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## Factors that Reduce the Dropout Rate in High Poverty Schools in Georgia

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FACTORS THAT REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS  
IN GEORGIA

by

MICHAEL L. LEWIS

(Under The Direction of Charles Reavis)

ABSTRACT

Georgia's dropout rate in the school year 2004-2005 was 5.0% while the nation's rate was 9.4%. Dropout statistics show that some schools have lower dropout rates than others, especially those with similar demographics. This study examined six schools with similar demographics with high, average, and low dropout rates. This study sought to find out what are the factors that can reduce the dropout rate in high poverty schools in the state of Georgia. This study sought to find out additional questions that included: "Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates?" "What practices, strategies, or services are being implemented in those schools that have the low dropout rates?" "What factors exist between the compared schools that relate to culture and school environment?" and "Is the leadership behavior of the administration making the difference in who drops out?" This was a qualitative study that included in depth interviewing and triangulation of the researcher's field notes, observations, and data retrieved from the schools' policies and manuals. Interviews from five participants at each school that included two seniors at risk, two veteran teachers, and an administrator or counselor were recorded, transcribed and searched for common themes. Findings showed that schools that had a Zero "0" tolerance for unacceptable behavior had higher absenteeism of students with 15 days or more were the schools that

had high dropout rates. Schools that had a faculty and staff that provided nurturing and care to include rewards, dining out in expensive restaurants, and providing students with whatever they needed had low dropout rates. The researcher implicated that schools with a Zero “0” Tolerance policy might want to examine other ways of handling inappropriate behavior and high dropout rate schools might want to consider staff development on building relationships; also schools might want to consider research implementing a “ninth grade academy” to help make the transition from middle to high school easier.

INDEX WORDS: Absenteeism, Alterable Variables, Decrease, Dropouts, Dropout Rates, Interviewing, Leadership, Ninth Grade Academy, Prevent, Factors, Zero Tolerance,

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all those persons who failed to receive a high school diploma or high school equivalent, especially to those at risk students, who in this study shared their testimonies. I hope those who are currently at risk but are still enrolled in public education will continue to be steadfast and not give up for the prize is given to him that endures the race, not to him who finishes first.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference” (Niebuhr, 2005, p. 1). This quotation indicates that there are factors or variables in life that can be changed and there are some factors or variables that cannot be changed. Specifically in relationship to the high school completion statistics, there are factors that affect those who complete high school and there are factors that affect those who drop out that educators can and cannot change. The wisdom, then, is knowing what they are and how to handle them.

The American Constitution mandates that education be the responsibility of the individual states (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). Georgia's compulsory attendance law mandates that all children, ages 7-15, must attend school. The Georgia law, however, defines this education as being public, private, or a home study program (Georgia Department of Education, 2005).

According to the introduction from the National Center for Educational Statistics (Chapman, 2004), school authorities in America have been concerned about the ongoing problem of those who fail to complete high school. While there has been a decline in the dropout rate since 1999, records indicate that many students who start high school still do not continue or complete their secondary schooling (Chapman, 2004). Often those students who eventually become a dropout statistic are absent from school with increasing frequency and consequently find themselves in the juvenile justice system (Smink & Reiner, 2005). Lowering the student dropout rate in America is “one of the most significant challenges facing educators today” (Schargnel, 2001, p. 2).

Research from the National Center for Education Statistics (Chapman, 2004) indicates that while the dropout rate in the United States has shown some decline over the years; the dropout rate is still a major concern (Smink & Reimer, 2005). America has been labeled as a “nation at risk” mainly because of its ongoing problem with those who fail to complete high school or obtain a diploma or equivalent (Chapman, 2004). Chapman’s compiled data over schools in the United States indicates that not only are many students not completing high school in four years (called the high school completion rate), but many of them never graduate or receive a high school graduation equivalent diploma regardless of when they dropped out (often referred to as the status dropout rate). To be competitive in the world, the President of the United States and state governors in 1990 adopted the goal of increasing the high school graduation rate as one of its six National Goals of Education (Britt, 1995).

Often, many schools use the dropout rate to determine the effectiveness of the school, thusly indicating the lower the dropout rate, the more effective the school is in keeping students in school and graduating (Chapman, 2004). In 1994, 86% of 18-24 year olds had completed high school, but 14% had not (Britt, 1995). In Georgia, the average dropout rate in 2005 was 5.0%, out of 481,408 students (Georgia Department of Education, 2005). This percentage represents those who entered 9<sup>th</sup> grade but did not graduate in four years.

#### Statement of the Problem

A review of literature suggests factors that are predictive of the dropout rate include high school students who had chronic absenteeism, had failed their grades one or two years, had repeated the same academic course two or three times, were constant

behavior-problem students in school and/or with the law, had siblings who were dropouts, came from low income families, came from single-parent households where the parent had little or no post-secondary education, had little or no affiliation with extra-curricular activities in school, had low self-esteem and who felt that the school administration and teachers did not encourage or give them moral support.

The dropout statistics show that some schools have lower dropout rates than others. Those that have low dropout rates are often called effective schools. Schools, in an effort to be effective, often look at what factors they do have control over and work on strengthening those factors in an effort to make students want to stay in school; on the other hand, there are factors that the school has no control over that include gender, age, ethnicity, and the socioeconomic status. Along with alterable factors from within the school, all of these factors play roles in determining who remains in school and who drops out. This study examined and paired schools in Georgia to learn why some schools have lower dropout rates than others.

### Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following research question: What are the factors that can reduce the dropout rate in high poverty schools in the state of Georgia?

Additionally, the study was designed to seek answers to the following sub questions:

1. Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates, especially those schools that have the same demographics?
2. What practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing?

3. What factors exist between the compared schools that relate to culture and school environment?
4. Is the leadership behavior of the administration in some schools making the difference in who completes or drops out of school?

#### Significance of the Study

There has been much research on the dropout rate, statistics associated with the rate, and many explorations on why students do not complete school. The research that this study offered will show what some schools are doing that seems to be working to reduce this rate. Policy and legislature dictate that the low dropout rate is an indicator that shows that schools are being effective. Schools that are not successful in reducing their dropout rate could, from this research, gain more insight and knowledge of ways that work that could reduce their high dropout statistics. The individual responses that persons (from effective schools) share may give school officials and other concerned individuals additional data that may assist them in implementing strategies that may keep students in school. If at-risk dropouts' reasons focus on alterable factors from within the school, then school officials may take this data and develop ways of changing or improving the school environment in order to keep them there. Responses from school officials, data, and the students themselves from schools that have low dropout rates may give school personnel at those schools that have high dropout rates possible solutions or strategies that may assist in reducing their dropout rate.

Scholarly significance is at the core of this study because the researcher's findings will add to the data that already exists on dropouts in pursuit of strategies to keep students in school.

The significant concern of this study hinges on the ultimate goal of educators which is to make an exchange: to teach and instill knowledge and for students to learn. That cannot happen if they are not there. Keeping students in school and reducing the dropout rate are two concerns in education today.

#### Assumptions

The responses that the researcher obtained were gathered and examined by using a semi-structured interview process. This is an accepted qualitative research strategy. For the purposes of this study, an assumption was made that the researcher would obtain honest, open responses from the students and staff at the two schools that have high, the two that have average and the two that have low dropout rates.

#### Procedures

##### *Research Design*

The design of this qualitative study was a comparative, descriptive type - specifically a collective case study - to examine what strategies schools that have low dropout rates are implementing in maintaining those low dropout rates. The study used the qualitative design to investigate the perceptions and experiences of the faculties, students, and administration regarding the strategies that are effective in keeping students in school. The qualitative design also used observations as noted in the researcher's field notes and data from documents along with responses from the interviews with the faculties, students, and administration of schools that have high, average and low dropout rates in order that a search for similar and contrasting themes and patterns may be identified. This study used open-ended questions during the interview process,



observations, and documents. Triangulation of these sources was conducted to cross-analyze for common themes and patterns.

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were selected from the population of schools in the state of Georgia. Purposive sampling was done to select school officials and students from two school that have high dropout rates, two that have average dropout rates, and two that have low dropout rates, all having similar demographics. The researcher used the Georgia Report Card site and Georgia School Council Institute web pages to locate schools of similar demographics and from this data compared the six schools to be included in the study.

### *Instrumentation*

The instrument was designed by the researcher. The researcher used an interview process consisting of 16-18 semi-structured, open-ended questions developed from the data reviewed in existing literature. A panel of experts of five educators throughout the state of Georgia reviewed the questions prior to implementation in order to eliminate wordy and ambiguous questions.

### *Data Analysis*

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in order to ensure validity and consistency. Transcripts were reviewed for common and recurring themes, ideas, issues, and effective/ineffective strategies. Notes were taken. Open-ended responses were coded and analyzed for patterns, frequencies, similarities and differences. Triangulation of sources (transcripts, researcher's field notes, and documents) was done as a cross-analysis in search of common themes.

### Limitations of the Study

While this study was limited to factors that affect the dropout rate, other limitations to this study included the following:

1. Responses that were gathered in this research design may not have been truthful, either because the participants may have been unwilling to share responses with a stranger or embarrassed of what could have been done that was not done in the form of programs or strategies that were to be in place but were not effectively executed.
2. Another limitation of this study was that it used only schools in the state of Georgia, indicating what has contributed to the dropout rate or what has worked to reduce the dropout rate in Georgia could be something that is effective only in the state of Georgia and not other states regardless of their regional location.
3. Also, this research did not use all schools in Georgia that have low, average or high dropout rates. A small comparison group of six schools, two that have low, two that have average, and two that have high dropout rates with the same demographics were used in this research.

### Delimitations of the Study

For the purposes of this study, research shows that there are both the alterable (factors that the schools have a direct control over) and the unalterable factors (those that the school systems have little if any control over resulting directly from the home environment and status quo). The study had the following delimitations:

1. There was no need to attempt to contact every school to ascertain reasons students dropped out or feared dropping out. Research shows that several different

strategies have been proven to work in the attempt to keep students in school.

While schools that have average or low dropout rates that were studied may not have used every known strategy, data on the strategies that they did use served as a starting place for ineffective schools, those that have high dropout rates.

2. It was important that only schools that have the same demographics be compared to eliminate other factors that may have impacted the dropout rate.

#### Definition of Terms

1. AYP is defined as Adequately Yearly Progress which measures growth from one year to the next as a mandate of all schools as part of the No Child Left Behind Act.
2. Block Schedule is defined as the system of scheduling four ninety minute classes per semester, thusly allowing a student to receive four full credits per semester and eight credits for the year as compared to the traditional three credits per semester and six for the entire year.
3. Cohort rate is a more descriptive approach to tracking the proportion of students who enter high school in ninth grade, but who do not graduate four years later (Chapman, 2004).
4. Common Core of Data (CCD) is the body of literature that is collected annually about students who complete high school and those who drop out.
5. Dropout is defined as an individual who was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year and was not enrolled at the beginning of the current year or one who has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or-district approved educational program, and/or one who does not meet any of

the following exceptions: transferred to another school whether it be public or private, state or district (this does include correctional or health facilities); has a temporary absence due to suspension or health-related issues or is dead (Young, 2002).

6. Event dropout rate reflects those young people between the ages of 15-24 who dropped out of grades 10-12 and never returned, not including their freshman year in school (Chapman, 2004).
7. Four-year completion rate incorporates four years' worth of data and thus, is an estimated cohort rate. It is calculated by dividing the number of high school completers by the sum of dropouts for grades 9 through 12, respectively, in consecutive years, plus the number of completers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006).
8. GPA represents the grade point average.
9. National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) is the parent organization that facilitates the supervision of data that relates to public education's statistics.
10. Ninth Grade Academy is defined as a school-within-a-school uniquely designed to provide ninth graders with the challenge and support they need. It is a strong unification that serves as a bridge that spans through adolescence, enabling students to cross the threshold into high school and continue to become better prepared academically and socially for the rigors of high school and post-secondary education. A ninth grade academy is yet defined as a school consisting of an administrator and team of teachers who work solely with ninth graders in making their transition from middle to high school. Often a ninth grade academy

is housed on a different campus or if on the same campus of the high school, it is quarantined and isolated from daily interactions with grades 10-12, with the exception of major assemblies and extra-curricular functions..

11. NCLB (No Child Left Behind) is the most recent authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which is the principle federal law affecting K-12 educators. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that all children be assessed each year in order to show adequate yearly progress in reading and mathematics. Schools must test at least ninety-five percent of the various subgroups of children.
12. Open Campus is defined as a school that operates out of the normal 7 am to 3 pm school hours of operation. This arrangement allows students to take classes at the hour that is most convenient for them, leave campus to go to work, and then return after work to take other necessary classes. This type of school leaves the flexibility of taking as many courses as one needs, to include as few as one class or as many as six classes. Hours of operation usually range from 7 am to 7 pm with two shifts of teachers and supporting staff and administration with one campus lead administrator
13. Performance Indicators are those selected items, such as the pass/fail rate on the high school graduation test, that are collected at regular intervals to track and assess the performance of a system (Chapman, 2004).
14. School High1 is the one of two schools the researcher has labeled as having a high dropout rate over the 5.0%, the average for the state of Georgia.
15. School High2 is the second of two schools the researcher has labeled as having a high dropout rate over the 5.0%, the average for the state of Georgia.

16. School Average1 is one of two schools the researcher has labeled as having a dropout rate that is comparable to the state of Georgia's average of 5.0%.
17. School Average 2 is the second of two schools the researcher has labeled as having a dropout rate that is comparable to the state of Georgia's average of 5.0%.
18. School Low1 is one of two schools the researcher has labeled as having a dropout rate that is much lower than the state of Georgia's average of 5.0%
19. School Low2 is the second of two schools the researcher has labeled as having a dropout rate that is much lower than the state of Georgia's average of 5.0%
20. SREB is the Southern Regional Education Board, the nation's first interstate compact for education, founded in 1948, that encompasses 16 member states. SREB works to achieve 12 *Challenge to Lead* Goals for Education in its region.
21. Status completion rate measures the population of young people between 18 and 24 who hold a diploma or high school credential regardless of when the credential was earned, even after dropping out and returning (Chapman, 2004).
22. Status dropout rate reflects those individuals who are not enrolled in high school, regardless of when they dropped out, and lack a high school equivalent (Chapman, 2004).
23. Suspension (in school) also known as "ISS" is designed to punish students for unacceptable behavior with the courtesy of being counted as "present." Students are isolated from the general population and assignments are sent to this location.
24. Suspension (out of school) also known as "OSS" is designed to punish students for unacceptable behavior. This suspension is counted as an absence for the

student is not allowed to be on the school's grounds during the length of the suspension which often varies from one to ten school days on an average.

25. Zero "0" Tolerance is defined as the concept of compelling persons in positions of authority to impose a pre-determined punishment regardless of individual culpability or "extenuating circumstances." Often students are suspended or expelled for any offense, regardless of the intent or the magnitude of the offense of the person or persons involved.

### Summary

Education is one of the nation's top priorities as reflected in the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). It has become the goal of each state to successfully graduate all students entering high school. Measuring the success of this goal is often viewed in terms of the graduation rates of high schools and their performance indicators, such as the pass/fail rates of the high school graduation tests.

Georgia's dropout rate has been on an average of 5% over the last three years. While that rate is comparable with the nation, some systems still have dropout rates as high as 15% while others have rates lower than 1%.

There are several factors that affect the success or failure of students who enter high school in the ninth grade. Some of those factors are unalterable that range from the socio-economic status of one's family or the education level of the parent(s). Then there are some alterable factors that could range from the types of courses offered to the support that the teachers, counselors and administration may give to incoming freshmen.

A review of literature revealed those factors that are associated with those who drop out and why, both alterable factors within the school and those factors outside of the

school's immediate influence. This study concentrated on the factors (alterable) in an attempt to understand why some schools have lower dropout rates than others. Through a qualitative approach using an interview technique, the study examined two schools that had high dropout rates, two that had average dropout rates, and two that had low dropout rates graduation rates. All schools had similar demographics.



## CHAPTER II

### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The Common Core of Data (CCD) through the National Center for Education Statistics also known as NCES (Young, 2002), annually collects data about students who complete high school and those who drop out. Young's report states that the CCD's definition of a dropout is determined by his or her enrollment status at the beginning of the school year as reflected in its enrollment count at that time. The NCES defines a dropout as an individual who was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year and was not enrolled at the beginning of the current year or one who has not graduated from high school or completed a state-or-district approved educational program, and/or one who does not meet any of the following exceptions: transferred to another school whether it be public or private, state or district (this does include correctional or health facilities); has a temporary absence due to suspension or health-related issues; or is dead (Young, 2002).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2001, dropouts and those who finish school are compared and measured in statistics according to the following five categories (rates): the event dropout rate, the status dropout rate, the status completion rate, the cohort rate, and the 4-year completion rate (Chapman, 2004).

According to this report by Chapman, the event dropout rate includes the statistics that show the number of students who dropped out of school from one year to the next, representing those students who dropped out within a current school year. Research showed that event dropout rates usually represent percentages of young people between

the ages of 15-24 who dropped out of grades 10-12, not including their freshman year in school (Chapman, 2004).

Between October 1991 and October 1992 (Goal, 1989), the event dropout rate for grades 10-12 was 4.4 percent, representing roughly 383,000 students in the United States. From 1998 to 2001, there was, however, no consistent upward or downward trend in event dropout rates (Chapman).

Chapman (2004) defines the status dropout rate as the percentage of individuals who are not enrolled in high school and lack a high school equivalent regardless of when they dropped out of school. Chapman's report adds that these are the students between the ages of 16-24 who are not in school and yet have no high school diploma or general education development certificate. This figure also reflects those individuals who never attended high school and immigrants who did not complete school in their country.

Chapman's report adds that the status dropout rate is usually higher because it reflects all people who have dropped out of school regardless of the last date that they attended. The status dropout rate in 1989 represented 3.4 million dropouts in America (Goal, 1989). While this figure is large, the rates declined from 14.1 percent in 1980 to 11.0 percent in 1992 (Hopkins, 2005).

The status completion rate measures the population of young people between 18 and 24 who hold a diploma or high school credential regardless of when the credential was earned, even after dropping out and returning (Chapman, 2004) while the 4-year completion rates show the percentages of those students who entered the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and received their high school diplomas in four years. These students, Chapman adds, include those who earn a diploma and those students who meet modified graduation

requirements as they relate to special conditions. Those receiving alternative credentials such as GED's are not considered completers.

The review of literature showed that there are certain factors both within and outside of the school that affect a student's decision to drop out of school. One factor reviewed focused on the environment and culture of the school. According to a qualitative study by Hales (1998), students who dropped out perceive the school setting as non-supportive to their needs. In a dissertation by Suzanne Toyryla (2003), she found that students were at risk for dropping out because of a lack of a positive and caring environment in the responses that she collected. Her study also revealed that students at risk were those who felt a lack of caring trust with adults. They felt that teachers did not support them because the teachers did not accept them as they were and consequently made little or no attempts to work with them regardless of their academic levels and emotional status. The SREB report (Goal, 1989) showed that high dropout rates exist in those schools where teachers have low expectations of students and where schools have poorly organized academic programs, morale problems and ineffective teachers. On the note of non-support, the report added that many academic problems that students experience in high school began when they were in middle school when they did not provide additional support to help them when they fell behind. In a study of 20 youths by Kitty Epstein (1992), it was found that the most common themes in dropout interviews that she conducted spoke of the non-supportive atmosphere of the school along with the humiliation experienced in school. According to surveys completed by students (Reducing, 1988), findings showed that a dislike of school and teachers ranked high statistically. Guthrie (1993) added that because of being unhappy and dissatisfied with

the school setting, the culture of the school, therefore, played a role in students' deciding to terminate their high school experience. Students' dissatisfaction, according to Arroyo, Rhoad and Drew (1999) was associated with teachers' demonstrations of a lack of caring, respect, and interest of the child's growth and teachers' low expectations for their students' achievement. Too, in a study by Schinke, Cole, & Poulin (2000), it was found that students who held discussions with adults, along with specific other academic/cognitive tasks, had correlation with grades in major subject areas. Research showed that extracurricular activities in the school's culture also helped reduce the dropout rates (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Also, programs such as the Teen Outreach Program produced significant reduction in school failure in community service activities followed by classroom-based discussions of these experiences (Allen, Phillibe, Herrling & Kuperminc, 1997).

But according to Srebnik and Elias (1993), too many programs have focused on changing the unalterable variables rather than working on the alterable variables (making school attractive and meaningful). Still associated with school culture, Fashola and Slavin (1998) reported great success in reducing dropout rates when students participated in programs that allowed bonding between the students and teachers, provided academic tutoring, connected students to attainable future goals and gave students an opportunity to be involved in their school. Research also showed that dropouts are generally less satisfied with school than those who remained in school (Henry & Roseth, 1985). Studies also showed that a lack of encouragement from teachers and counselors and the disagreement with teachers and school administrators also contribute to the dropout rate in America (Martin, 1995). Still related to school culture, an inability to get along with

classmates, according to the report by the SREB (Reducing, 1998), contributed to students' dissatisfaction with school. Peer acceptance, too, is another factor that contributes to the dropout rate according to Bowen and Walters (1978).

The review of literature found that chronic truancy or absenteeism was another factor that was related to the dropout rate. The dissertation by Guthrie (1992) further added that chronic absenteeism played a role in students' decision to drop out of school. The study by Hales (1998) showed that school dropouts have higher rates of chronic truancy and tardiness than those who stay in school. Hales' study also showed that daily attendance reflects both student motivation and parental support. Arroyo, Rhoad and Drew (1999) in their study concluded that the high attendance rate was a variable in the dropout rate.

According to the Chapman's report for the National Center for Educational Research (2004), in 2001 high school students living in low-income families were six times as likely as their peers from high-income families to drop out, thusly forming another variable. According to Hales (1998), family finances play a role in dropouts. His study revealed that limited economic resources are highly related to the dropout rate and thusly the family income becomes an at-risk factor. In a review of predictors under achievement in urban cities, it was noted by Arroyo, Rhoad and Drew (1999), the poverty level of the household affected the students' willingness to stay in school. In a study by Tesseneer and Tesseneer (1958), 20 dropout studies were reviewed that showed socioeconomic status was the most frequently used family variable in dropout research. The Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) study (Reducing, 1998) also showed that those students who live in low-income households tend to drop out of school.

In a study that used the counterfactual causal framework employing propensity score matching and sensitivity analysis (Harding, 2003), two groups of children who were identical at age 10 but experienced different neighborhoods during adolescence were studied. Those children who experienced life in the high poverty neighborhoods were more likely to drop out and have a teenage pregnancy than those in low-poverty neighborhoods.

While the study by Frank (1990) found that there was no significant relationship between income and dropout, his findings indicated that parent education (if parents graduated from high school) was likely to be the most significant factor between socioeconomic status and dropout, thusly forming another variable. Arroyo, Rhoad and Drew (1999) also found out that the level of the parents' education affected the dropout rate.

While the income and level of the parents' education have played roles in the dropout rates, the research showed that the students' behavior has played a factor in affecting the dropout rate as well. The qualitative study by Hales (1998) noted that students who drop out are more willing to have a history of serious behavior problems than those who complete high school. The Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) study (Reducing, 1998) showed that students who have behavioral problems are at the greatest risk of dropping out of school. Guthrie (1992) added in his dissertation that the students' behavior in school often affected their grades. Luster & McAdoo (1994) added that the behavior affected learning that caused frequent absenteeism that caused the eventual dropout of many students. Other research has found that youth who had stable relationships and conducted themselves appropriately in school were less

likely to drop out as compared to with those who had non-responsible, behavior problems (Berndt, Hawkins, & Jiao, 1999). Research also showed that students who drop out are not only likely to be those who are unmotivated by their class work, but those who have behavioral problems with either the school authorities or the police or both and those who are often absent (McWhirter et al, 1998).

