meet up after school and there was marijuana, and then eventually when you stop going to school there's cocaine and it progresses and it starts right at one thing, and then whatever else. No extra-curricular activities or sports. Depending on who it was. If it was somebody that I was hanging out with, they are, it was good. But if it was somebody they didn't like that I was trying to fit in with them, or I didn't like them either, so it would be, you know...*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*I did not attend high school.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?

*Yes; in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*Um... probably my second year in 7th grade. Everybody else was moving on and I was still sitting there. Um...probably about a year. I would always go home thinking I just won't go tomorrow and then finally my mom pulled me out when I was 15 because she didn't see any progress either and she was tired of worrying about if I was in school or not while she was at work, so she just pulled me out and told me to fend for myself. I spent three years in the same grade at that school; because that's the only school I ever went to. I dropped out in 7th grade because I never made it to the 8th grade.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*None. There are no positives. At the time it was because I didn't have to deal with going to school. But now, I realize that it was the most ignorant thing to do.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*It's initially that and now I'm 21 and I'm realizing that I have nothing. I have nothing to show for it and I've , I've been to college, but it doesn't mean anything because I don't even have a GED to prove that I can get into college. So all of the thousands of dollars of books I've paid for means nothing until I get that diploma. So now I'm backtracking.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*It hasn't.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*I'm backtracking.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*Um, I would worry about myself and not other people, and honestly I wouldn't care what people think because I know that I would have something in my future that I could look forward to. I would have graduated from high school.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*No; because I am behind and should have finished college courses by now.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?  
PLEASE DISCUSS.

*Um... if you have it in your mind, consider your options. Think about what your future may be like.*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*I'm trying to improve my life.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*Well, um, because I have a career goal and I can't get there without it. And, also, my two brothers they graduated, they have families, they have careers... one owns his own business and now my sister who's dumb as a box of rocks, and she has it, and she's a billing and coding, a medical billing and coding specialist, so she's. You know, I don't want to be stuck. Yeah.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*It will give me success in my life and a good job. The career that I want to go into is caring for people. I'm very good at caring for people and continuing my GED seems a little bit easier now. I kind of remember what I'm doing, so it's coming to me.*

## **PARTICIPANT WF17**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Date of Birth: 5-15-90

Ethnicity: Caucasian

GENDER: Female

Number of Schools Attended

Elementary: 1

Middle: 1



High: 1  
High school attended: Central Area  
Year participant left high school: 2009 after receiving Certificate of Completion  
Age at dropping out: Left school after turning 18

### FAMILY

FAMILY MEMBERS LIVING AT HOME WHILE IN HIGH SCHOOL: Mother, Father and two sisters

EDUCATION ATTAINED BY OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

Mother: High school graduate

Father: Took some college classes

Older Sister: Currently at BCC

Younger Sister: Currently in 11<sup>th</sup> grade

FAMILY INCOME: Did not know

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?

*It's not that I dropped out. I actually had a blast in high school. The four years I would like to go back to. I was an average student. I had fun, but it's the FCAT that held me back, so that's why I'm here because you can't get into any college with a Certificate of Completion.*

2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL?

*You could take the ACTs and that will replace the FCAT. I did that, but it got to a point where I came close, but not really passing and that's my problem with taking tests like that. No other options.*

3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*I don't think they should focus on the FCAT because there's a lot of students out there that are really good at school and they pass all their classes, like me, and this test is holding them back because it is one of the things you have to have to graduate now.*

4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?

*I didn't want to leave.*

5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

*Elementary school was okay, I guess. There was a year when I was just all by myself, so that was kind of hard, but it was okay. It wasn't as much fun as high school was. I didn't*

*have any friends, I felt like I was a loner. I was a good student, so I didn't get into a lot of trouble. That made the day even easier, but other than that. No challenges in elementary.*

6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL.

