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# Stakeholders' Perceptions of Dropout Prevention Strategies in a Rural Ninth Grade Academy

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**STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGIES**

**IN A RURAL NINTH GRADE ACADEMY**

by

SHAWN DAVIDSON

(Under the Direction of Jim Green)

ABSTRACT

The dropout rate among Georgia high school students is a critical issue within the United States' educational system. As a result, large numbers of programs have been created to reduce the dropout rate.  This study examined the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy to examine effective dropout prevention programs implemented at the school.  Participants in the study included administrators, teachers, and students who dropped out of the academy between 2009 and 2012.  Interviews were conducted to gather information from the participants.  In addition, school and district documents related to prevention programs at the academy were reviewed.  For data analysis, emergent themes from participants' responses were used to describe participants' perspectives of dropout prevention programs at the academy.  The results of the study showed that the administrators, teachers, and students were all aware of the programs being implemented at the academy.  The administrators and the teachers believed that the dropout prevention programs resulted in a reduction of the dropout rate at the academy.  However, the students did not agree that the programs reduced the dropout rates.  It was recommended by both teachers and students that dropout programs should include more activities to involve parents and encourage students to remain in school.

INDEX WORDS: Stakeholders, Perceptions, Prevention, Academy, Rural, Dropouts, Strategies

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**CHAPTER I**

**INTRODUCTION**

There has been a steady decline in student achievement and the number of students dropping out of high school. However, the dropout rate remains a problem plaguing school districts in Georgia and throughout the United States. "The status dropout rate declined from 12 percent in 1990 to 7 percent in 2011. Reflecting the overall decline in the status dropout rate between 1990 and 2011, the rates also declined for Whites (from 9 percent to 5 percent), Blacks (from 13 percent to 7 percent), and Hispanics (from 32 percent to 14 percent)" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). When students drop out of high school, they are limited by the quality and quantity of jobs available to them, which affects where they live, how they live, and ultimately their economic contributions as consumers (Kominski, 1990). Dropouts are more likely to remain in poverty and to receive public assistance. Many students who drop out of school eventually serve prison time, further increasing the likelihood of staying in poverty over a lifetime (Bridgeland, Dululio, & Morrison, 2006).

The responsibility of school systems and school administrators is to build early warning systems as early as middle school, because by sixth grade most potential dropouts can be identified. According to one study, more than half of sixth graders with the following three criteria eventually left school: (a) they attended school less than 80% of the time, (b) they received a low final grade from their teachers in behavior, and (c) they failed either mathematics or English (Neild & Balfanz, 2006a). The research indicated also found that if an eighth grader misses five weeks of school, fails mathematics, or fails English, this student has a 75% chance of becoming a dropout (Neild & Balfanz, 2006a).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies employed in a rural ninth grade academy. According to Neild and Balfanz (2006b), the ninth grade is considered a critical year and often referred to as the "make-or-break" year. Students who get off track during the ninth grade year or who have been unsuccessful during prior years are less likely to graduate from high school. Students who repeat the ninth grade are more likely to become potential dropouts. Also, students fail ninth grade more than any other grades in high school (Herlihy, 2007).

Many districts have developed strategies to help identify at-risk students early and provide safety nets to help students to complete high school. A safety net developed by community leaders and school administrators in the rural Shelbyville School District, located 30 miles from Indianapolis, made at-risk students a priority for the school district (Thornburgh, 2005). The school district placed dropout prevention at the top of the school agenda by acknowledging the need for substantial measures to reverse the dropout problem and by involving community leaders and school leaders to implement a systematic approach to increasing the number of students who graduated.

One strategy employed involved discouraging local industries from tempting high school students with job possibilities. Another strategy involved opening a store-front alternative high school for students as an alternative educational facility that provided the same requirements of the traditional high school (Thornburgh, 2005). An additional strategy called for tougher sanctions against students who attempted to leave school before graduating without permission from the school district or county judge (Thornburgh, 2005).

This dissertation outlines a proposal to investigate strategies for reducing the number of students who drop out of school in rural Georgia. The purpose of this research study was to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of the effectiveness of dropout prevention strategies implemented at a rural ninth grade academy. This study examined the effectiveness of the identified resources and strategies because little research has examined the success of those intervention efforts at reducing dropout rates at a rural ninth grade academy.

## Background

According to Bridgeland et al., (2006), the number of high school dropouts in America remains upsetting.  During 2006, nearly one-third of all the children in public high schools failed to graduate on time. One-half of this population of students is comprised of Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans (Bridgeland et al., 2006). While current national statistics have shown the number of dropouts decreasing and graduation rates increasing in most states, the dropout rate in the southern state of Georgia still looms around 33 percent (Department of Education, 2012). Additionally, Kelly Chen of PBS News Hour (2012) states, "Twenty-six states reported lower graduation rates, with at least seven states such as Oregon and Minnesota with double digit declines.  Fifteen states reported slightly improved rates, and five states reported no change in numbers" (Retrieved November 17, 2013, from: http://pbs.org).  Therefore, while the graduation rates in the US are increasing, Georgia's graduation rates among minorities remain low.  In 2012, 60 percent of Blacks Georgians (ages 16 – 24) graduated, and 58 percent of Hispanic Georgians (ages 16 – 24) graduated.  The aforementioned concludes that 40 percent of Blacks dropout and 42 percent of Hispanics dropout, which leaves a combined total of 82% of Blacks and Hispanics who drop out of high school in the state of Georgia (Department of Education, 2012).  Moreover, the National Indian Education Association (2012) reports, "Minnesota, which has a significant

Native student population, has the lowest four-year adjusted graduation rate, with only 42

percent of students graduating with a diploma in four years" (Retrieved November 17, 2013,

from: http://niea.org/News/?id=146).

Dropping out of high school is damaging for the individuals who do not complete high

school because many of those individuals will live in poverty. According to Bridgeland et al.

(2006), this leads to a tendency for the dropouts to engage in criminal activities to support

themselves. Other connections to schooling, neighborhood quality, education and income level

have been revealed in additional studies (Aud, Hussar, Planty, Snyder, Blanco, & Fox, 2010;

Colclough, 2012; Nwaokoro, Marshall, & Mittal, 2013). Furthermore, the 2010 American

Community Survey reported that the poverty rate for all persons masked considerable variations

between racial/ethnic subgroups (Abbey & Wight, 2012). Poverty rates for Blacks and

Hispanics greatly exceed the national average. As noted by Abbey and Wight (2012), 25.8% of

Blacks and 25.3% of Hispanics were poor, compared to 9.4% of non-Hispanic Whites and 12.5%

of Asians.

**Causes of the Dropout Problem**

The root causes of student dropouts are difficult to measure. However, factors such as

family, community, and school-based factors are measureable. According to Thomas and

Sawhill (2005), national data on family income showed that across all races and income levels,

children in lone-parent families (single-parent households with no co-habiter) had less family

income and were more likely to be poor than children in two-parent families. This change in the

family unit correlated with the disadvantages that many children experienced. As Duncan and

Brooks-Gunn (1997) reported, "Children that mature in low-income families are often less

privileged, experience health issues, and are not prepared academically, and their transitions to

adulthood are not as smooth as their advantaged peers" (p. 10). Also, low-income parents are

more likely to be in poor health, both emotionally and physically (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn,

1997).

The community at large has a responsibility to educate and mold youth into productive

citizens. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2009), approximately 90% of new high-

growth, high-wage jobs will require some postsecondary education in comparison to past

decades. "Today, many jobs once held by dropouts or by individuals who had attained only a

high school diploma are being automated or going overseas, leaving minimally educated

Americans with increasingly diminished options to support themselves and their families" (Wise,

2009, p. 45). Additionally, school-based factors including high student absenteeism, student

bullying, adolescent probation, and teen pregnancy extend beyond the classroom. No specific

reasons have proven to explain why students do not complete high school, but factors associated

with students who leave school early include limited connections to the school and community, a

perception that school is boring, poor motivation, academic difficulties, and personal difficulties

(Bridgeland, Dululio, & Morison, 2006).

**Dropout Prevention Strategies**

Dropout prevention strategies have been implemented by school districts to encourage

students to complete high school. The strategies include "current trends in education that may

yield better results" (Gleason & Dynarski, 1998, p. 12) to keep students in school. A number of

school districts have implemented dropout prevention programs; however, the districts have not

monitored the consistency of the programs nor implemented the evaluations necessary to help

determine the effectiveness of the programs.

A number of academic programs have been implemented across the nation at all

educational levels and in a variety of environments (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2013).

The dropout prevention programs include initiatives such as Families and Schools Together

(FAST), an 8-week family program for youth aged 4 through 13 in pre-school through middle

school (Tedeschi &Trahan, 2003).  FAST serves students who have been identified by school

personnel as at risk for controlled substance abuse, academic failure, and pre-teen delinquency.

The FAST program provides multi-family group strategies to help build social connections

between families, to reduce isolation, and to help inform both youth and parents about ways to

protect themselves on all levels around children.

Second Step, another dropout prevention program which helps build social skills in a

class room based model in pre-school and middle grade students aged 4 through 14 (Committee

for Children, 2010). The Second Step program uses group discussions, modeling, and coaching

techniques to reduce aggressive, impulsive, high-risk behaviors of students by introducing social

awareness of factors such as assessments of risks, effective decisions making, self-control, and

specific goal setting.  Other dropout prevention programs focus on improving essential academic

skills such as reading in elementary and middle school.

Soar to Success is a research-based reading program designed for students in grades 3

through 8 whose reading skills are significantly below grade level (Wahl, 2004).  The small

group model utilizes motivating literature, reciprocal teaching, and graphic organizers in fast

paced lessons to help increase student reading.  While the in-school academic support programs

were beneficial, the popularity of non-academic programs increased due to the decline in the economy and the shift in the financial outlook of many American families.

The Summer Training and Employment Program (STEP) is an example of a federally funded dropout prevention program that provides summer remediation along with part-time jobs for students who move between grades, fall below the academic gap on test scores, and live between low-income and higher-income (Summer Youth Employment, n. d.). Students' reading skills decrease in the summertime causing the academic gap in reading scores to increase over the summer (Krueger, 2003). The Quantum Opportunities Program (QOP) is similar to the STEP program. QOP is a community-based program providing multi-year, year-round academic assistance, life and family skills instruction, college and career planning, community service, and work experiences (Hahn, Levitt, & Paul, 1994). In addition to the identified programs, community agencies also support dropout prevention programs.

Ingersoll and LeBeouf (1997) suggested that, "Ensuring that children attend school, are safe, and receive a sound education has become a challenging task for parents and society in general" (p. 1). Community agencies have served as a catalyst in supporting students in a non-threatening manner by providing effective and innovative programs to reach our youth. The Youth Out of the Education Mainstream (YOEM) is a joint program initiative by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, and the U.S. Department of Education. YOEM's purpose is to address the needs of youth who do not attend school on a regular basis, truants, dropouts, and those who are afraid to attend school, have been suspended or expelled from school or have been reinstated into the mainstream of school after returning from juvenile detention or correctional settings (Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1997).

Collectively, these dropout prevention programs provide strategies to keep students in school as well as an intervention into in the larger community. Every child needs and deserves a personal one-on-one relationship with an adult who cares, a safe place to advance academically, a worthwhile skill to use after graduation, and a chance to give back to their perspective community (Rossman & Morely, 2010).

**Ninth Grade Year**

The ninth grade is a pivotal year because the transition from middle school to high school requires students to make significant academic adjustments (Karweit, 2005). For many students, the most difficult adjustments are block scheduling, peer-pressure, new teachers, and curriculum requirements (Karweit, 2005). More importantly, researchers found that students do not pass the ninth grade, more than any other grade in high school, and those students who do not pass the ninth the grade, eventually leave school prior to graduating (Finn, 2006). The ninth grade is also a critical transitional year in providing resources for dropout prevention.

Kennelly and Monrad (2007) identified factors relating to ninth graders' dropout tendencies. The information allowed schools and districts to begin to predict early dropout prevention strategies in order to intervene and curtail dropout rates. While statistics concerning student dropout rates are staggering, limited strategies have been implemented to identify the students who are at-risk of dropping out. The strategies have included identifying characteristics of students who drop out, understanding students' backgrounds, and identifying key transitional periods where students have the most problems.

In accurately predicting the dropout rate of ninth grade students in urban and rural schools, certain criteria are evident as predictors of student completion rates. The completion

rates and graduation rates are misleading predictors of student success because of the disparity in the data reported (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). Additionally, Kaufman, Alt and Chapman (2001) implied that the federal government indicated three reliable sources that identified high school dropouts and indicators including: (a) the Current Population Survey collected by the Bureau of the Census, (b) the Common Core of Data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics, and (c) the data from the National Center for Education Statistics Longitudinal Studies Program. The dropout rate can be calculated using the event dropout rate and the status dropout rate (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). The event dropout rate measures the proportion of students who drop out in a single year without completing high school (Thurlow, Johnson, & Sinclair, 2002). The status dropout rate differs from the event dropout rate in that it measures the proportion of students who have not completed high school and are not enrolled at one point in time, regardless of when they dropped out (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2003). The status dropout rate provides a definitive count of young adults who fall within a specific age range. Also, status rates provide a higher rate because they include all dropouts aged 16 through 24, even if it is undetermined when the student attended school last (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001).

The characteristics of urban students have changed drastically, which requires the development of new strategies to reach those students. Holland and Mazzoli (2001) suggested that teachers see beyond the students' surface characteristics to "see reflections of what lies beneath: abuse, fear, optimism, pain, alienation, distrust, confidence, failure, and a wide range of characteristics and attitudes born of the circumstances that each person has been fortunate to experience or forced to endure" (p. 294). The strategies implemented during instruction must

address the influences that lie beneath the surface to foster growth and development of the student learner.

Prevention strategies utilized by school districts to positively intervene with students include bell scheduling, mapping routes to and from classes, sample tests, and homework questions to expose the students to the difficulty level of high school classes. Other prevention strategies include mentoring programs, housing ninth grade students in a separate wing of the building, and slowly engaging the middle and high school students with each other.

There has been a 20-year decline in the dropout rates in rural southern high schools (McGranahan, 2004). A series of prevention strategies in small school districts have contributed to the decline in the student dropout rates in the southern rural school districts. The multi-faceted transition programs have improved retention as well as the academic performance of high school students (McGranahan, 2004). The prevention programs included having students meet with counselors on a regular basis, attend upper level classes, listen to a presentation from current students, and pair the students with successful students (Stein & Hussong, 2007). Despite the reduction in dropout rates, differences continue to persist regarding the disproportionate number of dropout rates between minorities and non-minorities (ages 16 to 24) in the United States. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). "For example, in 2011, the status dropout rate for Whites (5 percent) was lower than the status dropout rates for Blacks (7 percent) and Hispanics (14 percent)" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). When examining the aforementioned, the combined US dropout rate is 26 percent.

## Statement of the Problem

The national number of high school dropouts has decreased, but dropping out of school is still a major problem. School systems, community leaders, and parents have focused their attention on the following systemic reasons related to the dropout problem: economics, class-size, supplies and increasing achievement (Krueger, 2003). The ninth grade is considered the first year of high school. Many students who matriculate into high school have difficulty coping with the demands of schedules, completing homework, and adjusting to new teachers (Krueger, 2003). The students' inability to meet the demands of the ninth grade is often linked to the students' lack of social skills and maturity to cope with the demands of curriculum expectations in large, urban high school environments. Further, large urban schools reported that many students frequently move from school-to-school, which contributes to low academic achievement and an increase in student absenteeism (Rumberger, 2004).

Subsequently, the ninth grade is a critical transitional year. With this in mind, developing early dropout prevention programs to help administrators adequately address student dropout is critical in developing prevention strategies that work (Rumberger, 2004). One deficiency in previous literature on the possible causes of high school dropout rates was that the majority of research focused on dropout prevention programs conducted in large urban school areas rather than rural areas (Kominski, 1990). Another limitation in the literature was that the larger districts continuously piloted and developed programs to improve dropout rates, but reported limited success with the programs. Often, the research was not inclusive of data that outlined specific procedures that policymakers, school administrators, and parents could implement to improve such a pervasive dropout problem. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to add to the literature on the rural ninth grade academies with respect to identifying the strategies being

employed in dropout prevention programs and determining which ones worked and which ones did not. Another purpose of the study, was to address the dropout issue from multiple perspectives, including the experiences of the many stakeholders at the local school district level.

## Research Questions

Many programs have been put into place in various high schools to address the dropout rate. The total dropout rate in the United States has declined to a single digit. Nevertheless, Georgia's dropout rate remains in the double digits. Research is needed to examine effective dropout prevention programs in rural school systems. This study conducted an in-depth exploration of dropout programs in a rural school system which resulted in an improvement in dropout rates. The overarching research question which guided the study was as follows: "What are the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy?" Moreover, the following sub-questions were derived from the main question.

1. What dropout prevention strategies are having a positive impact?
2. What dropout prevention strategies are not having a positive impact?
3. What dropout prevention strategies that might have a positive impact should be implemented?

## Significance of the Study

Having worked as a principal in a rural school system in Georgia, the researcher is knowledgeable concerning ways in which high dropout rates have the potential to profoundly affect not only the individual, but also the community in which the individual lives and society as a whole. As stated previously, the literature indicates that dropping out of school has a negative impact on the people. During the course of this study, the researcher investigated the perceptions of stakeholders in evaluating effective dropout prevention programs in hopes that the

data would enable stakeholders to incorporate more effective academic components in school systems' programs. The inclusion of effective academic components may aid in decreasing the dropout epidemic, especially in rural communities.

This study worked to add to the literature by determining factors which influence rural high school students' dropout rates in the ninth grade academies which may not be included in current literature. Furthermore, the study examined thoroughly the school programs and strategies in a rural ninth grade academy which have been designed to decrease the number of high school dropouts. The study findings may also inform the community about the need to support the school district's efforts to meet students' needs.

The results of this study will be disseminated through conference presentations and peer-reviewed journals in order to provide viable information to school districts, administrators, teachers, and leaders who struggle with high dropout rates. Information about strategies used in the dropout prevention programs implemented in the identified school district may enable leaders to develop additional components to their existing programs which will aid in the decrease of ninth grade dropout rates. Also, administrators and teachers may benefit from the study by being informed of student behaviors which serve as warning signs about students who are at-risk of becoming potential high school dropouts. Community leaders who review the study's findings may contemplate the initiation of legislation, or family-oriented community projects relating to the status variables which will strongly encourage parents to become a vital part of the matriculation process of helping students graduate. In essence, the researcher hoped to decrease the number of ninth grade dropouts by increasing knowledge about high school dropouts in order to incorporate targeted interventions and early academic components into dropout prevention programs.