Research has found, also, that while behaviors of the students have affected the performance in the classroom that ultimately deters attendance, the students' grades and retention in those grades are variables that thusly create the dropout rate. The study by Hales (1998) cited that poor academic performance was the single strongest predictor on dropping out of school. Hales cited that poor grades and low test scores, regardless of ability, may increase students' frustration. Hales added that the retention grade is highly related to dropping out. Guthrie (1992) added that the behavioral problems reflected in low grade point averages (GPA) that ultimately result in students failing two or more courses placed them at a high risk of dropping out of school. According to surveys completed by students (Reducing, 1988), findings showed that maintaining poor grades was an influential factor in dropping out of school. In looking precisely at school dropouts, research has shown that the dropout rate is lower with school variables that include high achievement, little grade retention, and school commitment (Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997). Research also showed that before and after school tutoring programs improved academic success and deterred the dropout rate (Hock, Pulvern, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2001). The research by Hock, Pulvern, Deshler and Schumaker found that by helping students with actual assignments, their success with academics increased. In a quantitative longitudinal study by Somers & Piliawsky (2000)

where the school manipulated the variables, while there was no significant change in the control and experimental groups' GPA's and their attitudes and behaviors, the retention rate was higher for 9<sup>th</sup> graders who participated in the study than for the rest of the 9<sup>th</sup> graders at that school and in that district. In a review of predictors under achievement in urban cities (Arroyo, Rhoad, and Drew, 1999) it was noted that the following variables were associated with underachievement in urban settings: the relevance of curriculum; the size of their classes; non-participant status in extra-curricular activities by students; students' confidence and self-esteem in their potential to excel.

While behavior problems may have been another factor in the dropout rate, research showed that race was another variable. According to the Chapman's report for the National Center for Educational Research (2004) which profiled statistics for students in the 2001 school year, data showed that there was a strong association between race/ethnicity with the likelihood of dropping out of school. His report also showed that cohort studies of longitudinal data such as the High School and Beyond Study and the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 showed that Blacks and Hispanics were at the greatest risk of dropping out. Data from the October CPS (Chapman, 2004) showed that Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to have dropped out of high school between October 2000 and October 2001. During this year the following dropout rates were documented: Hispanics – 8.8, Blacks – 6.3, Whites – 4.1, and Asians - 2.3. This report showed that older students are more likely to drop out than younger students: 15-16 year olds – 3.9%, 19 year olds – 8.4% and 20-24 year olds – 21.2% (Chapman, 2004). The 1994 United States Bureau of Census (Hales, 1998) indicated that African American students complete high school at a lower rate than Whites, Hispanics, and Native



American students. Hopkins (2005) added that the dropout rate between Black and White youth is closing. In a statistical portrait of dropouts in “Goal 2 high school completion” (1989), while the cohort dropout rate measures what happens to a single group or cohort of students over a period of time, the report added that 64% of public education students are White and Whites make up 43% of the dropout rate, Blacks make up 17% of the school enrollment and make up 17% of the dropout rate, but Hispanics make up 14% of the enrollment and make up 38% of the dropout rates – yielding Hispanics with the highest drop out rate. As a result, ten SREB states (AK, FL, GA, LA, KY, NC, MD, TN, TX, and WV) use dropout rates as performance indicators in school accountability systems.

According to research, gender is another variable associated with the dropout rate (Reducing, 1988). This research found that boys are twice as likely as girls to drop out for behavior reasons than girls are. According to this research on reducing the dropout rate, girls are most likely to drop out due to pregnancy and marriages while boys drop out to seek employment. In reference to gender, males had a dropout rate of 5.6% while females showed a 4.3% between the ages of 15-24 (Chapman, 2004). Hopkins (2005) added that young women who are dropouts are more likely to become pregnant at earlier ages and are more likely to be single parents.

Research showed that other factors associated with the family affect the dropout rate. Hales (1998) added that parents of dropouts view school negatively, have little parental involvement, and place very little value on education. This study showed those dropouts who had siblings as dropouts are at greater risk as well as those families where English is not the primary language. In another study by Somers (2004), research

showed that risk factors that influence dropouts include larger family size and the low level of family support. In a study by Britt (1995), it was concluded that students are at risk when there was no parental support at home. Other research has shown that parental involvement in their children's lives has reduced the dropout rate (Seaman & Yoo, 2001).

Other data on dropouts revealed that school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed or to earn less money than high school graduates (Hopkins 2005). Hopkins study also added that dropouts are more likely to receive public assistance than graduates and that males are likely than females to drop out. The SREB (Reducing, 1998) reported that dropouts have siblings who dropped out or do not speak English.

Research also showed that in reference to region and state, no differences were detected among event dropout rates (Chapman, 2004). But in 2001, North Dakota had the smallest event dropout rate of 2.2% followed by Wisconsin, Iowa, New Jersey and Connecticut with 2.3%, 2.7%, 2.8%, and 3.0%, respectively. Georgia ranked 40<sup>th</sup> in the nation with a dropout rate of 7.2% (Chapman, 2004).

The 1994 United States Bureau of Census (Hale, 1998) indicated that 20% of adults over the age of 25 had not completed high school. This study also revealed that dropouts comprise nearly half of the heads of households on welfare and make up one third of the percentage of the prison population. The SREB surveys (Reducing, 1998) indicated that students who drop out of school are not in school because of the need to provide child care due to pregnancy, needed opportunities to get jobs and earn money, and pressure to hang with peer groups outside of school.

Researchers have found that students who are exposed to several risk factors simultaneously tend to experience difficulties in learning and as a result, drop out (Luster & McAdoo, 1994).

And finally, in a study by Frances Lee (Lee, 2003), findings showed from a qualitative study that family, school, and peers all play main roles in young people dropping out of school.

### Summary

The review of literature named a number of reasons why students have dropped out of high school. Among the most noted reasons are academic performance (low grades and test scores while in school) with retention, the culture and the environment of the school, and the socioeconomic status along with factors associated with the home environment.

The review of literature pointed out that while students who consistently do poorly in school and as a result repeat their grade, when interviewed they often quote the environment of the school as a big role in their decisions to dropout. The review of literature has cited that dropouts indicated that they often felt that the teachers and the school administration did not care about their well-being.

Also in reference to lack of a loving, supportive school environment, the review of literature often revealed the following factors and common themes about dropouts: dropouts usually come from a single parent household, have other siblings who were dropouts, become pregnant and/or have a need to provide child care, desire opportunities to maintain a job to make money, are pressured to hang with peer groups (especially those who are dropouts), have low or no concern (respect, care, and interest) from

teachers and administration, receive low expectations from teachers, do not participate in extracurricular activities, have parents with little or no education, come from a large family, have low self-esteem, miss many days from school, are often disruptive (display disciplinary problems at school, home, or with police), have poor or no parental involvement (regardless of one or two parents), and are unmotivated in school – (have unmotivated teachers and/or find classes uninteresting or boring).

The review of literature also indicated that Hispanics and Black youths were more at risk of dropping out of school than their White counterparts. Also, 20-24 year old Americans were more at risk of dropping out. These students were also the same students who had fewer credits than those students who were 18 years old. The data also indicated that males are more likely to drop out than females.

The review of literature indicated that while the dropout syndrome is a major concern in America, schools have not sat by and watched this phenomenon grow. As the research revealed, schools have attempted several strategies to keep students in school. These strategies have included adding before and after school programs, implementing more advisory sessions in the school day, and trying to implement strategies to get more parents involved, both at school and at home. School officials have realized that the smaller the class size, the more attention teachers can give to their students; as a result of this theory, the literature has cited that many schools are focusing on reducing the teacher to student ratio.

The review of literature found that schools that had low dropout rates often were schools that had a strong diverse curriculum, few disciplinary problems, high parental involvement, warm school climate, outstanding school leadership, and low teacher-pupil

ratio. This study addressed these concerns by interviewing students, teachers, and administrators from six schools – two with high, two with average, and two with low dropout rates – to share their perceptions on the dropout epidemic in an effort to cross examine their responses with the researcher’s observations from interviews and facts from the perusal of documents and school policies in an effort to give insight the dropout issue in schools in Georgia.

Table 2.1 *Toryla Study*

Name	Purpose	Participants	Methodology	Findings
Toryla, S. (2003) Factors That Help Continuation High School Students Complete Their High School Education.	To determine those factors that help students complete high school.	77 graduating seniors who were 18 years or older from 8 high schools in Los Angeles County, California.	Quantitative method that included both groups and individual interviews.	Study showed that students who were at risk of dropping out of school felt: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. felt better when the school size was small.</li> <li>2. the environment was caring</li> <li>3. personal attention was given to the students</li> <li>4. a trusting connection with adults was established</li> <li>5. involvement in school functions was there</li> <li>6. teachers accepted them as “they were”</li> </ol>

Table 2.2 *Guthrie Study*

Name	Purpose	Participants	Methodology	Findings
Guthrie, S. (1992). Identifying Variables of Potential Dropouts.	To identify priority variables that cause students to drop out of school.	Students in a large metropolitan public school district.	Quantitative using a control and experimental group based on at risk variables. A correlation matrix was created.	Study showed that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1198 380 1421 701">1. attendance or the lack of was the highest predictor of a student at-risk of dropping out of school.</li> <li data-bbox="1198 701 1421 953">2. the students' low grade point average (GPA) was the second variable</li> <li data-bbox="1198 953 1421 1289">3. The students' classification because of failing 2 or more courses was the third strongest variable.</li> </ol>

Table 2.3 *Harding Study*

Name	Purpose	Participants	Methodology	Findings
Harding, D. (2003) Counterfactual Models of Neighborhood Effects: The Effect of Neighborhood Poverty on Dropping Out and Teenage Pregnancy.	To prove that students raised in low poverty neighborhoods are more likely to drop out of high school and have a teenage pregnancy than those in a medium to high income level neighborhood.	4000 to 8000 people surveyed who were identified from the 1970, 1980, and 1990 census that created a census tract for the 1968-85 survey years who lived in low, middle and high poverty neighborhoods in America.	Quantitative using a counterfactual model, core matching propensity and a sensitivity analysis using an SPSS program.	Study showed that: those who grew up in a high poverty neighborhood dropped out of high school and had a teenage pregnancy than those who lived in a middle or low poverty neighborhood.



Table 2.4 *Epstein Study*

Name	Purpose	Participants	Methodology	Findings
Epstein, K. (1992). Case Studies in Dropping Out and Dropping Back In.	To identify those factors that led young adults to drop out and back in school before returning to an alternative school setting where they earned their diplomas.	20 youngsters who eventually went back to school and received some college training before this interview.	Qualitative using interviews.	<p>Study showed that several themes that flowed in their transcribed interviews to include</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. They felt that no one cared about them.</li> <li>2. They experienced an humiliating experience at school that they never got over</li> <li>3. They felt that there was no connection with what they were learning and the real world.</li> <li>4. They felt the counselors really didn't care.</li> </ol>

Table 2.5 *Frank Study*

Name	Purpose	Participants	Methodology	Findings
Frank, J. (1990). High School Dropout: A New Look at Family Variables.	To look at and discuss the importance of family variables in the high school dropout rate.	3,043 households in 112 counties in Texas	Both quantitative (survey analysis) and qualitative (interviews) were used.	<p>Study showed four independent variables were identified that affected the dropout rate. The were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. household income</li> <li>2. number of household stress factors (that included such factors as having problems with the police, drug use, single parenting, six or more people in the household, members who are sickly, child and adult exploitation , etc.</li> <li>3. parental education</li> <li>4. race/ethnicity</li> </ol> <p>All four variables contribute in making students at-risk of dropping out of school.</p>

Table 2.6 *Somer Study*

Name	Purpose	Participants	Methodology	Findings
Somers, C. (2004). Dropout Prevention Among Urban, African American Adolescents: Program Evaluation and Practical Implications.	To evaluate a pilot, dropout prevention program designed to provide academic tutoring and supplemental enrichment to 9 <sup>th</sup> graders and to examine additional data in adolescents' motivators and role models that are related to high school dropout and completion.	96 9 <sup>th</sup> graders in a major city in the Midwest who were 99% African American and from a lower socio-economic level.	Quantitative using experimental group and control group – using 9 <sup>th</sup> grade GPA as a means of academic performance.	The dropout rate was lower for 9 <sup>th</sup> graders in the experimental group (who experienced close relationships with their tutors) than those who were not in the experimental group as determined by their GPA's.

Table 2.7 *Britt Study*

Name	Purpose	Participants	Methodology	Findings
Britt, P. (1995). Giving Voice to Students At Risk.	To determine the process in the lives as seen by the students that has led them to be labeled as at-risk for dropping out of school.	15 students who were 12 <sup>th</sup> graders in Columbus High School, Mississippi.	Qualitative – using interviews.	Study found that students at risk for dropping out of school were those that had: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1222 489 1417 594">1. no parental support at home</li> <li data-bbox="1222 604 1417 846">2. school environmen t had an attitude of acceptance for teen pregnancy</li> <li data-bbox="1222 856 1417 1098">3. students had negative feelings about the school environmen t.</li> </ol>

Table 2.8 *Hales Study*

Name	Purpose	Participants	Methodology	Findings
Hales, L.F. (1998). Student Dropout Prevention.	To find out reasons why students dropout and then provide strategies to keep them in school.	20 students in a metropolitan city.	Qualitative – using interviews.	Study found that students at risk were those that had: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. poor academic performances</li> <li>2. poor grades</li> <li>3. low test scores</li> <li>4. little school support</li> <li>5. high absenteeism</li> <li>6. had behavior problems and experienced several confrontations with both teachers and the administration.</li> </ol>

Table 2.9 *Statistical Dropout Average of Six Schools in the Study*

Schools	Enrollment	05-06	04-05	03-04	02-03	4-Year Average
School High1	414	38.8%	6.3%	8.6%	7.0%	15.175%
School High2	725	14.1%	10.0%	11.4%	14.1%	12.4%
School Average1	1,044	3.9%	6.3%	4.3%	5.1%	4.9%
School Average2	1,062	7.3%	5.0%	6.2%	0.3%	4.7%
School Low1	465	4.0%	3.6%	2.2%	2.0%	2.55%
School Low2	1,168	0.4%	0.4%	0.9%	1.9%	0.9%
State's dropout rate		4.7%	5.0%	5.1%	5.5%	5.07%

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The dropout statistics show that some schools have lower dropout rates than others. Those that have low dropout rates are often called effective schools as termed by the Georgia Department of Education (Chapman, 2004). Schools, in an effort to be labeled as effective schools, strive to graduate all of their students. They work each year in an effort to reduce their dropout rate from the previous year. They often look at what factors they do have control over and work on strengthening those factors in an effort to make students want to stay in school in order to make their dropout rate low.

The purpose of this study was to examine six schools in Georgia of the same demographics (from a 4-year average whose dropout rates ranged from 0.9% to 15.175%, see Table 2.9) in an effort to find out what are the factors that have allowed those schools to reflect low dropout rates and therefore keep more students in school and graduate as compared to those schools that have higher dropout rates where more of their students are not graduating.

#### Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following research question: What are the factors that reduce the dropout rate in high poverty schools in the state of Georgia?

Additionally, the study was designed to seek answers to the following sub questions:

1. Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates, especially those schools that have the same demographics?

2. What practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that those other schools are not doing or implementing?
3. What differences or factors exist between the compared schools that relate to culture and school environment?
4. Is the leadership behavior of the administration in some schools making the difference in who completes or drops out of school?

### Methods

The major purpose of the this study was to examine and compare schools in Georgia that have high and low dropout rates in hopes to learn what are factors within the school that schools can control or alter that might affect who remains in school and who drops out. This study was a qualitative one in nature. The researcher sought to understand what factors within the school that made the culture and environment of some schools keep and maintain enrollment of students until graduation.

This qualitative study was descriptive in that the researcher was looking for the factors that keep students enrolled at the schools that had low dropout rates. Corrine Glesne (2006) says that qualitative is a term that refers to the practices that seek to interpret people's creations of what they think is reality; researchers try to identify patterns to explain the behaviors. Glesne adds that in qualitative research, "life history" is only one of three modes – the other two being grounded theory and case study – that can be classified as qualitative research (2006).

Stake (2000) identifies three types of studies that may be termed as case studies. They include the intrinsic, instrumental, and the collective. Stake adds that the intrinsic type focus is to understand the conditions and variables associated with one particular



case (such as an individual who may be having problems succeeding or graduating) while the instrumental case study seeks to understand the conditions associated with a particular issue (such as why students from a particular school may have a problem succeeding or graduating). Stake (2000) adds that the instrumental case becomes a collective case study when the researcher is looking at several cases (for example, several schools that may be having the problem with students succeeding or success with students graduating) and the process lends itself to the point that the researcher is studying a suggested phenomenon. This research, then, was a collective case study of the factors within and around the school's culture and environment that affect the graduation rates of six schools in the state of Georgia.

Glesne (2006) adds that case studies usually employ several types of methods, particularly using ethnographic techniques that employ participant observation and in-depth interviewing. When several cases are examined, each case study is examined separately and then a cross-analysis is done to look for patterns across the cases (Glesne, 2006).

Marshall and Rossman (2006) also add that to understand a society and culture within a group or organization, the case study is the best strategy. They add that the case study allows the researcher to immerse in the setting; the research findings depend on both the researcher's and the participants' views (2006). The case study, they add, must focus on language and communication that will entail an analysis of speech to include text and interactions that are recorded and noted and then analyzed. The case study may involve several techniques to gather the data. Marshall and Rossman (2006) add that in such case studies, the researcher may use a combination of methods to include in-depth

interviewing, but qualitative research depends on participant observation, interviewing, document collection and pattern analysis.

In this study, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document collection were used. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), a study that seeks to focus on studying a phenomenon typically depends and uses an in-depth interview strategy where the main focus is to capture an understanding of the phenomenon in the words of the participant or participants. Kahn and Cannell (1957) have defined interviewing as a conversation with the participants with a definite purpose in mind as compared to a casual conversation where anything may evolve in the discussion. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), researchers in the in-depth interview must explore a few general topics to help uncover the participants' views but otherwise respect how the participant frames and structures the responses. The most important aspect of the interviewer's approach is conveying the attitude that the participants' views are valuable and useful (Kahn & Cannell, 1957).

This in-depth interviewing took the form of what Marshall and Rossman (2006) has labeled phenomenological interviewing. Phenomenological interviewing is a specific type of in-depth interviewing grounded in a philosophical tradition (Kahn & Cannell, 1957). Kahn and Cannell (1957) add that phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a worldview; it rests on the assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated. The purpose of this type of interviewing, according to Marshall and Rossman (2006), is to describe the meaning of a phenomenon that several individuals

share, as in this case, what's keeping students in school and what's causing others to drop out.

After carefully examining the research questions that focused on learning what school factors are keeping students enrolled and later offered them the opportunity to graduate as compared to students of like demographics who eventually drop out, it was determined by the researcher that the in-depth interview approach was most appropriate. During these interviews of students, faculty, and staff - in their natural, school settings - an understanding of the culture of those schools gave some insight on the lived experiences of those primarily involved that sought to answer or give understanding to the proposed research questions.

Document collection in this study also included data on the background and historical context of the schools and the communities to include demographic data. Marshall and Rossman (2006) add that the knowledge of the history and context surrounding the different settings may explain beliefs and values of participants in the setting. This data included school data that was located from the school's web sites and from the schools themselves as well as data on the communities and cities of these schools that may seek to explain cultural norms and habits.

As the researcher interviewed participants, he kept field notes in notebook form to include descriptive and analytic descriptions of people, places, events, activities and conversations. Glesne (2006) warns that the researcher is not to be judgmental in the note taking process.

## Data Collection

### *Research Design*

The design of this qualitative study was of a comparative and exploratory type, to examine what strategies effective schools are implementing in maintaining low dropout rates. The study used the qualitative design of the case study with in-depth interviewing, observations kept in journals and document collection as the methods to investigate the perceptions of the faculties, students, administration and the environment regarding the phenomenon associated with the strategies that are effective in keeping students in school and/or causing them to leave school before graduation.

While many techniques are used in qualitative research, most case studies depend on in-depth interviewing, according to Marshall and Rossman (2006). Kahn and Cannell (1957) describe interviewing as having a conversation with a direct intent or purpose in mind. Patton (2002) puts interviews into three general categories: “the informal, conversational interview; the general interview guide approach; and the standardized, open-ended interview” (p. 134).

This study on dropouts used the in-depth interview style that according to Marshall and Rossman (2006) typically is much like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories. In this approach, the researcher explored a few selected topics to help uncover the participants’ views while maintaining trust and freedom so that the participants could respond without guided directions or leading the interviewee to respond in certain ways. As this was done, the participants’ perspectives on the phenomenon of interest was revealed as the “participant viewed it (the emic

perspective), not as the researcher viewed it (the etic perspective),” (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 101).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), when interviewing is combined with observation, researchers will understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people.

Lancy (1993) described the roles of the researcher and the participants as partners working together in collaboration for a common understanding. Lancy also stressed that it is important that a good rapport be established between the researcher and the participants so that genuine trust could be established in order to obtain genuine, valid responses.

Miles and Huberman (1994) stressed that the qualitative approach is best supported and gathered in close proximity to where the phenomenon takes place. This is why it was imperative for the researcher to interview the participants in the location of the phenomenon. The researcher interviewed and investigated the perceptions and experiences of the faculties, students, and administration of schools that have high, average and low dropout rates in an effort to search for similar and contrasting themes and indicators that could be identified to explain the phenomenon of high dropout rates. This study used open-ended questions during the interview process along with noted observations and document collection.

### *Sample*

Purposive sampling was done to select school officials and students from two schools that had high, average and low dropout rates with the similar demographics. The researcher used the Georgia Report Card site and Georgia School Council Institute web

pages to locate these schools of similar demographics. These data generated 13 schools of which six were included in the study.

The databases allowed schools to be sorted by eight categories. These categories included: size of school, percentage of the Black enrollment, percentage of the Reading/ELA Proficiency, percentage of the Math Proficiency, being a 9-12, public school, and the percentage of the Economically Disadvantaged. See Table 3.1 for the schools' profile.

Table 3.1 *Profile of Six Targeted Schools Used in Study*

Targeted Schools	Total Enrolled	Over 75% Black	Economically Disadvantaged 75-100%	Overall Math Prof. 75-100%	Overall Rdg Prof. 75-100%	9-12 Grades	4-Yr dropout Average
School High1	414	Yes	77.9%	83.0%	95.7%	Yes	15.175%
School High2	725	Yes	87.1%	83.2%	87.6%	Yes	12.4%
School Average1	1,044	Yes	75.9%	88.2%	93.0%	Yes	4.9%
School Average2	990	Yes	82.1%	80.7%	90.8%	Yes	4.7%
School Low1	465	Yes	84.9%	75.6%	86.7%	Yes	2.55%
School Low2	1,082	Yes	81.4%	78.7%	97.4%	Yes	0.9%

A school's culture often takes on the environment of the city or community in which it is located (Chapman, 2004). In order to understand these six schools, the following data below were researched about their communities and their schools.

1. School High1 is one of nine high schools in the downtown area of this metropolitan city. School High1 is located in an area that is being revitalized and renovated. According to the city's web page, (Atlanta, Georgia, 2007) the following data was retrieved: the median household income in 2005 in this city was \$39,752; in 2005 the median house/condo value was \$218,500; the percentage of residents living in poverty in this city in 2005 was 26.9%; of this city's household data, 45.5% are not married, 31.4% are married, 4.1% are separated, 7.7% are widowed, and 11.3% are divorced.

School High1's motto is: "We are special because we have faculty, staff, and parents who are embracing our students as they prepare themselves to be productive and contributing members of a global society" (Atlanta Public, 2007, p. 4). The school's goal is "to provide opportunities for learning through effective teaching" (Atlanta Public, 2007, p. 4).

According to the school's web page (Atlanta Public, 2007), the school uses a Comprehensive School Reform Design HSTW (High Schools That Work) - a school reform initiative that uses effective school practices to raise the achievement of career-bound students and yields other comprehensive improvements; higher standards and expectations are set for all students; low-level courses for all students are done away with and all teachers use engaging instructional strategies; School High1 is a Title I school. This school before becoming an open campus school that operates from 8:00 in the

morning until 8:00 in the evening with two shifts of classes, one principal and two assistants – one for the morning shift and one for the evening shift, was a traditional high school whose students were products of public housing. Anyone at risk of dropping out or who has other issues that prohibit him or her from attending regular school and living in the metropolitan area can now attend this school by application only.

2. School High2 is located near the downtown area of this metropolitan city. According to the city's web page (Augusta-Richmond, 2007), this city has a population of over 190,000 and has nine public high schools, with two of those being magnet schools – one in allied health and the other in fine arts. The city is about 134 miles east of Atlanta, Georgia. The following other statistics were also retrieved: the median household income in 2005 was \$37,231; the median house/condo value was \$92,200 in 2005; the percentage of residents living in poverty in 2005 was 22.9%; of the households represented, 31.7% are not married, 45.8% represents married households, 3.2% represents separated households, 7.1% represents widowed households, and 12.1% represents divorced households.

According to its web page (Richmond, 2007), School High2's mission is to provide the highest quality education so that all students continually acquire the knowledge and develop the skills and values necessary to become contributing members of society; the school's motto is: Leading Advancing Nurturing Educating Youth.