*Seventh grade was easier; eighth grade, that's when it got a little harder, and you have to try harder. Not much to say about elementary and middle school. Seventh grade, my grades are above average; eighth grade, I would say, that's when I had to work a little harder to get above average. I felt older, but it's hard to say positives. Not much to say. Not really challenges. I got along with other students. I played soccer, not a regular soccer team but I got to play.*

7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL.

*High school, I was scared to go at first, but then again it felt like; my sister was already up there and everyone knew my sister, so I said this is going to be a piece of cake. 9<sup>th</sup> grade was fun, got to meet a lot of people. 9<sup>th</sup> grade was easier, but then you got into 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, and that's when you had to like really focus on your school work in order to graduate, and um. I just know a lot of people. 12<sup>th</sup> grade was the best year because I got, in one of my classes, I got to help out in the Guidance and that's where even more people knew me, so... I don't know. I could go on about high school. I was always an average student; they (grades) would go up and down. Some subjects it (learning) was harder, especially science and social studies and math. Language comes somewhat easy to me. If you needed help, they would help you. You could even come in after school or before school, because I did stay after school in science in 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup>. And then they did have extra classes that they would put you in if you didn't pass the FCAT, but sometimes those don't help. I had to go in extra classes. It helped you with some, but sometimes they just don't. I just think the FCAT should be drummed out. No real challenges in high school. I joined the BETA Club; worked in Guidance Counselor's office, you got to do a lot of filing, and the things they had to pass to the teachers you got to do that. And, like everybody got to know you up in the office, so you got to get away with a lot. I was just a friendly person. I really just keep to myself; I won't talk to another person unless they talk to me first. Other than that I am just a friendly person, or at least I try to be unless someone is mean to me first. I hate getting in trouble, it just bothers me. That goes with being late for something. I hate being late, it drives me nuts.*

8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?

*No, I was never retained or held back.*

9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL?

*I didn't really drop out; I went my whole school life.*

10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*Not really anything is positive about leaving, because I would go back.*

11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?

*You just have to grow up really fast. You have to learn how to grow up once you are out of high school. You lose all your friends, like I have no one besides my family. Cause all my friends, like I had a group of friends, of course towards the end we all went our separate ways, so just, I don't talk to anybody from high school anymore.' I just got a couple people; that's probably what I miss the most.*

12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?

*Leaving high school – my family would rather I have my diploma already. I feel like I've let them down.*

13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?

*Like I have plans and I should have already got started. It's like pushed everything back, now. I can't do any of it now until I get my GED diploma.*

14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION?

*Um, just get rid of the test because I think it's really pointless. (Teacher or counselors) could have told me my other choices way before they did.*

15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

*I did not drop out.*

16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.

*Um, the only other choice that you have is to either pass the FCAT or take the ACT. They really didn't mention the ACT till it was like my 12<sup>th</sup> grade year and taking tests makes me really nervous, so it would have to take me a couple times to actually pass it. I don't think I would have left, even if I had to I wouldn't have wanted to.*

17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?

*I wanted my GED diploma. I had plans and a future that I still want so in order to have that I have to have my GED.*

18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA?

*I had plans and a future that I still want so in order to have that I have to have my GED.*

19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

*Once I get my GED I want to go to cosmetology school and start out there and one day have my own salon or spa. I hope I will be successful. I can be if I try at it. The GED,*

*once I get it I will be free. I still feel like I'm in high school and once I get it I get to move on to my next chapter in life. That's it. It was easy.*