**Procedures**

A qualitative approach utilizing the case study design was used to identify stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention programs. A qualitative case study was appropriate because the research sought to understand the perceptions and personal experiences of individuals involved in the study (Creswell, 2008; Maxwell, 2009; McMillian, 2008). The case studied in this research was a rural ninth grade academy (assigned the pseudonym Crane Academy to assure confidentiality of the school and community) located in southern Georgia and was limited to the 2009 to 2012 time period. The individuals in the case study were involved in developing and implementing dropout prevention programs to improve graduation rates in a rural high school. Furthermore, the researcher sought to understand the following: How do high school students who dropped out of high school perceive the programs designed to help them stay in school?

**Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

The participants of the study were limited to full-time administrators, faculty members (teachers) and students who were dropouts in one rural school system over a 3-year period (2009-2012). Limitations inherent to this case study method cannot be generalized to other cases. However, if the characteristics are sufficiently similar, the conclusions from this case study method may be "transferable" to other cases. School system participants were chosen for the study due to their knowledge of the school system environment and the system provided insight into factors which influenced the programs in place which prevent students from dropping out. In addition, the investigation took place in the same rural school system of

Georgia where the researcher formerly worked. The researcher assumed the participants were

open and honest in their responses.

## Definitions of Key Terms

The following are definitions for terms specific to this study.

### Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

The term AYP is an individual state's measure of the school's yearly progress toward

achieving state academic standards. AYP is the minimum level of improvement that states,

school districts, and schools must achieve each year, according to federal No Child Left Behind

legislation. This progress is determined by a collection of performance measures that a state, its

school districts, and subpopulations of students within its schools are expected to meet if the

state receives Title I federal funding (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

### At-risk Ninth Graders

At-risk Ninth Graders are students who attended school less than 70% of the time, earned

fewer than two credits, and/or were not promoted to 10th grade as scheduled (Harris, Jones, &

Finnegan, 2001).

### Communities-in-Schools (CIS)

CIS is a non-profit organization focusing on school success through assisting with student

retention and dropout prevention (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

**Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction which is also referred to as *individualized* or *customized* instruction offers several different learning experiences within one lesson to meet students' varied needs or learning styles.  For example, different teaching methods are used for all students with learning disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

**Dropout**

Students classified as dropouts are individuals in grades seven through 12 who left school prior to completing the school year and did not return by Information Day (a day in October when students throughout the state are counted and enrollment is determined).  Dropout students are not learners who receive a General Education Development (GED) or California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE) certificate, transfer to another high school or to a college, move out of the United States, are suspended or fail to attend school due to illness, or enroll late (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

**Formative Assessments**

Formative assessments are any form of academic measurement used by an educator to evaluate students' knowledge and understanding of particular content.  Once the formative assessment is complete, the educator adjusts instructional practices to reflect the assessment's results.  Lastly, these results are used to improve student achievement (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

**Graduation Coach Program**

This program identifies at-risk students who have a high probability of dropping out of high school. The program's coaches implement various strategies to ensure students' successful completion of high school and transition to post-secondary education and the workforce (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

**Ninth Grade Academy**

The Ninth Grade Academy is a separate school designed for first-time ninth grade students. The ninth grade teachers are assigned to teams with common planning periods and a common group of students. Efforts are made to minimize class sizes and assign the best teachers to the ninth grade academy (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

**Response to Intervention**

A response to intervention shapes the core of school improvement aimed at improving student performance through identifying specific areas needed to ensure student success through implementing research-based practices (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

**Rural District**

The U.S. Census Bureau defines a rural district as one that is not urban. Rural is defined as a place with less than 2,500 people or a place with a ZIP code designated as rural by the Census bureau and is also considered as an area outside of cities and towns (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010).

**Standardized Test**

A standardized test is an identical exam which United States' students in grades three to 12 are required to pass in order to matriculate or graduate. It often relies on multiple-choice questions and the testing conditions—including instructions, time limits, and scoring rubrics—are the same for all students, though sometimes accommodations on time limits and instructions are made for disabled students (Popham, 1999).

## Chapter Summary

The dropout rate amongst Georgia high school students is an issue and the total dropout rate in the US combined still hovers over 25 percent. Additionally, students have been dropping out of school at earlier time periods during their secondary school experience. There has been a large influx of programs created to prevent or reduce the increasing dropout rate. However, there are few studies conducted which directly determine the perceptions of these programs. The qualitative case study performed by the researcher addressed the ninth grade dropout problem at a rural ninth grade academy in Georgia. Additionally, the study used several methods to achieve data. The study used audio recorded, transcribed, and semi-structured interviews with both school personnel and students who previously dropped out were used to document perceptions in dropout intervention programs. The study collected data from school documents which provided information about the programs, strategies used in the programs, curriculum, and measures used to assess trends in the dropout rates for the ninth grade academy. Additionally, the investigation's data analysis followed the coding process, as emerging themes were grouped together. The research's interview data for each participant group and document data was reported in a narrative discussion which was supported by the appropriate tables and figures.

**CHAPTER II**

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Often students are expected to perform at or above state and national standards in completing rigorous high school requirements.  However, many students who lack the basic reading and mathematics skills necessary to meet the rigorous high school requirements often perceive graduating as inconceivable.  Many students fail to realize the value in obtaining a high school diploma and how the benefits of graduating from high school and obtaining a postsecondary education would improve their lives.  The purpose of this literature review is to discuss the theoretical framework of factors contributing to the stakeholders' perceptions of prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy.  In order to address this issue the chapter will be divided into four sections: (a) the problems of high school dropouts, (b) factors that contribute to the dropout problem, (c) dropout prevention programs, and (d) ninth grade year.

**The Problems of High School Dropouts**

The number of high school dropouts in America is alarming with more than a million students dropping out of high school each year (Editorial Projects in Education, 2010).  The dropout problem is even greater if one examines the combined number of Hispanic and Black dropouts compared to their White peers.  Likewise, in schools where the majority of students are low-income or minorities, the students have lower academic performance and higher dropout rates (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007).  Furthermore, in rural areas there is a higher indication of "income inequality" and "mortality" rates among minorities (McLaughin & Stokes, 2002). One can conclude that this linkage supports the correlation between low-income and lower academic performance, which results in dropout issues within the rural community.

Dropout rates also differ by ethnic groups and gender. Ethnically, almost one-half of all Black, Hispanic, and Native American students do not graduate from public high school with their class (Bridegeland, Dululio, & Morrison, 2006). Regarding gender differences among Black students, in 2010, 9% of males in the 16-to-24 age group were identified as high school dropouts compared to 6% of females (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011).

## Historical Trends

The dropout rate is not only a problem for individuals, but a problem for society as a whole. The word *dropout* emerged in the 1960s and, initially, described students who did not have a high school diploma (Dorn, 1996). However, as attaining a high school diploma became the norm, the term came to have a negative connotation. According to Dorn (1996), there was a need for reform to meet the changing needs of the high school population.

The literature described the term dropout and the ways in which social and educational critics viewed juvenile delinquency, labor markets, and gender roles during the 1960s. Dropouts were viewed as a social problem for schools because they were unable to educate, socialize, and develop the self-worth of all students. Dorn (1996) contended that lasting educational outcomes were evident in the inequalities that existed in schooling students. Therefore, Americans have focused on the social costs of dropping out, typically imagined as dependency, criminality, and lower economic productivity (Dorn, 1996).

**Educational Attainment**

While McDaniel, DiPrete, Buchanan, and Shwed (2011) explored the social and generational factors which contributed to the gap between Blacks and Whites in educational attainment, this literature review examines the historical trends of African-American women verses African-American men who graduate from college. Furthermore, the literature reviews identified early factors that contribute to the lack educational attainment of male students versus female students. Women graduates outnumber men who graduate from college. Overall, women earn 58% of all bachelor's degrees, while the 67% gap between African American men and women is even larger (DiPrete, McDaniel, Buchmann & Shwed, 2009; Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). Buchmann and DiPrete (2006) reported that, historically, African American women have had a large educational advantage over African American men.

The advantage has been evident since 1954 when the majority of African American college students attended historically Black colleges and universities (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). In 1954, women made up 58% of the student population at historically black colleges and universities. The 1974 census showed that women were awarded 57% of all earned college degrees awarded to African Americans (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). The educational advantage held by African American women in higher education impacts the social welfare, and demographic consequences of the African American population (Bauman, Bustillow, Bensimon, Brown, & Bartee, 2005). In order for these women to have achieved such accomplishments in higher education, they would first have had to have a solid foundation during their secondary education.

The educational attainment discrepancies between African American men and women begin at an early age. For example, African American boys often delay beginning elementary school, which results in a delayed high school completion (Gruae & DiPerna, 2000). Often, male students begin school far behind their female counter parts and at an older age; therefore, they do not complete high school at the same time as female students their age (Gruae & DiPerna, 2000; Malone, West, Flanagan, & Park, 2006). Additionally, African American boys are retained in elementary school more frequently than are African American girls (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dunbar, 2003; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). Lastly, more African American men drop out of high school and rely on the General Education Development than do African American women (NCES, 2007). These factors together contribute to fewer African American men entering college and completing college degrees in a timely manner (Buchanann & DiPrete, 2006).

**Data on the Social Implications of the Dropout Problem**

The dropout problem has long-term effects for the American economy and society (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008a). Dropouts suffer from limited incomes as well as limited job opportunities that create significant social and economic costs to the entire nation. According to Rouse (2005), a high school dropout earns $260,000 less than a high school graduate, in a lifetime. The ramifications of this are seen in an even scale when magnified. Throughout their lifetime, dropouts from the class of 2010 will cost the United States over 337 billion in lost income (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008a). Furthermore, if dropouts from the class of 2006 had graduated, the nation would have saved more than $17 billion in medical costs for uninsured health care over the course of those people's lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008a).

Raising minority groups' graduation rates to the same level as White students could add more than $300 billion to America's economy (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006c). Finally, small increases in male students' graduation rates and college enrollment could lead to significant revenue increases by lowering criminal-related costs as much as $8 billion each year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006c).  The data presented by the Alliance for Excellent Education in 2006 and 2008 substantiated the dropout epidemic and the need for dropout prevention programs to help improve student achievement.  The on-going mandates and curriculum requirements must lead to improved student performance for increased graduation rates.

**Graduation Rates**

In order for graduation rates to be helpful, the data must be reliable and accurate across all states.  Due to the No Child Left behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), states are required to use a specific graduation rate calculation.  However, poor interpretations and implementations have led to a high disproportionate number of graduation details that do not provide a concise measurement of the graduation rate calculations according to the law (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008b).  Private researchers have calculated a larger gap in the graduation rates than reported by state, federal, and independent reporting.  The federal government enacted regulations that required states to implement a common formula by the 2010-2011 school year.  Specific guidelines for how school districts are to calculate and determine graduation rates are imperative to assure accurate reporting of graduation rates. However, the majority of school districts do not have specific guidelines currently in place.

The gap between independent sources and state reporting was about 11% (Alliance in Excellent Education, 2010). The gap between subgroups is significant. To effectively increase graduation rates and improve student achievement, data must be disseminated accurately for reporting and liability purposes (Alliance in Excellent Education, 2008). According to the graduation disparities and inequalities among subgroups, the national graduation gap as estimated over a four-year period was a 19% gap between African American students and students of other races (Alliance in Excellent Education, 2010). However, the inequality is due in part to the graduation rates that have been inaccurately reported.

## Factors that Contribute to the Dropout Problem

Students' social background, students' educational experience, and school characteristics have been identified as factors that contribute to students dropping out of school (Jerald, 2006). The social background factors identified include socio-economic status, parents' attitudes toward education, ethnicity, family stability, and family responsibilities. The findings revealed that parents believed their children's educational level to be the strongest predictor of high school achievement (Jerald, 2006). Longevity was the second strongest factor. Furthermore, the results of the study suggested that parents of students who attended low-achieving schools were more satisfied with the educational plan of their children than those parents of medium or high-achieving school groups (Jerald, 2006). Subsequently, in a report for the National High School Center at the American Institute for Research, Kennelly and Monrad (2007) identified factors relating to ninth graders' dropout tendencies. The identified factors enable schools and districts to predict which students are more likely to dropout. As a result, the districts can implement prevention programs to, hopefully, decrease the number of student dropouts (Neild & Belfanz, 2006).

The key indicators identified by researchers to predict students who were more likely to dropout included poor grades in core subjects, low attendance, retention, and disengagement in the classroom (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Another factor was behavioral problems, such as acting out and fighting (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). The research further proposed that potential dropout students could be identified as early as the sixth grade. Moreover, according to Belfanz and Herzog (2005), dropouts were often students who attended school less than 80% of the time during their middle school years, received a low final grade in behavior, and failed either mathematics or English. The ninth grade was also identified as a potential factor that contributed to students' dropping out of high school. As it is a pivotal year, the ninth grade is a year in which a student either adjusts to, or becomes disengaged from, high school (Balfanz & Herzog, 2005). Unfortunately, according to McCallumore and Sparapani (2010), the ninth grade has the highest enrollment rate in high schools, especially for the large urban districts. John Hopkins University researchers' discovered that up to 40% of ninth grade students who are more prone to higher dropout rates repeat the ninth grade, and 10% to 15% of those repeaters graduate from high school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Further analysis of the importance of the ninth grade year will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

According to Jerald (2006), there is not a system in place designed to help decrease the flow of dropouts. However, the dropout indicators can help schools develop strategies to address the needs of at-risk populations and grade levels (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). The first step in building strategies for interventions designed to reduce the number of student dropouts is to obtain accurate student data. Data should represent the individual student and be followed over a period of time to provide an assessment of risk factors (Jerald, 2006). Jerald (2006) outlined steps and considerations for building early warning signs to include the following risk factors of

the individual student: (a) aggregated risk factors by the school and type of school, (b) rates of decline in student academic achievement, (c) engagement of students as marked by attendance and behavior, (d) school level outcomes as measured by graduation rates, (e) appropriate grade levels and recovery rates, and (f) a systematic analysis of risk factors, outcomes, and impact interventions.

**Special Education**

Special education students or students with disabilities have a higher rate of dropping out of school than students without disabilities. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders drop out at a much higher rate than other students (Cobb, Sample, Alwell, & Johns, 2006). Kemp (2006) compared dropout factors with rates for students with disabilities and students without disabilities. Kemp (2006) found that predictors for dropping out were the same for both groups and included lack of academic success, little or no involvement with school activities, and high absenteeism. Thus, dropout strategies that incorporated career awareness, vocational training, counseling, and extracurricular activities were the same for students with and without disabilities. This information is essential to consider based upon findings in Kemp's (2006) study which concluded that students with disabilities drop out at a much higher rate than students without disabilities. Therefore, prevention programs should be in place to specifically address the needs of special education students.

**Student Absenteeism**

Students who are habitually absent from school are more likely than other students of dropping out of school (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Therefore, school districts must develop practices which reduce student truancy and help habitual offenders attend school regularly. In a

longitudinal study, Sheldon and Epstein (2005) collected data from 39 schools on rates of chronic absenteeism as well as family and community interventions to help reduce this serious problem for student learning. Their findings indicated that recovery interventions which included family and community members decreased the number of students who missed 20 or more days from school each year.

The findings of Sheldon and Epstein's (2005) study concluded that schools should provide inclusive strategies to involve families and the community to help students improve attendance. The research showed that ongoing positive communication with parents regarding their children's attendance was necessary to decrease persistent absences. The research may have been skewed, however, because the sample included only schools that had been identified as having made improving student attendance a priority (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). To correct the possible sample bias, Sheldon and Epstein (2005) suggested further research to compare a matched sample of schools that had identified student attendance as a priority and those schools that had not. The future research could also explore whether school, family, or community partnerships reduced persistent absenteeism.

Additionally, Sheldon and Epstein's work (2005) was supported by the findings of Neild and Balfanz (2006). Neild and Balfanz (2006) suggested that partnerships were essential when encouraging ninth grade students to stay in school, to feel accomplished, to have a sense of direction, and to obtain their goals. This data suggested that a vital part of student success and graduation potential relied upon the development of life-long relationships with adults that fit the needs of the students. This included support in a variety of forms, all of which resulted in the students seeing the connection between content area and real life situations.

Darling-Hammond (2006) recognized the need to provide a connection for students with their schools and recommended redesigning schools in order to promote worthwhile relationships with students and teachers. Thus, examples included smaller classes, extended class periods, and students who move to the next grade along with their teacher. Multi-age grades have also proven to be effective in promoting academic progress. Darling-Hammond (2006) implied that programs targeted to help a sub-group of struggling students in reading recovery may decrease the number of student dropouts based upon the connections that the students obtain with one another and, subsequently, the resulting engagement with the material.

**Student Disengagement**

Student disengagement is characterized as the learner's inability to stay focused on educational issues at hand and what is expected of him or her as a student (Vaughn, 2011). Research by Balfanz, Hergoz, & Mac Iver (2007) focused on student disengagement and formulated an inventory of suggestions directed to all high school administrators. The researchers recommended that programs provide rigorous academic standards to every student. Programs should also include a meaningful personal connection to students. Further student engagement was facilitated by programs that provided guidance for students in personal development during high school and after graduation.

Student engagement is defined by Baxter-Magolda (2007) as "how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have critically assimilated from others" (p.69). This definition is best exemplified by Chickering's (1969) seven vectors of student development which was the landmark case identifying the developmental needs of students. Chickering (1969) surmised that the development of

competence included (a) the movement towards interdependence, (b) the development of mature relationships, (c) the development of purpose, (d) the establishment of identity, (e) the management of emotions, and (4) the development of integrity. These factors are crucial components to the formation of student engagement. Without these essential vectors, students were unable to actively be engaged in the learning process, thus crippling their ability to be successful in the classroom environment (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

According to Bandura (1986), student motivation or the lack of motivation is directly associated with individual self-efficacy in completing tasks. Subsequently, Bandura (1986) defines self-efficacy as our belief system that propels us to make decisions, to put forth an effort, and to fight relentlessly in the eye of adversity. Furthermore, Bandura (1986) acknowledges that self-efficacy is a mastery completed by experience. Mastery of experience is defined as the student's self-awareness of his and/her own competence after learning prescribed objectives and enacting the objectives with success (Bandura, 1986). Additionally, social interactions are critical and the interactions between peers and teachers play an important role in building self-efficacy.

According to Tinto (1993), students are making wiser decisions in selecting post-secondary education programs. Students, based on their skills and socioeconomic backgrounds, are more selective in the length of programs selected as well as the type of programs selected. Many students are selecting two-year programs verses four-year programs. Also, students are selecting technical school verses traditional college and university programs. The percentage of students who attend and complete four-year institutions is nearly half. Only half of the students who attend colleges and universities in the U.S. earn a degree in six years.