The mission of this school system is to educate students to become lifelong learners and productive citizens. Other key ideas include: every person has the right to a quality education; education is the shared responsibility of the individual, home, school, and community; every person can learn; respect and acceptance are essential for learning



and personal development; a safe, healthy and orderly environment is essential to learning; communication is the key to understanding among people; and excellence cannot be compromised (Richmond, 2007).

This system includes over 33,000 students of which the following categories exist: African American, 73%; Asian, 1%; Hispanic, 2%; Multi-Racial, 2%; and White 22%. In this system, 70.2 % of its schools met AYP; graduation rates have improved to 69.5 %; the system offers supplemental academic support to students who are achieving below standard; approximately 67% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches; the graduation rate is 66.3%; approximately 22,000 students are transported each day; the school system has formed a partnership in collaboration with local city and government officials and businesses who understand that the community is dependent upon good schools; the system has implemented the i-Parent program, a web based program for parents to receive electronic access to student grades and allow them to follow the student's progress (Richmond, 2007).

3. School Average1 is located in a small rural city that has a population of around 2, 680 people. This is the only high school in the county that includes three other cities of similar size. According to county's detailed web page (Jefferson County, Georgia 2007), the entire county's population is around 16,926 with 19% of this population considered to be urban and 81% rural. The county's average wage per job in 2003 was \$25,885. The estimated median household income in 2005 was \$28,072 and the estimated median house/condo value in 2005 was \$83,427. The median monthly cost for houses with a mortgage in this county in 2000 was \$666. The crime in 2005 (reported by the sheriff's office or county police) included the following data: murders: 1, rapes: 0,

robberies: 0, assaults: 30, burglaries: 54, thefts: 84, and auto thefts: 18. People 25 years of age or older with a high school degree or higher make up 58.5% of the population. People 25 years of age or older with a bachelor's degree or higher make up only 9.1% of the population. The racial makeup includes: Black (56.3%), White Non-Hispanic (41.8%), Hispanic (1.5%), other race (0.8%), and mixed (two or more races) (0.5%). The work force is made up of the following: private wage or salary: 76%; government: 18%; and Self-employed, not incorporated: 6% (Jefferson County, Georgia, 2007).

It is the mission of this county high school to partner with the community in creating a learning culture that challenges, supports, and ensures the success of every child, every day. The motto of this school, a fountain of knowledge - don't leave thirsty, was established by a group of students during the fall of 2001. In 2006 the county's board of education adopted a county wide mission statement that stated the system is six schools with one Mission - every child, every day (Jefferson County Board, 2007). The faculty and staff at this school believe in the 3 Rs - relationships, rigor and relevance which are supported by research-based best instructional practices. The principal is the 2008 National High School Principal of the Year (Jefferson County Board, 2007).

There are only 3,200 students in this system of six schools of which the high school is the only high school. Five out of six schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the 2006-07 year. "We are proud of our children, parents, employees, and community and we take every opportunity possible to celebrate the school system's successes," (Jefferson County, 2007). . According to the county's web page, all three of the system's elementary schools are Title I Distinguished Schools. There are a number of countywide efforts in place to improve student performance, particularly in mathematics.

This includes professional development trainings for administrators and teachers on research-based instructional strategies; pre- and post- benchmark assessments through Testgate, an assessment that measure student performance throughout the year; and more collaboration and consistency across system levels (Jefferson County, 2007).

The school is not only just working to improve test scores, but they are working to prepare students to be life long learners and productive citizens. The vision of the system is that of a unified community ensuring that every child will graduate from high school postsecondary ready (Jefferson County, 2007). The web page adds that to make this possible, schools are filled with outstanding teachers, principals, and support staff, who regularly update their skills and participate in professional learning to help them meet the needs of all students, according to the web page (Jefferson County, 2007). Schools use strategies from High Schools That Works (HSTW) as well as other researched based approaches that include ideas from Thinking Maps, Read With Sarah, Thinkgate, Math Solutions, grants and clinicians from Emath and ETTC (Educational Technology Training Centers), Learning Focused Schools, and Algebra That Works (ATW), an instruction model that was designed by this school (Jefferson County, 2007).

4. School Average2 is located near the downtown area of this metropolitan city. According to the city's web page (Augusta-Richmond, 2007), this city has a population of over 190,000 and has nine public high schools, with two of those being magnet schools – one in allied health and the other in fine arts. The city is about 134 miles east of Atlanta, Georgia. The following other statistics were also retrieved: the median household income in 2005 was \$37,231; the median house/condo value was \$92,200 in 2005; the percentage of residents living in poverty in 2005 was 22.9%; of the households

represented, 31.7% are not married, 45.8% represents married households, 3.2% represents separated households, 7.1% represents widowed households, and 12.1% represents divorced households. According to its web page (Richmond, 2007), School Average2's essential purpose is to develop the capacity of each student to contribute effectively to a changing global society (Richmond, 2007). The page adds that the faculty and staff encourage and expect each student to achieve individual success, to grow educationally throughout life, to become life-long readers, and to advance toward higher learning in order to exemplify the standards of this institution. The principal's note on the web page says:

We have the opportunity to serve and work with our students through teamwork.

Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision and the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward a common vision and the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results. In order to attain uncommon results, we must work together as a team (Richmond, 2007, p. 1).

The mission of this school system is to educate students to become lifelong learners and productive citizens. Other key ideas include: every person has the right to a quality education; education is the shared responsibility of the individual, home, school, and community; every person can learn; respect and acceptance are essential for learning and personal development; a safe, healthy and orderly environment is essential to learning; and excellence cannot be compromised (Richmond, 2007).

This system includes over 33,000 students of which the following categories exist: African American, 73%; Asian, 1%; Hispanic, 2%; Multi-Racial, 2%; and White

22%. In this system, 70.2 % of its schools met AYP; Graduation rates have improved to 69.5 %; the system offers supplemental academic support to students who are achieving below standard; approximately 67% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches; the graduation rate is 66.3%; approximately 22,000 students are transported each day; the school system has formed a partnership in collaboration with local city and government officials and businesses who understand that our community is dependent upon good schools; the system has implemented the i-Parent program, a web based program for parents to receive electronic access to student grades and allow them to follow the student's progress (Richmond, 2007).

5. School Low1 is the only public high school in this county. It is located in the county seat. This rural city/county is located about 55 miles southeast of Athens/Clarke County. According to the city's detailed profile web page (Sparta, 2007), the following data was retrieved: the estimated median household income in 2005 was \$17,900 (it was \$18,580 in 2000), a slight decline; the estimated median house/condo value in 2005 was \$57,200; 34% of the population has never been married, 38.4% are married now, 4.9% are separated, 17.1% are widowed, and 5.1% are divorced.

According to the school's web page (Hancock, 2007), the mission of School Low1's system is to educate students and help each one become an independent learner (Hancock, 2007). The following data was also retrieved: "In a climate of high expectations, we foster good study skills and a healthy self-concept through interest, support, and involvement; parents and community members play an integral role in helping us develop responsible, productive citizens" (Hancock, 2007, p. 1).

6. School Low2 is one of nine regular public high schools in this downtown metropolitan area. This school's county is one of several counties that make up this major metropolitan area. According to the city's web page (Atlanta, Georgia, 2007), the following data was retrieved: the median household income in 2005 in this area was \$39,752; in 2005 the median house/condo value was \$218,500; the percentage of residents living in poverty in this area in 2005 was 26.9%; of this area's household data, 45.5% are not married, 31.4% are married, 4.1% are separated, 7.7% are widowed, and 11.3% are divorced..

From the school's web page (Atlanta Public, 2007), School Low2's mission statement says: "We are special because a true 'family' atmosphere exists whereby a sense of caring and nurturing exists among the faculty and staff that translates into the belief that ALL students have potential and that ALL students will succeed" (p. 1). As far as instruction is concerned, the following data was retrieved: this school "uses the Small Learning Communities (SLC) model in the organization of its 9th Grade Success Academy where interdisciplinary teams of teachers provide respective TEAMS of students with individualized and focused instruction designed to facilitate students' successful transition to the high school environment; has in place an Aviation Maintenance Technology (AMT) Career Academy that offers students a unique opportunity to prepare for careers in aviation technology in a small learning community setting; and has an Academy of Finance where students are prepared for careers in the financial services industry in a small learning community setting with a strong work-based learning component" (Atlanta Public, 2007, p. 2).

The school's motto is: "Together we promote learning!" (Atlanta Public, 2007, p. 2). School Low2 also uses what it has termed as a Whole School Reform Design in which the community is involved in several capacities (Atlanta Public, 2007). According to the board of education's web page, "Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams) is a school-community collaborative to improve the instructional quality and culture of at-risk feeder patterns in school systems. The goal of the program is to find and implement the most cost-effective, research-based prescription for addressing the educational needs of an inner-city school system. Project GRAD seeks to prove that the problems facing inner-city school systems can be overcome with the right resources, strategies, and school-community collaboration" (Atlanta Public, 2007, p. 2).

*"The Scholarship Program*, the cornerstone of Project GRAD, is a privately funded program to award scholarships to all students in the high school feeder pattern who achieve a 2.5 grade point average in college prep courses, attend two specially designed summer institutes, graduate on time with their class and take higher-level math courses, including Algebra II; the *Communities in Schools (CIS)* is a non-profit, dropout prevention program and social service agency that provides guidance, counseling, community outreach and family case-management services to at-risk children; the *Consistency Management Cooperative Discipline (CMCD)* program is a comprehensive program tailored to respond to individual campus needs that builds on shared responsibility for learning and classroom organization between teachers and students; the HSTW (High Schools That Work) is a comprehensive reform model based on 10 Key Practices that set HIGH EXPECTATIONS for ALL students. Academic and career/technical teachers, administrators, and counselors work to develop rigorous,

coherent academic programs for all students. Higher standards and expectations are set for all students. Low-level courses for all students are done away with and all teachers use engaging instructional strategies” (Atlanta Public, 2007, p. 3). School Low2 is a Title I School.

Participants in this study from this sample included six people from each school: two students who demonstrated characteristics of at-risk students – those that, according to research, had factors that educators could not presently change such as chronic absences, siblings who had dropped out, coming from single-parent and/or low socio-economic households, and those who had already repeated several courses and were behind; two veteran teachers; and one administrator and/or counselor.

### *Instrumentation*

The instrument was designed by the researcher. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), it is imperative that the researcher should collect data in such a way that the flow of daily events will be not be disturbed; the setting in which the researcher is in and the techniques for recording observations, interactions, and the actual interviews themselves should be both appropriate and low-key.

The researcher used an in-depth interview process consisting of 15-17 semi-structured, open-ended questions developed from the data reviewed in existing literature. A panel of experts (Appendix A) evaluated the interview questions prior to implementation to eliminate ambiguous or misleading questions. Questions were also piloted by seniors from neighboring high schools and analyzed to insure that they were appropriate. The interview question analysis (Table 3.2) shows how all questions are related to the reviewed literature and how they relate to the researcher’s set of sub



questions. The researcher took comments from committee members, the piloted question responses, and from the panel of experts and tweaked the final version of the 17 interview questions compiled in the table below (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 *Item Analysis of Interview Questions*

Interview Questions	Literature	Research Subquestions
1. Tell me about your school.	Chapman (2004); Epstein (1992); Goal (1989); Hale (1998); Hopkins (2005);	1. Demographics 2. Practices and strategies in schools
2. Talk about how you feel when you're here at school (culture and atmosphere of the school).	Chapman (2004); Hale (1998); Reducing (1998)	3. Culture and school environment of schools
3. How long has the principal been here and do you get a lot of new teachers every year?	Britt (1995); Epstein (1992); Henry & Roseth (1985); Reducing (1998); Tesseneer & Tesseneer (1958); Young (2002)	4. Leadership and administration in schools
4. What do you see as the major strengths in your school (outside of sports and band or music)?	Educational (2004); Goal (1989); Guthrie (1992); Henry & Roseth (1985); Lee & Ip (2003)	2. Practices and strategies in schools
5. What do you see as the major weaknesses in your school (outside of sports or band or music)?	Bowen & Walters (1978); Guthrie (1992); Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice & Tremblay (1997); Lee & Ip (2003)	1. Dropout rates 3. Existing factors in school culture and environment
6. What do students say or how do they feel about the teachers and the administration of the school?	Allen, Philliber, Herrling & Kupermine (1997); Arroyo, Rhoad & Drew (1999); Mahoney & Cairns (1997)	4. Leadership and administration in schools
7. Why do you think that some students fail or repeat classes?	Britt (1995); Chapman (2004); Guthrie (1992); Hale (1998); Henry & Roseth (1985); Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice & Tremblay (1997); Lee (2003); Somers & Piliawsky (2004); Toyrla (2003)	1. Dropout rates

Table 3.2 (continued)

Interview Questions	Literature	Research Sub questions
8. Why do you think some students eventually drop out of school?	Arroyo, Rhoad, & Drew (1999); Guthrie (1992); Hale (1988); Luster & McAdoo (1994); Reducing (1998)	1. Dropout rates
9. Why do you think that some at risk students(as defined by coming from single-parent households, having many absences, being socio-economically deprived, having other siblings who dropped out, and being in trouble) continue and graduate?	Allen, Philliber, Herrling & Kupermine (1997); Brendt, Hawkins, & Jiao (1999); Britt (1995); Epstein (1992); Fashola & Slavin (1998); Goal (1989); Hale (1998); Luster & McAdoo (1994); Reducing (1988); Somers & Piliawsky (2004); Toyryla (2003)	1. Dropout rates 3. Differences in factors in culture and environment of schools
10. What types of incentives do teachers and the administration give to students to encourage continued attendance and/or excellence?	Chapman (2004); Educational (2004); Fashola & Slavin (1998); Frank (1990); Georgia (2005); Hock, Pulvers, Deshler & Schumaker (2001); Luster & McAdoo (1994); Toyryla (2003)	2. Practices and strategies of schools
11. Are there additional programs offered for failing students such as after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school, to name a few?	Goal (1998); Hale (1998); Harding (2003); Hock, Pulvers, Deshler & Schumaker (2001); Mahoney & Cairns (1997); McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter (1998); Tesseneer & Tesseneer (1958); Young (2002);	2. Practices and strategies of schools
12. Is the community (outside of the students' family) involved in education and how are they involved?	Arroyo, Rhoad, & Drew (1999); Epstein (1992); Harding (2003); Lee & Ip (2003); Luster & McAdoo (1994)	2. Practices and strategies of schools 3. Factors in culture and environment 4. Leadership in schools
13. How would you describe the parent involvement with students and the total school program both academically and non-academically?	Arroyo, Rhoad, & Drew (1999); Britt (1995); Frank (1990); Guthrie (1992); Hale (1998); Hopkins (2005); Research (2004); Seaman & Yoo (2001)	2. Practices and strategies of schools 3. Factors in culture and environment 4. Leadership and administration in schools

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Interview Questions	Literature	Research Sub questions
14. Describe the administrators. Do you think that students support them and how well do they “believe in” and “appreciate” them?	Arroyo, Rhoad, & Drew (1999); Education (2004); Fashola & Slavin (1998); Guthrie (1992); Martin (1985)	4. Leadership and administration in schools
15. Describe the teachers as far as commitment, dedication, teaching styles, level of knowledge, and how they get along with students.	Arroyo, Rhoad, & Drew (1999); Education (2004); Fashola & Slavin (1998); Guthrie (1992); Martin (1985)	2. Practices and strategies in schools 4. Leadership and administration in schools
16. Describe your counseling services. What role does the counselor play with students?	Arroyo, Rhoad, & Drew (1999); Education (2004); Fashola & Slavin (1998); Guthrie (1992); Martin (1985)	4. Leadership and administration in schools
17. If you could change or add anything to this school, what would it be and why?	Britt (1995); Educational (2004); Georgia (2005); Goal (1989); Hale (1998); Hopkins (2005); McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, and McWhirter (1998)	1. Demographics 2. Practices, strategies 3. Factors in culture and environment 4. Leadership

### *Process*

Marshall and Rossman (2006) agree that the process of bringing “order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data is messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating” (p. 154). Marshall and Rossman add that this process is not a linear one. Research explains that qualitative research has been revealed to be one of exploratory, looking for common themes, strands, or variables in order to make a conclusion about a certain phenomenon. Then, so, qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes (Glesne, 2006). Glesne adds that the search for these themes builds grounded theory.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) add that there must be a balance between the flexibility of the process and the most practical way of retrieving this data. Mishler (1990) pointed out that looking for and describing a relationship or relationships through the development of specific analytic categories is the main objective and goal of qualitative research. Then after data is collected, according to Marshall and Rossman (2006), the process of analyzing this data falls into seven phases: “(1) organizing the data; (2) immersion in the data; (3) generating categories and themes; (4) coding the data; (5) offering interpretations through analytic memos; (6) searching for alternative understandings; and (7) writing the report or other format for presenting the study” (p. 156). Marshall and Rossman (2006) add that each phase of the data analysis will require reducing data and interpretation as the researcher finds meanings and insight from data that is gathered from the participants.

The primary methods of gathering information for this study were interviewing, observing, and data collecting. Corrine Glesne (2006) comments that early data analysis is done before all data collection has taken place. However, before any analysis was done, all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in order to ensure validity and consistency. Transcripts were reviewed for common and recurring themes, ideas, issues, and effective/ineffective strategies. The researcher was very observant and took notes as well. Open-ended responses were coded and analyzed for patterns, frequencies, similarities and differences.

Glesne (2006) adds that data analysis is done simultaneously with data collection; she argues that this process enables the researcher to remain focused. Therefore, the

researcher, then, consistently reflected on data, wrote memos, kept a journal of observations within the schools both during interviews and unguided tours.

All interviews were guaranteed confidentially as suggested by Glesne (2006). Before the implementation of the project, the researcher submitted a proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia Southern University for approval to use human subjects in the research. After receiving approval, the researcher wrote a formed letter for each person interviewed that outlined the purpose of the study, discussed the interview process, and asked for the consent of the interviewees by signing the consent form. The researcher assured interviewees about confidentiality and that all audio tapes would be destroyed after the study was completed, but that they would receive a copy of the interviews for their final approval before the study was published and submitted.

Five interviews (from two at risk seniors that the counselors selected, two veteran teachers having three or more years of experience that the administration selected, and one administrator or counselor that the principal selected) were designed to last from 30 to 45 minutes and were recorded electronically with the interviewees' prior approval. Glesne (2006) comments that tape recording over note taking is a better approach because the tape recording gives lends for better accuracy of the interviewee's word for word comments and answers to interview questions; also, tape recording can be played over and over again. Interviewees were given the option to speak off the record if so desired and the tape recorder would be turned off.

#### Treatment of the Data

Glesne (2006) emphasizes that it is important to keep dates and times on all files, tapes, papers, and all other forms of note taking. After all note taking was done and

completed, audio tapes were transcribed and common themes and recurring patterns were identified. Marshall and Rossman (2006) described the analysis of data as the system of bringing focus and direction after the data collection is complete. Because multiple data-collection methods and sources were used, triangulation was used to increase confidence in the researcher's findings.

### Summary

The present qualitative study sought to find and identify factors within the school culture and environment that cause students to drop out of school. After the panel of experts reviewed the questions and the interview questions were piloted, the interview guide that reflected ideas found in the review of literature was finalized. Data were collected through the process of interviewing and observations. Using the Georgia Report Card website and searching for parameters as being over 75% economically disadvantaged as determined by students' free and reduced lunch status, having over 75% black enrollment, scoring over 75% on both the math and English proficiencies of the high school graduation test, and schools housing grades 9-12, thirteen schools were generated of which six were used in this study, two that had high, average and low dropout rates. The researcher decided that five participants would be used from each of the six schools to include two at risk students selected by the counselors or the administration, two veteran teachers, and an administrator or counselor. Interviews were tape recorded and immediately transcribed. Triangulation of the transcripts along with the researcher's filed notes, observations, and data from the schools' manuals and policies was done in search of common themes.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

This study examined and paired schools in Georgia to learn why some schools have lower dropout rates than others. This study examined six schools in Georgia with similar demographics (from a 4-year average whose dropout rates range from 0.9% to 15.175%, see Table 2.9) in an effort to find out what are the factors that have allowed those schools to reflect low dropout rates and therefore keep more students in school and graduate as compared to those schools that have higher dropout rates where more of their students are not graduating. This study was designed to answer the following fundamental research question: What are the factors that can reduce the dropout rate in high poverty schools in the state of Georgia? Additionally, the study was designed to seek answers to the following sub questions:

1. Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates, especially those schools that have the same demographics?
2. What practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing?
3. What factors exist between the compared schools that relate to culture and school environment?
4. Is the leadership behavior of the administration in some schools making the difference in who completes or drops out of school?

This chapter gives an analysis of the data collected through scheduled in-depth interviews with 30 participants from the six schools in this study, five from each school.

## Research Design

A qualitative approach was used in this study to learn why schools with similar demographics have differing dropout rates. Interview questions were reviewed by a panel of experts and then piloted. The six high schools were selected from a database that incorporated the demographics of being at least 75% in the following categories: minority enrollment, passing the Georgia High School Graduation Test in English and Mathematics, and eating free and reduced lunches. Participants were purposefully selected and interviewed. Interview questions were based on themes and ideas that emerged from the review of literature on the dropout program of the nation and in the state of Georgia. The substance of the interviews focused on:

1. Describing the school
2. Comparing the school with other high schools
3. Defining the culture and atmosphere of the school
4. Explaining any major organizational or leadership changes in the past five years
5. Describing the principal and the teachers
6. Describing the students who attend the school
7. Telling why they think some students fail or repeat classes
8. Telling why they think some students eventually drop out of school
9. Telling why they think some students (who may be at risk as defined by coming from single-parent households, having chronic absences, being socio-economically deprived, having other sibling who dropped out, and being in



trouble frequently in and out school) still do not give up but remain in school and graduate

10. Talking about the incentives teachers and the administration give to students to encourage continued attendance and/or excellence
11. Explaining additional programs offered for failing students such as after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school
12. Talking about the role the community plays in education
13. Talking about the role parents play in the students' academics
14. Describing the administration and the students' support or non-support if it
15. Defining how well students "believe in" and "appreciate" their administrators
16. Describing the teachers as far as commitment, dedication, teaching styles, level of knowledge, and rapport
17. Describing the role of the counselor

Five people were interviewed from each school. Of those, two were at risk senior students and three were adults. At some schools the adults included a combination of veteran teachers, counselors and the administrators. The goal of the researcher was to include opinions from two perspectives, that of the student and that of the adult from each of the six schools in the study. For anonymity, the two schools with high dropout rates were labeled as School High1 and School High2. The two schools whose dropout rates are comparable with the state's average were labeled as School Average1 and School Average2. And the two schools whose dropout rates are well below the state's average were labeled as School Low1 and School Low2 (Table 4.1).

Table: 4.1 *Identification of Codes of Six Schools Used in the Study*

Definition of School	School	Participants
High Dropout Rate Schools (Having a 4 yr. mean of over 12% or higher from 2002-2005)	School High1	Student A Student B Administrator Teacher A Teacher B
	School High2	Student A Student B Administrator (Counselor) Teacher A Teacher B
Average Dropout Rate Schools (Having a 4 yr. mean of around 5% from 2002-2005, close to the state's average of 5%)	School Average1	Student A Student B Administrator Teacher A Teacher B
	School Average2	Student A Student B Administrator (Counselor) Teacher A Teacher B
Low Dropout Rate Schools (Having a 4 yr. low mean of 2.0% or lower from 2002-2005)	School Low1	Student A Student B Administrator Teacher A Teacher B
	School Low2	Student A Student B Administrator (Counselor) Teacher A Teacher B

All interviews were tape recorded on site of the respective schools except for School High1 and School Low2 because of limitations banning such audio recordings as a part of that county's policy on research as noted from personnel from the office of

planning and accountability. The interviews took place over a period of approximately two weeks. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher within twenty-four hours of the interview and checked for accuracy against written notes. The interview responses were reviewed, read numerous times, and then coded to identify major patterns and themes. All interviewees received a copy of their transcript and verified the contents thereof.

The transcribed data were then analyzed using the software package HyperRESEARCH Version 2.7 to support validity and identification of common themes. The responses to the interview questions all fell under the overarching question to identify the factors that affect the dropout rates in high poverty public schools in Georgia but were sorted by the four research sub questions in order to establish common themes for the analysis of the findings. The patterns and themes identified by the researcher and the software were compared and resulted in the data analysis. Findings from the transcripts were triangulated with the schools' and districts' handbooks and pamphlets and with the noted researcher's on-site observations, notations of observed behavior and field notes.