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. WHY DID YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL?
2. WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU AT THE TIME YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE SCHOOL? *Potential Probe*
  - a. *When you left, did you feel you had other choices?*
  - b. *Did anyone try to make you change your mind?*
  - c. *Are there any pressures that made you leave? Please specify.*
3. IS THERE SOMETHING THE SCHOOL COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?
4. IS THERE SOMETHING YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU STAY?
5. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. *Potential Probes*
  - a. *Was learning easy or difficult? Please explain.*
  - b. *How are your grades?*
  - c. *What are the positives?*
  - d. *What are the challenges?*
6. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL. *Potential Probes*
  - a. *Was learning easy or difficult? Please explain.*
  - b. *How are your grades?*
  - c. *What are the positives?*
  - d. *What are the challenges?*
  - e. *Did you participate in extra-curricular activities or sports?*
  - f. *How did you get along with other students?*
7. DISCUSS YOUR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN HIGH SCHOOL. *Potential Probes*
  - a. *Was learning easy or difficult? Please explain.*
  - b. *How are your grades?*
  - c. *Did you get additional assistance with academics?*
  - d. *What are the positives?*
  - e. *What are the challenges?*
  - f. *Did you participate in extra-curricular activities or sports? Please specify.*
  - g. *How did you get along with other students?*
  - h. *Did you have any difficulty following the school rules? Please specify.*
8. ARE YOU EVER RETAINED, AND IF SO, HOW MANY TIMES AND IN WHAT GRADE(S)?
9. HOW LONG DID YOU CONSIDER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL BEFORE YOU MADE THE FINAL DECISION TO LEAVE HIGH SCHOOL? *Potential Probes*

- a. *How long did you think about the decision:*
  - b. *Was the decision made quickly?*
10. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?
11. WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL?
12. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AFFECTED YOUR FAMILY?
13. HOW HAS DROPPING OUT AFFECTED YOUR LIFE?
14. WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO IMPROVE YOUR SITUATION? *Potential Probes*
- a. *What might have made you more successful in school?*
  - b. *What could teachers or counselors have done to help you?*
  - c. *What kept you from staying in school?*
15. IF YOU HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, WOULD YOU DROP OUT OF SCHOOL? WHY OR WHY NOT?
16. IS THERE ANYTHING MORE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL? PLEASE DISCUSS.
17. WHY ARE YOU ENROLLED IN THE GED PROGRAM?
18. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO EARN A DIPLOMA? *Potential Probes*
- a. *What are your goals?*
  - b. *Do you feel you will be successful? Why/why not?*
19. HOW DO YOU BELIEVE EARNING A DIPLOMA WILL IMPACT YOUR LIFE?

APPENDIX E: BREVARD COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT EXIT INTERVIEW



**Florida Department of Education  
Exit Interview Student Survey**

School Name \_\_\_\_\_ School District \_\_\_\_\_

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Student DOB \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions: Please circle the response that best describes your experience or provide a description of your experience in the space provided.**

1. Which of the following best describes your **primary** reason for terminating school enrollment?

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| A. Classes were not interesting/bored                | K. Student-teacher conflict          |
| B. Missed too many days and could not catch up       | L. Employment/have to work full-time |
| C. Did not like school                               | M. Friends dropped out               |
| D. Failing classes/couldn't keep up with school work | N. Failed to pass FCAT               |
| E. Illness   | O. Intimidated/Threatened/Bullied    |
| F. Became a parent                                   | P. Migrant                           |
| G. Getting married                                   | Q. Homeless                          |
| H. Felt like I did not belong                        | R. Family Problems                   |
| I. Suspended from school often                       | S. Other                             |
| J. Expelled from school                              |                                      |

2. Which of the following best describes your **secondary** reason for terminating school enrollment?

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| A. Classes were not interesting/bored                | K. Student-teacher conflict          |
| B. Missed too many days and could not catch up       | L. Employment/have to work full-time |
| C. Did not like school                               | M. Friends dropped out               |
| D. Failing classes/couldn't keep up with school work | N. Failed to pass FCAT               |
| E. Illness   | O. Intimidated/Threatened/Bullied    |
| F. Became a parent                                   | P. Migrant                           |
| G. Getting married                                   | Q. Homeless                          |
| H. Felt like I did not belong                        | R. Family Problems                   |
| I. Suspended from school often                       | S. Other                             |
| J. Expelled from school                              |                                      |