Tinto (1993), affirms that classroom success is determined by several factors: 1)

**Expectations** are the standards given to the students which drive them to succeed because of the

faculty's belief in the students and the setting of high expectations for the students' success;

therefore, alleviating low expectations. 2) **Support** provides and environment where high

expectations can flourish. The students must have a support system to help them to meet

achievement goals.  Students need, in many instances, academic, social, and financial support.

However, students who enter college at academically low levels need additional academic

support to be successful.  Thus, the academic support must align with the classroom

requirements that allow for students to value their own success. 3) **Assessment and Feedback** is

needed to ensure expectations and academic goals are being met, being used appropriately or

need to be revised.  If consistent formal and informal assessments are done and immediate and

frequent feedback is used and provided, the students are more likely to succeed in the classroom.

This feedback allows faculty, students and support staff to adjust specific behaviors to transcend

into student success. 4) **Involvement,** which is participatory engagement in school by students,

parents, stakeholders, teachers, staff and administration, is imperative to school recognition,

climate, culture and success.  This engagement translates into students who are more actively

involved socially and academically with faculty and other peers in classroom activities and those

who become more successful. Thus, this interaction builds stronger learning communities for

greater involvement, therefore, producing student success in the classroom.

Tinto (1996) surmised that in order to enhance student success, a series of changes have

to take place in the classroom.  These changes would include reshaping initiatives, setting

expectations, and providing support for students to effectively improve classroom success.

Administrators must understand the reasoning for students dropping out of high school before

they can address the problem.  Research has found a few common behaviors among potential

dropouts.  These common behaviors include high absenteeism, poor academic performance, poor

grades, and behavior problems leading to excessive discipline problems (Belfanz & Herzog,

2005).  However, scholars have realized that schools are not responsible for, and should not be

held accountable for, developing interventions targeted to all factors associated with students

dropping out of school.

**Family History**

The home environment is an important factor influencing student achievement and

engagement in school.  Students with parents who are involved with their schooling set higher

expectations for student learning and participate in school activities (McNeal, 1998).  Yan and

Lin (2005) raised two critical points regarding involved parents of children in kindergarten, early

literacy, and parent practices in preparing their children academically for kindergarten. Yan and

Lin (2005) found that the practices differed based upon race, ethnicity, and income levels.

Additionally, the authors discussed how parent involvement and early literacy differed in

children from various racial/ethnic and income backgrounds.  In examining parent involvement,

those parents who read to their children on a regular basis helped to increase reading knowledge

and skills (Yan & Lin, 2005).

Furthermore, parents who play an active role in their children's extracurricular activities

(e.g., concerts, sports, scouts) positively impact their children's reading and general knowledge

skills (Reaney, Denton, & West 2002).  Parent involvement and early literacy impact

significantly the reading, mathematics, and general knowledge skills for all students.  Parent

involvement is a predictor of kindergarten literacy skills and extracurricular activities increase

the literacy skills of Whites, Hispanics, and middleclass children.  However, extracurricular activities were not found to increase literacy skills for African American and low-income children (Reaney et al., 2002).

Reaney, Denton, & West (2002) concluded parents' involvement in school activities may help increase literacy skills at the end of the kindergarten year, especially for the children from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.  Furthermore, the findings suggested that educators' and parents must coordinate involvement opportunities in school.  Therefore, educators can inform parents of educational needs and incorporate parental motivation for desired outcomes that benefit the students, parents, and educators.

**Student Discipline**

According to Foucault (1995), discipline is a repressive operation by which individuals are seasoned into productive labor, i.e., bodies for capitalism. It is "a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior…Thus discipline procedures subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (Foucault, 1995, p. 138). In a time in which school disciplinary policies have been evolving, based upon types of gruesome and sometimes fatal natures of the crimes which students have been committing, many school districts have been forced to come up with more stringent discipline policies (Shah, 2013).

For example, due to increased school violence specifically involving handguns, the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) was implemented by Congress in 1994 (Dupper, 2010a).  The law requires students' to be expelled for one-year for possessing a firearm at school.  The results of this legislation enacted zero tolerance policies and practices in a majority of U.S. public schools

(Fenning & Bohanon, 2006; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).  Additionally, during the 1996-97 school year 94% of U.S. public schools enacted the zero tolerance policies for firearms, 91% of schools for other weapons, 88% of schools for drugs, and 87% of schools for alcohol (Kaufman, Chen, Choy, Ruddy, Miller, Fleury & Planty, 2000).

Dupper (2010a) discussed the impact of zero tolerance on public schools regarding policies and best practices.  At one time, discipline in schools involved administrators listening and exploring the issues at hand and then deciding the action connected to the offense.  Now, factors outside of the school system have begun taking a more active role in making decisions and/or suggestions for administrators.  For example, in August 2012, a large collection of national organizations endorsed by the National Education Association (NEA) proposed a one-year moratorium for out-of-school suspensions and a more constructive formation of discipline policies (Shah, 2013).  A few months later, in December of 2012, the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing where they brainstormed on ways to diminish or reduce the effect of what was deemed the "school-to-prison pipeline," a phrase which describes the process by which students were being referred to the justice system for relatively minor school infractions (Gonsoulin, Zablocki, & Leone, 2012).

Thus, increased scrutiny has led to administrators and teachers having to make quick and oftentimes exceedingly public decisions and judgment; the result of this has been an increase in criminal-like behavior of students that creates a hostile environment of fear and control (Giroux, 2009).  The swift one-size-fits all punishment resulted in an epidemic of out-of-school suspensions (Dupper, 2010b).  Also, the zero tolerance has affected African American and Hispanic students disproportionately compared to White students (Fenning & Bohanon, 2006; Rausch & Skiba, 2004).  Additionally, the zero tolerance policy has resulted in an alarming

number of students reported to law enforcement.  One example of an alarming rate of students

reported to local law enforcement was in the Chicago school district where a fight in the cafeteria

led to the arrest of 25 students' between the ages of 11 and 15.  The students were taken from

school, arrested and put in jail (Saulny, 2009).  Further, the disproportionate number of zero-

tolerance incidents signifies the misguided definition of the term *possession of weapons*.

Students who bring weapons other than firearms and explosives receive an automatic removal

from school.  However, taking into consideration that a variety of weapons which are not

included in the state's definition of weapons could be considered arms, the issue of suspension

and expulsion is questionable in any given situation (Dupper, 2010a).

An additional element of the zero-tolerance policy that was problematic is

insubordination.  School districts across the United States vaguely define the catch-all phrase that

applies to the interaction between students and teachers as categories of behavior that remove

students from schools, which is a hindrance to enforcement.  Included with the vague catch-all

category phrase of zero-tolerance are major and minor offenses, but all the offenses are handled

in the same harsh manner.  The ability to characterize certain student behaviors as insubordinate

is a difficult process (Dupper, 2010b).  For example, a student may challenge the statements of

one teacher and be praised for thinking outside the box while being written up for

insubordination by another teacher for the same statements.

As long as school administrators have the ability to characterize student behavior under

the catch-all phrase that encompasses insubordination, the number of suspensions and expulsions

will not be questioned.  Also, administrators are afforded the opportunity to misuse their

authority by regularly punishing certain students (Dupper, 2010b).  This is an important issue

and the generic phrase for unruliness should not be used to report punitive offenses.  States and

local school systems should gather relative data that clearly defines students' violations, the

disciplinary actions enacted by school administrators, and the length of the encounter to assure

the conduct warranted the disciplinary action. Thus, exclusionary practices should be put in place

for reserving suspensions and expulsions for serious and disruptive student behaviors (Dupper,

2010b).

## Dropout Prevention Programs

While local school districts have dropout-prevention programs, the districts have not

observed the effectiveness of the programs through detailed evaluations (Gleason & Dynarski,

1998). To effectively implement a dropout prevention program, school districts need to (a)

establish the program's objectives, (b) allocate resources to support the program, and (c)

determine criteria for students to be served by the program. The success rate for many programs

relies on the students' willingness to attend school and their participation. Also, students' past

experiences with school and their self-esteem level is valuable in the success of dropout

prevention programs. Criteria for completing dropout prevention programs may vary depending

on the program. For example, middle school programs which focus on increased preparation and

competition, may require students to compress two years of course work into one school year.

Furthermore, successfully completing high school dropout prevention programs allows the

students to receive either a diploma or a General Education Diploma. The high school

completion programs are normally established by the school district for students who have not

yet dropped out of school, and the General Education Diploma initiative was established for

students who recently dropped out (Gleason & Dynarski, 1998).

In the late 1980s, the U.S. Department of Education conducted three large evaluations of the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs. The programs were funded by the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act under the Cooperative Demonstration Program and conducted in two phases of the School Demonstration Assistance Program (SDDAP). One program operated from 1989 to 1991, and the other from 1991 to 1996 (Gleason & Dynarski, 1998). The research examined how dropout-prevention programs operated, how programs used their funding, the types of students who attended the programs, and whether the programs improved student outcomes (Gleason & Dynarski, 1998). More than 20 programs around the country and more than 10, 000 students who attended the programs for two to three years were evaluated. The findings concluded that, in general, most of the programs made no difference in preventing dropouts. Most of the outcomes improved for some students, but for the most part no program was able to improve all of the educational outcomes to include dropping out, attendance, test scores, and grades (Gleason & Dynarski, 1998).

According to Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, and Goldber (2006), the dropout problem can be improved if students are provided a realistic opportunity for reading and academic success with monitored student performance. Also, by increasing student engagement, students can increase defined academic standards and simply stay in school (Christenson et al., 2006). Student engagement coupled with marked academic social competence increases students' chances of completing school. The No Child Left Behind Act (U.S Department of Education, 2001) provided greater opportunities for teachers, administrators, and parents to partner in fostering the best learning environment for all students. The findings in the Christenson et al. (2006) research concluded that the success of all students will require detailed attention to social and emotional

learning as well as academics, psychological and behavioral engagement, and academic

engagement.

**Graduation Coach Programs**

The graduation coaches program was initiated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

of 2001 to monitor graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The Act also required

states to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the area of graduation rate (Patterson, Hale,

& Stessman, 2007).  Many school districts across the nation have begun programs to help

increase the graduation rates such as the graduation coaches program in high schools. The goal

upon the inception of the graduation coaches program was to assist schools and the state in

assuring that all students graduate on time by 2014 (Georgia Department of Education, 2009).  In

2006, the Georgia Department of Education began the graduation coaches program to identify

and lend support services to students who are at-risk of dropping out of school (Georgia

Department of Education, 2008).

The main responsibility of graduation coaches is to ensure that at-risk students obtain

support and resources to graduate from high school.  In the state of Georgia, graduation coaches

use the Graduation Coach Work Management System to manage and make data-related decisions

from their schools regarding which students to serve (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

Additionally, schools that had less than 95% graduation rates in 2007-2008 hired graduation

coaches in middle schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).  Also, graduation coaches

receive ongoing training from Georgia's Department of Education School Improvement

Secondary Improvement Redesign and Graduation Unit that works to improve graduation rates

in Georgia.  Students are served by graduation coaches according to students' individual risk

ratios. The risk ratios consider academic risk factors such as attendance, test results, retention, special education status, behavioral problems, levels of disengagement, English to Speakers of other Languages status, history of school failure, retention, low scores on standardized assessments, and pregnancy (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

The program uses graduation coaches, teachers as advisors, and school counselors who utilize research best practices (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). Graduation coaches delivered more than 282,400 interventions for at-risk students in Georgia during the 2007-2008 school year and documented 11 million contact hours (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). Graduation coaches make an asserted effort to resolve student involvement concerns of at-risk students by addressing cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects of student engagement (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). Thus, the student graduation coach interaction may result in increased graduation rates for students across the nation.

**Communities in Schools Program**

Another community-based program, which heavily utilized the graduation coach to facilitate student achievement, is the Communities In Schools Program (CIS). CIS is the nation's largest stay-in school network.  CIS was formerly known as Cities in Schools.  The CIS helps to connect students and their families with the communities' existing health, education, and human resources (Rossman & Morely, 2010). The CIS began in the early 70's and was named Cities In Schools. The three founders established the program as a private and public partnership to help urban students graduate from high school and plan for successful futures (Communities In Schools Georgia, 2011).  The program which began in Georgia has now grown into one of the nation's largest stay-in-school networks.  The CIS program serves over one million youth in 27

states across the United States and the District of Columbia (Communities in Schools Georgia, 2011).

The CIS of Georgia and other state CIS organizations help lend services to communities that desire to improve the outcome for students in their communities. Furthermore, CIS helps fight dropout problems in communities in which school failure is a problem (Communities in Schools, 2011). The CIS of GA encourages the work of performance learning centers and graduation coaches in Georgia. CIS programs are based on the beliefs that a child needs and deserves the following five basics (a) a personal, one-on-one relationship with a caring adult, (b) a safe place to learn and grow, (c) a healthy start and a healthy future, (d) a marketable skill to use upon graduation, and (e) a chance to give back to peers and the community (Communities in Schools Georgia, 2011).

The Georgia state office of the CIS includes a network of 41 locally managed CIS affiliates that provide fundraising, marketing, technical assistance, and program evaluation and advocacy (Community in Schools, 2011). Through the help of thousands of volunteers, the Georgia local affiliates served several hundred thousand students and parents, giving them access to school and community-based engagement resources (Communities In Schools Georgia, 2011). Additional funding through the Department of Education helped CIS programs of Georgia invest over $800,000 in other grants and funding to local affiliates (Communities in Schools Georgia, 2011). The grants help support many performance learning centers (Communities In Schools Georgia, 2011).

The CIS key initiative programs include the Real World project that helps local affiliates develop and increase partnerships with community businesses (Communities in Schools Georgia,

2011).  Another CIS program initiative is to support performance-learning centers that are small

high schools designed to provide an alternative path for high school students. The centers utilize

a blended learning model for students who are not successful in the regular high school setting

(Communities in Schools Georgia 2011).  The Georgia Mentoring Partnership which is a part of

the National Mentoring Partnership provides resources and information for students to help link

them to caring adult mentors (Communities in Schools Georgia, 2011).  Additionally, the

AmeriCorps Reading Tutorial program provides AmeriCorps members an opportunity to tutor

(K-12) students and recruit students to help in service projects (Communities in Schools Georgia,

2011).

**Response to Intervention Program**

Response to intervention (RTI) begins with screening students for effective results.

Students are identified using pre-year and mid-year screenings in the lower grades to predict

reading performance in the future (Cole & McCann, 2009).  In identifying the most efficient

measure of students failing, dependable, accurate, and solid implementation of student centered

reading skills is required (Cole & McCann, 2009).  Establishing cut-off scores helps schools

target a specific student group that may require interventions. Additionally, progress monitoring

by school staff helps to establish the validity of the test as viable and adequate in assessing

building-level interventions (Cole & McCann, 2009).

Response to intervention is divided in tiers and modeled in a pyramid beginning with

Tier1-Differentiated Instruction, Tier 2-Small Group Instruction, and Tier 3-Intensified

Instruction.  Differentiated instruction is important for students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3

interventions.  Differentiated instruction allows teachers the flexibility to vary instruction by

changing the content focus, the time of instruction, and the level of scaffolding. Additionally, differentiated instruction can be provided to individual students or to whole groups (Cole & McCann, 2009). Small group instruction in Tier 2 consists of basic reading skills enforced 20 to 40 minutes each session and three to four times a week (Cole & McCann, 2009). Tier 3 students are exposed to more intensified instruction that focuses on limited skills in extended daily sessions. As research suggests, systematic direct instruction is most effective. The teachers should incorporate instructional strategies and supports to include modeling, scaffolding, think aloud, graphic organizers, and immediate feedback to students (Cole & McCann, 2009). Also, teachers must build skills at a slow pace and provide students an opportunity to master reading skills before moving on through frequent practice.

Response to intervention is systematic and requires continued progress monitoring, differentiated instruction based on data, as well as routine teaching that encompass emergent skills. The employment of leadership by districts and schools must provide guidance at all levels to support the execution of the response to the intervention process (Cole & McCann, 2009). Thus, district- level teams that follow professional development guides help model, support, and sustain the response to interventions framework.

**Out-of-School Time Program**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB) required states to ensure children reach high standards of learning so all students will be proficient after 12 years. Low-income students in Title I schools that do not achieve adequate yearly progress toward this goal for three or more years are eligible to receive supplementary educational services (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, n. d.). Due to the increased mandates for improved reading and

mathematics requirements in preventing increased student dropout rates, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (2003) study examined out-of-school-time strategies.

The term Out-of-School Time (OST) refers to hours school-aged children are not in school (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education). The OST strategies help deliver after school enrichment and summer school instruction through school-based funding and community sponsorship. Due to the critical role reading and mathematics play in the educational attainment of children, OST interventions and strategies are designed to improve reading and mathematics achievement. To help students become academically proficient in reading, OST strategies provide low-achieving students an opportunity to participate in summer loss prevention, early interventions, remediation of skill deficiencies, acceleration of learning, and increased reading motivation activities.

The research further indicated that students reading on-grade-level must master basic skills before the third or fourth grade. During the developmental years (K-2), students must master all fundamentals such as sound recognition with written words and context clues. During intermediate grades (3-5), children must have word identification concepts and skills. Intermediate grade students must also acquire comprehension strategies such as recognizing confusion and adjusting and identifying and summarizing main ideas and important details (Kendall & Marzano, 2003). As students move through middle and high school, they are expected to develop and advance reasoning skills for reading to understand and interpret texts well enough to pass the required college sequence of courses (Committee for Economic Development, 2000).

The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2002 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011) reported that 69% of fourth graders were not proficient in reading, were unable to read a fourth-grade text, could not make inferences, could not draw conclusions, and did not make connections to their own experiences (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). However, the average fourth grade reading score in 2011 remained unchanged from 2009, but was four points higher than in 1992 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). The findings of the study concluded that OST programs significantly increase reading achievement among low-achieving and at-risk students. Furthermore, the study found that prevention strategies that focused on reading disabilities were most effective when provided to students at an early age. Additional findings indicated a majority of the interventions targeted elementary students and middle school students and a combination of both resulted in an increase in student learning (Mathes, 2003).

Increased monitoring across the nation of student progress in mathematics is needed to improve mathematics graduation rates. In 2000, a vast number of students in the United States accomplished a middle level of performance in mathematics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The students who performed at or above target levels were 26% at grade 4, 27% at grade 8, and 17% grade 12 (Braswell, Lutkus, Griggs, Santapau, Tay-Lim, & Johnson, 2001). OST strategies helped to enrich mathematics skills, homework skills, study skills, and basic lessons for students struggling academically.

The mathematics OST programs examined several summer school programs across the nation and several grade levels, with an attempt to determine if adding homework assistance involving mathematics to administering the design of curriculums would increase state-level tests results. Welsh, Russell, Williams, Reisner, and White (2002) examined after school programs on both elementary and middle grade levels in New York and found an increase in

mathematics achievement among low-achieving students.   However, a similar study examined

middle school students in California found summer school programs did not result in a

significant increase (Prenovost, 2001).  Overall, the findings concluded that OST are effective in

increasing   mathematic strategies in helping students below grade level and who are not passing

required courses.  However, the OST strategies are most effective when implemented for

secondary students (McMillan & Snyder, 2002).