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

#### *School High1*

1. Student A – is a senior who is not on track as identified by completing high school in four years. This is his fifth year after having repeated courses during high school. He had decided to give up, but he chose the non-traditional high school setting to complete his graduation requirements. He

has been at this school for the last two years and plans to graduate in May 2008.

2. Student B – is a senior who is on track, completing high school in four years, but had trouble in her second year of high school and was expelled. She went to summer school and chose the open campus, non-traditional high school, to complete her education. She is expected to graduate in May 2008.
3. Teacher A – is a teacher who has been teaching for over 25 years, with most of those years at the same current high school. She was employed there when the high school was a traditional high school and is still employed as it is now an open-campus high school serving potential dropouts in the city's overall geographic area. She teaches Language Arts.
4. Teacher B – is a veteran teacher who has been teaching for over 20 years. She was not employed at this high school when it was a traditional high school but after learning of its opening two years ago, she asked for a transfer to this school, an open-campus, non-traditional high school. She teaches mathematics.
5. Administrator – is a veteran educator. She has been employed in this district for over 15 years and has worked in administration for over 8 years. She designed the concept of this open-campus school and has served as its principal since its inception, now in their third year of operation as an open-campus school that is in operation from 8 am until 8 pm with two shifts of teachers, with a morning and afternoon assistant principal.

*School High 2*

1. Student A – is a senior who is on track as identified by completing high school in four years. He is the football captain and is ranked number 2 in his graduating class. He is an honor roll student and is class president. He plans to attend college after graduation in May.
2. Student B – is a senior who is on track, completing high school in four years. She is a cheerleader and is in the marching band. She is expected to graduate in May 2008.
3. Teacher A – is a teacher who has been teaching for over 20 years; he has spent the last five years at this present school. He teaches physical education and weight-training classes. He has served as the assistant football coach since he has been at this school, but this year he serves as the head football coach.
4. Teacher B – is a teacher of 10 years. She has spent five of those first years teaching special education in another state. Since she has been at the school, she has worked in special education as an inclusion teacher serving the students with special needs who are mainstreamed in the regular classroom setting with other regular education students. This format allows her to work with struggling and average performing students.
5. Administrator – is a veteran educator. She currently serves as the junior/senior counselor, a position she has held for the last two years. Prior to that position, she was the freshmen/sophomore counselor; this relationship has allowed her to know each of the seniors individually. She has been employed in this district for over 15 years and has worked at three different schools, one

of them being the middle school that is the feeder school for this high school. She has been at this school for the last 10 years.

*School Average 1*

1. Student A – is a senior who is on track as identified by completing high school in four years. She has participated in extracurricular activities to include cheerleading and the band. She will be an honor graduate and plans to attend Georgia Southern University in the fall. She comes from a single parent household that serves three other siblings. She has been at this school throughout her high school career and plans to graduate in May 2008.
2. Student B – is a senior who is not on track, completing high school in five years. This is his fifth year in high school after having failed and repeated courses in English and math. He is expected to graduate in May 2008 and plans to join the Army.
3. Teacher A – is a teacher who has been teaching for over 20 years, with all of those years in the same system and 12 of those being at the current high school. This school was started 12 years ago as a result of combining two smaller high schools. All twelve years have been under the leadership of the same principal. She has taught the GED class that is offered at the school, Advanced Placement English, College Preparatory English, Technical Preparatory English, and a class in Teacher Apprenticeship. She has had contact with students of all intelligences from gifted to below average as the Inclusion Model of Special Education is used at this school. She has been

named the Teacher of the Year several times as well as the system's Teacher of the Year.

4. Teacher B – is a veteran teacher with 12 years of experience, all at this same school. She teaches Biology and Physical Science. In addition, she serves as the Cheerleader Advisor.
5. Administrator – is a veteran educator. She has been a classroom teacher for over 15 years; of those eight have been at this school. For the last four years, she has served as the assistant principal for instruction. Prior to being named to that position, she taught 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade English.

#### *School Average2*

1. Student A – is a senior who is on track as identified by completing high school in four years. He is the school's Student Government Association president, a position he held his Freshman and Sophomore years as well. After graduation in May 2008, he plans to attend a major university in Georgia and pursue a career in Business Administration - Management.
2. Student B – is a senior who is on track, completing high school in four years. She moved from New York City to this area at the beginning of her freshman year. She plans to graduate in May 2008 and enlist in the Marines.
3. Teacher A – is a teacher who has been teaching for over 18 years, with most of those years at the same current high school and all of those years in the same system. She teaches history and serves as the chairperson of this department, a position she has held for the last five years.

4. Teacher B – is a veteran teacher who has been teaching for over 28 years. She was a graduate of this school and returned to this system after graduating from college. She teaches mathematics.
5. Administrator – is a veteran educator. She has been employed in this district for over 12 years and has worked as a counselor at this school for the last eight years. She serves as the junior/senior counselor. Prior to that position, she was the freshman/sophomore counselor.

*School Low I*

1. Student A – is a senior who is not on track as identified by completing high school in four years. This is his fifth year after having repeated courses during high school. He is uncertain of his plans after graduation in May 2008.
2. Student B – is a senior who is on track, completing high school in four years. He plays football for the school. After graduation in May 2008, he plans to attend an area technical school.
3. Teacher A – is a teacher who has been teaching for over 12 years, with nine of those years at the same current high school. He teaches math and has served as the math department's chair for the last four years. He is the only veteran math teacher at this school; all other math teachers are new this year.
4. Teacher B – is a veteran teacher who has been teaching for over 12 years. She teaches American and English Literature. She is a product of this area and school. She sponsors the BETA Club.



5. Administrator – is a veteran educator. This is, however, his first year as principal of this school. Prior to this school and system, he worked as an assistant principal in a neighboring, small system.

### *School Low2*

1. Student A – is a senior who is on track as identified by completing high school in four years. She does not participate in any extra-curricular activities and is unsure of what she plans to do after graduation in May 2008.
2. Student B – is a senior who is on track, completing high school in four years. She transferred into this system four years ago after her family relocated in this area. She is a member of several clubs and serves as the Student Government Association's vice-president. She plans to attend college after she graduates in May 2008.
3. Teacher A – is a teacher who has been teaching for over 25 years, with all of those years at the same current high school. He teaches Aviation.
4. Teacher B – is a teacher who has only been teaching for 5 years. This is her third year at this school. She teaches Art.
5. Administrator – is a veteran educator. She has been employed in this district for 5 years. Prior to coming to this district, she worked out of state as the assistant principal at a high school. She serves a dual role as a facilitator in counseling services and instructional leader to the subject chairpersons.

### Findings

The interview questions were organized and discussed into the researcher's four sub questions in the following manner:

1. Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates, especially those schools that have the same demographics?
  - a. Why do you think that some students fail or repeat classes? (Interview Question 7 for students and adults)
  - b. Why do you think some students eventually drop out of school? (Interview Question 8 for students and adults)
  - c. Why do you think that some students (who may be at risk as defined by coming from single-parent households, having chronic absences, being socio-economically deprived, having other sibling who dropped out, and being in trouble frequently in and out school) still do not give up but remain in school and graduate? (Interview Question 9 for students and adults)
2. What practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing?
  - a. What types of incentives do teachers and the administration give to students to encourage continued attendance and/or excellence? (Interview Question 10 for students and adults)
  - b. Are there additional programs offered for failing students such as after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school, to name a few? (Interview Question 11 for students and adults)
  - c. Is the community involved in education and how are they involved? (Interview Question 12 for students and adults)

- d. Are parents actively involved in the students' academics? (Interview Question 13 for students and adults)
3. What factors exist between the compared schools that relate to culture and school environment?
  - a. Tell me about your school. (Interview Question 1 for students and adults)
  - b. Talk about how you feel when you're here at school – the culture and atmosphere of the school. (Interview Question 2 for students)
  - c. Describe the culture of your school? (Interview Question 3 for adults)
  - d. How well do you think your school compares to other high schools? (Interview Question 2 for adults)
  - e. What do you think about the way things happen here and the way that you are treated at this school? (Interview Question 3 for students)
  - f. Other than sports or music (like band or chorus), do you consider your school as having any major strengths? (Interview Question 4 for students)
  - g. Other than sports or music (like band or chorus), do you consider your school as having any major weaknesses? (Interview Question 5 for students)
  - h. If you could change anything about this school, what would it be and why? (Interview Question 17 for students)
4. Is the leadership behavior of the administration in some schools making the difference in who completes or drops out of school?
  - a. Describe the administration. Do you think that students support the administrators? (Interview Question 14 for students and adults)

- b. How well do they "believe in" and "appreciate" their administrators?  
(Interview Question 15 for students and adults)
- c. Describe the teachers as far as commitment, dedication, teaching styles, level of knowledge, and how they get along with students. (Interview Question 16 for students and adults)
- d. Describe your counseling services. What role does the counselor play with students? (Interview Question 17 for students and adults)
- e. How long has the principal been principal and are there many new teachers? (Interview Question 5 for adults)
- f. What do students say or how do they feel about the administration of the school? (Interview Question 6 for students)

#### Research Sub Question 1

*Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates, especially those schools that have the same demographics?*

This was the first sub question of four in search of the factors that affect the dropout rate. Three of the 17 interview questions directly focused on this sub question as to why schools of similar demographics have varying dropout rates. And in this study of six schools, the dropout variance (from a mean average of four years) spanned between a low 0.9% to a high 15.17%. Three sub questions were asked.

1. In order to determine if dropping out was related to failing classes, the following interview question of three was asked, "Why do you think students fail or repeat classes?" (Interview Question 7 for students and adults)

Most of the students commented that they felt students were not focused, didn't study, procrastinated, and were influenced by peers who were not interested in school and as a result had chronic absenteeism. Most said that students just didn't apply themselves and as a result failed. One student said, "Peers influence them and they lose focus on what's important. They get behind in their studies and eventually fail the tests because they were partying instead of studying" (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). Another student said, "They become discouraged, and after procrastinating, they get behind. Some need encouragement to be pushed by peers and family members" (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07).

A student from the school that had the lowest mean average dropout rate had this to say about why students fail:

I failed my freshman year; we were not paying attention, not taking things seriously, trying to fit in with everybody. The second year, I changed. I had stuff to take care of. But sophomores and juniors fail because they don't do their work (...) skipping classes (...) sometimes the teachers make too many demands, not really unreasonable. I didn't have high expectations. That's where I messed up. You got finished with one thing, and before you know it (...) it was too much work (...) my ninth grade year (...) making the transition. Those that fail, well they fail because they didn't do the work (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07).

A student from a school whose dropout rate is comparable to the state's average said that students fail classes "due to goofing off. The high school sets up an easy program for us to succeed. It is up to us to succeed. They fail because they don't apply

themselves” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). Another student from that same school had similar comments to make:

Students don't care and then again, some teachers don't care. Some teachers give students the opportunity to come after school, but all students can't come after school. I understand that you can't point out one student because you have a class full of students to teach. But they should, I don't know, have classes where they take you out; they did it last year. I don't know if they are doing it this year, if you are down in one class, they had a tutor to take you out and (...) I don't know it's the beginning of the year. Some fail because they didn't apply themselves. It's the majority. They fail the classes, okay and then they are the ones that drop out (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07).

A student from the school in this study that had the second high dropout rate agreed also that students don't take advantage of their opportunities. “It's a lot of kids; they think that just because they are buddies they don't study. They don't apply themselves” (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07). Another student added, “They are trying to have fun and they are not paying attention” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07).

Still with the theory that students don't come to school with a focus, another student added:

I think that they just don't come to school and they choose to live the street life, and when they do come to school they are tired and not focused. My dad, he wouldn't let me stay out all night. Yes sir. Parents are not making them come to school and take responsibility (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

The adults from all of the schools agreed that students don't apply themselves as well as to the reason that they fail classes.

Students do not follow procedures; they do not study, not take an interest; they are not motivated. Yeah, the students are not interested; some teachers not being energetic; I would say only half of those who fail, failed because of attendance (School Low1, Administrator, 10-05-07).

The counselor at a school that has a dropout rate that is comparable to the state's rate said this as it relates to students not applying themselves:

They don't study. They go home and have a good time. They don't open their books. They leave the books here. They don't apply themselves. They come to have a good time. You can sit right here and watch. They don't even have a book (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07).

A teacher from this same school added, "I feel we have many students who fail and/or repeat their grade because they do not apply themselves. Some are just disinterested in attending school" (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). And another teacher added that the students show a "lack of motivation to succeed" (School Average 2, Teacher B, 10-09-07).

Then many of the adults who were interviewed attributed failure in the classroom to the inability to read, making it almost difficult to make passing grades. The principal at the school with the second highest dropout rate in this study had this to say:

The problem starts when kids can't read; it is taught to educate a kid, especially when his reading level is so low because reading encompasses so much how a kid learns. When kids get to high school, they want to do and are encouraged to do,

but the barriers make it hard; they are made fun of; they are embarrassed. They lose confidence. 'I can't breathe now, but somewhere I will learn; don't let anyone laugh at you,' this is what they say. But they hide behind a lot of things; academically you can hide. They are self-contained in middle school. They are mainstreamed in classes but they can't function. To them it is so faster. They see words but they don't understand. That's a problem; it's hard for you to function in society when you don't have the skills, but the parents are going to say, 'Hey, daddy owns a paint and body shop, but you can learn a skill. At least you can have something to fall back on.' But these kids have no knowledge and no skills to fall back on. Mother at home has personal issues. That makes it tough (School High2, Administrator, 10-10-07).

The principal at one of the schools that has the lowest dropout rate made similar comments. He said that students fail or repeat classes because:

They have poor reading skills, weak from elementary. They translate into middle school and then into high school and still can barely read. The rigor and relevance are too hard, too fast; they miss out and can't catch up. They fail the classes. Their thinking skills are poor as well as their written comprehension. We have a challenge to take what you got and get them going. But it's hard (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

Some adults mentioned that students fail or repeat classes as a result of a pattern or a trend they have established or a trend that has been established in that student's family and consequently, the student has not experienced success. This teacher at an average dropout school had this to say:



Too often students have experienced a pattern of failure that becomes what they believe. Early failures lead to additional failures and soon they don't believe in success. When that's not the case, often it's because other pressures are impacting students: depression, lack of sleep, little support at home, too much responsibility of the adult kind, temptations of drugs, alcohol. Sometimes we simply fail to intervene and figure out what to do for that student soon enough. It is important that a student feels that success is important and that it will matter in his or her future (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

A teacher from one of the high dropout rate schools added that in addition to completing the family cycle of failures, teaching styles may be a contributing factor.

In my opinion, the way they feel about education, the way they value education, we have so many students here who complete the cycle. Momma didn't finish school, siblings didn't finish school, and it doesn't matter if they finish school. That's what I see. There are a few who can't grasp the concepts and it's really hard for them because of reading deficiencies. Too, I think we still have some teachers who don't want to change with the times and teach with new methods. Too, some don't realize that students learn differently and they don't want to change with the times; I guess some teachers need to try different methods of teaching (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

Other noted reasons include having failed in the past makes it hard to catch up, no motivation from home, poor attendance, and not wanting to do their work (lazy). "Most got behind in their studies and couldn't catch up, with personal issues coupled with that" (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07). "They are not motivated at home. Teachers

probably didn't care. Teachers did not provide everything they needed to pass....love, care, concern, warm smile, hugs, pat on the back, approval" (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). "They have issues, some want to do other things that they feel are important to them like friends, babies, and some of these things are important. They have issues that take precedent over studying and preparing for class" (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

Some adults cited laziness as a factor as to why students fail. "No concern for educational future. They want to graduate but they are lazy. And some have problems at home. There are many distractions that include peer pressure and other personal problems such as jobs, babies, etc." (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

Some students fail or repeat classes because they do not want to do their own work. They would want others to do it for them or if not them they would like for the teachers to give them all of the answers (School Average 1, Students A & B, 10-08-07).

One administrator mentioned that there are circumstances at home that contribute to the fact they fail:

Sometimes there are extenuating circumstances outside of school that keep students from passing due to absences. Sometimes the material is difficult and the students are not willing to stay for the sessions in the tutorial program after school. Sometimes a student just simply gives up and thinks that failing a class won't affect him, but later realizes that was a mistake (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07).

One teacher at a low dropout school mentioned that some students who are smart are afraid to show their academic intelligence for fear of being ridiculed by their peers.

This teacher said:

Many here are afraid to show that they are smart, peer pressure. They refuse to acknowledge their knowledge. I had a student who was originally from Europe. She knew more about our government and its policies than the students from America. They kept teasing her and ridiculing her, so she decided to stop participating in class (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

2. To further find answers to the first sub question which asked, “Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates, especially those schools that have the same demographics,” sub question one of four, the second interview question associated with this sub question was asked: “Why do you think students eventually drop out of school?”

Most of the adults (administrators and teachers) cited that many students drop out because they have failed too many classes and are too far behind to catch up.

The principal at the school in this study that had the highest dropout rate in the state said:

Having failed too many classes and not having enough credits to go to the next grade, that’s the reason why they dropped out along with not being able to keep up; they become bored. I guess they get behind because the society offers too much temptation. Here at my school since we have become an open campus, the first class had 0% dropout rate and 100% graduation rate; last year, we had a few to not graduate, but that figure was something like 2% dropout rate, well below

the 38% that this school had before it became an open campus school (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07).

A teacher from that same school added, “They get too far behind and are repeating the same classes and grades. They don’t think school is important” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). Another teacher from the same school added, “They failed too many classes. They thought they could make it without school. School was boring to them” (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). A teacher from a school with a dropout rate that is in line with the state’s average agreed by saying, “Most students who drop out have gotten so far behind that graduation seems too far away or too challenging for them” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07). A teacher from the school in this study that had the second highest dropout rate added:

They realize that I have been in the ninth grade three years, and there is no sense in my coming back. Secondly, I think that they want to try the GED program or night school. Thirdly, some think that there is something better on the streets and they go for it (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

Some adults have attributed the age factor of the freshmen as the reason students drop out. The counselor at a school with a dropout rate that is in line with the state’s average also said:

Some of them drop out, well, I really don’t know. But this is what I think. They have been retained so many years, and because of their age, they don’t want to be around the younger ones. I have one kid, he was 17 already and he was in the freshmen class. I tried to work with him, work around some of those classes where he would fit in. But that didn’t help. He was too far behind and could

barely read and perform to keep up with his classmates (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07).

Some felt that students had no sense of motivation or hope. The administrator of one of the schools that had the lowest dropout rate said:

No interest in the school whatsoever, not motivated, find it boring, some of us not motivating them as they should, another thing, we talk about teachers, high turnover. This year, we had one veteran math teacher in the department. Math teachers always come and go; not many math teachers were certified...they could not come back. There were some who were here for two or three years, but basically, they could not get certified. I think most of the ones who are here now will come back in the fall (School Low1, Administrator, 10-05-07).

A teacher from a school with a dropout rate that is in line with the state added, “There’s a total lack of hope, a lack of vision. They can’t envision a future in which completion of school will make a difference. All they see is today – and today has other pressures than completing American Literature” (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07). “Students dropout because they do not have the motivational skills to move on. There is no one to help them along the way to encourage them on how important it is to receive a good education,” added another teacher (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). And another teacher simply said, “Hopelessness” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07). A teacher from a school with a low dropout rate added to this conclusion by saying, “They give up. They can’t see a future in education. Parents dropped out; they complete the cycle. Ladies get pregnant; they sell drugs; they just give up” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

One administrator from the second school in this study with the highest dropout rate added that students who come to this school are already too old and can't read, thusly giving them a disadvantage and a slower start in the race of completing high school:

Here is my thought. If you look at the feeder schools, they are in the bottom. Not a middle school in this area made AYP. When you start at the elementary and the kids walk in the door needing something, and you don't get them up, and they send you to middle school, and I don't catch you up and I send you to the high school, you have not even started the race fair. Everybody else has gotten 250 meter head start and you're running a 450 meter race and you're starting square one and you're running hard the entire time. If you reach a certain point and you are a 19 year old sophomore, it's discouraging. We had 40 freshmen who were already 16 years old out of 140 ninth graders. The likelihood is that those kids are missing something. Kids tell me that if he can read, he may understand. The second kid read it but he's not ready for the question. Here is what happens with these kids. You have to go over it twice, three, or four times before they can get the point. Most of these kids are not willing to read it four times. The status is brought into this school. Those social standards whether it's being a football player, a good looking kid, your momma has money, whether you dress nice or whatever, those things have a major impact on how kids function here at this school. Those things need to be geared to get these kids in an academic comfort level. I use football all the time on how much you are willing to sacrifice. My question is not about losing, but how much or bad you want to win then I can tell you how if you have a good football team or if you have good kids. Some

schools, if you have status and you can't read, you are headed for failure. At some point, you will give up. Some kids don't have decent grades. We have had kids who passed the graduation test, but they don't want to come to school. Some kids have the academic ability, but the conglomeration of their life is what's important in their household. If education is important but not focused on, then they lose. The hardest part is when we release our kids and send them back home. That's the hardest fight. When they are here they are fine. What we need is dormitories. Yes, at home it is not enforced. Momma is drinking and smoking, my cousins, they dropped out; they are selling drugs for easy money (School High2, Administrator, 10-10-07).

The administrator at a school with a low dropout rate agreed in his comments. "They are already behind when they get to high school. They repeat classes and never catch up. They drop out. Plus there are issues at home that we have no control over" (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

Other factors that adults commented on included being not recognized by the teachers or school. "The issues are that everyone is not recognized or praised. Those recognized for awards and those that are not. Students become invisible and they are no longer visible...students being recognized while the low achievers are not" (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

Also, other factors included issues inside and outside of school. "Many girls get pregnant during the school year. Some get bored with school; there are compounded reasons. The graduation test is a major reason. They can't pass the science and social studies parts. They soon say forget it" (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

Students agreed with the adults in naming being too far behind to catch up as a main reason students drop out. Students at both schools that had the highest dropout rate had this to say: “They get behind, too far behind and catching up is almost impossible. So they drop out” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). “They drop out when they get behind in classes, they get discouraged and quit” (Student High2, Student B, 10-10-07). “They get too far behind, having repeated classes, and they don’t have any hope” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). “They have failed too many classes and didn’t get enough credits. Some even failed the graduation test, and as a result, they became discouraged and dropped out” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07).

Associating with people who were not educationally positive was also a factor as stated by a student from a school with a very low dropout rate.

I know some people who dropped out in middle school. One was hanging with the wrong crowd, and another got the street life to make quick money. Some of my friends dropped out after being retained so many times. They said it was too much work. They said they were going to go get the GED, settle for the easy way out (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07).

Some students said that many students are not focused; the students said students drop out because many students want to have fun.

They don’t care. When they come to school they want to do what they want.

Since the administrators cracked down on the rules, it’s like I can’t have my way; I don’t want to be there. It is sad to say but when you’re in school you’re supposed to get an education, but they want to have fun. Some, because, others a lot of kids, some that goof off in class, they are real intelligent, real smart. Some



do, but others they don't care. After a while, the teachers will come to their side and talk to them and let them know they care; they start doing better. But if the teachers and the administration from the jump let them know from the beginning that they can come to them, they are here, I don't think it would be a problem (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07).

Another student added, "They dropped out because they didn't apply themselves. They think teachers didn't teach them but it was up to them to learn; the teachers did their part" (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07).

In addition to the factors already noted, participants named other factors inside and outside of school:

I think that they drop out because sometimes there are problems at home that they don't want to talk about it. Sometimes it's peer pressure; they think that they are too cool to come to school; they come to school sometimes and don't come back. Some kids don't come back because they feel our principal is too strict and hard on them (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07).

3. To further find answers to the first sub question which asked, "Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates, especially those schools that have the same demographics," sub question one of four, the third interview question associated with this sub question was asked: "Why do you think students who are at risk (having failed classes or repeated grades, having siblings who dropped out, coming from a single parent household, having been in trouble in and out of school, having given birth, and financially coming from an poverty-stricken family) still remained in school and graduate?"

Most all of the participants, both adults and students, cited that students who had a goal and were determined to accomplish them were the ones who stayed in school to achieve those aspirations. “They were determined; they would not give up,” said the principal from the school with the highest dropout rate (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07). Students from that same school agreed; “They had a goal and were determined” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “They were determined. Someone kept motivating and encouraging them or working with them. They had a dream, maybe to go to college” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). “They saw a goal, doing what’s expected,” said the teacher from the same school (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). “These students see a need to get the high school diploma; they have a goal” (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07). A student from a high dropout rate school also stated, “They probably have a goal set; they want to be successful in life. A lot of them, they don’t set goals and have a future and have goals” (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

Comments from a school with an average dropout rate were similar. “On the other hand, I feel students who press on have set goals in their life and they are striving for the stars no matter what. They have individuals who encourage them along the way” (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07).