3. What would have improved your chances of staying in school? (Circle all that apply.)

- A. Opportunities for real-world learning (internships, service learning)
- B. Better teachers
- C. Smaller classes
- D. More individualized instruction
- E. Better communication with your teachers
- F. Better communication with your parents
- G. Increased parental involvement
- H. Less freedom and more supervision from parents
- I. Less freedom and more supervision from school officials
- J. Other

4. What actions did your school personnel take to keep you enrolled in school? (Circle all that apply.)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| A. Provided student counseling  | I. Discussed and offered participation in a credit recovery course/program   |
| B. Scheduled a conference with parent(s), guardian(s), student, and school staff  | J. Discussed and offered access to Dropout Prevention Program(s) (e.g., alternative education, disciplinary, teenage parent) |
| C. Discussed and offered options for tutoring   | K. Tracked student progress (by teacher, counselor, social worker, graduation coach, etc.)                                   |
| D. Discussed the consequences of dropping out   | L. Changed or revised course schedule  |
| E. Discussed and offered options for continuing education in a different environment (e.g., Adult Education, home school, virtual school, hospital homebound)               | M. Implemented intervention contracts (e.g. attendance or behavior)  |
| F. Discussed and offered alternative options for graduation (e.g., diploma options or GED Testing)  | N. Student reported that school staff took no action   |
| G. Conducted home visits  | O. Other   |
| H. Referred student to agencies/programs to address problems interfering with school success (e.g., substance abuse counseling, psychological counseling, family counselor) | Z. Not Applicable: Student did not drop out of school or did not provide information about actions taken                     |

Please check and sign below to certify that each of the following statements was addressed by school personnel.

I am at least 16 years of age and it is my intent to terminate my school enrollment. I received counseling from a guidance counselor or other school personnel which addressed the following:

- Terminating school enrollment prior to graduation will likely reduce my potential earnings and negatively affect my career options.
- Termination of school enrollment will result in the revocation/denial of my driving privileges until age 18.
- My reasons for leaving school prior to graduation.
- Possible actions that could keep me from leaving school prior to graduation.
- Options for continuing my education in a different environment, e.g., Adult Education or GED testing.
- For Bright Futures eligibility, GED students must complete credit requirements before taking GED exam.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(if student is under 18 years of age)

School Personnel Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Optional:**

1. What is the highest level of education completed by your maternal parent/guardian? (circle one)

Elementary    Middle School    High School    College    Graduate School    Unknown

2. What is the highest level of education completed by your paternal parent/guardian? (circle one)

Elementary    Middle School    High School    College    Graduate School    Unknown

APPENDIX F: BREVARD HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT PLAN

## BREVARD HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION PLAN

SY 2009 – 2010

Dropout prevention is a crucial element in our school district. Dropout prevention programs will be offered at all of our high schools with the exceptions of West Shore and Edgewood; these programs will be accessible at 14 high schools.

The two types of dropout prevention programs, Competency-Based Diploma and Credit Retrieval, afford students the opportunity to work at their own pace, utilizing computer software to master the standards in each academic course. Students also receive one-on-one instruction from experienced academic teachers.

### **Summary of Dropout Prevention Program Offerings for 2009-2010**

<b>Program Type</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>
Competency-Based Diploma (Full-Time)	6
Credit Retrieval During the School Day	13
Credit Retrieval Before & After School	8
Credit Retrieval Adult Ed Co-Enrollees	9

### **Competency-Based Diploma (CBD) Program**

The Competency-Based Diploma Program is a full-time, school within-a-school model. This program provides at-risk students the opportunity to earn credits and graduate from high school in a non-traditional program. Academic progress is monitored regularly and students are frequently provided feedback. Enrollment in this program

allows students to progress at their own pace; they may be awarded credit for less than 135 hours of instruction if they have demonstrated mastery of the course requirements and Sunshine State Standards in accordance with the student progression plan. Students should be enrolled in the program for a minimum of four of seven periods or two block periods. If a student is enrolled in a separate OJT program, the student should be enrolled in the CBD Program for the majority of the remaining instructional courses.