**Ninth Grade Year**

The acclimation period of those students who matriculate from middle school to high

school can be critical in the lives of most adolescent teens because they must adjust to a new set

of rules, programs, school culture, and expectations.  High school administrators and teachers

must be aware of factors that contribute to difficulties experienced by ninth grade students in

order to ensure student success.  Academic difficulties frequently begin in the middle grades,

especially for students who attend high poverty schools with predominately minority student

populations.  Many of the students in high poverty schools fall far behind the achievement levels

of peers who live in more affluent neighborhoods (Balfanz & Brynes, 2006; Hanusek & Rivikin,

2006).  Therefore, students in high poverty areas are less likely to graduate from high school due

to their lack of academic skills (Hanusek & Rivikin, 2006).  Ninth grade students may struggle

academically, socially, and physically.  Many ninth grade students experience peer pressure with

other students concerning whether they are liked or not.  Also, ninth graders lack the social skills

and maturity to cope with the demands of curriculum expectations in the high school

environment.

Research indicated that the ninth grade is the transitional year that determines whether or not a student will or will not remain in school. The student's academic progress is an important factor in their decision (Karweit, 2005). The students' responses to failure are commonly indicated by a decline in attendance and an increase in disciplinary problems (Karweit, 2005). In order to curtail the dropout epidemic, ninth grade students must have guidance and support to keep them on track for graduation and deter them from leaving school.

Neild and Balfanz (2006b) identified the ninth grade as an important juncture in American schooling. The research examined the theories concerning the ninth grade and why the grade was difficult for many students. Further, the research examined the difficulty students had in adjusting to new school environments once they relocated to new schools as well as breaking the bonds developed between teachers and peers during middle school. The research also focused on the number of middle school students who were not prepared academically for high school. Neild and Balfanz (2006b) suggested that both school organization and instructional improvement had to be in place to keep ninth graders on track for graduation. School districts must focus on the ninth grade and make comprehensive school reform and accountability indicators to measure the progress in keeping ninth graders on track (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Furthermore, the involvement of parents in supporting and supervising their children was another important element. Ultimately, high schools are responsible for putting in place curriculum, safety nets, and strong teachers to help the ninth graders make a smooth transition to high school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006a).

## At-Risk Ninth Graders

The strongest predictors of ninth grade student dropouts occur during the eighth grade year. Students who have chronic absenteeism in eighth grade as well as fail mathematics or English are subject to dropout in the ninth grade (Neild & Balfanz, 2006a). According to Neild & Balfanz (2006):

> Of those eighth graders who attended school less than 80% of the time, 78% became high school dropouts. Of those eighth graders who failed mathematics and/or English, 77% dropped out of high school. Importantly, gender, race, age, and test scores did not have the strong predictive power of the attendance and course failure. (p. 27)

Similarly, ninth grade students who had poor attendance (for the purposes of this paper, > 70%), failed to earn more than two credits, and were retained in ninth grade were identified at risk of dropping out of school (Neild and Balfanz, 2006a).

The research suggested that ninth grade students who possessed one of the predictor characteristics (poor attendance, failure to earn more than two credits, and were retained in the ninth grade) had a 75% chance of dropping out of school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006a). Furthermore, one half of the dropouts could be identified as potential dropouts before they reached high school, and 80% of those students who dropped out were at-risk eighth graders and ninth graders (Neild & Balfanz, 2006a). The findings concluded that students who were held back or repeated a grade presented the largest risk factor for dropping out of school.

**Rural School**

Rural schools are those located in areas not identified as urban by the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010). A rural area was defined by the U.S. government as having less than 2,500 people or a place with a ZIP code designated as rural by the Census bureau.  Further, a rural area is also considered as an area outside of cities and towns (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010).  Rural school districts educate more than 23% of public schools students with rural schools continuing to increase (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).  The rural school districts have complex issues that create challenges to effectively educating students.

Students in rural areas are likely to be (a) from low socio-economic homes with 20% of the students living in poverty, (b) ethnically diverse with 25% being Black, and (c) migrant with 13% moving at least once a year (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). The data indicated that more students in rural areas were identified as needing special education services compared to urban areas.  Further, the socio-economic status of families in rural areas created funding problems.

Data presented in the Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein (2012) report revealed that Georgia, the setting for this study, is particularly affected by rural school districts. Nearly 575,000 students attend rural schools in Georgia, the third largest absolute rural student enrollment in the nation.  Poverty and mobility rates are among the highest in the US, as is the percentage of minority students.  Only three states have larger rural schools and districts than Georgia.  Rural NAEP scores are near the bottom nationally, and just over six in 10 rural students graduate from high school, with only Louisiana's rate being lower than Georgia's rate.

The rate of growth for rural students is dramatic, and the rate of growth in the rural Hispanic

student population is among the highest in the nation. (Strange, et. al, 2012). The information

supports the need to identify effective dropout prevention strategies that may improve graduation

rates in Georgia's rural school districts.

## Chapter Summary

The number of programs, strategies, and interventions that schools have implemented to

decrease the number of students leaving schools are limited in scope. While statistics concerning

student dropout rates are staggering, limited strategies have been implemented to identify the

students at risk of dropping out.  These strategies have included, but are not limited to,

identifying characteristics of students who drop out, understanding students' backgrounds, and

identifying key transitional periods where students have the most problems.

Even with a decrease, dropout rates are still at near epidemic proportions in school

systems across the nation, which make these dropout rates problematic for school administrators,

parents, and government agencies.  The continued growth in the high school dropout rate

indicates that this problem has become a crisis. The responsibility of school systems and school

administrators alike is to build early warning systems, as early as middle school.  High

absenteeism, bad behavior, and failure in core academic subjects among sixth graders are factors

used to predict which students are likely to become school dropouts. Three criteria which predict

student dropouts were (a) attended less than 80% of the time, (b) received a low final grade in

behavior, and (c) failed either mathematics or English. The three predictors were also true at the

ninth grade.

The literature revealed key dropout indicators and strategies needed to address them must be grade specific and population specific.  Additionally, ninth grade educators must focus on critical school factors within the school, such as student engagement and retention versus race and poverty.  Statistically, however, background factors such being male, or economically disadvantaged, or African American, or Hispanic have been associated with dropping out of school.

The literature review helped to define the theoretical framework of factors contributing to the stakeholders' perceptions of prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy.  Most of the literature on dropout prevention programs targets the prevention programs in large urban school districts, rather than rural school districts, and is grade level specific.  However, there is a gap in the literature related to setting up dropout prevention programs for specific at-risk populations attending rural ninth grade academies, which is the focus of this study.  The researcher hoped to identify the prevention strategies implemented by a rural school in order to successfully decrease the number of students leaving high school.  Also, the researcher hopes to add to the literature through assessing the effective policies put in place by school districts to intervene in the on-going epidemic of high school dropouts.

**CHAPTER III**

**METHODOLOGY**

Dropping out of high school has a negative effect on the quality of students' lives, as well as the prosperity of various the communities in which they live. Large numbers of students dropping out of high school can also negatively impact America's economic status. Therefore, it becomes important for researchers to closely monitor key indicators that depict dropout prevention. School programs that reduce dropout rates benefit all stakeholders, including policy makers, educators, and families, and society as a whole (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Urban school students face an educational crisis that policy makers and community leaders must address. The unique needs of urban school students vary. However, the fundamental problems in urban schools include gangs, poverty, subsidized housing, and violence that continue to deteriorate urban communities (Levine & Lezotte, 1990). Rural school districts also have unique problems that negatively impact educational outcomes. These problems include having (a) a low socio-economic population with 20% of the students living in poverty, (b) ethnic diversity with 25% of the population being Black, and (c) a high concentration of migrant families with 13% moving at least once a year (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012). Therefore, strategies identified to assist with dropout prevention in urban school districts must incorporate factors to help address students academically and socioeconomically. To address this concern, the researcher conducted a case study.

This research study examined the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy. This chapter outlines the specific methods and instruments used to conduct this study. The chapter contains the following sections (a) research

questions, (b) research design, (c) site selection, (d) participants, (e) data collection, (f) data

analysis, and (g) limitations, delimitations, and assumptions.

## Research Questions

While programs have been put in place in many high schools to address the high dropout

rate, the problem persists.  Research is needed to examine effective dropout prevention programs

in rural school systems.  The researcher conducted an in-depth exploration of the various

prevention strategies included in the dropout program in a rural school system which have

resulted in a decline in dropout rates. The primary research question which guided the study was:

What are the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade

academy?

The following sub-questions were proposed to augment the primary research question:

1. What dropout prevention strategies are having a positive impact?

2. What dropout prevention strategies are not having a positive impact?

3. What dropout prevention strategies that might have a positive impact should be

implemented?

## Research Design

A qualitative research method utilizing a case study design was used to answer the

research questions in this study.  According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative research method is

designed to explain the what, how, and why of a phenomenon rather than predict and control, as

does the quantitative research method.  Additionally, the case study design explored "an in-depth

study of a single or a limited number of programs, events, activities, and groups or other entities

defined in terms of time and place" (McMillan, 2004, p. 12).  Furthermore, the quality of a

qualitative research method depends solely on how the data are collected and analyzed (Tracy,

2010). This study attempted to understand stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention

strategies in a rural ninth grade academy.  Therefore, the qualitative research method attempted

to explore the "multiple realities that are rooted in the subjects' perceptions" (McMillian, 2008,

p. 11).  The researcher also attempted to link program implementation to program effectiveness

(Yin, 2003).

Yin (2003) described several categories of case studies that could be used to explore a

phenomenon, including exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory approaches.  The researcher

utilized the exploratory case study to examine closely the data above and below the surface to

gain an understanding of the phenomena of student dropout programs (Zainal, 2003).

Additionally, the exploratory case study method is appropriate because the data collection will be

conducted within the defined area of use in which the situation occurs (Yin, 2003).  This study

attempted to determine how high school students who dropped out of the ninth grade perceived

the programs designed to help them remain in school.  Subsequently, the case study method

allowed the researcher to explore real-life phenomena through specific background details of a

small number of procedures or circumstances and their associations by researching actual

participants involved in the case being studied (Yin, 2003).

The case study method allowed the researcher to thoroughly examine the data within a

particular context as well as select a small number of individuals or a specific geographic area as

subjects in the study (Yin, 2003).  The case study method provides a detailed description of the

behaviors of the subjects of interest as well as provides the data of real-life situations (Yin,

2003). The single-case design limits the occurrence of events to a single entity, which is also a disadvantage of a single-case method because the conclusion may not be applicable to other entities (Yin, 2003).

## Site Selection

As stated previously, the researcher, who worked as a principal in a rural school system in Georgia, is knowledgeable of ways in which high dropout rates profoundly affect individuals, the greater community in which the individuals live, and society as a whole. The school and community selected for this case study is located in a small town in rural Georgia. Crane Academy will be the pseudonym used throughout the study to assure confidentiality for all participants. The school is a ninth grade academy (i.e., the school is organized to serve only pupils in the ninth grade). It is part of a public school district that serves the entire county.

The town where Crane Academy is located has an estimated population of 17,041 citizens (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The median household income during the 2006 to 2010 period was reported to be $29,549. Also, the average monthly number of food stamp households is 4,101. The actual number of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was 158 (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.). TANF services are provided to families of dependent children deprived of a single parent due to abandonment, death, and underemployment (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.).

At the research site, 50 students are eligible to receive services through the Migrant Education Program. The number of students receiving migrant services is based on the 2011 student record. The Georgia Department of Education calculates this number by dividing the number of students enrolled in the migrant program by the number of students in the school,

system, or state during the academic year (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, n.d.). The population in the area was reported to be comprised of 20% White persons and 63.5% Black persons (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Persons below the poverty level were reported to be 33.9% of the population. The educational status statistic reported that during the 2006 to 2010 period, 78.3% of residents were high school graduates and that 22.5% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher (Census Bureau, 2010).

The Crane Academy is in a Title I, targeted assisted, school district that is accredited by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges. The school district offers gifted programs, vocational programs, alternative programs, special education programs, English to Speakers of Other Languages programs, early intervention programs, and remedial education programs. The school district is comprised of one superintendent, one administrative supervisor of personnel, and one After School 21st Century program.

The school district serves a student population of 4,756 enrolled students in grades K-12. The district includes four elementary schools, one middle school, two high schools, and the ninth grade center. Also, according to the National School Lunch Program (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012), qualified students in the school system receive reduced breakfast, lunch, and after school snacks with funding from federal funds, state contributions, and U.S. Department of Agriculture donated food. The total number of free and reduced lunch participants is 557.

The number of regular instructional personnel is 85 for the county's elementary schools and 120 for the county's secondary schools. The school district employs 141 special needs teachers, and 144 ESOL teachers (Proximity, 2012). The Crane Academy offers additional tutoring to meet the standards outlined by the state curriculum to include Response to

Interventions, Student Support Teams, and the Graduation Coach Program. The school district is currently under SACS review for accreditation which occurs every five to seven years.

The Crane Academy has a separate campus for ninth grade students located approximately two miles from the high school campus that houses tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students. The student to teacher ratio is 13.3 in the ninth grade academy, which is 12.5% lower than all other public schools (Proximity, 2012). The administrative staff of the Crane Academy consists of one female principal and one male assistant principal. The Crane Academy has 24 certified teachers, six males and 18 females. Of the certified teachers, 12 are White; 11 are Black, and one is Indian.

The Crane Academy programs include career technical and agricultural, computer applications, Junior ROTC, welding, health and physical education, Spanish, and French. Additional safety nets have been established to help the students meet the rigor of state standards. These safety nets include Response to Intervention, Student Support Teams and Graduation Coaches. The Crane Academy also utilizes an instructional coach assigned by the local superintendent of schools to help implement state mandates. The instructional coach provides professional development as well as classroom monitoring for the instructional development for all teachers at the Crane Academy.

**Participants and Sampling**

The participants in this study were one principal, one assistant principal, and five teachers employed at the Crane Academy who have had experience with the implementation of prevention programs. In addition, participants included students who had dropped out of the Crane Academy. The researcher utilized a purposeful sampling technique to select participants.

Creswell (2007) suggested the intent of purposeful sampling is to focus on understanding rather than generalization. According to Maxwell, (2009), purposeful sampling ensures that the participants have knowledge and experience with phenomenon that is the focus of the study. All participation in this study was voluntary. The teachers, administrators, and students were willing to participate in this study because their input may help to develop additional prevention strategies or improve current strategies to enhance graduation rates and prevent dropouts at the Crane Academy.

Two groups were selected as participants in the study. First, teachers and administrators employed at the Crane Academy who have had experience with the implementation of prevention programs were invited to participate in the study. The selection criterion for school personnel was (a) full-time employees, (b) a minimum of three years of experience at the academy for administrators, and (c) a minimum of five years of experience at the academy for teachers. This criteria was selected to ensure the data retrieved would be relevant and given by educators who were considered to be experienced enough to have a level of objective comparison. The administrator of the school was asked to recommend five teachers who meet the criterion and have experience in the ninth grade academy. The five recommended teachers were invited to participate. Additional teacher recommendations would have been requested if any of the first five did not volunteer to participate.

Secondly, individuals who previously attended the Crane Academy but dropped out during their ninth grade year prior to completion were invited to participate in the study. The selection criteria for the student participants were (a) 18 years of age or older, (b) previously attended the Crane Academy, and (c) dropped out of school in the ninth grade during the 2009 to 2012 school years. The population of students meeting the selection criteria was identified from

information obtained through Infinite Campus, a student information database system used by the academy.  The Infinite Campus database was accessed with written permission from the superintendent of schools of the Crane Academy.  A letter explaining the study and inviting the previous students over the age of 18 to participate was sent to the identified students.  The first five individuals who responded to the invitation and met the inclusion criterion comprised the student sample.

## Instrumentation

The single forms of instrumentation used in this investigation were interviews. According to Maxwell (2009), interviews are common methods in gathering information from participants in a qualitative case study.  Therefore, interviews were used to gather information from the participants in this study.  The researcher developed open-ended questions utilizing a structured interview protocol included demographic information (see Appendices A-C).  The researcher utilized structured interview questions for each of the participant groups.  Follow-up questions were asked as appropriate to obtain in-depth information about each interview question topic.  The researcher took notes and noted any non-verbal cues during the interviews to increase his understanding of the participants' responses.

## Piloting of Interview Protocols

The open-ended questions modeled previous literature provided by Jabor, Machtmes, Kungu and Nordin (2011), Jerald (2006), Rumberger (2004), and Herlihy (2007), along with work from Kennelly and Monrad (2007).  The open-ended questions explored the in-depth perceptions of school administrators, teachers, and ninth grade dropouts in determining the root causes behind the high school students dropping out.  Furthermore, the research questions were

piloted utilizing a group of teachers, administrators, and students who currently teach at or attend a different ninth grade academy. This procedure helped establish the face validity of the interview questions.

## Data Collection

The researcher conducted interviews with administrators, teachers and students, and reviewed demographic and statistical data.

### Teacher, Student, and Administrator Interviews

The researcher obtained written permission from the superintendent of schools in the district in which the Crane Academy is located prior to submitting an application to Georgia Southern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. The approval to conduct the study, access student data from Infinite Campus, and interview the participants was included in the written request to the superintendent of schools. Upon receipt of approval from the Georgia Southern University IRB, the school superintendent scheduled all interview dates and times at the Crane Academy for convenience to the participants.

The researcher ensured the informed consent forms were signed prior to conducting each interview. The participants and the researcher read the signed consent forms aloud to ensure the participants were aware of the purpose of the study and to identify their rights as participants during the interview process. The researcher assigned each participant a number before conducting the initial interviews to protect the identity of each participant. Interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher and the methodologist were the only persons with access to the raw data obtained from the interviewing process. A professional transcriptionist, who signed a third party confidentiality agreement, prepared verbatim transcripts of the audio recordings.

Once the interview transcripts were prepared and verified by the participants, the researcher filed

the audiotapes. The transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the

researcher's for five years, at which time the researcher will destroy them. Identity information

is stored in a separate, secure location. The raw data will be secured in a locked storage, and

only the researcher and the researcher's dissertation committee chair will have access.

**Demographic and Statistical Data**

In addition to the interviews, Crane Academy demographic data and other statistical data

such as dropout rates for the academy and statewide assessment scores relevant to dropout rates

were collected from the Georgia Department of Education's website. Any data obtained in no

way allowed for the identity of the school to be made known. Various school documents from

the Crane Academy that are public information had the potential to contribute pertinent

information to the investigation were accessed where they exist. These documents included

policy manuals, student handbooks, minutes from policy manuals, curriculum guides for courses

designed for students at risk of dropping out, and programs for faculty professional development,

to name to few. Finally, the researcher obtained relative data and statistics regarding the

dropout rates and trends from the student database, Infinite Campus, as well as the Director of

Pupil Services, for the time period of 2009 to 2012. The researcher accessed the data from the

Crane Academy with the help of the building principal after conducting the initial interviews.