Another student from an average dropout rate school shared similar comments on this topic:

These students want to prove to their family members or others that put them down that they are capable of doing whatever they wish to do; they had a goal and went out to achieve it. They believe that they make their own decisions and others cannot make it for them (School Average1, Student A, 10-08-07).

“Wanting a way out of the circle of despair, a dream to be better,” was a teacher’s response from a school with an average dropout rate” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07), while a student from that same school agreed: “I would say it was the mindset to want to do better” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07).

Even from the school with a low dropout rate, the response was similar. One student said, “They wanted to make a life and have goals; they had hope” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). A teacher from the same school said, “They have a vision for themselves. They have a goal” (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07). A student from another school with the lowest dropout rate added:

I had a friend that I thought would drop out, but he proved us wrong. He had a message to prove to people that he would not drop out. He had something that he wanted to do and he was not going to let anyone stop him from making that dream come true, to be the first in his family to graduate. He had support from family, friends, teachers (School Low1, Student B, 10-03-07).

One teacher said that the fact that the students’ parents did not graduate gave the students that momentum to stay in school and not give up.

I think they knew the value of education, the students’ parents. Students look at their parents and say, ‘we are not going to do because they did or we are going to do because they did not.’ We have a few who will say, ‘My momma didn’t get, but I am going to get it.’ This is what drives some students to not give up but hang in there (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

A common factor that many (adults and students from all six schools) spoke of included the support and motivation that such individuals received, whether it was from teachers, friends, themselves, peers, or family members.

Well, I don't really know of any cases like that. I think we are a very family-oriented community. Half of the teachers are products of this community.

There's a close-knit relationship with the kids, parents, relatives, all playing a role, contributing to the fact that students don't drop out. We have some real good people in this community that care about these students (School Low1, Teacher B, 10-05-07).

A teacher added this point:

Sometimes it's just a matter of having ONE thing going for them: a caring teacher, a goal, a mentor, a strong personality, a mom or dad or grandma who won't take 'no' for an answer. But everybody needs something going for them, somebody pulling for them (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

A principal from the same school added, "I see most of those students have people here at school and at home encouraging them not to make those same mistakes. They are able to see the effects first hand of dropping out" (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07). "Some of the teachers helped them stay in school. Some kids have that motivation and some of the teachers motivate them," said a student from another average dropout rate school" (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07). At one of the average dropout rate schools, the counselor said:

Many potential dropouts don't drop out because they were around some of their peers, who wanted some of the same things they wanted in life. Realizing there

is a goal somewhere, it may have been, yeah, it could have been a teacher he was really interested in; maybe someone came in and motivated him (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07).

A student from a high dropout rate school added, “They had self motivation and they had motivation from other people. I had a friend that I talked with and told her not to give up,” (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07), just as the comments from a student from a school with a low dropout rate were very similar: “They didn’t drop out because they got good advice; they were told that they had to go to college and get more than just a high school diploma if they wanted to provide more for their children” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07).

Too, still other participants at the schools with the lowest dropout rates shared similar beliefs.

There is something within that tells them ‘keep a going, don’t quit, don’t give up.’ They say to themselves, ‘I am not going to quit.’ Plus, having mentoring friends and supportive teachers keep those few in school and eventually graduate (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

“Encouragement from teachers; the older teachers who have been in the profession for a long time, that’s what kept them in school” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

The principal at a high dropout rate school said that it is uncertain what drives a potential at-risk student from dropping out and remaining in school, but the process of making the decision not drop out is the same. He commented:

You know I think it's different for each student, but the process is the same. I have a kid who came out for football his senior year. In his ninth grade year, he was a little trouble for me. I don't know if he was masking his ability, but he wasn't doing well in class. I don't know if he didn't have the ability or if he had it. But he got his classes in order and his grades. What turned him on? I don't know. I think at some point, I talk to adults and they say, 'I wish I had I had this or that.' Now what held them back, they can't tell me. Things surrounding their lives take precedence of their academic areas. Some give up and some regain their hope. I don't know if I can do that. They try it, and they say, 'If that guy is doing it, then I can.' Some don't even try. You gotta have something in you that will say I got to do something better. What is that something that turns their ship around, it could be almost anything, but the process is that the ship is turned around and they reach their destination, for them graduation (School High2, Administrator, 10-10-07).

#### Research Sub Question 2

*What practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing?*

This was the second sub question of four in search of the factors that affect the dropout rate. Four of the 17 interview questions directly focused on this sub question as to why schools of similar demographics have varying dropout rates. And in this study of six schools, the dropout variance (from a mean average of four years) spanned between a low 0.9% to a high 15.17%. Four questions were asked.

1. In order to know what practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing, the following interview question of four was asked, “What types of incentives are given to encourage positive behavior?” (Interview Question 10 for students and adults)

Participants said that all of the schools do recognize students who perform well academically by acknowledging them through a published honor roll. “We have honor roll and a distinguished honor roll list that’s published” (School Low1, Teacher B, 10-05-07). A student from an average dropout rate school added that while recognition of this nature is good, more should be done.

We have an honor society. That’s okay. Some students are smart but not as smart as others. They should have activities, do something for students they see are doing well; they should do something for them. Yes, they do a lot, but they should do more (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07).

Some teachers and students feel that the incentive of giving students many opportunities or “extra help opportunities” as a teacher from an average dropout rate school said is one of the many ways to help students be successful as seen in her comments below:

A vision of a future in which they are successful and can achieve the American Dream - live where I want, how I want, doing the work I enjoy doing and being paid a decent wage for it – is what we all want. We rarely – and only when forced by law or lack of choice – say ‘No more chances. That’s it.’ We give children time to grow, to make mistakes, learn from mistakes, and go forward without

holding it against them constantly. For some, that's not enough – because we don't control all the variables in their lives, but for many, it is enough. We say, 'Come on. Take your consequences, but move on. Let's try again. Let's do it differently, better, correctly this time.' We believe in extra-help opportunities of all kinds (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

Along with that thought of giving extra chances, the principal of this school added, "I think that when we meet with students to draw up credit recovery contracts; the students are motivated not to mess up this last chance" (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07).

Most of the schools recognize academic achievement in the form of giving pizza parties and dining outside of school for those who made the honor roll. "For our Honor Roll students, they have a pizza party every six weeks to encourage them. With our all 'A' students, they are taken out to lunch. All students receive a certificate of high achievement" (School Average 2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). At a school with a high dropout rate, the same rewards are given. "Every six weeks, they will call us down and give us pizza and ice cream. They also have honors day" (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07). In addition to the pizza parties, gift certificates and prizes are awarded at this same high dropout rate school. "If you make the honor roll, they throw pizza parties, they give gift certificates, and they give out prizes" (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

At a school with average dropout rate, the counselor added, "They do pizza parties, for attendance; that's for the A B honor roll. But the A honor roll, they take them to a nice restaurant, Red Lobster, every nine weeks" (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07).



The average dropout rate school did add encouragement from teachers as a main incentive. “Encouragement, well teachers give a lot of that and students appreciate and perform well” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07).

At a school with a low dropout rate, the same rewards are given out to include individual prizes not only from the school, but also from the teachers, for outstanding performances both for academics and attendance in the classroom. “Pizza parties, ice cream socials, certificates, teachers go out their way too, doing small unrecognized things in their individual classrooms for exceptional performances. Money for A’s, bringing in restaurant coupons for those who do well, things like that” (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07). “They give parties for perfect attendance, too” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). Also at this same school, it was added that the entire school participates in a dress for success day.

They give parties for students with good grades, but what I like is that everybody can feel good on Wednesdays; that is “Dress for Success Day whether you are on the honor roll or not, everybody feels and looks outstanding (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07).

In addition at this same low dropout rate school, a teacher added that the extra love that they give makes the difference as seen in her comments below:

Yes, they throw pizza parties and have birthday cakes. Teachers even have a cake of the month for all those born in that month, and doughnuts, and attendance vouchers to participating restaurants to give out. Because they get no support at home, they need someone to give them that warm ‘fuzzy’ love. We, the teachers, help out as much as we can; we give them love and they know we love them

unconditionally and will go the extra, extra mile for them (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

Another teacher added, “Rewards, parties, pizza. Never been absent students are rewarded. They give out trophies and certificates” (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

At yet another school with a low dropout rate, not only does the school reward students in the form of dining out, but also the teachers reward them in the same manner:

For all those students who passed, the principal took them out to eat at the end of the first semester. For those who make the honor roll, juniors and seniors for the semester, they go out to a local restaurant for lunch. Our economics teacher took his honor roll students out to Red Lobster; he told them at the beginning of the semester so everybody was trying to make good grades. I passed, but it was not 90 or above (School Low1, Student A, 10-05-07).

In addition to the recognition that the schools and teachers give, many participants cited teacher’s availability to work with students as a major incentive. The principal of a high dropout rate school added, “Teachers give 150%. What I mean by this is that they give a lot of their time to work with the students” (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07). At this same school, a student reported, “Teachers are so understanding, and they work with you. They do have coupons to ride the public transportation for those students who make the honor roll. Transportation here is on your own here” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). At an average dropout rate school, a student commented on the same idea: “They give a lot of their time and some teachers give extra credit; the school does give a school wide honors program, too” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07).

The principal at a low dropout rate school added that teachers give time, money and give students exposure as incentives:

I think so. Oh they give lots of incentives with their time and money being at the top. I have known teachers to go out and buy gift certificates; they have bought prom dresses, paid dues. They are involved in their lives. I know they take them places. The exposure is what they need. That's the single greatest thing they need. One year we took some kids to Albany. One kid got into trouble. He was trying to get his roommate in trouble. He told him that he needed to get back in here and make up his bed. He went back to do it, but he had never stayed in a hotel. He had never seen anything differently. Another time, I took a kid who was having housing problems to live in my house. He had never had exposure to anything. The kid lived in my house and did not know that Chiles, and other restaurants like that even really existed; he thought that was something only in places like New York or California. He had lived here three years and had never gone outside of his immediate area (School Low2, Administrator, 10-10-07).

One student reported that getting out early is an incentive. "They can get out at the half of their senior year if they have a job and have earned all of their credits" (School Average1, Student B, 10-08-07).

The high dropout rate schools give out tangible rewards such as bus buttons that recognize students who have demonstrated outstanding traits and bus cards to ride the city's public bus. "I have developed what I call the 'I have been caught' buttons to be passed out when you are doing something right to promote self-esteem," said a teacher at a high dropout rate school (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07). At the other high

dropout rate school, a teacher commented, “They give the ‘Breeze Card’ for exceptional attendance and academics, also behavior. They have the ‘O Zapper’ card to replace any low homework grade. They have doughnuts and juice for being on time” (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). At this same school, a student commented, “They give the bus coupons to ride if you do well in class” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). Another teacher explained, “Students are given a ‘Breeze Card’ that allows them to ride the MARTA public system free. It is given weekly to students who have good attendance, maintained superior behavior, and have posted outstanding academic standings” (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

2. In order to know what practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing, the following interview question of four was also asked, “Are there additional programs offered for failing students such as after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school, to name a few? (Interview Question 11 for students and adults)

All of the schools offer tutoring to help students who are failing. This comes in the form of after school, during school, Saturday school and summer school.

At one high dropout rate school before it became an open campus school, all teachers establish office hours so that students can receive additional tutoring.

All teachers set up office hours so that students can come for additional help. Our grades are have A, B., C, or F. We don’t give out D’s. If students are far off the mark, we recommend the GED program. Students know that they can come for tutorial help. It’s posted on their doors, said the principal (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07).

“Teachers have before and after class hours for you to come and talk to them and be tutored” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “Teachers set up hours before or after classes that they are available for students to come and be tutored” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). “Tutoring is provided by all teachers. It is required, before and/or after class” (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). “Teachers provide tutoring before and after classes” (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

All six schools in the study do provide tutoring after school.

They have tutoring after school. Students didn't stay for after school tutorial for the graduation test last year, so now they have breakout classes during the day and offer a late bus to transport students back home. This has been helpful and successful (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

Even at the lowest dropout rate schools, not only after school or after hours tutoring is available, but Saturday School is offered as well. “Yes, students can be tutored after school and on Saturdays” (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07). At the same school, the principal said:

Yes, we offer after school tutoring. We offer Nova Net, an online tutorial service that allows students to retake courses; it's like working in the computer lab and studying things that you are failing. We offer after school tutorial. Some teachers would go beyond. Graduation coach works with them as well; we have a graduation team, teachers and the coach (School Low1, Administrator, 10-05-07).

The same services are provided at the average dropout rate schools as well, to include Saturday school. “After school tutorial, Saturday school, and summer school are offered” (School Average1, Student A 10-08-07). A teacher from the average dropout

rate school added, “A strong tutorial program, at-risk mentoring/group meetings, occasional Saturday school and a not-yet philosophy – as well as Resource teachers who help co-teach in classrooms where there are special needs children” (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07). The principal added, “The after school tutoring program is very successful here” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07). “They have after school tutoring. I am not going to say all teachers do it, but they have at least one teacher from each subject who does it. They have Saturday school” (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07). “Saturday school for seniors, after school tutoring for SAT, an after school program for every major academic area, we bend over backwards to help these kids; they are our kids” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

In addition to Saturday school, evening school is offered in the system of an average dropout rate school.

We also have evening school; they get a regular high school diploma from their regular schools. This evening program targets 9<sup>th</sup> graders; they take classes that they have failed and still attend and graduate from your regular high school. Oh yeah, but if you drop out, you can go full time. If it’s dual enrollment, you can only take one class at a time – the class that you failed the previous semester (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07).

“We have 21<sup>st</sup> century program, tutoring from 2:30 -5:00. We also have a program called Nova Net; they take classes on the computer and they score it. We have Saturday classes also” (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

In addition to Saturday school, most of the schools (to include those from low, average, and high dropout rates) in the study allow students to take courses on line.

“They have Saturday school, tutoring, Nova Net online classes – take them on line for classes that you have failed” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). “Yes, they have Nova Net which is a credit recovery. We do have night school as well as after school tutorial” (School High2, Administrator, 10-10-07). “In addition to tutoring, we have Nova Net; every Tuesday and Wednesday we go to the field house to tutor football players” (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07). “After school tutoring, Nova Net for classes failed, Saturday school” (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07). “Tutorial, Nova Net” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). “Some teachers have tutorial after school and we have Nova Net” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07).

3. In order to know what practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing, the following interview question of four was asked, “ Is the community involved in education and how are they involved? (Interview Question 12 for adults and students)

All schools indicated that the community is involved, but at a very limited level. One form that this involvement comes in is through a partnership with local businesses for on the job employment/experience at one high dropout and one average dropout school. “We have an apprenticeship program where we place students in businesses” (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07). “We have an apprenticeship program” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “Not really, except if you get an apprenticeship job” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). “Business and industry sponsor apprenticeship students as well as they support much of what we do academically and for our extra-curricular activities in a financial way” (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

Businesses do offer coupons and other certificates at all three levels of high school dropout rates (high, average, and low). “Not really, but some restaurants do offer coupons” (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07). “Well, not that much support. We have one company that would give us support, giving us things. They have been supporting us for the last couple of years” (School Low1, Teacher A, 10-05-07). “Yes, they give donations, coupons, and sometimes other things for out extracurricular activities, things they need such as uniforms” (School Average1, Student A, 10-08-07). “Yes. They offer certificates at the pizza places and some businesses try to employ students who are trying to better themselves. Some businesses will not hire you if you cannot prove that you are still in school” (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07). “Not as they should. Some businesses do offer certificates for students” (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

The alumni supports two of the schools, an average and a low dropout rate school in the form of moral and physical support at extra-curricular activities and at other in and out of school functions. “We have numerous amounts of alumni who constantly give back to the school” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). “Yes, a lot , we have a lot of alumni. They participate in everything” (School High2, Student A, 10-09-07).

“My lay community, alumni, or anybody outside of the student body supports us,” said the administrator at a high dropout rate school, and “the community supports them. And the kids feel that the community supports them” (School High2, Administrator, 10-10-07). “Extremely, the alumni support this school. It is amazing; even at graduation they have reunion classes who come to the graduation. It is exceptional” (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).



At another average school, community involvement includes guest speakers coming into the school to speak. “We have multiple opportunities throughout the year with guest speakers who come in to tell students about the world of work, employer expectations, etc.” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07).

Other involvement included support from local fraternities. “I know when my brother was here, the fraternity gave you a scholarship when you are in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade” (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

The local recreation center, says a student from a low dropout rate school, helps also. “The recreation center looks out for the neighborhood kids; they do things for them; take them places and give them an outlet to get together when school is not in session” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07).

Other participants said that there was little or no support from the community. “No, they don’t care about us” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07). “No help from the community” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

4. In order to know what practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing, the following interview question of four was asked, “Are parents actively involved in the students’ academics?” (Interview Question 13 for students and adults)

There were “yes” answers from all schools, some from students but mostly from adults while there were many more “no” answers to this question from all schools mainly from students and a few from adults. In all, there were 10 “yes” answers and 20 “no” answers. Of the “yes” responses from adults, many stated that they come for non-academic reasons, such as athletics or music performances.

Of the “yes” responses, the following comments were noted: “Every 4 ½ weeks we have an open house from 4-6 so that parents can meet with their child’s teacher about their academic success” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07). “I get good involvement. They come pretty much. It’s been pretty good, the nine weeks is not up but they come out. They listen more to the media. They listen more” (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07). “I believe so. Here in order for you to get your report card, your parent must come up here. They come and you have to sit down and talk with the teacher and see how you are doing” (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07). “Parents support athletes and events like talent shows, but academics, you can forget it” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

A teacher at an average dropout rate school said:

We make every effort to communicate with parents and our parents love and are concerned about their children. We see parents as important to the task of educating students. We send home syllabi and progress reports and through our advisement program contact every child’s parent every year. Senior advisement sessions are always held with parents whenever parents are able to attend (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

Of the “no” answers, the following responses were noted: “Most students are on their own” (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07). “Most parents don’t care. These students are on their own” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “Most of us are on our own” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). “Not really. Students are mainly on their own” (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). “Parents are not involved. Students are on their own. Some parents come, but there is a lack of interest” (School High1, Teacher B,

10-03-07). “I would say that the majority of the parents are not. If parents were involved there would be a big difference. Most just don’t care. They live in a single household and don’t have time” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). “Yeah, most parents don’t. If most parents did, the school system and the teachers would be better, because they would tell them what their child is lacking” (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07). “Parents are not as involved like they should be. We have a few parents that support their children to the utmost” (School Average 2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). “No” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07). “I guess not; I talk to students, and not parents. Some students don’t bring their parents back so they don’t come back. It’s the students’ fault” (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07).

Also, the following “no” comments were noted: “No, they don’t care. They don’t put enough value on education because many of them don’t have a high school diploma” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). “Not involved enough; parents don’t push their kids. We are now in a temporary building; they feel that this school where we are now is not our neighborhood school” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07). “Not as they should; parents are the most important ingredient in a child’s success” (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

There were a few responses that supported support, but the participants noted that these are the parents of the children who are doing well.

The ones who have the good ones, the parents support them. But the ones who are failing, they don’t. Right, the ones you don’t see, are the ones you need to see. We are working on trying to give notices out to parents; phone numbers are

disconnected, addresses are not right, but we try to reach out to parents (School Low1, Administrator, 10-05-07).

Added to that theory are the following comments: “Yes, the same parents. At times, my parents support the school, for parental support, but always the same parents” (School Low1, Student A, 10-03-07). “Some parents are involved enough in the students’ life at school while others do not really care what their child do but as long as they get out of their house” (School Average1, Student B, 10-08-07). The principal at a low dropout rate school added:

Not at all, the parents we see are the ones we don’t need to see. Struggling students’ parents are the last parents to come to check on their kids. The households where education is valued will be the parents we see, and those are the students who know the value and are the ones who are doing well in school. (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

At yet another school with a high dropout rate, a teacher commented that parents who do come, come for the wrong reasons not associated with academics:

We have the ones who are here for everything, mainly the ones we don’t need to see, and some of those are here for the wrong reasons. That number is fewer than those who are not here. Athletes, we have a lot of parents. But for the future of their children, they don’t come for academics, but if you make them take out the grille in their mouths, the parents are up here (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

A teacher from a high dropout rate school also had the following remarks to say about parents.

I'll use my football team. In my four years as a teacher, I met about three sets of parents, no four. In football, recently it's gotten better. Recently I have met 20 sets of parents, not for academics, but for sports. Academically, they are doing fine. Most of my kids are the kids who are doing well in school; my senior class had the number two student on my team. I had three of the top ten students in the senior class on my team (School High2, Teacher A, 10-10-07).

### Research Sub Question 3

*What factors exist between the compared schools that relate to culture and school environment?*

This was the third sub question of four in search of the factors that affect the dropout rate. Eight of the 17 interview questions directly focused on this sub question as to why schools of similar demographics have varying dropout rates. And in this study of six schools, the dropout variance (from a mean average of four years) spanned between a low 0.9% to a high 15.17%.

1. In order to determine if dropping out was related to the culture and environment of the schools, the following interview question of eight was discussed: "Tell me about your school" (interview question 1 for adults and students)

The participants' responses were grouped and coded to summarize the six schools involved in this study. The following are the results;

School High 1: Participants stated the school was flexible, good, unique, non-traditional, an open-campus with a relaxed atmosphere. "Well put together; they have a

day care. There are no excuses. School offers flexible schedules. Students are focused; it's a good school." (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). "Non-traditional. We accept those falling behind. Our goal is to help students get a high school diploma. We treat students as they are college students. The vision is the high school diploma. We don't have extra-curricular activities" (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

The principal from this same school made the following comments:

Our school is designed to reduce the dropout rate for the entire system. It is a choice school, after 16, in or out. Here they learn to think like adults. Schedules are flexible; if there is a conflict with schedule due to work or whatever, we make the schedule to fit their needs so the students don't drop out. We have a full day care for 0-4 years old. No hall passes. No school bus, students must provide their own transportation. Can't wear black, red, or white tees – they are gang related colors. We are on a 4X4 block schedule so that students can get 8 credits a year. No sports program, no clubs, no class officers, no prom, none of the traditional things, just the academics and most of the students only want that anyway. We do have a GED program offered here as well. We have roughly 48 teachers and two counselors (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07).

"It is different, more relaxed; everyone is focused on their classes and graduating" (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). One of the teachers from this same school added:

Very unique. We serve a diverse group of kids with all kinds of needs. They are trying to complete high school. We have many ESOL students – children with disabilities. The unique schedule is good – designed to meet the needs of all

students, and they do have issues and needs; that's why they are here. The flexible schedule is ideal! (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07).

School High 2 was described as a prestigious, proud, and organized school. "The alumni play a big part in how this school goes. They do a lot for the student body. Anything we need, they will do for us. That wildcat pride, once it's in you, it will never leave you" (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07). "Our school is a good school. Organized. I think it's designed to, shall we say, more or less put responsibility on kids. We serve a lot of kids that have home problems; we try to do our best. A lot of kids, to get them on a level to compete and be successful" (School High2, Administrator, 10-10-07). Another teacher from this same high school had this to say:

I was in another county before the four years I came here. I often hear about how everyone used to be together, but I think that as you walk down the halls, the majority of us still have it. We are always trying to find something to reach out. It's a good school (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

"This school is a prestigious school that has a lot of history. Teachers here are great. The principal is very strict. You have fun all the time, but they believe in excellence. So, it's pretty decent" (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07).

Average School 1 was viewed by the participants as a small, rural, consolidated school with a high graduation rate. The following comments included:

This is a consolidated high school in a rural Georgia County. It is the only public high school in the country and serves all who walk through the door. This is its 13<sup>th</sup> year of existence. We serve a high poverty, high minority population, but we

are at the forefront of innovative teaching strategies backed by strong beliefs about how children learn best (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

A student added: “My school is very small and only half of the senior class is graduating (School Average1, Students A 10-08-07). “Our school is a great school with a reputation for supporting all students in their learning. We are recognized by the state as having one of the highest graduation rates for students of our demographics” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07). “We are a small, but a good school.” (School Average1, Students B 10-08-07).

The second average dropout rate school was described as energetic, strict, enthusiastic, and where everybody is somebody. “It is a very energetic school, always something going on, good or bad, a very good place to be because we have instructors who really break down the instruction; teachers are really great” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07).