Admission to this program is contingent on results of an achievement test and parental consent. Students in this program may make up credits and earn credits in new courses. The GED Exit Option may be offered, in accordance with state guidelines, in this program.

The school district's graduation requirements for a standard diploma and the Secondary Schools of National Prominence initiative are applicable to students enrolled in the CBD Program. Students must have access to Career Technical Education (CTE) labs in their schools.

There are six CBD programs in the school district. Barriers to offering this program are the teacher certification and NCLB highly qualified (HQ) requirements. Administrators may elect to rotate teachers through this program to meet the certification and HQ requirements.

### **Credit Retrieval (CR) Programs**

Credit Retrieval programs provide students an opportunity to recover credits and improve their GPA by re-taking courses they failed (provided they did not receive an FA)

and/or re-taking courses in which they earned a D. Students may **not** take new courses in this program due to the 135 hours of instruction required to earn a credit.

#### CR During the School Day

Courses in this program are offered during the regular school day. Typically, a student will complete one credit during one period of one semester.

#### CR Before and After School

High schools may offer classes before and after school to provide students the opportunity to recover credits (provided they did not receive an FA); this opportunity was previously afforded during summer school. A student, who is behind only ½ credit, may participate in a before/after school class; the student is only required to attend until mastery is demonstrated. In order to receive a grade higher than a “C”, a student must fulfill an academic contract approved by the principal. The school may elect to offer before and after school classes to a student who earned a “D” in order to improve the GPA, provided the student demonstrates mastery and fulfills an academic contract. Priority should be given to students who have failed a class.

#### **CR Adult Ed Co-Enrollees**

Many schools are offering Adult Ed (co-enrollee) classes at their school site (before or after school) to make this method of credit retrieval accessible to a greater number of students.

### **Progress Monitoring in Credit Retrieval**

Credit Retrieval programs offered during the school day will include a student **progress monitoring component**. Progress monitoring entails identifying students in this program and providing them feedback on their progress towards on-time graduation. Schools may develop a spreadsheet of all students enrolled in the Credit Retrieval programs during the school day, or they may create a report from AS400 to identify them, as students in these programs are coded. Principals will identify personnel (teachers, counselors and/or administrators) to monitor these students and provide them regular feedback, both positive and negative. Brief meetings with the students to provide feedback and academic counseling should occur at least once a grading period.

### **The Florida Ready to Work (RTW) Program**

RTW will be accessible in the Competency-Based Diploma and Credit Retrieval (during the school day) programs. Students who demonstrate competency will earn the RTW certificate issued by the state of Florida. This certificate provides students proof that they have the fundamental skills to succeed on the job. Florida legislation has identified RTW as one of four diploma designations available to eligible seniors. At least one dropout prevention teacher from each of the 14 high schools has received training in the RTW Program.

### **Career & Technical Education (CTE) Programs of Study**

Students enrolled in the Competency-Based Diploma Program (full-time) will have access to Career & Technical Education Programs of Study offered at their schools.

Additionally, an approved CTE program will be available in each of the full-time programs if funding is available.

### **Brevard Virtual Instructional Program**

High school students in dropout prevention programs may be eligible for the school district's part-time Brevard Virtual Instructional Program. Access to the program will be on a case-by-case basis; there is an FTE cost factor.

### **Curriculum Enhancement**

The Offices of Student Services and Secondary Programs will continue to collaborate with the curriculum software corporation representative to enhance the software product utilized in our programs.

### **Best Practices Meetings**

The Office of Student Services Resource Teacher will coordinate Best Practices meetings with dropout prevention teachers on a quarterly basis. Other District staff will participate in these meetings as needed.



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