## Data Analysis

According to Tracy (2010), the quality of qualitative research depends on how data are gathered and analyzed. Therefore, qualitative research conclusions are produced through inductive protocols from specific information to general themes (Bamberger Rugh, & Mabry, 2006). Data analysis for this study began when the interview transcripts were received from the transcriptionist. The researcher read the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings of the interviews to assure the transcripts are accurate. After the researcher was confident the transcripts were accurate, each transcript was sent to the participant for review. The participant review of the transcripts is member checking, which helps to validate the credibility and trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2009). Participants were asked to verify with the researcher that they had read and agreed with the transcripts within five days.

Data analysis continued after the participants reviewed the transcripts. The data analysis followed the thematic analysis process proposed by Bamberger, and Mabry (2006). After creating a preliminary coding list, the researcher followed the steps listed below when analyzing the interview transcripts:

- read the transcripts several times to understand the narratives as a whole;

- identified statements that were common throughout the transcripts;

- reorganized the statements into common themes; and,

- identified significant statements in order to establish the trustworthiness of the themes.

As attention to detail is important in thematic data analysis while considering the data as a whole (Bamberger et al., 2006), the notes taken during the interviews were reviewed during

interview transcript analysis to facilitate emergent themes. In this case study, the researcher identified emergent themes or recurring patterns from the participants' responses that address the overarching research question and sub-questions. Furthermore, the recurring patterns were used to describe participants' perspectives of dropout prevention strategies and programs utilized to prevent students from dropping out of high school.

Responses from each of the participant groups were analyzed separately to identify each group's perceptions about the dropout problem, the dropout prevention strategies used in the academy's dropout prevention program, and the changes that might be made to reduce the dropout rate at the academy. A comparative analysis of the three participant groups was conducted to identify similarities and differences within and among the groups. The interview data was presented in a detailed narrative and supported by tables and figures as appropriate in Chapter IV.

The researcher reviewed information from school documents and data on the Georgia State Department of Education relating to the dropout rates at the Crane Academy. School documents included professional development training related to dropout prevention strategies, curriculum guides, student test scores, and weekly assessments to identify and evaluate programming and strategies implemented by the ninth grade center to improve student achievement and reduce dropout rates. The data review sought to identify programs in place at the Crane Academy to effectively improve student achievement and reduce student dropout rates.

Further, students' weekly assessments and grades were evaluated to identify patterns in student achievement gains linking strategies to curriculum used to improve student achievement.

The Department of Education data were reviewed to identify dropout rates for the Crane Academy and for other ninth grade centers as one measure of the success of the Crane Academy's dropout prevention efforts.

The final step of data analysis was to compare the various data sources to identify similarities and differences among all data sources through a triangulation process. Triangulation of the data helped to verify the accuracy of information obtained in this study (Maxwell, 2009). A narrative summary was developed to report the findings.

## Role of the Researcher

The researcher acts as an instrument in a qualitative research design during data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Paisley & Reeves, 2001); thus, the researcher's biases and experiences have the potential to influence outcomes in this study. The researcher in this study previously worked as the principal in the same ninth grade academy that is the setting for this case study; thus, he was familiar with the educational barriers that may impede student progress. The educational barriers included, but are not limited to, poor reading and mathematics scores, poor attendance, discipline, and previous grade retention. In addition, the researcher conducting this study has 16 years of educational experience in variety of positions within the Georgia public school systems, which include teaching fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. The researcher also served as an Early Intervention Program Mathematics Specialist. The researcher was also a high school assistant principal and a high school principal for three years within the same school district. In addition to the public school experience, the researcher served as a human resources certified staffing coordinator. At the time of the study, he served as the Education Quality Monitor for the Department of Human Services. The

researcher holds a bachelor's degree in business administration, a master's degree in middle grades certification 4–8, an educational leadership certification P-12, and an educational specialist certificate in language arts.  The researcher's educational philosophy is that all students can learn regardless of their socioeconomic background.

The researcher remained unbiased throughout the research and conducted the research with integrity and honesty.  For this study, the researcher assumed the role as an outsider throughout the study.  The researcher compensated for bias in this study by observing the sensitivity in which the data were collected, viewed, analyzed, and reported.   Additionally, the researcher examined each stage of the research process, from selecting the samples, structuring the interview questions, and conducting the observations to seeking themes in the data and making meaning (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, 2008).  To prevent potential bias, the researcher engaged in reflection by maintaining a separate journal that depicted personal reactions, reflections, and past experiences (Yin, 2003).

## Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

The researcher was previously employed at the Crane Academy, thus there was the potential for analysis and interpretation of the data to have been influenced by his awareness of existing issues prevalent at the Crane Academy which contributed to the increased number of student dropouts.  Furthermore, the limitations of this investigation derive from the nature of case study research; therefore, the findings are not generalizable to any other school community.  Also, the participants were believed to have provided honest responses to the protocol questions because they were familiar with the researcher who had previously worked as an administrator

within the district. However, it is possible that they may not have been because of the same reason.

## Chapter Summary

This qualitative case study addressed the ninth grade dropout problem at a rural ninth grade center in Georgia. Structured interviews with school personnel and students who dropped out of the ninth grade center as well as document reviews provided information to answer the overarching research question, "What are the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy?" Interviews were conducted at the Crane Academy during a two-week period.

In addition to the interviews, data were collected from school documents related to the rigor of the programs implemented at the ninth grade academy to help reduce the number of dropouts. Data analysis followed the emerging theme analysis process. Interview data for each participant group and documents were reviewed and analyzed separately then compared through a triangulation process to answer the research questions. Findings were reported in a narrative discussion and supported by tables and figures as appropriate.

**CHAPTER IV**

**REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS**

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs at a public ninth grade academy in rural Georgia. Additionally, this investigation sought to determine whether or not these programs provided guidance for students in the matriculation process of their high school career and beyond. Furthermore, the investigation focused on the perceptions of stakeholders involved in the educational attainment of the rural ninth grade learner. The researcher especially focused on the ninth grade students identified as dropouts who agreed to participate in this study. This chapter will present findings from interviews of administrators, teachers, and students who met the selection protocol criteria for each participant group, as well as the analysis of selected school documents.

**Research Questions**

The information gathered from the structured interview questions helped to answer the overarching research question: "What are the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy?" In addition, the following sub-questions were considered: 1) What dropout prevention strategies are having a positive impact? 2) What dropout prevention strategies are not having a positive impact? 3) What dropout prevention strategies that might have a positive impact should be implemented?

**The Site**

The site for the interviews was the Crane Academy, a rural ninth grade academy located in a rural South Georgia community. The Crane Academy has Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation, and has created new implementation action plans which are under review for reaccreditation. Accordingly, the Crane Academy has submitted Georgia Accrediting Commission (GAC) documentation for certification. The Crane Academy, a Title I, targeted-assisted school located within a rural county, enrolled a student population of 4,906 students in the fall of 2013 in grades PK-12. The Crane Academy houses ninth grade students only, and is a small learning community that promotes the success of students as they transition from the middle school environment to high school.

Additionally, the Crane Academy is two miles from the main high school campus that houses tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students. The high school campus offers dual advanced enrollment with state-of-the-art vocational classes to help prepare students for careers in culinary science, construction, auto repair, health occupations, and business education. The fine arts program has offered one of the model programs in South Georgia. During the 2011-2012 school year, the Ombudsman program was implemented at the Crane Academy. The Ombudsman program offers flexible schedules, smaller class sizes, and specific educational plans designed for student progress at a pace the student can adhere to, while still being aligned to the rigor of Georgia standards and mandates.

**Data Sources**

As a case study, multiple sources of data were utilized. Participants included current school administrators and teachers from Crane Academy, as well as former students of Crane Academy who dropped out of the ninth grade. In addition, documents from the Georgia

Department of Education, the local school district, and Crane Academy were analyzed for information relevant to the research questions.

**Participants**

Participants were selected using convenience sampling.  The selection criteria for school personnel administrators and teachers included the following: 1) served as full-time employees, 2) had a minimum of three years of experience at the academy as administrators, and 3) had a minimum of five years of experience at the academy as teachers.  The selection criteria for students was limited to individuals who attended the Crane Academy but dropped out during their ninth grade year prior to completion, were 18 years of age or older, and dropped out of school in the ninth grade during the 2009 to 2012 school years.  Participants who met the requirements for the study through the process described in detail in Chapter III were approached as candidates for participation until the desired number of participants was identified.  The sample for the study included two administrators, five teachers, and five students. These were enough participants for an adequate sample, without creating an overabundance of information (Sandelowski, 1995). All interviews of administrators and teachers were conducted at the county's central education office on July 18, 2013.  The probation officer housed at the Department of Juvenile Justice arranged the student interviews conducted on July 19, 2013, at that facility.

**Administrator participants.** Administrators were numbered Administrator One and Administrator Two to protect their identity. Table 1 details administrator participant demographics.

Table 1

*Administrator Participant Demographics*

| Participant Type/Number | Years Teaching | Years In Administration | Race | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Administrator One | 6 years | 19 years | Caucasian | Male |
| Administrator Two | 9 years | 15 years | African-American | Female |

Administrator One obtained a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education (K-5) from a large state university, a master's degree in Curriculum Studies (P-12) from a different large state university, and an educational specialist degree in Educational Leadership (P-12) from a large private university.  Administrator One has six years of teaching experience, including a role as an academic coach in the ninth grade academy for three of the six years. Administrator One has served in a leadership capacity for 19 years as both an assistant principal, and a principal in an elementary, middle, and high school.  Administrator One has served as the ninth grade principal of Crane Academy and was recently promoted to a leadership role at the central office.

Administrator Two obtained both a bachelor's and a master's degree in Middle Grades Education (4-8), along with an add-on certificate in Educational Leadership (P-12), from a mid-sized state university.  Additionally, Administrator Two obtained an educational specialist degree in Curriculum Studies (P-12) from a large private university.  Administrator Two served as a graduation coach for the ninth grade academy, as well as the assistant principal in charge of discipline, testing, and curriculum. Administrator Two has nine years of teaching experience and 15 years of administrative experience, including the roles of both assistant principal and principal at the middle and high school levels.  Administrator Two formerly served as the middle school

principal and of the Crane Academy and recently promoted to a leadership role at the central office.

      **Teacher participants.** Teachers were numbered Teacher One through Teacher Five in order to protect their identity. Table 2 details teacher participant demographics.

Table 2

*Teacher Participant Demographics*

| Participant Type/Number | Years of Teaching | Race | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher One | 17 years | West Indian | Female |
| Teacher Two | 10 years | Caucasian | Female |
| Teacher Three | 15 years | African-American | Female |
| Teacher Four | 9 years | Caucasian | Female |
| Teacher Five | 11 years | Caucasian | Female |

      Teacher One has 17 years of teaching experience, seven of which have taken place at the Crane Academy.  Teacher One serves as the mathematics grade-level chair, a Student Support Team (SST) member, and an after-school mathematics tutor at Crane Academy.  Teacher One is committed to excellence and believes children have the skills to be successful if given the opportunity.

      Teacher Two is the Chair of the Biology Department, serves on the School Leadership Team, and serves as the after-school biology tutor. Teacher Two worked as a classroom teacher for ten years, seven of which have been at the Crane Academy as the Biology I and Biology II teacher.  Teacher Two believes all children can learn, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Teacher Three is on the Leadership Committee at the Crane Academy and active in many school activities. Teacher Three has fifteen years of teaching experience, ten of which have been at the Crane Academy as the Consumer Sciences Teacher. Teacher Three believes that all students have talents and that educators are responsible for developing the talents of each student whom they serve.

Teacher Four is the Chair of the Special Education Department, the after-school tutor for the Special Education Department, and serves on the School Leadership Team. Teacher Four has nine years of teaching experience in special education, all of which have been at the Crane Academy. Teacher Four describes her teaching style as "old school" and believes students who do not want to learn should be given additional time and instruction to help them become successful.

Teacher Five has 11 years of teaching experience, eight of which have been at Crane Academy. Teacher Five serves on the Student Support Team (SST), the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and as an after-school tutor at the Crane Academy. Teacher Five has as series of beliefs regarding students, such as the belief that students should be afforded an opportunity to make decisions regarding their education. She also believes decisions should be based on student needs. Teacher five believes traditional school settings may not be in the best interest of each student; therefore, students should be able to select an alternative school setting or program that fits their needs.

**Student participants.** Students were numbered Student One through Student Five in order to protect their identity. Table 3 details student participant demographics.

Table 3

*Student Participant Demographics*

| Participant Type/Number | Student Ages | Race | Gender |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student One | 18 | African American | Male |
| Student Two | 18 | African-American | Male |
| Student Three | 20 | African-American | Male |
| Student Four | 19 | African-American | Male |
| Student Five | 19 | African-American | Male |

Student One is an 18-year-old African American male, born and raised in the rural South Georgia city in which Crane Academy is housed. A single-parent mother who dropped out of school in the tenth grade raised the student. His mother did not return to school to obtain a formal education. Student One's father was absent from the home and dropped out of school in the ninth grade. Student One has two siblings, one of whom also dropped out. Student One was retained in both 3rd and 5th grades due to both academic and behavioral issues. In the 2010 school year, Student One was pursuing General Education Development (GED) courses to prepare for his completion of the diploma track. Student One lacks parental support and in the neighborhood he is considered a gangbanger.

Student Two was raised by a number of family members, including his grandmother, aunts, and uncles; therefore, he did not have a stable home for many of his critical developmental years. Student Two was also partially raised in the streets. To be raised in the streets can be defined as living a life without strong parental guidance. Student Two's mother was a drug addict who never completed high school. His father was in-and-out of jail and absent for the

majority of the student's life.  Student Two was retained once in the 3rd grade, primarily for behavior problems, which included lashing out at administrators, teachers, and other students when corrected for minor incidents.  Student Two is currently unemployed and actively participating in gang-related activities, with no intentions of returning to school.  Student Two dropped out of the rural ninth grade academy in 2012.

Student Three is a 20 year old African American male who was raised by a single parent mother who completed her General Education Development (GED) credentials and is employed in a low-paying job in the local community.  Student Three's father was absent from the home and did not complete high school.  Student Three has two younger siblings, both of whom are enrolled in school in the same rural South Georgia city.  Student Three was retained in the 2nd, 4th and 5th grades for excessive behavior problems leading to extended suspensions, and ultimately, expulsion.  Student Three has problems with following directions, adult supervision, and expressed that he would live in the streets and continue to make money the best way he could.  Student Three does not intend to further his education and feels as though "the streets is where [I] belong and where [I] will die."  Student Three dropped out of the rural ninth grade academy in 2011.

Student Four is a 19 year old African American male, born and raised in the rural South Georgia city in which Crane Academy is housed.  Neither his mother nor his father completed high school. Student Four has an older brother also who dropped out in the ninth grade.  Student Four was retained in the 2nd grade due to excessive discipline issues and continuous absenteeism. Student Four has a problem with authority figures and is frequently viewed by authority figures as being defiant and disrespectful.  Student Four does not want to pursue his General Education Development (GED), and stated he would "make it the best way he could in the streets."  He

expresses pleasure in dating an older woman who "takes care of him." Student Four dropped out of high school during his ninth grade year.

Student Five is a 19 year old African American male, born and raised in the rural South Georgia city where Crane Academy is housed. Student Five's mother was murdered when he was a child and he was raised by his grandmother. His father was absent from his childhood. Student Five was retained in the 3rd and 5th grades for discipline issues and excessive fighting. Student Five has two siblings, an older sibling who completed high school and a younger sibling who is currently enrolled in the same rural South Georgia city. Student Five continues to grieve for his deceased mother and has channeled this grief into negative behaviors. Student Five admits that he has trust issues and acts out to seek attention from adults and peers, frequently making bad decisions and thinking about the consequences afterwards. Student Five admitted to selling drugs in the streets and participating in gang-related activities. Student Five is currently pursuing his General Education Development (GED) and has aspirations of becoming a truck driver. Student Five suspended his gang activity and is working at odd jobs. He dropped of high school during his ninth grade year.

**Documents Identified for Analysis**

The documents for analysis were retrieved from central office and examined to determine measures and procedures put in place to address the dropout problem at the Crane Academy. The following instruments were analyzed: the county's Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) review, Crane Academy's School Improvement Plan (SIP), certain county-wide professional development training, and weekly academic progress monitoring from the school-instituted PASS program.

**GAPSS.**  The Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS) Analysis is an onsite assessment of a school's progress toward meeting the School Keys.  The purpose of the GAPSS was to implement an inclusive, school-wide process using analysis and data from a multitude of assessment measures in order to fine-tune instruction techniques and help students succeed. GAPSS incorporates planning and organization, professional learning, and student, family, and community support.  GAPSS improvement suggestions for Crane Academy included the following recommendations: 1) the usage of formative assessment tasks and tools to monitor student progress, 2) ensuring clear and high expectations for all students, 3) engaging students by working with teachers to establish challenging learning goals and having students evaluate their own performances, and 4) the maximizing of instructional time by streamlining transition between classes and classroom management.

**SIP.**  Crane Academy's School Improvement Plan (SIP) emphasized student goals and promoting consistent attendance through communication and teamwork.  The SIP stressed measureable and attainable goals for student progress.  The SIP encouraged administrators to monitor lesson plans, structure department meetings, and perform focus walks, a form of teacher evaluation where administrators actively engaged faculty and students to ensure learning goals were met.  Attendance measures were channeled to the counselors, social workers, and attendance officers.  These academic professionals were charged with keeping contact with parents on a more consistent basis in order to ensure that all stakeholders were aware of the attendance issue.  Teachers were requested to create more detailed curriculum maps, express clearer classroom expectations, utilize planning periods for shared instructional time, and produce more standards-based classroom instruction.

**Developmental training.** Professional Development for the district's faculty was examined in terms of the focus of the programming. Emphasized in the district's professional development training were the following topics: Cooperative Learning, Dealing with Difficult Behavior, Classroom Management, Reading/Math Activities, Discipline, Differentiated Instruction, How to use Resources for Instruction, American Red Cross CPR Training, Customer Service, Higher Order Thinking Skills, Incorporating Flexible Grouping, Communication of High Expectations, Diagnostic and Formative Assessments, and Incorporating the Language of the Standards. Each of these topics implied areas in need of improvement and development for staff. Training was facilitated at various times throughout the school years, beginning in mid-September and ending in late May.