One student had this to say:

That was my situation. I’ve been here since 2004. When I first came I didn’t want to go to this school. Honestly, first impression is everything. When I get here I see a fight in the hallway. I don’t know what was going to happen. When I got here it was a very bad situation. It’s much better since the assistant principal got here, she’s really cracked down. She’s strict. When I first saw her I thought that she was going to change everything, but when I talked to her I saw her goals for this school. I understand that this is going to work. She’s looking out for our good (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07).



The counselor at an average dropout rate school had the following comments to make her school:

Well, this school is a magnificent, black school. The administration is easy to work with, ok. It's, a lot of folks come in with negative views, a learning environment. The first person you would meet as a student would be the principal; when they do come to guidance we try to treat everybody as somebody. We are an academic school. We try to get our school back up to standards (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07).

Other comments included: "It's an inter-city African-American school with the majority of the students being bussed in daily. There are about 1100 students enrolled in the school. The school is conducive to learning" (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). "This is an inner city with strong historical background, large population below grade level and living in poverty" (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07).

At School Low 1, the school is described as small, good, and consolidated. "This is a good school" (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07). "We are a small school, but everybody knows everybody and looks out for everybody" (School Low1, Teacher A, 10-05-07). "We are a consolidated high school serving the entire county, but everybody knows everybody and knows their mother and father, where we taught their grandparents" (School Low1, Teacher B, 10-05-07).

One student also noted characteristics that described the school but noted things that the school could improve in:

It is a good school, but needs to be improved. Food for one. Better, I mean how they keep up the school. Take for instance, I don't want to have to walk through

the halls and smell smoke. It needs to be improved – better food, better teachers. Teachers who don't show favoritism (School Low1, Students B, 10-05-07).

The principal had this to say:

Well, this school is a very small high school. We share the building with the middle school. Population is around 400 students in grades 9-12, about 97% African American and 3 % White. We have six departments to include vocational and Special Ed. Each department consists of 4-5 teachers. Students are pretty good. We do have a low dropout rate. When I first got here it was higher. Teenage pregnancy is high too. For the last two years we have not made AYP. The English proficiency is really high, math is lower. We are working to improve the math proficiency. Last three weeks we've been working at the school board to match objectives with the GPS and activities to increase the proficiency levels. Math teachers are getting ready to be trained (School Low1, Administrator, 10-05-07).

School Low 2 was described as strict, small, unique, but a school with close relationships. "Very strict, the rules, but nice. I've been to four different schools. This is the best, because they care about you" (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07). The principal had this to say:

Small, unique, I think this year, they are performing 'out of the box.' Why, new leadership, new rules, and new expectations. Now students are where they need to be. School is developing a personalization with students, being proactive, not reactive. School is developing a close relationship (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

Other participants had this to say: “More of a haven for students in the community. A safe place. Takes them out of their surroundings. Ties them to real world life” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07). “Clean facility – made students act better” (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

The only negative comment was made by the following student from School Low 2 as it relates to rules of the school: “Feel like we’re in jail. We can’t come in without a collar shirt” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07).

2. In order to determine if dropping out was related to the culture and environment of the school, the following interview question of eight was asked, “How do you feel when you are at school?” (Interview Question 2 students)

Students from all six schools stated that they felt “okay” when they are at school as it relates to the atmosphere and the environment at the school. This was a common theme in all schools showing that the environment and atmosphere of the school was not a variable that affected the dropout rate. The following comments were made:

“Wonderful. The entrance is secured with metal detectors. Police officers are in the parking lots. It’s a safe school” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “Teachers are really cool. You’re able to talk to them; they understand and work with you” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). “I feel okay. The school is so small you know everybody; that’s a plus – being a small school. There is a good communication. Teachers are able to talk to the students and stop them from dropping out” (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07). “Some days when I come to school I feel okay. The teachers are nice and helpful most of the time. Students sometime try to mess up my day, but I get back on track” (School Average1, Student B, 10-08-07). “For the most part, I feel good, the way some

people carry themselves. Some are made to come and those are the ones who interrupt the learning process for others, some who really want to be here” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). “The new assistant principal has changed everything. I am grateful for that. She has had a big impact. Kids are now settled down. I feel safe here at school” (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07).

“I feel like a regular individual. It’s basically school. We don’t have problems here” (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07). “Principal and his staff do a good job. If you get a write up, he will take you in the office and try to work things out and settle things with the teacher” (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

Only one student stated that she hated the school. This was a student from one of the low dropout rate schools. “Even though I hate it here, we are safe. No one can just walk in this school off the streets, and the metal detectors catch any weapon that anybody may have” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07).

From the same school, the other student did make the statement that she felt unsafe. This was the only “not safe” statement made, due to the background history of the school. “Not safe because of the history of the school” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07).

3 In order to determine if dropping out was related to the culture and environment of the school, the following interview question of eight was asked, “How would you describe the culture of school.” (Interview Question 3 for adults)

Again, all participants made positive comments about the perspective schools. These comments included a culture that is safe, strictly business (high dropout rate school), proud and rich in history (high dropout rate school 2), data driven and one that

goes out of its way to know students (average dropout rate school 1), conducive to learning, loving (average dropout rate school 2), loving and warm (low dropout rate school 1), and has a very good learning environment (low dropout rate school 2).

The principal at School High1 said:

Very good. It's strictly business. You are in and out. We have had '0' fights.

We don't have that here. No confrontations. Students know if there are any such problems, they are out of the program. They signed the contract. The only problem that I have will be students who are in danger of missing too many days and I have to run them down. Those are the non-school issues that make students drop out; if they should drop out, it is not because they could not pass here at school or if the teachers did not care. It will be that they missed too many days for being locked up or whatever. Everybody shows respect; students give respect and teachers give respect. Freedom is what the kids like. No one is watching over their shoulders. They come and take their classes and leave. It might be at 8:00 then off to work and back at 1:30 for the other classes. All students sign a contract (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07).

Other participants from School High1 said: "Kids are committed to passing their classes to get a high school diploma. They feel safe and comfortable. There are no major problems" (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). "The freedom to come and go. They don't run behind students here at this school. The rules that they expect you to abide by are really practical" (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

The principal of School High2 stated:

This school has a lot of pride and one of the things in this area, if you look at schools around the area and state, this school is one of the only schools that have survived. This school still exists where other black schools after integration have folded. This school through all those things still exists and that creates that sense of pride that says ‘I graduated from there, my kids graduated from there, and my grandkids will graduate from there.’ I think that’s important. I really do because when you have pride in something you are going to take care of it; you are going to cherish it. I don’t have that connection with my old high school. But people here are still actively involved in the kids, the sports program, some of the other programs. It’s amazing. The pride permeates this area. In our football program, about 45 out of 75, their parents were a part of the athletic program; it’s hard to find that love. That’s where we make issues what’s right and wrong, but the pride is there (School High2, Administrator, 10-10-07).

A teacher from the same school added, “I would say that it’s a school rich in culture and history. It’s a high school, but once they graduate, they are always around. Once a wildcat, always a wildcat” (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

One teacher from average dropout rate school said:

We are student-focused, data-driven, research-based. We don’t accept new trends on face value; we research, evaluate and then adapt to best suit our needs. We are a community and we go out of our way to know our students and make sure each has a caring adult in the building. Our lessons are standards-based. The objective is to use all the time we have available to focus on student learning – and

everyone from the custodians to the office staff to the coaching staff to the faculty knows that (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

Other participants from that school added: “The culture at this school is supportive of students and the students are for the most part are willing to rise to the challenge of the education” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07).

Participants from School Average2 sated: “When I have worked at several different high schools, the atmosphere is a friendly environment. Everybody tries to be of some assistance, you know if the department head tries to assist you. It is a friendly environment” (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07). One teacher stated:

The culture and atmosphere of the school is great. There are about 1100 students, 97% African-Americans and 3% others. There are more young ladies than young men. The atmosphere of the school is conducive to learning. Some students may come to school for the wrong reason and they would not be ready and prepared daily with school tools for a positive learning situation (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07).

Another teacher from the same school said, “There are neighborhood situations that find their way back to our environment. Other than those rare incidents, the culture and atmosphere are like other schools” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07).

Participants from School Low1 said:

This is a very loving and warm school. Teachers go out of their way and the students know it. They really love you; everybody knows everybody and everybody shares in the ownership of success whether it is the custodians or

people in the office. Love permeates the atmosphere (School Low1, Administrator, 10-05-07).

A teacher from the same school added, “This is a very caring school. Everybody loves everybody” (School Low1, Teacher B, 10-05-07).

The following comments came from School Low 2: “Very good learning environment, now” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). “School is much better than what it used to be. Halls are clean. The principal has cleaned up this place. Now there are consequences for behavior. All students signed contracts that spelled out expectations and consequences for behavior (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07). “The culture is good, outstanding, and superior. The students are energetic, ready to learn. Teachers make sacrifices, easy to love being here” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07). “Very clean, now. It has made the students’ behavior much better” (School Low2, Student B 10-04-07).

4. In order to determine if dropping out was related to the culture and environment of the school, the following interview question of eight was asked, “How does your school compare with other schools?” (Interview Question 2 for adults)

Again, all of the participants made positive comments about the perspective schools indicating that they felt the schools ranks among good performing schools.

School High 1 participants said: “It is a unique school, nontraditional but graduates must comply with all state requirements like attendance, Carnegie units, end of course tests, graduation tests, etc.” (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07).

It is non-traditional. All of the things that regular high schools have, we don’t have, such as class officers, extra-curricular activities, clubs, sports, chorus, and



field trips. They are here to concentrate on passing their classes and getting a high school diploma. Nothing else matters (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07).

“It is non-traditional. There is no comparison” (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

A teacher at School High 2 made the following comments:

This is the best school in the county because of the structure of this school; it's because of the discipline, because of the principal who sets the tone. Everybody falls in line, not to say, everybody knows what we're dealing with and there's a way to go about producing good students, putting out a good quality. We have to do more than the average school like tutoring, helping the kids with their social etiquette and how they present themselves. I know kids at other schools; kids walk around any kind of way during the school day; they were in the media center with earrings. Here, no. Sometimes the kids think it's overboard; some of the kids have no structure in their lives. This is the foundation for them. That's what creates that nice family atmosphere, and I think that's important along with that, the kids feel that they have a good support system. The parents want to do better, 'Johnny do your homework,' but they can't really help Johnny because of their level of intelligence (School High2, Teacher A, 10-10-07).

“Overall, it has potential to be right up there with all other schools. Academically we fall short, because of the way students view education” (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

The following were comments from School Average1: “It compares very favorably. We have the data, the recognition, and the students to prove it” (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07). “I think our faculty is one of the strongest for instructional delivery. They are trained and monitored in use of Learning Focused

Strategies, Thinking Maps and the 10 keys of High Schools That Work practices”  
(School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07).

School Average 2 participants said: “I would give this school a 9 from a scale of 0-10 with 10 being the highest” (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07). A teacher said:

I feel that this school is highly compared to all other school except for the magnet schools. Students are provided with an opportunity to learning, if they take advantage of it. We have highly trained teachers to promote the educational arena" (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07).

“Those schools with our same demographics rate the same as we do” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07).

The teacher at School Low1 had this to say:

Honestly, I haven't looked at the percentages. It's basically a good school, but could be better in academics, having higher expectations, student behavior, more proficiency. Those key areas, it's on the teachers as well. Behavior is not quite where it should be, could be better. One thing I want to say during these nine years, this school went through 4 or 5 principals. Our principal is in his first year. We had a woman principal before, two years. I'm not for sure what it was; she now works for the middle school. It maybe that it was not a good fit. I think she was strong enough, not the strongest. Well, it wasn't the best; students did not respond to her, but it wasn't the best. We pretty much did respond to her; most of the principals who worked here, the faculty embraced them (School Low1, Teacher A, 10-05-07).

The following comments came from participants from School Low2:

“Academically, I would rank the school as a 10 on a scale of 0-10 with 10 being the highest” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07). “Similar” (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

5. In order to determine if dropping out was related to the culture and environment of the school, the following interview question of eight was asked, “What do you think about the way things are run and how you are treated?” (Interview Question 3 for students)

All of the student participants felt that the way they and other students are treated is fair, indicating no difference that relates to treatment being a contrasting variable. Only one student from a low dropout rate school stated that students are not treated fairly.

“I’m treated with respect. That makes me feel good. Even though I have it rough at home, here at school I’m treated like somebody with respect” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “Things are fine. It’s flexible and it works with my schedule” (School High1, Student B). “I’m treated fairly well by some people. Some days are fine; the other days they want to snap on you – both teachers and office people – but that’s life; everybody has moods. But for the most part, the treatment is good” (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07). “I am treated fairly at this school. There is no racism or prejudice that I know of. When students have a problem, the counselor is always there to help. Students still break the school codes” (School Average1, Student B, 10-08-07). “Rules and regulations are pretty just; they give you opportunities to do what you need to do. The dress code is good” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). “At the beginning I didn’t think it {the rules} was fair, but in the long run it is benefiting us. So now it is fair”

(School Average<sup>2</sup>, Student B, 10-09-07). “Rules are strict, but I’m treated fairly”

(School Low<sup>2</sup>, Student B, 10-04-07). “Yes, I’m treated fairly” (School High<sup>2</sup>, Student A, 10-10-07). “The environment, well, teachers care for you a lot. I feel real safe. Our principal does a good job with discipline. True, we are predominantly black. Since last year we don’t have any major problems” (School High<sup>2</sup>, Student B, 10-10-07).

Only one student spoke negatively and implied that students are not treated fairly. This participant came from a low dropout rate school. “I don’t think we are treated fairly; we are treated like prisoners. They won’t give us a chance; everybody is not bad” (School Low<sup>2</sup>, Student A, 10-04-07).

6. In order to determine if dropping out was related to the culture and environment of the school, the following interview question of eight was asked, “Other than sports, what are your school’s strengths?” (Interview Question 4 for students)

Only School High<sup>2</sup> and Low School<sup>1</sup> cited educational factors that are the strengths at their schools. While these are strengths at both a high and low dropout rate school, the strength cannot be considered a factor in this study on reducing dropout rates since they are already successful in keeping students in and graduating.. Also a common theme was the mentioning of the School Government Association as a strength at an Average and Low Dropout Rate School.

Comments included from School High<sup>1</sup>: “The respect that you get” (School High<sup>1</sup>, Student A, 10-03-07). “Having one goal, to get that diploma, no class officer, sports, club, no superlatives or popular clicks” (School High<sup>1</sup>, Student B, 10-03-07).

From School High 2, the following comments were offered. “We have a good after school program. We have Saturday school if you are not good in an area. We also

have students who tutor other students, mostly juniors and seniors” (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07). “This the best school in the state of Georgia. If anyone came here, they would love it. It’s the wildcat pride, and once you’re a wildcat, you’re always a wildcat” (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

From Average School 1, both students replied that there were no strengths. “Nothing, no strengths” (School Average1, Students A & B, 10-08-07).

The School Government Association was named as the strength at School Average 2. “The main strength is our SGA, because we run the school. I am the president. We take on school issues; go to the school board to improve our school. My third year as president. I was president my freshman, sophomore, and senior years. My junior year I was not present at school” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). The other student named the students as the strength. “The students because without the students it wouldn’t be a school or basketball” (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07).

From School Low 1, comments included: “We have a great chorus. Great band, but Skills USA is doing pretty good. We used to have FFA and FBLA, but not anymore. Academics are pretty good. Teachers and classes are our strengths” (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07).

From School Low2, the School Government Association was named as the strength. “The SGA is the greatest thing, because I am an officer. We are trying to get the students’ voices heard. If they behave, they can have more. Students don’t want to act right” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07). The other student stated, “Nothing” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07).

7. In order to determine if dropping out was related to the culture and environment of the school, the following interview question of eight was asked, “Other than sports, what may be your school’s weakness?” (Interview Question 5 for students)

The only common theme surfaced from this question was a need to improve test scores from School High2 and Average School2. “The main weakness is to get at least 75% of the students to pass the EOCT {End Of Course Test}. Some are not passing all parts of the test” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). “We really need to improve our test scores, up. They need to go up” (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07).

All other comments varied. “I wish we still had a prom. I didn’t get to go to one in my regular high school. I just wish that we had one dress up affair that we could go to” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “The police officers, how they talk to students. We are located in a rough neighborhood. They don’t give us the respect they we need” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). “Teachers are alright. Everything else is good, no real weakness” (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07). “Not enough discipline. Even though students get kicked out of school or other punishments, they still make the same mistakes other students have done before in the past” (School Average1, Student A, 10-08-07). “The athletes. They get away with a lot. If you are slipping, the coaches, they are going to make sure that you pass. In a way I understand it, but it is not fair” (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07). “Lack of trust is automatically not up to par” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). “Student behavior needs to be improved; they need work detail for bad behavior. They need to accept the punishment or go home or to an alternative school” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07). “I would say the lunch needs to

be improved. I think it's the variety; it's good, but a variety" (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

8. In order to determine if dropping out was related to the culture and environment of the school, the following interview question of three was asked, "If you could change anything, what would it be?" (Interview Question 17 for students)

There were no common themes stated in the participants' responses except two students from different schools would not change anything. "It's straight as it is" (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). The other comment of changing nothing came from students from School Low2:

Complaints, but I like this school. I am proud of this school. I want things better, but I wouldn't change anything. I wouldn't change anything. I would be here if given the chance to change schools. We might say at times I hate this school, but really we don't. Half of them will be crying at graduation. The community says that things have changed a lot since they were in school (School Low1, Student A, 10-05-07).

"Nothing" (School Low2, Student B, 10-05-07).

All other comments varied from improving test scores (School High2) to the attitude of the principal (School Low2).

"Students abuse the fact that they do have the freedom to leave without signing in or out. Some abuse a good thing. I wish that students would stop abusing the freedoms that we do have" (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). "More discipline, encouraging teachers, and a higher graduation status" (School Average1, Student B, 10-08-07).

“I would change the school spirit. This is a renovated school, and it should look way better than what it looks. The gym is nice” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07).

I would change the teachers. They should crack down on how they hire teachers, be more specific with the criteria as to what they are looking for. Some come for the paycheck, other teachers come to teach and help the students (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07).

“I never really thought about that. I would have a class that you are made to take that will help students improve test scores. I would have a class, a testing class to improve test scores” (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07). “The attitude of the principal” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). “I’ll change the rule that we have to tuck in our shirts” (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

#### Research Sub Question 4

*Is the leadership behavior of the administration in some schools making the difference in who completes or drops out of school?*

This was the fourth sub question of four in search of the factors that affect the dropout rate. Six of the 17 interview questions directly focused on this sub question as to why schools of similar demographics have varying dropout rates. And in this study of six schools, the dropout variance (from a mean average of four years) spanned between a low 0.9% to a high 15.17%. Six questions were asked.

1. In order to determine if dropping out was related to leadership behavior of the administration makes a difference in who completes or drops out of school, the following interview question of six was asked, “Describe the administration. Do you think that students support the administrators?” (Interview Question 14 for students and adults)



All of the participants stated that most students do support the administration. Only one participant from School Low2 said that she and other students “hate the principal and his rules.” She said, “Students hate the principal. They don’t like his rules”(School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07).

Other comments included the following:

School High1: “They respect the principal because she respects them. She tries to help them and they know that they are already at the bottom. It’s this help or no help at all” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “Excellent!” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). “We are open from 8 to 8. I have a morning AP and an afternoon AP. I work some of both shifts. Everyone knows that I’m the quarterback and they are the players. Because we have that knowledge, everything runs smoothly” (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07). “Principal is good and fair. Students appreciate them” (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). “The principal is a structured disciplinarian. She is clear on her expectations and does what she says that she is going to do. She cares and tries to make all students feel appreciated” (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

School High2: “Assistant principals. One is laid back; one is strict like the principal. They both are good; they are fun to be around, though” (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07).

I appreciate the administrators. Since I have been here, they have taken me under their wings. They tell me to keep m head up when my mother was gong through some problems. To this very day, they ask me if I need something or if they can do anything for me (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

The principal of high school<sup>2</sup> had this to say about students' safety and they act when they are at school:

I think the kids feel, here is the deal. They are safe and they understand that they need to be safe. Sometimes they don't understand what's best for them until it's too late. Then they realize that they could not come in here and act a fool. If you came in and cursed and acted silly, they would be out of this school. You are not going to be loitering, freelancing; it is structured. And I can say that it is the best thing for these kids. If you want to go to a school where you are allowed different types of freedoms, it is going to be hard to function. This is the best place for these kids (School High<sup>2</sup>, Administrator, 10-10-07).

A teacher made this comment:

The principal has a no nonsense style. But you know it. Anything he says when the superintendent is not here, he will say it when he is here. The principal is the principal. But, most of the students have had him because the principal was their principal in the elementary and middle schools. That helps, there is a personal relationship. They know him and he has always been the same (School High<sup>2</sup>, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

School Average<sup>1</sup>: "Yes, the students love the administrations and support them all the way" (School Average<sup>1</sup>, Student B, 10-08-07). "Students support the principal and teachers" (School Average<sup>1</sup>, Student A, 10-08-07).

Model educators. The administrators are directly involved in instruction; they are themselves highly honored and recognized former teachers. The other is a widely respected former coach. The students know their administrators and trust them to

do what is in their best interests. Our administrators are not stuck in the past or committed to the status quo. They work long and they work hard because they are committed to our mission and the vision of this school as the economic furnace of the county (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

“I think the students are very proud to have our principal to be their principal” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07).

School Average2: “Yes, if students feel that they care, they care for them (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07). Another student commented:

Right now, it’s very positive. One thing, we have had a lot of change with our new assistant principal – second year. A lot of changes, she keeps students out of the halls. She’s very tough. They haven’t adapted to her. She keeps drama out of the halls. Classes are able to take place, no distractions in the halls. Her presence has made a great difference. If you get a certain amount of tardies, you go home. She started that. That keeps students in classes. If they are late to class and you have five minutes, they are going to the house. Students support the administration (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07).

“I would give the administration a 9 on a scale of 0-10” (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07). “The administrators are great. I feel they do have the support of the student body” (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). “Do the best they can with the tools given to them. Students are supportive” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07).

School Low 1: “Other principals were good, but the current one is more understandable. He is the best one because he will listen to the students. Teachers support the principal” (School Low1, Student A, 10-05-07). “It’s not the best; they are

not responding to him, making the adjustments. He has not worked in this system before, whereas the others, except one, did” (School Low1, Teacher B, 10-05-07).

School Low2: “He’s strict, but I like it. Most of my friends do not like him” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07). “Most of them complain about the new rules. But they do what is asked of them” (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

Most of the teachers love and embrace the firmness of the principal. They are glad that he is here. The students for the most part do not like him or his strictness. They can’t see down the road, the big picture of how these expectations will help them in the long run (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

Another teacher added:

The principal is a very strong leader, but he lacks effective communication with his staff. He is more of a dictator and dictators soon fall flat on their faces. He’s coming around, but he needs to communicate and allow the staff to share in its ownership – ideas and implementation of things, not be told what to do about everything (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

2. In order to determine if dropping out was related to leadership behavior of the administration makes a difference in who completes or drops out of school, the following interview question of six was asked, “How well do they ‘believe in’ and ‘appreciate’ their administrators?” (Interview Question 15 for students and adults)

Again, as the previous question related to the support of the administration by the students, the student from School Low2 who said that the students did not support the administration also said in this question that the students do not believe in them. “They, all my friends, say that things are too strict - banding the collarless shirt is the worst,

though” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). While the other student did say that many students do not like him, other respondents agreed that the students do not support him but on the other hand, appreciate what he’s doing in getting them postsecondary ready. “They don’t like him, but I appreciate that he wants us to be all that we can be. He’s getting us ready for the real world” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07).

They hate the rules. They are used to running things. But they are coming around. Many know that this is for their good. Life is about following rules. The sooner they realize it, the better effect it will have or be in their lives” (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

“They really don’t like the change, but they are abiding by the rules” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07). One teacher explained why the students hate the administration and the rules:

Before, students ran the school. They did what they wanted and were rarely disciplined for their actions. Most of their freedoms have been taken away. The principal has said that they have to earn the privileges such as Senior Night and pep rallies. They have only had one, the first one. It was awful. He told them until they prove that they can conduct themselves, they will never have another one (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

Also, comments from a high dropout rate school also supports that students do not believe in and support the administration. “They don’t like them. They don’t like the rules, too strict” (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07).

All other comments were favorable in saying that students do believe in their administrators.

From School High1, the following “They appreciate the opportunity to be able to come to this school where the school works with their schedules and their issues” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “We all appreciate them because they have not given up on us. They are here for us and we know that and thank them for it” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07).