**Weekly academic progress monitoring.** Weekly academic progress monitoring was conducted through probing PASS data sheets. Each student was given a certain time and rotation station from which to obtain enrichment and homework. Academic rotations were facilitated to help students with needs in multiple content areas. PASS forms were evaluated to determine the caliber and effectiveness of the students served.

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**Findings**

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This section reports information obtained from each of the sub-groups about their perceptions of dropout prevention strategies used by the academy which are having a positive impact, strategies which are not having a positive, and strategies which staff members and students believed might have a positive impact and should be implemented. The section is organized by research sub-questions. Findings from each participant group, as well as the findings from analysis of the relevant documents that add to the rigor of programs implemented, are reported for each of the sub-questions. The raw data were analyzed in three stages. First,

patterns for primary significant statements were identified. Next, secondary reformulated meanings were derived. Finally, the reformulated meanings were applied to the research questions (Ge, Lubin, & Zhang, 2010; Geertz, 1976).

**Strategies Having a Positive Impact**

The first sub-question posed the question: "What dropout prevention strategies are having a positive impact?" The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of interviews with two administrators, five teachers, and five students.

**Primary significant statements.** In order to gauge perceptions from the participants, the researcher first gleaned primary significant statements from the interview transcriptions.

**Administrators.** The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of interviews with two administrators. Table 4 lists the primary significant statements from administrators.

Table 4

*Primary Significant Statements: Administrators*

> . *Most of the programs we have in place...do [allow] students to recover credits and attendance.*
> . *The alternative programs [are] having [a] positive effect in preventing student dropouts.*
> . *The alternative program allows for self-guided learning, just not in the regular school setting.*
> . *But, [programs] are not successful with all kids because we are still losing students.*
> . *Any program [in which] you [build] positive relationships with students, keeps [students] interested,[and] makes learning fun [with] hiring qualified teachers.*

**Teachers.** The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of interviews with five teachers. Table 5 lists the primary significant statements from teachers.

Table 5

*Primary Significant Statements:  Teachers*

· *The at-risk programs that start in the middle of the day, 'Panther Period' as opposed to*
  *tutoring [at] the end of the day and the teachers work with them [on] remediation.*
· *Taking more of an interest in the students personally and their parents' beliefs.*
· *The teacher [instructional] approach has the biggest impact.*
· *If the student is interested and engaged, he will want to stay in the class.*
· *Both the academic coach and the graduation coaches have an impact.*

**Students**. The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of

interviews with five students. Table 6 lists the primary significant statements from students.

Table 6

*Primary Significant Statements:  Students*

· *But, I remember [we] had after school programs.*
· *After school programs, the 'PASS Program', and tutoring.*
· *[The] school [gives] you mentors, [and] after-school programs.*
· *Allowing students to talk [problems] out with administrators and teachers.*
· *Work with the students with [discipline] and [academics]*

**Strategies Not Having a Positive Impact**

The second sub-question posed the question, "What dropout prevention strategies are not

having a positive impact?"  The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's

evaluation of interviews with two administrators, five teachers, and five students.

**Primary significant statements.**  In order to gauge perceptions from the participants, the

researcher first gleaned primary significant statements from the interview transcriptions.

**Administrators.**  The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's

evaluation of interviews with two administrators.  Table 7 lists the primary significant statements

from administrators.

Table 7

*Primary Significant Statements:  Administrators*

> . All the programs are having a positive impact; safety-nets; after-school programs; summer
>    programs.
> · You can have the best programs, teachers, and the reality [is] you may lose one-or two
>    children in the [process]. It's the society we live [in].
> · [I] can't think of anything that didn't have a positive impact at the academy.

**Teachers.** The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of

interviews with five teachers. Table 8 lists the primary significant statements from teachers.

Table 8

*Primary Significant Statements: Teachers*

> · I don't think  attendance recovery is very successful; the kids sign-in and they don't [read]
>    or [study], they just sit there.
> · Students are not [going] to attendance meetings that are required to stay in school.
> · The expectation for students is not high enough.
> . [Not] identifying at-risk students that may dropout.
> . [Not] meeting with the students regularly [to] discuss issues at home.
> . [Not] providing students with alternatives to dropping out.
> . [ Not] exposing the students to [other] environments [excluding] the school.

**Students.** The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of

interviews with five students. Table 9 lists the primary significant statements from students.

Table 9

*Primary Significant Statements: Students*

> · The [administrators] and [teachers] did not have events for the students.
> · The teachers and [administrators] would make [negative] comments to you [such as] either
>    come [to school] or not come.
> · The teachers and [administrators] judged you based on your family members' reputation.
> · The [administrators] and [teachers] didn't allow the students to be teenagers.

**Strategies That Should Be Implemented**

The third sub-question posed the question: "What dropout prevention strategies that might have a positive impact that should be implemented?" The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of interviews with two administrators, five teachers, and five students.

**Primary significant statements.** In order to gauge perceptions from the participants, the researcher first gleaned primary significant statements from the interview transcriptions.

**Administrators.** The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of interviews with two administrators. Table 10 lists the primary significant statements from administrators.

Table 10

*Primary Significant Statements: Administrators*

· *Expand advisement programs [that] connect with students.*
· *Develop early intervention programs as early as elementary school and middle school.*
· *Bullying prevention programs.*
· *Implement the right programs that fit the culture [of ] the school building.*

**Teachers.** The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of interviews with five teachers. Table 11 lists the primary significant statements from teachers.

Table 11

*Primary Significant Statements: Teachers*

· *Counseling so the students [do] not lose interest in school.*
· *[Enact] policies that [hold] the students accountable for their work.*
· *Set higher expectations for students to excel.*
· *Identify the students early,[establish] a pattern of misbehavior, attendance records, and test scores over the years.*
· *There needs to be more student accountability [with] academics and discipline.*
· *The school system[should] be more courageous in implementing discipline and academic requirements.*

· *The students who are disruptive should be moved to [the]Ombudsman [program] or [an]*
  *alternative program.*
· *[Enact] policies to make sure the child is not made to feel like a failure.*

**Students.**  The data from the study were retrieved from the researcher's evaluation of

interviews with five students.  Table 12 lists the primary significant statements from students.

Table 12

*Primary Significant Statements:  Students*

· *The administrators and teachers should have allowed the students to talk [about] their*
  *personal problems.*
· *The administrators and teachers should have allowed the students to try different*
  *academic activities to see if they work.*
· *The administrators and teachers should change[discipline] policies to help students stay in*
  *school.*
· *The administrators and teachers could have been more understanding of my [personal]*
  *situation.*

**Secondary Formulated Meanings**.

Primary significant statements were evaluated to determine more formulated meanings.

By utilizing selective coding, the researcher was able to identify classification titles by further

grouping patterns into emergent themes represented in Table 16.  This data extraction allowed

the discernment of the impact of dropout prevention strategies related to each sub-question.

**Administrators.**  Three main patterns were identified from the primary significant

statements from the administrators.  These included the belief that a wide variety of programs

had been implemented, a lack of agreement regarding program effectiveness, and the need for

programs that will create and foster authentic adult-student relationships.  Table 13 represents

more profound themes which were discovered for administrators.

Table 13

*Patterns of Formulated Meanings of Significant Statements: Administrators*

| Patterns | Significant Statements from Interview Transcripts |
|---|---|
| Wide Variety of Programs Implemented | · *Well, we have all sorts of safety-nets.*<br>· *We have after-school programs.*<br>· *We have during school programs.*<br>· *We have programs that allow students to come in and receive tutoring.*<br>· *We have programs that allow students to come in and recover credits they may have not [gained].*<br>· *We have alternative programs…some self-paced individualized instruction.*<br>· *Alternative programs that allow students to possibly gain a high school diploma.*<br>· *We have a lot of programs that have caring individuals.*<br>· *We have the "Rising Stars" a mentoring program in which an adult is paired with a student in the building and they are required to meet once a week …specific activities are used with the student. The mentoring takes place during the teacher's planning time.*<br>· *The [Leaders in Education Apprentice Program] LEAP is a mentoring program made up community members; they're trained ...and they have to be approved, but they come into the schools…every so often, and they are assigned a student.* |
| Lack of Agreement Regarding Program Effectiveness | · *At this time I can't think of anything that didn't have a positive impact.*<br>· *I think most of them that we are trying are having a positive impact.*<br>· *I would say none, because I see some kids that have been successful in the various things we've tried to do…with the safety-nets, the after-school programs, the summer programs…we've had some success in most of the areas, so…probably none.* |

| Need for Programs that will Foster Authentic Adult-Student Relationships | *. Expand the advisement programs.*<br>*. We have one in place, but …we probably need to do a better job of making sure that every child has a real adult they can connect with in school.*<br>*. Really taking a look at even beginning in elementary and middle school…developing  career plans and other things for children.*<br>*. Engaging the students and hooking them into…something they are really interested in…part of enhanced advisement programs throughout the district.* |
|---|---|

**Teachers.**  Four main patterns were identified from the primary significant statements from the teachers.  These included the belief that a wide variety of programs had been implemented, a lack of agreement regarding program effectiveness, the need for programs that will create and foster authentic adult-student relationships, and parental-social support needs. Table 14 represents more profound level themes which were discovered for teachers.

Table 14

*Patterns of Formulated Meanings of Significant Statements: Teachers*

| Patterns | Significant Statements from Interview Transcripts |
|---|---|
| Wide Variety of Programs Implemented | *·For years [we] target at-risk students, [students] that are already behind grade level… that are not passing [the] eighth grade [ by using the Criterion  Reference Competency Test] CRTC].*<br>*· They have different programs that target those  at-risk students… during homeroom they go to a  certain teacher, where they do remedial work…  or make-up work….[or] just get extra help.*<br>*·There are [also] after-school programs, after school tutorials, and… the [Plan to Achieve  Self Support] PASS Program* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | · *Student [attendance issues] …[if] they're not regularly coming, after a set number of days,…[the educational team has] an attendance requirement meeting…* <br><br> . *A person is called,[his name is] Dr. [X] and he [finds] out how many people are missing and… then he goes to the students' houses and finds out what's going on and tries to bring [the students] back to school.* <br><br> ·*We have after-school programs that help kids [who] are struggling with keeping up; we have special education classes that help the kids with special needs [which] offer various strategies and methods for instruction.* <br><br> · *Some of the students are also called in for this attendance meeting.* <br><br> · *So, there [are] instructional strategies… teachers use, plus there [are] after-school programs… remediation programs… and attendance recovery.* <br><br> ·*[In attendance meetings][students and parent] listen to the consequences, and they listen to benefit it gives… it unlocks doors in the future… so they are sometimes motivated to come back to school regularly.* <br><br> · *The [after school] program[s]… [help students [ to] pass[the students pass] they come to the ninth grade.* <br><br> *[In the after-school programs, there would be English, and a Science, [and a Math] teacher for those that needed help… so, they were getting help… in the thing they needed help in.* |
| Lack of Agreement Regarding Program Effectiveness | · *I really do believe that teachers try their hardest to make that approach [instruction] for the kids interested.* <br><br> · *[One student was referred to] the RTI [Response To Intervention] and still things could not [happen]… he just [couldn't] be focused and stay attentive in the class. That's one of the students that I can recall… was [just] a plain dropout.* <br><br> · *[Some] students were too sick, they just had to stay at home.* |

| | · *There is no proper motivation ….from home….themselves…to allow them to succeed* |
|---|---|
| | · *The after-school [programs], I don't think works as well, for those students who are at-risk for dropout because those students are usually not going to stay after school.* |
| | · *I don't think the after-school academy really had a positive effect. · [For our parents], it ended up being a baby-siting session. They were getting help… but… they were coming because they were made to come.* |
| | · *[In my experience] there's…317 kids [in the] ninth grade, and when they graduate, there's only….. [Around] 200 [who graduate].* |
| | · *At the beginning of the year, [the school] start[s] off with a number of students,… towards the end of the year, there are [less] students, the [the school] started [off] with.* |
| Need for Programs that will Create and Foster Authentic Adult-Student Relationships | · *Some kids need more mentoring… They need more of a one-on-one approach of an adult, an additional adult in the building that takes a hands-on approach with them one-on- one.* |
| | · *Target at-risk students the first nine-weeks of school.* |
| | · *Identify students with attendance issues* |
| | · *Supporting parents…sometimes with the parents… they [are] high school dropouts, or sometimes if they are working two or three jobs… so they don't push the children like they need to.* |
| | · *Sometimes, I think in certain schools, the supports are not there for those at-risk students.* |
| Need for Parental and Social Support Programs | *. Students who are behind academically and were have been retained, previously, are often over aged-students who are parents themselves.* |
| | *. Students that are parents and do not plan their career, too immature.* |
| | *. Home life or background, generational, kids of parents that did not graduate so they [do not] see the value of graduating.* |
| | · *Parents the way they go through system policies handicap the students[the students] are allowed to earn a 0 for not doing their work [and] it sets them up for failure in the* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *future, and not only for school but for life.* <br> · *Personal things in the [child's] life, health issues, not focused on education, they can't keep up, started school late, behind and many can't stay on track.* <br> · *The students that have personal problems, things going on at home, perform lower academically than other students, and lack of support.* <br> · *Shared responsibility teachers, parents, and students* <br> · *Parents need to reinforce the importance of education, [and ] lawmakers should [not] allow students to dropout at 16.* <br> · *It's the parents, [they] did not graduate, so they don't lead their children to want to be successful in education.* |

**Students.** Four main patterns were identified from the primary significant statements

from the students. These included limited knowledge of available programs, student alienation, a

need for more relevance in programs offered, and a need for programs that will create and foster

authentic adult-student relationships. Table 15 represents more profound level themes which

were discovered for students.

Table 15

*Patterns of Formulated Meanings of Significant Statements: Students*

| **Patterns** | **Significant Statements from Interview Transcripts** |
|---|---|
| Limited Knowledge of Programs Available | ·*[We have] the after-school programs* <br> ·*[We have] the PASS program* <br> ·*[We have] the after- school tutoring* <br> ·*They give you mentors and after-school programs.* <br> ·*There [is] nothing.* <br> · *I remember [the school] had after-school programs.* |

| Student Alienation | · *Some students drop out and others decide to dropout.*<br>· *It [is not] right! It just [is not] right.*<br>· *The school environment [is] just [is not right] for people to come. No freedom at all! No freedom in what you eat, in clothes [and] [it] gets boring [and] worse each year!*<br>· *I just get tired of the teachers and all. It is just not working!*<br>. *It is bad! Real bad!*<br>· *Most of the teachers don't take time to work with you.*<br>· *They want to write you up, get you out, because of your past.*<br>· *I don't remember meetings.*<br>· *I was passing so I did not look at [the programs] as a big problem.*<br>.*[Teachers] always told you were [going to]come or you are not.* |
|---|---|
| Need for more Relevance in Programs Offered | · *Have more [positive] student events…I had too many street friend and could not focus.*<br>.*My brother didn't finish school…My mom didn't finish school… It just makes you feel different.*<br>·*Nobody talked to me about doing positive things, instead of negative things.*<br>·*My teachers told me I should continue and try to succeed.*<br>.*Yes, they stayed on me.*<br>·*[The teachers] allow the students to talk [problems] out.* |
| Need for Programs that will Create and Foster Authentic Adult-Student Relationships | · *They could have put me in a room with somebody [that] I wanted to teach me.*<br>· *Ask [students] what they want to do. Then let them do it and see if it works.*<br>· *Work with the students.*<br>. *[We need help with] stress, home related [stress] and school related[stress].*<br>. *Allowing students to talk out their problems*<br>· *They could have been more understanding of my situation.* |

**Emergent Themes**

Seven patterns were identified from the primary and secondary significant statements

from the administrators, teachers, and students. Thus, four emergent themes derived from the

patterns were identified and each pattern was assigned to a theme. Additionally, the research

questions in this study were identified with a theme that answered that particular question.

Table 16 represents the patterns, emergent themes, and related research questions from the

Administrators, teachers, and students.

Table 16

*Patterns of Formulated Meanings of Statements Gleaned from Administrators, Teachers, and Students*

| Patterns | Emergent Themes | Research Questions |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Wide Variety of Programs Implemented<br>2. Limited Knowledge of Programs Implemented<br>3. Lack of Agreement Regarding Program Effectiveness<br>4. Need for more relevance in academic programs<br>5. Student Alienation<br>6. Need for more programs that will create and foster authentic adult-student relationships<br>7. Need for parenting and social support programs | I. Need for focused program evaluations of individual dropout prevention programs (Patterns 1-6)<br><br>II. Enhanced relevance (Patterns 3,4)<br><br>III. Improve adult-student relationships in school (Patterns 5, 6)<br><br>IV. Improve school-parent partnership (Patterns 5, 6, 7) | **Research Question 1**<br>**What dropout prevention strategies are having a positive impact?**<br>(Theme I)<br><br>**Research Question 2**<br>**What dropout prevention strategies are not having a positive impact?**<br>(Theme I)<br><br>**Research Question 3**<br>**What dropout prevention strategies that might have a positive impact should be implemented?**<br>(Theme II, III, IV) |

**Discussion**

The discussion is organized by research sub-questions and derived from all data sources for each participant group, as well as selected documents.

**Sub-Question 1: What dropout prevention strategies are having a positive impact?**

According to the administrators, teachers, and students a number of programs implemented at the Crane Academy have been successful in helping promote student achievement and decreasing the dropout rate. However, the evaluation of the raw data indicated the administrators and teachers had a difference of opinion in program implementation and the knowledge of the effectiveness of the programs implemented. The administrators specified student access to as many programs as available is most effective in promoting student success and academic achievement; therefore, decreasing the dropout rate. However, the teachers suggested varied interpretations regarding the effectiveness of the programs offered. The teachers implied that the programs within the Academy were helpful, but not as effective in decreasing the student dropout rates. Moreover, the students were not familiar with the programs implemented at the Crane Academy to reduce or prevent dropouts. As a consequence, the need for focused evaluations of implemented programs would be a beneficial step in addressing the dropout problem at the Crane Academy. Overall, the administrators, teachers, and students were able to identify selected dropout prevention strategies within the academy.

The administrators, teachers, and students referred to the following programs during the interviews to include: the Positive Approach to Student Success Program (PASS), Ombudsman, and Credit Recovery (this is part of PASS). The interviewees commented on the programs and their effectiveness at the academy and how the efforts of parents and community leaders helped contribute to the programs' effectiveness. The administrators, teachers, and students agreed

there were some beneficial programs in effect, but many could not specifically recall changes in these programs because of the frequent changes in name. However, several programs were mentioned by participants as possibly having a positive impact.

The PASS program is an after school program offering TestPrep, Credit Recovery, and tutorial services for students at the academy. The program is divided in sessions and the students must register to participate in the sessions held on campus. Many of the students are encouraged to participate in the sessions by teachers and administrators and applications are available for students during school hours. Teachers Two and Three, as well as Students Two and Three specifically mentioned the PASS program when detailing possible effective dropout prevention strategies.

The TestPrep is a computer-based session designed to prepare students for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the Advanced College Test (ACT) through a series of prep lessons that promote students' test-taking skills with abbreviated five-to-fifteen minute sessions that make test taking less intimidating. A certified teacher is in the class and monitors the progress of the students as they move through the active test modules. The administrators and teachers believed that the TestPrep program was most effective in helping prepare the students for standardized testing. However, the students were familiar with the program, but were non-responsive to the program effectiveness in preparing them for standardized testing.

The Credit Recovery offered through the PASS program affords students who have failed a class in a content area to take that course during the after-school tutoring sessions. The teacher of the class in which the student failed will compile a contract specifying the missing assignments and tests the student must complete to regain the credit. The entire team, which includes the program director, counselor, teacher, administrator, parent and student must agree

and sign the contract. Once the student completes the requirements of the contract, the new

grade and credit hours will be averaged into the student's cumulative average. The administrators

and teachers believed the Credit Recovery program was a great avenue to recover credits for

students who had excessive absenteeism, suspensions, and illnesses. According to the

administrators and teachers, the credit recovery programs had such a positive impact because

they offered students who considered dropping out a viable alternative for completing high

school. The student participants had knowledge of the Credit Recovery program; however, many

of the students were so far behind that they believed the program would not benefit them.

The PASS program is a tutorial program which encompasses the aforementioned

programs and is held Monday - Thursday. The English and science tutoring sessions are offered

Tuesdays and Thursdays; the social studies sessions are offered on Monday and Wednesdays,

and the mathematics session is offered Monday through Wednesday. The PASS program

provides mathematics tutoring Monday through Thursday by certified teachers in each

mathematics discipline and the program is staffed by full-time Crane Academy teachers who are

familiar with the students who attend the sessions. The administrators believed the PASS

program was effective in reducing the dropout rates for the Academy students. However, the

teachers believed the PASS program was not as effective because the student participants did not

take it seriously. Many of the teachers believed the students and parents viewed the PASS

program as a form of baby-sitting for parents who worked late and as a way for students to

socialize with friends that lived in other rural areas. The student participants were most familiar

with the PASS program; however, they believed the program was not an option because of their

excessive suspensions from school.

The Ombudsman program is offered to the students who attend school in the district in which the Crane Academy is housed.  Students who attend the Ombudsman program are middle and high school students who prefer an alternative class setting in which they can obtain flexible schedules, a slower class pace, and smaller class sizes.  The students are held to the same rigor and requirements of the traditional school, however, self-guided learning modules are implemented through the help of certified staff and support staff.  The students work through an assigned student plan that is designed to help guide the student through assigned computer-based modules.  The students attend the program at various times and at their own pace, but they must complete the assigned task on the student plan to obtain class credit.  Additionally, tests are administered during the regular testing season for the middle and high school students.  The administrators, teachers and students found the Ombudsman alternative program an excellent way to gain a high school diploma within a learning environment conducive to the needs of the individual learner. Unfortunately, the student participants mentioned that because of their own excessive suspensions and expulsions, the Ombudsman alternative program was not an option at any point in their educational career.

Furthermore, when examining the positive effects of programming within the Academy, one must be able to identify improvements within the program to enhance the effectiveness of the aforementioned program.  The qualitative data from this research indicated administrators, teachers and students have suggested program improvements. Administrators indicated the Academy would benefit from the expansion of the advisement programs.  As one administrator noted, "We have one in place, but… we probably need to do a better job in making sure that every child has a real… adult they can connect with in school." (Administrator One, personal communication, July 18, 2013).  In addition to the aforementioned, administrators also indicated

that career planning programming in the elementary and middle school would be beneficial.

Lastly, administrators suggested that there is a need for district-wide programming which

directly targets student engagement.

**Sub-Question 2: What dropout prevention strategies are not having a positive impact?**

The administrators interviewed indicated that the dropout prevention programs

implemented by the Academy were relevant.  However, teachers and students had doubts about

whether some of these programs were working. In particular, the data from the teachers revealed

that they had concerns about whether the dropout prevention programs were effective in

identifying dropout students quickly, and they did not feel as though the programs were as

effective as they should be for matching students with teachers who can build those key

relationships. Additionally, the data revealed that teachers (based on informal assessments)

believed the programs did not assist the student who is deemed "a plain dropout" or at-risk.

Moreover, students and teachers indicated there were no dropout prevention strategies which

positively impact the students' parental-social support needs. Teachers and students suggested

programs were not having a positive impact because they did not address the students' concerns,

and failed to include parental resources to draw parents into the school environment.

**Sub-Question 3: What dropout prevention strategies that might have a positive impact**

**should be implemented?**

The administrators indicated there was no need for future programming. On the other

hand, students and teachers suggested there is a need for programs which foster authentic adult

relationships. Also, teachers suggested the following program improvements: adding one-on-one

mentoring programs, targeting at-risk students by pre-screening and identifying students with

pervious attendance issues the first nine-weeks of school, and providing parent/home mentoring

and support programs. Lastly, students suggested programming that matched teachers and students for one-on-one instruction. They also suggested using informal assessments that afford students an opportunity to have input into the assessment process. In the students' opinion, there should be more events that focus on building community and relationships within the Academy and more aggressive counseling geared toward helping students who will be first generation graduates. Additionally, teachers indicated there should be focus on future programming which targets families with generational educational failures. Moreover, students indicated the need for programming which allowed them to talk out problems and concerns and encouraged them to attain educational success.

### Chapter Summary

The researcher gathered information from structured interviews to help answer the overarching research question: (1) What are stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy? The researcher also posed the following sub-questions: (a) What dropout prevention strategies are having a positive impact? (b) What dropout prevention strategies are not having a positive impact? (c) What dropout prevention strategies that might have a positive impact should be implemented?

The data analyzed in this research included structured interviews of participant groups of administrators, teachers, and students who met the selection criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Initially, the research questions were piloted utilizing administrators, teachers, and students in a neighboring district with similar backgrounds and experiences. The piloting results helped the researcher access the viable purpose in utilizing the aforementioned questions in obtaining personal responses from each participant group in this study.

Additionally, the transcripts were reviewed by each participant group described to ensure the validity of the transcripts.

First, the researcher evaluated data that included professional development records, school agendas, school improvement plans, and weekly assessment sheets. Finally, structured interviews were conducted in order to gain stakeholders' perceptions by having them answer both the overarching question, and the sub-questions in this study. During the interview portion of the study, the participants were candid when giving their individual responses regarding aspects of the dropout problem, their personal beliefs about the dropout prevention programs currently in place at Crane Academy, and their opinions about the quality and consistency of interactions between staff members and students at Crane Academy.

After the interviews were conducted, the researcher placed the primary and secondary formulated meanings into tables that included verbatim responses from the participant groups. This information yielded the results in this study. The researcher found the administrators, teachers, and students had knowledge of programming available at the Crane Academy to help students remain in school and on track to graduation. Overall, the administrators and teachers believed the programs were effective. Both administrators agreed, however, that although the best programs and teachers are in place, the reality is that a number of students will still not be successful. Both agreed that by building relationships, the students attain the ideology that learning is fun, which makes students more likely to attend school on a regular basis. The teachers believed a majority of these students were behind a grade level and having attendance issues. They thought it important to develop programs that incorporate remediation to ensure student success and prevent their dropping out. All five teachers suggested that the success of the Ombudsman and PASS programs involved multiple steps, which included building

relationships between administrators, parents, teachers, the community, and students. While interviewing the students, it was hard to discern any detailed, consistent information from them about measures the schools had taken to keep them in attendance at school. None of the students expressed that a particular program was effective in preventing dropouts. However, few students believed the programs helped with graduation rates and prevented high school dropouts. Additionally, the researcher ascertained in-depth themes for each participant group of administrators, teachers, and students to specifically document responses related to the sub-questions in this study. The participant groups responded and the verbatim responses gave key indicators of the effectiveness of the currently instituted programs, along with suggestions for improvements to the current programs at Crane Academy. The answers to the overarching research question in this study from participant groups yielded viable information that the researcher documented in the tables. The responses suggested strategies which, if implemented at the Crane Academy, would have the potential to decrease student dropout rates.

**CHAPTER V**

**SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS**

This case study explored the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy. The literature review identified the broad perspectives of the dropout problem and delved into specific programs and strategies implemented as viable tools in dropout prevention. The researcher explored the overarching research question and sub-questions and specifically gathered data from school and central office artifacts, state data, and interviews to answer the overarching research question. The participant groups that met the selection protocol criteria included administrators, teachers, and students familiar with program implementation at the Crane Academy. The case study explored primary and secondary themes of the aforementioned participant groups to effectively determine which programs had a positive impact on the dropout problem, which programs did not have a positive impact on the dropout problem, and which programs should be implemented to decrease the number of high school dropouts. This chapter includes a discussion of findings relative to dropout prevention strategies having a positive impact, dropout prevention strategies not having a positive impact, and dropout prevention strategies that should be implemented at the Crane Academy. It also contains recommendations for practice, an alignment of findings with previous research, supporting research, recommendations for further research, limitations, implications for educational leadership, and concluding thoughts.

## Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study contribute to current literature and provide an overview of dropout prevention strategies implemented in a rural ninth grade academy. The researcher cautions the reader that the facts presented were gathered from a small participant group of administrators, teachers, and students affiliated with one ninth grade academy, and may not be generalizable.

The student participant group interviewed included those students who dropped out of the Crane Academy during the 2008-2009 and 2011-2012 school years. Student participants appeared to have provided limited information during the initial interviews; however, transcription analysis provided a more in-depth perception of student opinions and sentiments of the student participants. Each student participant recognized program implementation and the rationale for the current programs; however, the students did not at any time during the interviews describe program effectiveness in preventing student dropouts at the Crane Academy.

Furthermore, previous research and current data support the aforementioned. In the United States, the dropout rates have decreased. However, there are students who still dropout because the educational system has failed to reach them and aide the students in successfully completing school. Even with the decrease, this problem still remains, as schools and states continue to try to define and combat the issues creating the problem, while addressing other pressing social and financial problems. Each year, the number of students who leave high school exceeds the half-million mark, and the rate in which these students exit high school has remained consistent over the past 30 years, regardless of funding (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007).

Dropout prevention is inclusive of detailed district-wide plans which allow districts to quickly identify program effectiveness and allow for progress monitoring and long-term strategic development plans which have improved graduation rates. Though there has been some improvement in graduation rates, there are still large numbers of students who do not graduate and a significant gap exists between the graduation rates of Non-Whites and Whites. As a result, one of the goals of programs should be to provide the students with a means to obtain personal connections for their high school career and beyond. This is extremely vital to the continual improvement in graduation rates because minorities, (specifically Black male students) experience the realities of not fully belonging to society and school environments. As such, program goals should provide students an opportunity to obtain personal connections. Similarly, a beneficial program like the PASS program must adapt instructional techniques that align with the ways in which the students learn; the program must use flexibility; the program must distribute leadership among teachers, parents, students, and administrators, and the program must provide continuous staff development (Herzog, 2005).

**Dropout Prevention Strategies Having a Positive Impact**

The dropout prevention strategies that had a positive impact, as identified by the administrators, teachers, and students, included the Positive Approach to Student Success Program (PASS), the Ombudsman program, and the Credit Recovery program. The programs, as outlined in Chapter IV, provided additional educational support in core academic areas for students at-risk of dropping out of the Crane Academy. Additionally, preliminary and secondary responses also identified in Chapter IV provided verbatim responses to protocol questions that helped further explore viable information regarding the strategies having a positive impact at the Crane Academy. Again the administrators, teachers, and students readily identified programs

and the frequency in which the programs had been implemented at the Crane Academy. Although the programs identified change frequently, many of the interviewees believed the programs made a difference in the academic progress at the academy and prevented student dropouts.

**Dropout Prevention Strategies Not Having a Positive Impact**

The dropout prevention strategies not having a positive impact as identified by the administrators, teachers, and students are limited in scope as the protocol questions identified deeper primary and secondary meanings of concise responses from the interviewees. In Chapter IV, the interviews revealed that each aforementioned program has impacted the ninth grade academy in a positive manner. The administrators believed overwhelmingly that employing qualified staff and providing additional training has worked. Therefore, they did not identify any programs at the ninth grade academy as not having a positive impact. However, many of the teachers believed that the after-school programs, specifically Positive Approach to Student Success (PASS), were not as effective because the students did not take the programs seriously. The students were aware of the programs implemented, but they did not identify strategies not having a positive impact at the ninth grade academy. Research suggests that in order for students to take advantage of programs available to them, they must be able to participate in the programs and identify how the strategies in the programs can contribute to their success. The difficulty experienced by students who enter the ninth grade academy and the success and failure of those students is based on their knowledge and perceptions of programs offered.

**Dropout Prevention Strategies that Should Be Implemented**

The administrators, teachers, and students identified a number of programs implemented at the ninth grade academy that promoted student achievement and decreased the dropout rate.

However, the administrators, teachers, and students were not able to identify dropout prevention strategies that should be implemented. The participant groups overwhelmingly believed that the Ombudsman, PASS, and Credit Recovery programs were the most effective programs implemented in preventing student dropouts. Additionally, the administrators and teachers agreed that effective programming included the support of parents and community leaders. The students, again, were aware of program implementation; however, they could not articulate dropout prevention strategies that should be implemented to help decrease the dropout rate.

## Recommendations for Practice

The researcher reviewed data from the Georgia Department of Education regarding dropout rates at the Crane Academy. Also, school documents were reviewed. These included professional development training for teachers, district training for teachers, dropout prevention programs, curriculum guides, the school improvement plan, and weekly assessments of the implemented programs' effectiveness.  According to the 2011 Cohort Graduation Rate Chart by School Level provided by the Georgia Department of Education (2011), the Crane Academy's graduation rate is calculated with the neighboring high school rate.  The schools are identified with separate school codes; however, the cumulative graduation rate for the Crane Academy, as well as the adjoining high school, was 69.43.  The graduation rate includes the 368 students who entered the Crane Academy in 2007. Only 255 of those completed high school. The graduation rate is comparable to neighboring districts with similar demographics.

The data collected from the county office also included a performance evaluation from the Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS), an online assessment of the school's progress in streamlining specific instructional techniques to help students' academic success.  Also, the School Improvement Plan (SIP) at the Crane Academy was analyzed for its

relevance to dropout prevention programs.  The SIP included professional development activities that focused on teacher leaders and how effective training would develop the student learner. The teachers were exposed to the following topics: Cooperative Learning, Coping with Difficult Behavior, Classroom Management, Reading/Math Activities as well as Differentiated Instruction.  Professional development was seen as an effective strategy that the Crane Academy utilized to ensure teacher effectiveness and promote student academic success.  Moreover, the SIP made provisions for weekly assessments to help teachers and administrators evaluate progress towards meeting school improvement goals.

The two administrators in this study were selected using convenience sampling and have 34 years of combined educational experience in teaching, staff development, discipline, and school leadership. During the interviews, reoccurring themes remained constant as the researcher asked the protocol questions in an attempt to answer the overarching research and sub-questions. The researcher recorded in detail constant themes which arose during the interviews among the administrators.  These included program implementation, program effectiveness, program ineffectiveness and suggested program improvements. The administrators' referral to the themes was in-depth; they articulated their perspectives satisfactorily while answering the protocol questions.

The five teachers in this study were selected using convenience sampling. Together they have a combined total of 62 years in education, which includes: teaching, progress monitoring, discipline, and school leadership.  During the interviews with the teachers, the researcher observed the following themes: experience with implemented strategies, effectiveness of strategies, ineffectiveness of strategies, and suggested program improvements. During the interviews, the researcher observed the body language of teachers which indicated a level of

compassion. Furthermore, teachers exhibited the ability to articulate the programs which have been put in place to provide additional support. One teacher specifically stated that educators should make time not only to cover the rigor of the lessons and objectives, but also to listen to what the students have to say. The teachers agreed that a number of the students had complex home situations in their lives which affected them socially, physically, and mentally.

The teachers indicated that the school needed programs which emphasized counseling and mentoring programs for students to help them beyond secondary education and into adulthood. These programs would be responsible for motivating the students to attend school regularly and to obtain the required credits for graduation. Also, teachers concurred that the students should be exposed to alternative programs for the purpose of retaining students and motivating them to learn at their own pace.

Like the administrators, the teachers agreed that they must listen to the needs of the students in order to gain an understanding of the root causes leading to the dropout problem. Finally, the teachers that agreed in order for student learners to become successful, the teachers must spend more time with individual students.

The five students in this study were also selected using convenience sampling and the average age was 19. During the interviews with the students, the researcher observed the following themes: strategies recognized, helpfulness of strategies experienced, strategies experienced (not helpful) and suggested program improvements. The students agreed that the administrators and teachers did not want them to attend the Crane Academy. Likewise, the students insisted that they were labeled by administrators and teachers as *gang-bangers* and trouble makers before they even entered the building. The labels were assigned to the students based on their actions in earlier grades or on the negative actions of their family members and

friends who had preceded them  Thus, the student participant group would be considered at-risk

ninth graders, according to key terms outlined in this study.  The students vocalized an array of

perspectives during the interviews; however, the researcher found students were aware of

strategies used to assist them, but unaware of all programming within the Crane Academy.

Additionally, the students recognized the strategies within the Academy; however, they

specified an indifference to the actual helpfulness of the programs offered.  Moreover, the

students offered suggestions for school improvement. Lastly, during the entire interview process,

they failed to indicate personal responsibility for their perceived negative behaviors or

educational journey.

## Alignment of Findings with Previous Research

The findings of this case study aligned with previous research in several ways.  One

significant alignment was with the National Center for Educational Statistics data reported that

more African American men drop out of high school more than the rest of the high school

population (NCES, 2007).  The research suggested that numerous factors influence the

accomplishment or failure of a student's transition from middle school to high school. One factor

is the individual's sense of community exchanges, enthusiasm, and individuality (Jenkins, 2010).

Based on the findings of this qualitative research study, the African American male

students indicated personal perceptions of frustration with their school community. They also

indicated concerns with individuality or the lack of "freedom" within their educational

community.  Furthermore, this particular finding is indicative of the research (e.g., lack of

student engagement, poor attendance, and behavior problems) concerning the perceptions of

African-American male students and the factors which cause the African American male student

to dropout or become unsuccessful in the educational system.  Moreover, these personal

perceptions (among many factors) can be attributed to the data which indicated that African American women, historically, have a large educational advantage over African American men (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006).