They know we care, they know I care. I talk with every student. I have a conference with each. Every month we do a survey of their needs, wishes, and where they are in the program; they discuss problems and potential concerns. We do a follow up (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07).

“They support and love them” (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). “I would say that 90% of the students support her. They think that we care; they are not afraid to ask questions. I would say that they really do believe in them” (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

From School High 2, the following comments were made. “Every teacher on this staff at this school when we are playing football, they will come to the field house and see if I need any help or tutoring” (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07). “The achieving students appreciate him. Students who are not on the top, the ones he has to put out every week, they don’t care for him” (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07). The principal had the following comments to make:

Now we look back at our parents and we appreciate our parents. I tell the kids you are not going to wear anything, walking up and down the streets looking any kind of way. At the time I didn’t understand my parents’ rules, and now I look at

some of those guys who did what they wanted to do and I am glad momma made me come home (School High2, Administrator, 10-10-07).

From School Average1, the following responses were given. “They believe in and appreciate their administrators. Our principal is the best” (School Average1, Student B, 10-08-07). The following teacher had this to say:

I don’t think there are any admins out there who are more admired and appreciated than ours. Our students seek her out for problems of personal, social, legal, and academic nature. Her home is even open to students who need her. Her door is never closed to them; her heart is never closed to them even though she expects great things from each one. They will be telling their own children one day about the difference their admins made in their lives (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

From School Average 2, the following comments were made. “I would give the administration a 10 because they do everything in their power to help us succeed” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). “Most of the teachers, now the material they cover, they find new ways to teach it. Some just stand up and talk, and personally I am not going to pay attention, but if it is eye catching, I am going to pay attention” (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07). “I think they have seen all of the administrators working hard to help them be successful and the students realize they are very approachable” (School Average1, Administrator).

I think the kids, they really do; they really think the administration cares about them. When they come in you can see how they respond to him. The assistant

principal knows everybody. The assistant principal is not doing bad herself. She is on top of her game (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07).

“Most students do believe that there are rules to be followed and they support the administrative staff” (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). “Greatly!” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07).

From School Low1, the following comments were made. “He will listen and try to reason with you” (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07) “They like them okay” (School Low1, Student A, 10-05-07). “They like them alright” (School Low1, Student B, 10-09-07). “I feel they believe and support them” (School Low1, Administrator, Teacher A, 10-05-07). “They support them” (School Low1, Teacher B, 10-05-07).

3. In order to determine if dropping out was related to leadership behavior of the administration makes a difference in who completes or drops out of school, the following interview question of six was asked, “Describe the teachers as far as commitment, dedication, teaching styles, level of knowledge, and how they get along with students. (Interview Question 16 for students and adults)

All of the respondents cited that their teachers at each school are committed; thusly this gives little theory as to if the level of dedication affected who stays in school and graduate. Responses included the following.

School High1. “They are committed. They really care about us” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). They are very helpful and committed” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07).

Teachers are highly qualified and want to be here. We have two sets of teachers, a morning shift of teachers and an evening shift of teachers. They give what I



call 'excellent customer service.' They are here to answer the students' every concern" (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07).

"They are committed; that's why they are here" (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07).

"They are committed. They are here because they want to be here" (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

School High2. "They support them" (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07). "They would say about the same thing. They treat you well. They do just about anything for you" (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07). The principal at this school had the following comments to make:

I think our teachers and our staff understand the task at hand. I understand the philosophy. I think everybody in this building knows that most of our kids are going to be slightly behind and we have to do what it takes to catch them up. Teachers volunteer to come over every afternoon and we tutor. Math on Mondays, science on Tuesdays, work with freshman trying to get them ready for high school. I think that our teachers ban together to get things done. Every idea is a great idea and it's one of those things that if it's a square pig and a round hole, we're not going to try to force it. We are going to find the round peg for the round hole. They need someone fighting for them at all times (School High2, Administrator, Teacher A, 10-10-07).

Another teacher added, "The majority of our staff is committed. We can leave at 3:20, but at that time, the parking lot is still full. They are still here" (School High2, Teacher B, 10-09-07).

School Average 1. “Some teachers do not get along well with some students because of their behavior. We have many teachers that quit after the first year teaching” (School Average1, Student B, 10-08-07). One teacher had this to say:

This environment has become so laser-focused on student achievement that those who are not committed, dedicated and extremely knowledgeable in their fields are generally long gone. I put this faculty up against ANY on those issues. Almost every teacher wears more than one hat, puts in long hours, creates, investigates, evaluates and goes the extra mile or more. Teaching styles differ but not teaching strategies! And that’s good. Different kinds of children respond to different kinds of teachers, but we believe in the proven teaching strategies here and ALL use them – or get assistance learning how to use them (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

The principal of an average dropout rate school said, “The teachers here are cognizant that teaching style and student-teacher relationships are most important to student success. Most are very dedicated to doing whatever it takes for their students to succeed” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-09-07).

School Average 2. “They have to adapt to the assistant principal, but they appreciate her” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). “Yes, they support them. Some administrators support them well. Some of them can show them that they care, but they are hard core” (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07). “I think that the teachers get a 9 on a scale of 0-10 because they really stay late” (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07). “Individual teachers are positive but we have some teachers who have low morale and feel they are not being supported by the administrators especially when it

comes to discipline problems” (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). “Some teachers are very committed, dedicated and use various teaching styles and are very knowledgeable. Then there those who are quite the opposite, but they are very small in number” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07).

School Low1. “This one time, I didn’t turn in my paper. I could have flunked the class but the teacher gave me several chances to make it up; they are better than good” (School Low1, Student A, 10-05-07). “This year all of my teachers are fair” (School Low1, Student B, 10-09-07). “Students support the teachers; some are disrespectful. For the most part they do. Teachers are committed to students; there are some who after school and do things. For the most part they are very dedicated” (School Low1, Teacher B, 10-05-07).

School Low 2. “Teachers are committed; they really do care and try to help you as much as they can. They look out for you and you can tell that they really care” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07). “They are really committed” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07). “Very committed, especially the 10% - old faculty. They go way out of their way to reach students, to help them, to give them what they need both academically and socially. Many of them need love and that’s what we give them” (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07). “Yes, dedicated. Difficult when you find students not focused; efforts are useless; it takes a lot to maintain vision” (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07). “Teachers are very committed and they go the extra miles” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

4. In order to determine if dropping out was related to leadership behavior of the administration makes a difference in who completes or drops out of school, the following

interview question of six was asked, “Describe your counseling services. What role does the counselor play with students?” (Interview Question 17 for students and adults)

“They are there for us. They talk to us all the time” (School High1, Student A, 10-39-07). All of the schools commented that the counseling services were good, with the exception of a student from School Low2 who said, “No, they look out for seniors only” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07), while the other student spoke very contrastingly to this statement: “Counselors are great!” (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07). A teacher from that school cited a need for improvement. “They could be better, really reach out to the students, but some students don’t want to be reached. They, the students, don’t show any initiative” (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

One comment shared cited that not only are the counselors advising students, but everyone in the school serves in an advisor role:

Counseling services have changed over the past few years with new emphasis on professionals in the building being responsible for a small group of students and their needs. The guidance office spearheads all this, directly our small group advisement sessions, and still provides the level of expertise and the resources necessary to do this effectively. And of course when their special training is needed, in matters of personal crises and issues and sensitive matters, they step up to the plate and do what is necessary to meet the child’s specific needs (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

With that same idea that everyone serves as a counselor, the following comment was made: “Most of the teachers are counselors, too. This is a career, not just a job....it takes the whole village, this school, to raise the child” (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-

07). “We have distributed counseling; we are all counselors and share in knowing what our students need and should be taking; that makes the difference when students know that we are a family and we all care about their well-being” (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

At a high dropout rate school the amount of scheduled advisor/advisee sessions has increased. “We have added another counselor. They are beginning to offer advisee sessions, once a month for all students to make sure that they are meeting the students’ needs and that they are covering all the bases” (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07). Other roles of the counselors include those of dealing with personal issues in addition to the regular job description of a counselor. “The counselors work with students refining their schedules and dealing with personal issues. The teachers assist every student with making sure students are on track for graduation” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07). “The counselor plays an important role with the students. Sometimes students need someone to talk to about private issues. Whenever a student needs someone to talk to, the counselor is there. They also help you with graduation, SAT, etc.” (School Average1, Student B, 10-08-07). “They are there for us. They talk to us all the time, about anything we are going through” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “Counselors are always talking and checking up on us about school and out of school problems or concerns” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07).

As far as rating the counseling services, those that rated the services rated them from 7 to 10 on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest. “I would give our counseling services an ‘8’ on a scale from 1-10. They have improved” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07). “Now, I would rate them ‘7 ½.’ Overall they could be better.

Administration I would give them a '9.' Teachers I would give them overall an '8'" (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07). The principal at a high dropout rate school said:

On a scale from 1 to 10, individually or as a group, I would give them a '10.' Our counselor is more straightforward, and she is going to make sure that these kids are put in the right classes. She will say, 'I understand what you want to do, but this is what you need to do.' She cares about these kids, their academic future. I think she's doing an outstanding job (School High2, Administrator, Teacher A, 10-10-07).

Many of the counselors and the counseling services were described as good.

Most of the counselors or counseling services were described as good. "The counselor is doing real good, making sure we know what we need to know" (School Low1, Student A, 10-05-07). "Our counselor is real good. I have had her all four times. She tells us about meetings. She keeps us updated" (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07). "They are good. Respect, must have it, must give it" (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07). "They are good. They really work well with the student." (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). "Very good. Many students want to see the counselor and graduation coach. Very good support" (School Low1, Administrator, Teacher B, 10-05-07). "She goes beyond her job" (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07).

"We have two counselors. They do a good job. They put me in the right classes. They tell me about scholarships and steer me in the right direction" (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

Other comments varied. “Change anything, take away the counseling form the counselors” (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07). “Most counselors do not do have much one on one counseling. Over the past years, the counselors’ roles have changed. They are involved more with testing. However, they do have the open door policy concept” (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). “Counselors seem to be overwhelmed. I’m not sure what they don’t do only a daily basis” (School Average2, Teacher B, 10-09-07). “I think sometimes communication is lacking. I don’t think, I know you can’t reach out to every child, but some children are not reached out to” (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

“The students say they do not like some of the teachers, and people are viewed as crybabies if they run to the counselor about their problems with other students” (School Average1, Students A & B, 10-08-07).

5. In order to determine if dropping out was related to leadership behavior of the administration makes a difference in who completes or drops out of school, the following interview question of six was asked, “How long has the principal been principal and are there many new teachers? (Interview Question 5 for adults)

According to the adult participants, all of the schools have had the same administration for at least three to five years, if not more. Only School Low1 and School Low2 have had a change of administration over the past four years. School Low1 has seen three principals in five years, and School Low2 has seen two in five years. The teaching staffs at both schools have shifted from year to year as well. “He’s been here one year. We do have a rather large turnover due to the location of the school and problems with some teachers’ certification” (School Low1, Teacher A, 10-05-07). “I’m

new to the system, but many of our teachers are new as well” (School Low1, Administrator, 10-05-07).

At School Low2, the change in administration was due to the former principal being labeled as a tyrant and as someone who did not support the teaching staff. One teacher made the following comments:

Previous principal wanted to clean house. She felt that the older teachers were not ‘up to par’ with new innovative teaching styles and strategies. She did not support them in conflicts with the students. She said in an open forum that if you were over 45, look for another job. When she observed them, she gave them unsatisfactory evaluations. Many of the older teachers got tired. They fought and wanted to stay, but eventually transferred out. There is only about 10% of the staff that stayed. The remainder of the faculty, 90%, is new. Because she was a tyrant, the board fired her over the summer. Now there has been a lot of change. Respect. Kids now have a dress code. Before we had fires 3-4 days out of the week. Level and demand for respect has changed the way students act. Not one fire this year, yet, due to the new attitude and firm structure of the present administration – new principal and new assistant principals (School Low2, Teacher B, 10-04-07).

Other comments about the new administration included the following: “New principal and new administrative team. 90% of the teachers are new” (School Low2, Administrator, 10-04-07).

This is his first year. This year there was a new crop of teachers...about 90% new. Others left because they were hounded by former principal. They did not



know the former principal was not going to come back. The board fired her (School Low2, Teacher A, 10-04-07).

At the other schools, the leadership has not changed. At School High1, the principal has been the only administrator since the school became an open campus school three years ago. And the staff has not seen any major changes. At School High2, the principal has been the same person for over six years. At School Average1, the principal has been the only principal there for the last 12 years, since the inception of this consolidated high school. At School Average2 the principal has been the same person for over six years and the staff has seen very little turnovers. The staffs at these schools have seen very little turnover as well.

From School High1, the principal had this to say:

Teachers usually stay. I don't have a major turnover. Teachers like it here; they have a love for helping students. They are here because they requested to come here. Class size is 1 teacher to 15 students – max. ONLY ONE QUEEN UP IN HERE, ME! If police officers don't show respect, they are out of there (School High1, Administrator, 10-03-07).

Other comments from this school include: “She has been the only principal. As I said, she designed this school. This is her baby” (School High1, Teacher A, 10-03-07). “Most of the teachers are here because they want to be here. They stay to help students” (School High1, Teacher B, 10-03-07).

From School High2, the leadership has not changed much and that has been attributed to their love for working with students.

The current principal and AP's have been here for over five years. Not much of a teacher turnover every year. The teachers love being here and working with these students; it kinds of make them feel that their job is meaningful (School High2, Administrator, Teacher A, 10-10-07).

“The administration has been here for a long time” (School High2, Teacher B, 10-10-07).

From School Average1, a teacher has also attributed the low turnover due to the commitment and care of the staff.

The principal was hand-selected by the BOE to head this new high school 13 years ago. She is still here and we hope she stays for a long time. Some years there are lots of new teachers; some years just a few. It can be difficult attracting new and young teachers to this rural community if they weren't raised here but we have an outstanding staff that we wouldn't trade for any other in the state or beyond. This is a committed, caring group – with one or two exceptions (School Average1, Teacher A, 10-08-07).

The assistant principal added, “Our principal has been here since 1995 and there are about 5 new teachers (out of 68) each year” (School Average1, Administrator, 10-08-07).

At School Average2, the following comments were made: “The principal has been here a number of years. One of the assistants only a few years” (School Average2, Counselor, 10-09-07). “Our present principal has been at this school since 2002. For the past two years, we have had quite a few changes, a few new teachers” (School Average2, Teacher A, 10-09-07). “Principal has been here for approximately 6 years, and most of the teachers have been here for about 15 years” (School Average2, Teacher B).

6. In order to determine if dropping out was related to leadership behavior of the administration makes a difference in who completes or drops out of school, the following interview question of six was asked, “What do students say or how do they feel about the administration of the school? (Interview Question 6 for students)

All of the student participants said that most of the students like the administration and the rules expected of them to follow, except students from School Low2. They hate the administration and the rules of the school. “No, don’t appreciate or believe in him; he’s too strict” (School Low2, Student A, 10-04-07).

While the other student from this school agreed that most of the students do not like the teachers and the administration, she did say:

Students need to be glad that someone cares about them. They make comments like, ‘She gets on my nerve. She’s always picking on me.’ But I feel that teachers aggravate you or stay on you because they want you to do right and make good grades. They need to be glad that someone cares about them. My education is interrupted when teachers have to deal with bad behavior students (School Low2, Student B, 10-04-07).

All other students felt that the administration was good and that the administrators were fair and cared about them. “The respect that you get, it’s straight” (School High1, Student A, 10-03-07). “Things are fine. They really care about us” (School High1, Student B, 10-03-07). “They like them. They are real fair” (School Low1, Student B, 10-05-07). “I would say that teachers and students get along very well. The majority of the teachers go out of their way to help students” (School Average2, Student A, 10-09-07).

The majority of them, we get along with. I understand that you can't push or make a student do his work, but you have to motivate them. Yes, some may not be doing everything that they could do as teachers, but the majority is doing their job (School Average2, Student B, 10-09-07).

“Definitely, they are dedicated. I like the way my teachers teach. They have a syllabus; they give us handouts; they break it down. My teachers are good. The ‘not so good’ teachers, they’ll tell you only one time,” said one student (School High2, Student A, 10-10-07). “We have the best principal” (School High2, Student B, 10-10-07).

Table 4.2 *Analysis of Schools’ Manuals, Policies and Researcher’s Observations*

Items in Question	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
1. School’s Appearance	Very clean	Very clean	Very clean	Clean	Very clean	Very clean
2. Traffic in halls	None	Very little	Average	Average	Average	None
3. Traffic in office	None	Average	Average	Average	Average	None
4. Atmosphere of school	Quiet; focused	Quiet; focused	Quiet; relaxed	Quiet; relaxed	Quiet; relaxed	Quiet; focused
5. Disciplinary Plan of Action in Place	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. Periods in the day	8	Traditional	Block 4X4	Traditional	Traditional	Traditional
7. Programs of Instruction	Re-searched based	Re-searched based	Re-searched based	Re-searched based	Re-searched based	Re-searched based
8. Number of Assistant Principals	2	2	3	2	2	3
9. Ratio of students to teachers	11 to 1	12 to 1	16 to 1	14 to 1	15 to 1	16 to 1

Table 4.2 (continued)

Items in Question	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
10. Tolerance of unacceptable behavior	"0" tolerance	"0" tolerance	Each case is on its own	"0" tolerance	Each case is on its own	Each case is on its own
11. Marching Band	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
12. Have both football and basketball programs	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
13. Number of Counselors	2	2	2	2	2	2
14. After school programs in place	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
15. Breakfast programs in place	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
16. School Grounds	Clean	Clean	Clean	Clean	Clean	Clean
17. Paddling permission for students per parents' consent	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
18. Number of teachers	48%	52%	63%	77%	55%	78%
19. Bachelor's degree	25%	47%	42%	41%	47%	48%
20. Master's degree	32%	30%	48%	40%	39%	39%
21. Specialist degree	39%	17%	5%	11%	10%	10%
22. Doctorate degree	4%	2%	2%	4%	2%	1%
23. School rankings out of 332	332	313	309	324	248	285
24. Average years of teaching	16	12	14	17	13	11

Table 4.2 (continued)

25. New teachers average from 2003-2006	8%	1%	3%	2%	12%	22%
26. absent more than 15 days or more – average from 03-06	38%	33%	20%	32%	11%	9%
27. Made AYP in 05-06 year	No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 4.3 Responses to Interview Questions for Teachers and Administrators

Interview Questions for Adults	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
1. Tell me about your school.	Choice School; unique	Organized good, rich in culture	Consolidated; one of best in state	Inner-city school; Strong history	Consolidated	A haven; small and unique
2. How do you think your school compares with other high schools?	Unique; non-traditional	Best in the system, but fall short in academics	Favorably	Compares well	Good; has weaknesses	Clean and much better; A "10" on a scale from 0-10
3. Describe the culture and atmosphere of your school.	Kids are committed good	Lots of pride	Go out of the way to know students	Conducive to Learning; friendly	Okay	Good learning environment
4. Have there been any major organizational changes in the past five years?	None	None	None	No; Different assistant Principals	New principal; In leadership and grade chairs	New principal; new administrative team
5. How long has the principal been here, and how many new teachers each year?	Since school has been open campus (five years); Few new teachers	8 years; few	12 years; few	6 years; few	1 year; 50% new teachers	1 year; 90% new years

Table 4.3 (continued)

Interview Questions for Adults	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
6. What do you think about the students who attend this school?	Potential dropouts with one purpose	Project kids; half will do other half will not	Wonderful but impacted by poverty	Positive attitude; disadvantaged	Many are challenging	Respectful; needs lots of nurturing
7. Why do you think that some students fail or repeat classes?	Poor attendance ; got behind	Can't read; too far behind; completing cycle of family who did not	Outside pressures; absences	Not applying; Don't study	Do not study	Poor reading Skills; No concern for education
8. Why do you think some students eventually drop out of school?	Failed too many classes	Too far behind	Lack of hope; Too far behind	No skills; No one to motivate them; retained	No interest; Not Motivated	Already behind; peer pressure; issues at home
9. Why do you think that some students at risk remain in school?	Determined; had a goal	Having hope; realized value of education	Goal; Caring teachers; Encouragement from outside sources	Set goal; Wanting a way out; Someone Motivated them	Motivation and care from outside	A force from within; vision; encouragement
10. What incentives does the staff give to encourage attendance and/or excellence?	"Breeze Card" to ride buses, the school does not transport students; doughnuts and juice	Take them places; teachers give time; buttons	Encouragement; credit recovery	Pizza parties, certificates	Honor rolls; Parties	Pizza; honor rolls; certificates



Table 4.3 (continued)

Interview Questions for Adults	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
11. Are there additional programs offered for failing students such as after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school, to name a few?	No outside tutoring; teachers have office hours	Yes; all mentioned	All	All	All	All
12. Is the community involved in education and how?	Yes, apprenticeship programs	Yes, alumni	Yes; apprenticeships, guest Speakers	Very little; alumni	Not much	Not as could be; Businesses offer coupons
13. Are parents actively involved in the students' academics?	No	Some; the ones who show for everything	Yes; parents pick up report cards	Not as they should	Only the good students' parents	Parents that come are the ones who don't need to come
14. Describe the administration. Do students support them?	Yes	Very strict; no nonsense	Yes; they work with the staff	Great	Yes	Very strong; see him as a dictator

Table 4.3 (continued)

Interview Questions for Adults	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
15. How well do the students believe in" and "appreciate" their administrators?	They know they care	Non-achieving; don't like them; achieving students like them	Proud of principal	Rules must be followed; Students support them	They love him; he respects and listens to them	Before students ran the school; now the principal runs things; they hate him
16. Describe the teachers as far as commitment, dedication, teaching styles, level of knowledge, and rapport.	Very committed	Dedicated	Strong staff	Committed; a few have low morale	Very committed	Very Committed
17. Describe your counseling services. What role does the counselor play with students?	Good	Excellent, but some students are not reached	Counselors spearhead advisement; Everybody counsels	Overwhelmed too many jobs to do with testing	Very Effective	Distributed counseling

Table 4.4 *Responses to Interview Questions for Students*

Interview Questions for Students	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
1. Tell me about your school.	Well put together; relaxed; focus on graduating	Best school; Prestigious; lots of history; principal too strict	Small-many not graduating	Teachers are great; new assistant has made a difference	Good school; needs better food	Very strict but nice; it's a jail
2. Talk about how you feel when you're here at school (culture and atmosphere of the school).	Wonderful; teachers are great	Basically school; feel safe; principal is great with discipline	Teachers are helpful	Good; safe due to new Assistant	Safe; small size is a plus; teachers help the discouraged	Safe; Not safe when the history of school is considered
3. What do you think about the way things happen here and the way that you are treated at this school?	With respect; flexible scheduling	Treated fairly; principal does great job	No racism, no prejudice; counselors always there for help	Dress code is good; rules are okay; at first doubtful, but now it's fair	Treated well	Treated fairly despite strict rules; treated like prisoners
4. Other than sports or music, what's a strength?	Respect given; having one goal – graduating	Good after school program; alumni support	No; not really	Student Government association	Other clubs	Nothing; Student Government association

Table 4.4 (continued)

Interview Questions for Students	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
5. Other than sports or music (like band or chorus), do you consider as major weaknesses?	No prom; police officers lack of humanity	Test scores need to be up; lunch needs improving	Not enough discipline	Improve EOCT scores; athletes get away with too much	No	Lack of trust; student behaviors
6. What do students say about the teachers and the administration of the school?	Love the principal; the best	Don't like them; treat you well	Some don't like some of the teachers	Very positive; assistant tough on academics and discipline; some teachers don't motivate students	Decent; they have brought in new ideas, but he's old-fashioned	Rules are too strict; students don't like the staff
7. Why do you think that some students fail or repeat classes?	Lose focus; discouraged after falling behind	Didn't apply themselves; poor parental motivation at home	Didn't apply themselves	Goofing off; not applying themselves; teachers not motivating them	9 <sup>th</sup> grade transition is a lot; not paying attention and skipping school	Not paying attention; not applying themselves
8. Why do you think some students eventually drop out?	Too far behind to catch up	Outside issues; too far behind; dislike principal	Too far behind	Discourage; didn't care; lack of care from staff	Too far behind; to make quick cash	No hope; not applying

Table 4.4 (continued)

Interview Questions for Students	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
9. Why do you think that some students stay in school and graduate?	Had a goal; determined	Motivation from others; set goal	Prove to some they can succeed	Mindset to do better; motivated from someone else	Encouragement; support from school, family	Had hope or good advice
10. Do you think parents are involved enough student lives at school?	No; you are on your own	No, students don't ask them; parents pick up report cards	Some are and some are not	Some are and some are not	Always the same parents	No; not enough
11. Describe the administration. Do you think that students support the administrators?	Respect the Principal; yes	Assistant is easy-going; other is too strict; principal behind students	Love administrators	Administration gets a "10" on a scale of 0-10 – with 10 the highest	Yes, he listens to our problems	Most hate the principal – too strict
12. What types of incentives do teachers and the administration give to encourage them to attend school regularly and/or make good grades?	Bus coupons for transportation; understanding of teachers	Pizza; ice cream parties; certificates; honor rolls	For seniors, get out half of the year and work	Teachers give extra credit; honor rolls; honor society; parties	Principal treated seniors out to restaurants; teachers took students out to restaurants	Parties; dress for success day each Wednesday

Table 4.4 (continued)

Interview Questions for Students	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
13. Are there additional programs offered for failing students like after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school, to name a few?	Teachers have before and after office hours	All that are stated	All that are stated	All that are stated	All that are stated	All that are stated
14. Is the community involved in education and how are they involved?	Apprentice - ship program	Alumni	Businesses Donate to clubs and other functions	Alumni	Yes	City's rec dept. helps out; no other support
15. How well do they appreciate their administrators?	Appreciate them; they did not give up on them	They believe in them; some think they are too strict	Principal is the best	Adapting to the new assistant; but appreciate her	A whole lot	Don't believe in him because he's too strict
16. Describe teachers commitment, dedication, and how they get along with students.	committed	Some are committed; some are good; some are bad; some have attitudes	Have some teachers who quit after 1 <sup>st</sup> year	Some are committed; others believe it's up to the students	Teachers are fair and go many extra miles	They are really committed; they look out for you and do things for you

Table 4.4 (continued)

Interview Questions for Students	School High1	School High2	Average School1	Average School2	Low School1	Low School2
17. Describe your counseling services. What role does the counselor play with students?	They are there for them; checking up on them	Excellent	Counselors are always there	They get an "8" on a scale of 0-10 – with 10 the highest	Go beyond their job titles	Good but look out for seniors only
18. If you could change or add anything to this school, what would it be and why?	Students' abuse of freedom; change nothing	Test scores; dress code	More discipline; encouraging teachers; higher graduation status	School spirit; get rid of teachers who teach for a paycheck	Even though complaints are made, would not change anything	Attitude and rules of the principal

### Summary

This study examined and paired schools in Georgia to learn why some schools have lower dropout rates than others. This study examined six schools in Georgia of the same demographics (from a 4-year average whose dropout rates ranged from 0.9% to 15.175% (see Table 2.9) in an effort to find out what are the factors that have allowed some schools to reflect low dropout rates and therefore keep more students in school and graduate as compared to those schools with similar demographics that have higher dropout rates resulting in more of their students not graduating.