Additionally, within this study, educators and students indicated and the research suggested that, in some homes, not having a high school diploma became the norm (Dorn, 1996). When examining the qualitative data mentioned, clearly there was a constant theme throughout which supported the theory that both the teachers and the students themselves view the students as persons destined to fail within the educational system because of family norms of educational incompleteness. Thus, the research showed that students viewed themselves as dropouts because their family members were dropouts. As a result, they viewed this as normalcy or a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Another concern the research reported was the correlation between the rural areas' dropout rates and income inequality (McLaughlin & Stokes, 2002). During this research one teacher indicated, "sometimes if they are working two or three jobs… so they don't push the children like they need to" (Teacher Four, personal communication, July 18, 2013). With this case study, the teachers indicated that parents were working hard and had no choice other than to work hard. Moreover, if a parent is working "two or three" jobs, versus another person who works one job which supplies a family's needs, then there is an inequality there. This inequality affects parents' ability to be present in the home, present in the school, and present to assist their children sufficiently in their educational pursuits. If parents are not in the home due to the fact that they must work to provide for the family, it is difficult for them to adequately support their children with homework or give them the encouragement needed to succeed within the school setting.

Furthermore, the research suggested that, although the high school dropout rate has lowered, it still remained a concern within rural areas and Title I schools. The number of high school dropouts in America remained significant, with more than a million students dropping out of high school each year (Editorial Projects in Education, 2010). During this study, one teacher stated, "[In my experience] there's…317 kids [in the] ninth grade, and when they graduate, there's only….. 200 [who graduate]" (Teacher Three, personal communication, July 18, 2013). This data showed that a teacher has experienced approximately 63 percent of her 9th graders not completing the 12th grade.

Lastly, the research suggested that based on the aforementioned concerns, many districts have developed strategies to help identify at-risk students early and provided safety nets which helped students who completed high school (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). The school district placed dropout prevention at the top of the school agenda and acknowledged the need for substantial measures. These measures reversed the dropout problem by involving school and community leaders and implementing a systematic approach which increased the number of students who graduated. During this case study, the researcher discovered that the Crane Academy employed a plethora of strategies including, after-school programs, credit recovery programs, and mentoring programs. All of these were reported as being successful.

### Supporting Research

The South Carolina School's Red Carpet Schools initiative, instituted in 2001, was the brainchild of the State Department of Education and the South Carolina chapter of the National School Public Relations Association. The Red Carpet program was initially proposed by State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum (South Carolina Public Schools, 2003). The program targets the customer service needs of schools in conjunction with facilitating the pupils'

families in becoming more enthusiastically drawn into the educational system. The Red Carpet

School program also enlists support from community stake-holders, such as the National School

Public Relations Association (NSPRA) and the South Carolina chapter of NSPRA, to provide

guidance in formulating curriculum procedures, critiquing school applications and delivering

customer service instruction for respective schools (South Carolina Public Schools 2003). The

program is relevant to this study because it clearly links customer service efforts, increased and

targeted community stakeholder involvement, and added training of faculty and staff (with

emphasis on customer service) to a school's and district's improvement in parent involvement

and student achievement.

Within the research conducted, there were concurrent themes of students and teachers not

being able to identify the full scope of services provided by the school; teachers felt that neither

they nor their colleagues were able to fully provide the connection needed to reach students or

their families. A lack of parental involvement within the school and with students and a lack of

services targeted to assist parents who lack the resources to be fully engaged in their child's

education were also themes.

The aforementioned program is vital to the research because the Red Carpet School

initiative is being instituted by a southern school district quite similar to the school district

chosen for this study.  Thus, it validates and addressees the aforementioned needs and themes

found in the research.  Moreover, the Red Carpet School initiative focuses on ensuring that a

"major part of improving student achievement is making sure that school learning environments

are places where people feel welcome to visit and participate.  Red Carpet helps schools

strengthen their customer service efforts as well as expand opportunities for parents to be

actively involved in their school's decision-making" (South Carolina Public Schools, 2003).

The Red Carpet School program clearly encourages schools to adopt family-friendly beliefs. It also requires schools to post these beliefs within the school. This is useful to the researcher in that it is a proven strategy that will assist the Academy and other schools in creating a more cohesive, enthusiastic school environment that is focused on family and teacher needs. Such an environment, ultimately, addresses students' needs and successes.

## Recommendations for Practice and Further Research

Based on the findings of the study which examined the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy and the literature review, the following recommendations would help future researchers, district leaders, teachers, and community members.

The Crane Academy administrators, teachers, and students believed that programming occurred. The administrators believed that the programs were effective, when properly used, in preventing students from dropping out of the Crane Academy. However, the teachers indicated mixed and varying data which ranged from effectiveness to ineffectiveness of the current programming at the school. The students interviewed indicated that they were aware of program implementation. However, they believed that the programs were not effective in preventing them from dropping out of school. Based on the findings of this study, which examined the stakeholders' perceptions of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy and the literature review, the following recommendations would help future researchers, district leaders, teachers, and community members.

First, formal program evaluations should be conducted to include exit interviews for students and teacher surveys for specific programs mentioned as having a positive effect on the dropout problem at the Crane Academy (i.e., PASS and the Ombudsman Program). Findings

revealed a lack of agreement by administrators and teachers on the impact that these programs

have on reducing the dropout problem. One of the first steps in addressing a systematic problem,

such as school dropouts, is knowing in precise terms which programs are working and which

ones are not working.

Second, implementing programs that focus solely on dropout prevention would benefit

the Crane Academy. The programs should begin in primary grades to help target at-risk students

early and provide safety-nets which target absenteeism, reading levels, and math scores

throughout their enrollment, from elementary to middle and high school.

Next, the administrators believed that building positive relationships with students helped

prevent students' lack of interest in school and prevented students from dropping out. Therefore,

a mentoring program incorporated in the school day would build stronger relationships between

administrators, teachers, support staff and students. The data suggested the aforementioned

would further decrease the dropout rate at the Crane Academy.

Additionally, the teachers throughout the interviewing process believed there were many

personal, direct and indirect external factors which impeded the students' ability to sufficiently

take responsibility for their education, which led to the students dropping out.  As a result of the

aforementioned data, the researcher recommends that administrators, teachers, and support staff

be exposed to staff development that focuses on at-risk students, and how to effectively help

those students cope with the demands in their lives.

Finally, throughout the interviewing process the students expressed their belief that the

administrators and teachers did not want them at the Crane Academy and that they should be

measured by their own merit. Students indicated a lack of teambuilding activities and events that

promoted school unity and pride.  As a result of this data, the recommendation is for the

Academy to implement more activities which focus more on students, character building,

community building and school pride.

## Limitations

The researcher previously worked as the principal of the Crane Academy and is aware of

the instructional barriers in place at the academy during his tenure.  These instructional barriers

included poor attendance rates, low reading and math test scores, and required supplemental

increases in the Average Movable Objectives (AMOs).  Therefore, the district mandates required

of the Crane Academy forced administrators and teachers to focus solely on the mandates,

causing them to exclude targets to improve the ninth grade retention.

The researcher intended to gain knowledge of prevention strategies from the answers to

selected protocol questions during structured interviews with administrators, teachers, and

students.  He also intended to use the findings of the data as primary and secondary themes

reflecting individual perceptions of current programs and programming implemented to decrease

the dropout rate. Therefore, the researcher in this case study interviewed volunteer participant

groups, utilizing the selection protocol criteria. The participant groups had knowledge of

programs implemented at the Crane Academy and the effectiveness and the ineffectiveness of

those programs.  Again, the limitations of this investigation derive from the nature of case study

research; therefore, the findings are not generalizable to any other school community. Also, the

participants were believed to have provided honest responses to the protocol questions because

they were familiar with the researcher who had previously worked as an administrator within the

district. However, it is possible that they may not have been honest because of the same reason.

**Implications for Educational Leadership**

Based on the data retrieved within this study, there were a plethora of programs being instituted and implemented within the Academy.  These programs were identified by administrators.  However, students and teachers reported inconsistency in program identification.

Furthermore, administrators perceived the programs' effectiveness as satisfactory in improving the retention of students.  On the other hand, some teachers and students perceived the programs as ineffective in addressing the needs of students and parents.  The consequence of the aforementioned data for educational leadership would include administrators developing and executing more cohesive and universal decisions with the consideration and perceptions of the students and teachers.

Furthermore, one could suggest that if these programming decisions will continue to be made, leadership needs to focus on reporting the data which substantiates the programs' effectiveness to all stakeholders in an effort to promote a more cohesive perception of a program's improvement within the school community.  Additionally, the inconsistent programming perceptions imply that the school would benefit from having the leadership recruit public relations stakeholders to devise ways to incorporate public relations techniques which will foster methods to ensure all stakeholders' perceptions are consistent with the actual dropout data. Lastly, a public relations component will include assisting administrators, teachers, students, families and all stakeholders in reimaging the school, personal perceptions, communication, philosophies, curriculum and relationship approaches within the school's community.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The researcher identified primary and secondary themes during the structured interviews of the participant groups.  The data presented in Chapter IV proved to directly answer the overarching question and sub-questions one and two by the administrators, teachers, and students in this qualitative research study.  Again, the researcher believed overwhelmingly the administrators, teachers, and students had knowledge of program implementation. Therefore, the administrators and teachers believed that the programs which were implemented impacted the reduction of students dropping out of the Crane Academy.  Also, the teachers presented a number of perspectives which helped mirror district expectations in training, which effectively answered the overarching and sub-questions in this study.  However, the students collectively agreed that the programs did not decrease the dropout rate at the Crane Academy.  The administrators and some teachers believed that the programs implemented were most effective in the reduction of students exiting the Crane Academy. The detailed responses from the interviews provided additional recommendations from the participants in cohesively addressing the dropout rate at the Crane Academy.

Again, the researcher has worked as a former administrator within the district that houses the Crane Academy.  The researcher has a reflective interest in the success of the student population within the Crane Academy; therefore, the researcher has taken a personal approach in researching methods which the Crane Academy could effectively utilize to prevent student dropouts.  The researcher, as a result of this study, has a different view of student alienation, the lack of social development relating to parental support, and program effectiveness.  Through this dissertation, the researcher has worked diligently to identify specific recommendations for future studies that address ways of helping at-risk students become successful.

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**APPENDIX A**

**Administrator Interview Questions**

All administration participants will be asked the following questions with follow-up probing or clarifying questions being asked as appropriate. The interviews will be audio taped for later transcription and analysis. Participant permission to audio tape will be obtained prior to the beginning of the interview as part of the Informed Consent Form.

1. Please describe the ways that you know that there is a dropout problem at the school.

2. What do you think are some possible causes of the dropout problem?

3. Please describe the types of students who drop out of your high school? How do the different kinds of students who drop out differ from one another?

4. Who is responsible for students dropping out of high school? In what way are these people "responsible" for the problem?

5. What types of strategies does your school implement to promote dropout prevention? Which of those implemented strategies have a positive impact to keep students in school? What reasons can you give to explain its success?

6. What strategies have your school tried that are not having or did not have a positive impact? What reasons can you give for these strategies not working?

7. What additional strategies should be adopted at the school to help prevent dropouts? Why do you think these strategies might be successful?)

8. What else would you like to tell me about the dropout problem or dropout prevention at the school?

9. If you had unlimited resources and no limitations placed upon you, what would you do at your school to help all you students finish high school?

**APPENDIX B**

**Teacher Interview Questions**

All teacher participants will be asked the following questions with follow-up probing or clarifying questions being asked as appropriate. The interviews will be audio taped for later transcription and analysis. Participant permission to audio tape will be obtained prior to the beginning of the interview as part of the Informed Consent Form.

1. Please describe the dropout problem at the school.

2. What do you think are some possible causes of the dropout problem?

3. Please describe the types of students who drop out of your high school. How do the different kinds of students who drop out differ from one another?

4. Who is responsible for students dropping out of high school? In what way are these people "responsible" for the problem?

5. What types of strategies does your school implement to promote dropout prevention? Which of those implemented strategies have a positive impact to keep students in school? What reasons can you give to explain its success?

6. What strategies have your school tried that are not having or did not have a positive impact? What reasons can you give for these strategies not working?

7. What additional strategies should be adopted at the school to help prevent dropouts? Why do you think these strategies might be successful?

8. What else would you like to tell me about the dropout problem or dropout prevention at the school?

9. If you had unlimited resources and no limitations placed upon you, what would you do at your school to help all you students finish high school?

**APPENDIX C**

**Student Interview Questions**

All former student participants will be asked the following questions with follow-up probing or clarifying questions being asked as appropriate. The interviews will be audio taped for later transcription and analysis. Participant permission to audio tape will be obtained prior to the beginning of the interview as part of the Informed Consent Form.

1. Do you feel as though there is a dropout problem at your school? How would you describe this dropout issue?

2. What did your school do to try to keep students in school?

3. What were the contributing factors that led to your decision to drop out of high school?

4. What did you like and dislike about school?

5. How did your parents feel about you dropping out of high school?

6. Did the school do to try to convince you to stay in school? What problems or efforts did they make to do so?

7. Was there anything that the school could have done to keep you in school?

8. Do you have regrets about dropping out of high school?

9. How has dropping out of school affected your life? What have been your personal positive and negative results?

10. What suggestions do you have about ways in which the school could keep students from dropping out in the future?

11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your life experiences related to

   dropping out of school?

## APPENDIX D

## Administrator Background Information Sheet


Administrator Participant # _____

## Stakeholder 1: Principals/Assistant Principals/Administration

 Highest Degree Completed: _____

 In what field? _____

 Current job title at the ninth grade academy: _____

 Years in Current Assignment: _____       Years in Administration _____

**APPENDIX E**

**Teacher Background Information Sheet**


Teacher Participant # _____

**Stakeholder 2: Teachers**

Highest Degree Completed: _____

In what field? _____

Current job title at the ninth grade academy: _____

Years in Current Assignment: _____        Years of Teaching Experience _____

**APPENDIX F**

**Student Background Information Sheet**

Student Participant # _____

**Stakeholder 3: Former Dropout Students**

Age _____                     Year student dropped out of school _____

Current occupation? _____           Plan to obtain further education _____

**APPENDIX G**

**Recruitment Letter**



**College of Education**

**Department of Leadership and Educational Administration**

Dear Administrator/Teacher/Student-

My name is Shawn Davidson, and I am an employee of the Department of Human services as the Education Quality Monitor for the State of Georgia, and a former Principal. I am also a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University in the Educational Leadership program. It is my pleasure to invite you to participate in a study on the stakeholders' perception of dropout prevention strategies in a rural ninth grade academy. This study will investigate the perceptions of dropout prevention programs in hopes that the data will enable stakeholders to incorporate more effective academic components in school systems' programs. In order to measure the perceptions of the dropout interventions programs, it is important to have the viewpoints from various stakeholders that are/were involved. Therefore, as opposed to simply analyzing data, I am hoping to conduct personal interviews with current and past participants. I will analyze the interviews, and feedback will be provided in the form of a dissertation that will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the dropout intervention programs.

Enclosed you will find a self-addressed, stamped envelope to use when returning the consent form if you will consent to participate. Please feel free to include any additional comments you deem necessary or relevant. Your response and time is greatly appreciated. I,

can be contacted at exavier100@aol.com or call (678) 358-5692 to answer any questions you

may have.  Additionally, Dr. James Green, my advisor, can be contacted at

jegreen@georgiasouthern.edu or call (912) 478-5567. I look forward to having you join together

with other stakeholders to take a close look at our dropout prevention strategies. Thank you!

Sincerely,

## APPENDIX H

## RESEARCH BASIS FOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

| Dropout Student Questions | Teacher Questions | Administrator Questions | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How would you describe the dropout problem at the school? | 1. Please describe the dropout problem at the school. | 1. Please describe the ways that you know that there is a dropout problem at the school. | Herlihy (2007), Jerald (2006) |
| 3. What were the contributing factors that led to your decision to drop out of high school? | 2. What do you think are some possible causes of the dropout problem? | 2. What do you think are some possible causes of the dropout problem? | Herlihy (2007), Jerald (2006), Rumberger (2004) |
| | 3A. Please describe the types of students who drop out of your high school. | 3A. Please describe the types of students who drop out of your high school? | Herlihy (2007), Herlihy (2007), Jerald (2006) |
| | 3B. How do the different kinds of students who drop out differ from one another? | 3B. How do the different kinds of students who drop out differ from one another? | Herlihy (2007), Jerald (2006,) |
| | 4A. Who is responsible for students dropping out of high school? | 4A. Who is responsible for students dropping out of high school? | Herlihy (2007), Jerald (2006) |
| | 4B. In what way are these people "responsible" for the problem? | 4B. In what way are these people "responsible" for the problem? | Rumberger (2004) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2. What did the school do to keep students in school?<br><br>6. What did the school do to try to convince you to stay in school? | 5A. What types of strategies does your school implement to promote dropout prevention? | 5A. What types of strategies does your school implement to promote dropout prevention? | Herlihy (2007),  Jerald (2006) |
| | 5B. Which of those implemented strategies have a positive impact to keep students in school? | 5B. Which of those implemented strategies have a positive impact to keep students in school? | Herlihy (2007), Kennelly and Monrad (2007). |
| | 5C. What reasons can you give to explain its success | 5C. What reasons can you give to explain its success? | Herlihy (2007), Kennelly and Monrad (2007). |
| | 6A. What strategies have your school tried that are not having or did not have a positive impact? | 6A. What strategies have your school tried that are not having or did not have a positive impact? | Herlihy (2007), Kennelly and Monrad (2007). |
| | 6B. What reasons can you give for these strategies not working? | 6B. What reasons can you give for these strategies not working? | Herlihy (2007), Kennelly and Monrad (2007). |

| Dropout Student Questions | Teacher Questions | Administrator Questions | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7. Was there anything that the school could have done to keep you in school?<br><br>10. What could the school do to try to keep students from dropping out in the future? | 7A. What additional strategies should be adopted at the school to help prevent dropouts? | 7A. What additional strategies should be adopted at the school to help prevent dropouts? | Herlihy (2007), Kennelly and Monrad (2007). Kennelly and Monrad (2007). |
| | 7B. Why do you think these strategies might be successful? | 7B. Why do you think these strategies might be successful?) | Herlihy (2007), Kennelly and Monrad (2007). |
| | 8. What else would you like to tell me about the dropout problem or dropout prevention at the school? | 8. What else would you like to tell me about the dropout problem or dropout prevention at the school? | Herlihy (2007), Jerald (2006), Kennelly and Monrad (2007). |
| | 9. If you had unlimited resources and no limitations placed upon you, what would you do at your school to help all you students finish high school? | 9. If you had unlimited resources and no limitations placed upon you, what would you do at your school to help all you students finish high school? | Herlihy (2007), Jerald (2006), Kennelly and Monrad (2007). |

| | |
|---|---|
| 8. What regrets do you have about dropping out of high school? | Alliance for Excellent Education (2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2008a) |
| 9. How has dropping out of school affected your life? | Alliance for Excellent Education (2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2008a) |
| 11. What else would you like to tell me about your life experiences related to dropping out of school? | |