Participants from the six schools included five people from each school, representing perspectives from that of the students and the adults. Those five people included two seniors, two teachers, and an administrator or counselor. Adults included were veterans, not necessarily veterans at their particular schools, but veterans (having at least five or more years of experience) in education. At each school, most teachers were veterans at those schools. Most administrators and counselors were veterans unless newly appointed at their perspective schools, as in the case of the two schools with low dropout rates.

This study was designed to answer the following fundamental research question: “What are the factors that reduce the dropout rate in high poverty schools in the state of Georgia?” In order to learn those factors, there were four sub questions related to the overall driving question. There was a list of interview questions that were reviewed by a panel of experts and piloted. After the review and the pilot, seventeen questions were selected and then sorted by the four sub questions.

From the first sub question, “Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates, especially those schools that have the same demographics?” Respondents were asked three of the seventeen interview question. The first of the three questions asked participants why they felt that students failed or repeated classes. Most of student participants felt that students were not focused, didn’t study, procrastinated, and were influenced by peers who were not interested in school and as a result had developed chronic absenteeism. Most of these students said that these students who failed or repeated classes simply didn’t apply themselves and as a result, they failed.



Many of the adults who were interviewed attributed failure in the classroom to the inability to read, making it most difficult to make passing grades. Some adults mentioned that students failed or repeated classes as a result of a pattern of a trend they have established or a trend that had been established in that student's family; the adults referred to this trend as one where there is no educational success in the family.

The adults noted other reasons to include having failed in the past makes it hard to catch up, coupled with no motivation from home and poor attendance. Too, the adults added many of the failing students are lazy or that they are distracted by external reasons to include peer pressure, jobs, babies, etc. One adult commented that some potentially smart students who are around poor performing students will often become hesitant to do well for fear of being ridiculed for not fitting in with everyone else.

In reference to the second question, "Why do you think students eventually drop out of school," most of the adults cited that many students drop out because they have failed too many classes and are too far behind to catch up. Some adults added that the age factor of the incoming freshmen was the reason students drop out in that after repeating classes and one or two grades, they are already seventeen and eighteen in the ninth grade; thusly, they become discouraged thinking that they are too far behind to catch up and they drop out. Again, adults added that the lack of motivation or hope contributed to their decisions to quit school. Other factors cited included the lack of support from within and outside of the school as it relates to having someone to talk to or to see them through their problems.

Students agreed with the adults in naming being too far behind to catch up as the main reason students drop out. Also, students noted that the peers (other dropouts or at-

risk of passing students) force them to identify and conform to their habits and mindset and the students lose interest in completing assignments and passing the grade. Students did note that many of the students just didn't apply themselves. Some also noted that the external factors (such as jobs, babies, and home problems) took priority over school.

The third and final interview question in relationship to the first of four sub questions centered around the participants' views on why do those students who are at-risk of failing do not fail, but yet they remain in school and some even graduate. All of the participants, adults and students, cited that those students were students who had a goal and were determined to accomplish those goals. Both the adults and students commented that those students probably received added or extra support and motivation.

The second sub question, "What practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing," encompassed four interview questions as well. The first interview question in this area asked participants to identify what types of incentives are given to encourage positive behavior and performance. The adults and students recognized that all of their schools publish honor roll lists and have honor societies for those who excel. All of the participants cited that schools have pizza parties for those who have done well. Students are given certificates of achievement, all participants agreed. In addition to academic achievement, participants cited rewards are also given for good or perfect attendance.

The adults from all schools in the research mentioned that teachers go beyond normal expectations to support students. The degree of exceeding expectations varied among the schools. The adults at the low performing schools included many instances of

outside dining for good performance to include school-wide sponsored outings as well as those sponsored by individual teachers. It appeared that all of the schools, as indicated by the adults, have staff members who give of their tutorial time to help struggling students. Many comments were made about how teachers arrive early and stay long after the school day is over.

The second question, “Are there additional programs offered for failing students such as after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school, to name a few,” student and adult participants all agreed that tutoring is available for struggling schools to include after school, during school and Saturday school. Evening school is offered in a system of one of the high and average dropout rate schools included in this study. All of the schools do have a computerized tutorial program where students can take and earn some credits via the internet.

The third question under this sub question examined the extent of community involvement at the schools. All participants agreed that the communities are involved, but at a very limited level. Participants from one high and one average dropout rate school said that local businesses have partnered with the schools to offer employment/experience. Participants added that some businesses do offer coupons that are valid at their businesses.

The alumni are very supportive at two of the schools in this study, a low and an average dropout rate school. Participants from these two schools added that the alumni gives the school whatever is needed to include physical man power in completing tasks or giving monies or offering mental support at all functions. However, a teacher and a

student from the same low dropout rate school commented that the community did not support them.

The fourth question under the second sub question of four explored whether parents are actively in the students' academics. Most of the adults agreed that parents are involved and concerned about the students' academics. There were 10 "Yes" responses to 20 "No" responses. There were 12 students who were a part of this study, so some of the adults agreed also that parents are not concerned about the academic success of the students. Of the responses that agreed that parents are involved admitted that those parents are the parents of the children who always do well and have promising futures as they relate to sports.

The third sub question, "What factors exist between the compared schools that relate to culture and school environment," covered eight of the interview questions.

The first of the eight questions inquired how they viewed their school. School High1: The responses stated that the school was flexible, good, unique, non-traditional, with a relaxed atmosphere. School High2: The responses described the school as prestigious, proud and organized. Average School1: The responses viewed the school as a small, rural, consolidated school with a high graduation rate. School Average2: The participants described the school as energetic, involved, and a good place to be. School Low1: The participants described the school as small, good, and consolidated. School Low2: The participants described the school as strict, small, unique, but a school with close relationships.

All comments were positive except a comment from a student from School Low 2 who described the school as a jail and the students are prisoners.

The second of eight questions asked participants about how they feel when they are at school. This question was for students only. Students from all six schools stated that they felt fine as it relates to the atmosphere and the environment of the school.

The third question was for the adults only: describe the culture of the school. All participants made positive comments about the perspective schools. The comments included that the culture was one that was safe, strictly business, proud and rich in history, data driven and one that goes out of its way to know students, conducive to learning, loving and warm, and possessing a good learning environment.

The fourth question was for adults also. It attempted to find out how they felt their school compared with other schools. The adults all made positive comments about their perspective schools indicating that they felt their schools ranks fairly well among other good performing schools with the same demographics.

The fifth question of eight under sub question three of four which centered on the culture and environment of the school was for students only. It sought to find out how students felt about the way things are run and how they are treated at their schools. All of the students felt that the way they and other students are treated is fair, indicating no difference that relates to treatment being a variable. Only one student from a low dropout rate school indicated that students are not treated fairly.

The sixth question of eight under sub question three of four which centered on the culture and environment of the school was also for students only. It sought to find out what students felt outside of sports or the band/choral program were the strengths of their schools. The students' comments varied.

School High2 and Low School1 cited educational factors are the strengths of their schools. A participant from School Average2 and a participant from School Low2 cited educational opportunities as well as the student government association as strengths of their schools. Students from the other schools mentioned that there were no exceptional or outstanding strengths.

The seventh question of eight under sub question three of four which centered on the culture and environment of the school was also for students only. This question sought to find out what these students felt were their schools' weaknesses, other than sports or the band/music program. Students from School High2 and Average School2 felt that low test scores was a weakness. All other comments varied that included such responses as a need to have a prom, the treatment of students by the security officers, not enough discipline, athletes getting away with too many "breaks" when other students are not given the extra privileges, lack of trust by the administration and teachers, overall poor and rude student behaviors, and the poor lunches.

The eighth and last question of eight under sub question three of four which centered on the culture and environment of the school was also for students only. It asked students if they could change anything about their schools, what would that change be. Responses varied. Only two students (School High1 and School Low2) said that they would not change anything. Other comments varied from improving test scores to the attitude of the principal.

The fourth and final sub question, "Is the leadership behavior of the administration in some schools making the difference in who completes or drops out of school?" covered six of the interview questions.

The first of six these six interview questions about the leadership behavior of the administration asked students and adults to describe the administration and to respond on how well they felt students supported the administration.

All of the participants stated that most students do support the administration. Only one participant from School Low2 said that she and other students hated the principal and his rules.

Other comments from the students and adults included that while students felt that the rules and expectations are strict and high, respectively, they still respected the principal and supported the administration.

The second of six these six interview questions under the fourth and last sub question about the leadership behavior of the administration asked students and adults to describe the administration and to respond on how well they felt students supported the administration.

Again, as the previous question related to the support of the administration by the students, a student from School Low2 said that the students did not support the administration and that they did not believe in them. While this student did say that many students do not like him, other respondents from this School Low2 school agreed that the students did not support him but on the other hand appreciated what he was doing in getting them postsecondary ready.

Also, comments from a high dropout rate school also supported that students do not believe in and support the administration. All other comments from students and adults from all other schools were favorable in saying that students do believe in their administrators.

The third of six interview these six questions about the leadership behavior of the administration asked students and adults to describe the teachers as far as commitment, dedication, teaching styles, level of knowledge, and how they get along with students. All of the respondents cited that their teachers at each school were committed; however, they gave little opinion as to if the level of dedication affected who stays in school and graduate. Responses included that many teachers do not like the unacceptable attitudes of some students and therefore do not stay long at their schools, but while they are there, they are dedicated and the students appreciate them as well as the administrators. Respondents did comment that there are always a few teachers who are not giving as much as others but that number is a very small percentage.

The fourth of six these interview six questions under the fourth and last sub question about the leadership behavior of the administration asked students and adults to discuss and describe their counseling identifying the role that the counselor plays.

All of the schools commented that the counseling services were good, with the exception of a student from School Low2 who felt that counselors only looked at the needs of the seniors. While the other student from the same school, however, stated the counselors were doing a great job, a teacher from that school cited a need for improvement.

Comments from other schools explained that because of the need for more counselors and a need to have more advisor/advisee sessions as mandated by the legislature, schools now provide more services. Most participants added that in a sense everyone assumes the role of offering counseling services to students – hearing their cries and offering help in making decisions about both school and personal issues and matters.



While most of the participants were very positive about the counseling services, the counselor participants felt that they are overwhelmed with the duties of the counselor that include often being test coordinators and the primary scheduling facilitator.

From the fifth of six these six interview questions associated with if dropping out was related to leadership behavior of the administration making a difference in who completes or drops out of school, the adults were asked about the tenure of the principal and the retention of veteran teachers.

According to the adult participants, all of the high and average schools have had the same administration for at least three to five years, if not more. Only School Low1 and School Low2 have had a change of administration over the past four years. School Low1 has seen three principals in five years, and School Low2 has seen two in five years. The teaching staffs at both of these schools have shifted from year to year as well. At School Low2, the change in administration was due to the former principal being labeled as a tyrant and someone who did not support the teaching staff. But at the other schools, the leadership has not changed. From School Average1, a teacher attributed the low turnover due to the commitment and care of the staff.

In the last of the six interview questions that examined if dropping out was related to leadership behavior of the administration making a difference in who completes or drops out of school, the students were asked to comment on how other students felt about the administration.

All of the student participants said that most of the students like the administration and the rules expected of them to follow, except students from School Low2. They hate the administration and the rules of the school.

While the other student from this school agreed that most of the students do not like the teachers and the administration, she did say that students need to be glad that somebody cares about them and their academic success; this included the concern of the teachers as well. This student added that negative comments are made by students when they have been cited or singled out when they are guilty of certain acts.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

According to the introduction from the National Center for Educational Statistics (Chapman, 2004), school authorities in America have been concerned about the ongoing problem of those who fail to complete high school. Often it is those students, who eventually become a dropout statistic and are absent from school with increasing frequency and consequently, who find themselves in the juvenile justice system (Smink & Reiner, 2005). Therefore, lowering the student dropout rate in America is “one of the most significant challenges facing educators today” (Schargnel, 2001, p. 2).

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine six schools in Georgia having similar demographics (from a 4-year average whose dropout rates range from 0.9% to 15.175% see Table 2.9) in an effort to find out what are the factors that have allowed some schools to reflect low dropout rates and therefore keep more students in school and graduate as compared to those schools that have higher dropout rates where more of their students are not graduating

Epstein (1992) did a qualitative study of 20 youngsters in a report entitled *Case Studies in Dropping Out and Dropping Back In* where it was found that many dropped out because they felt no one cared about them, they felt there was no connection to what they were learning, and that the counselors did not care. Noted variables outside of the school setting were disclosed in a quantitative and qualitative study by Frank (1990) that disclosed that such factors as the household income, race/ethnicity, parental education and household stress factors to include problems with drugs, the police, single parenting,

members of the family who are sickly, and adult exploitation were the reasons students dropped out from 3,043 families that were surveyed and interviewed in Texas.

In a study on dropout prevention, Hales (1998) disclosed that students at risk were those who had poor academic achievement, poor grades, low test scores, little support, high absenteeism, and behavioral problems stemming from confrontations with teachers and administration.

While these studies disclosed variables outside of the school environment that affect the dropout rate, this study wanted to examine if factors from within the school setting play a role in keeping students in school or giving them reasons to leave.

#### Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine why some high poverty schools in Georgia have lower dropout rates than others. More definitively, this study examined six schools of the same demographics (from a 4-year average whose dropout rates ranged from 0.9% to 15.175%, see Table 2.9) in an effort to find out what are the factors that have allowed some schools to reflect low dropout rates and therefore keep more students in school and graduate as compared to those schools with similar demographics that have higher dropout rates resulting in more of their students not graduating.

Participants from the six schools included five people from each school, representing perspectives from that of the students and the adults. Those five people included two at risk seniors, two teachers, and an administrator or counselor. Adults included were veterans, not necessarily veterans at their particular schools, but veterans (having at least five or more years of experience) in education. At each school, most

teachers were veterans. Most administrators and counselors were veterans unless newly appointed at their perspective schools, as in the case of the two schools with low dropout rates. These findings were reported in Chapter IV. In this chapter, the researcher used the findings related to each research subquestion to discuss the findings, to draw conclusions and to consider implications from the study.

This study was designed to answer the following fundamental research question: “What are the factors that reduce the dropout rate in high poverty schools in the state of Georgia?” In order to learn those factors, there were four sub questions related to the overall driving question. There was a list of interview questions that were reviewed by a panel of experts and later piloted. After the review and the pilot, seventeen questions were selected and then sorted by the four sub questions.

#### Research Sub Question 1

*“Why is it that some schools have low dropout rates while others have high dropout rates, especially those schools that have the same demographics?”*

Respondents were asked three of the seventeen interview questions. The first of the three questions asked participants why they felt that students failed or repeated classes and the second question asked why they thought students eventually dropped out of school. These two questions had no ties to dropouts from any school associated with a high, average, or low dropout rate status.

The responses to both of these questions were very similar citing absenteeism, poor performance in school, and repeated retention of classes and grades as the reasons for failing classes and dropping out of school. A dissertation by Guthrie (1992) stated that chronic absenteeism played a role in students’ decisions to drop out of school. The

study by Hales (1998) showed that school dropouts have higher rates of chronic truancy and tardiness than those who stay in school. Hales' study also showed that daily attendance and the lack of it reflect student motivation. Research by Berndt, Hawkins & Jiao (1999) also showed that students who drop out are those who encountered frequent absenteeism. According to Bowen and Walters (1978), peer acceptance and following ones' peers was another factor that contributed to the dropout rate. Most of student participants felt that students were not focused, didn't study, procrastinated, and were influenced by peers who were not interested in school and as a result had developed chronic absenteeism. Most of these students said that these students who failed or repeated classes simply didn't apply themselves and as a result, they failed.

Many of the adults who were interviewed attributed failure in the classroom to the inability to read, making it almost difficult to make passing grades. According to the research, students' grades and retention in those grades are variables that thusly create the dropout rate (Hales, 1998). Hales also cited that poor grades and low test scores, regardless of ability, increase students' frustration.

Some adults mentioned that students failed or repeated classes as a result of a pattern or a trend they have established or a trend that had been established in that student's family; the adults referred to this trend as one where there is no educational success in the family. Hales' study (1998) identified dropouts who had siblings who dropped out are at greater risk of dropping out. Also, the SREB (Reducing, 1998) reported that dropouts have siblings who dropped out.

The adults noted other reasons to include having failed in the past makes it hard to catch up, coupled with no motivation from home and poor attendance. Too, the adults

added many of the failing students are lazy or that they are distracted by external reasons to include peer pressure, jobs, babies, etc. The SREB (Reducing, 1998) indicated that students who drop out of school are not in school because of the need to provide child care due to pregnancy, needed opportunities to get jobs and earn money, and pressure to hang with peer groups outside of school.

In reference to the second question, “Why do you think students eventually drop out of school,” students’ and adults’ responses cited that many students drop out because they have failed too many classes and are too far behind to catch up. Guthrie (1992) added in his research that while behavioral problems reflected in low grade point averages, students who fail two or more courses are placed at a high risk of dropping out of school. Some adults in the researcher’s study added that the age factor of the incoming freshmen was the reason students drop out in that after repeating classes and one or two grades, they are already seventeen and eighteen, thusly too far behind to catch up. Again, adults added that the lack of motivation or hope contributed to their decisions to quit school. Other factors that participants cited included the lack of support from within and outside of the school as it relates to having someone to talk to or to see them through their problems.

In a study of 20 youths by Kitty Epstein (1992), it was found that the most common themes in dropout interviews that she conducted spoke of the non-supportive atmosphere of the school. According to a Hales’ qualitative study (1998), students who dropped out perceive the school setting as non-supportive to their needs. In a dissertation by Suzanne Toyryla (2003), she found that students were at risk for dropping out because of a lack of a positive and caring environment both at school and at home. Students’

dissatisfaction, according to Arroyo, Rhoad and Drew (1999) was associated with teachers' demonstrations of a lack of caring, respect and interest of the child's growth.

The third and final interview question in relationship to the first of four sub questions centered around the participants' views on why do those students who are at-risk of failing do not fail, but yet they remain in school and some even graduate. All of the participants, adults and students, cited that those students were students who had a goal and were determined to accomplish those goals. Both the adults and students commented that those students probably received added or extra support and motivation. Students agreed with the adults in naming being too far behind to catch up as the main reason students drop out.

Other student responses to the second question were similar to the responses of the first question noting that many of the students just didn't apply themselves. Some also noted that the external factors (such as jobs, babies, and home problems) took priority over school.

#### Research Sub Question 2

*“What practices, strategies or services are being implemented in those schools that have low dropout rates that other schools are not doing or implementing?”*

The first interview question in this area asked participants to identify what types of incentives are given to encourage positive behavior and performance. All participants from all six schools (regardless of high, average, or low dropout rate status) gave similar responses. The adults and students recognized that all of their schools publish honor roll lists and have honor societies for those who excel. All of the participants cited that schools have pizza parties for those who have done well. Students are given certificates



of achievement, all participants agreed. In addition to academic achievement, participants cited rewards are also given for good or perfect attendance.

The adults from all schools in the research mentioned that teachers go beyond normal expectations to support students. The SREB report (Goal, 1989) showed that high dropout rate exists in those schools where teachers have low expectations of students and where schools have poorly organized academic programs, morale problems and ineffective teachers. The degree of exceeding expectations varied among the schools. The adults at the low performing schools included many instances of outside dining at restaurants like Red Lobster or Chiles for good performance to include school-wide sponsored outings as well as those sponsored by individual teachers. It appeared that all of the schools, as indicated by the adults, have staff members who give of their tutorial time to help struggling students. Many comments were made about how teachers arrive early and stay long after the school day is over.

The second question, “Are there additional programs offered for failing students such as after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school, to name a few,” student and adult participants gave affirmative responses. Fashola and Slavin (1998) reported great success in reducing dropout rates when students participated in programs that provided academic tutoring and gave students an opportunity to be involved in their school. Research has also shown that before and after school tutoring programs improved academic success and deterred the dropout rate (Hock, Pulvern, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2001). This research by Hock, Pulvern, Deshler, & Schumaker (2001) found that by helping students with actual assignments, their success with academics increased. In a quantitative longitudinal study by Somers & Piliawsky (2000) where the school

manipulated the variables (tutoring opportunities), while there was no significant change in the control and experimental groups' grade point average (GPA) and their attitudes and behaviors, the retention rate was indeed higher for 9<sup>th</sup> graders who participated in the study who were not offered tutoring opportunities than the rest of the 9<sup>th</sup> graders in that school and in that district. In a study by LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay (1997), it was found that before and after school tutoring programs improved academic success and deterred the dropout rate. All participants in the researcher's study agreed that tutoring is available for struggling schools to include after school, during school and Saturday school. Evening school is offered in a system of one of the high and average dropout rate schools included in this study. All of the schools do have a computerized tutorial program where students can take and earn some credits via the internet.

The third question under this sub question examined the extent of community involvement at the schools. In a study by Allen, Phillibe, Herrling & Kuperminc (1997), community programs produce significant reduction in school failure. All participants agreed that the communities are involved, but at a very limited level. Participants from one high and one average dropout rate school said that local businesses have partnered with the schools to offer employment/experience. Participants added that some businesses do offer coupons that are valid at their businesses.

The alumni are very supportive at two of the schools in this study, a low and an average dropout rate school. However, a teacher and a student from the same low dropout rate school commented that the community did not support them. This showed a contrast in opinions from the same school over the extent of the community involvement.

This could have been to a lack of knowledge or to the degree that the participant felt the involvement was supportive.

The fourth question under the second sub question of four explored whether parents are actively involved in the students' academics. Hales (1998) added that parents of dropouts view school negatively, have little parental involvement, and place very little value on education. In another study by Somers (2004), research showed that risk factors that influence dropouts include the low level of family support. Britt (1995) also added that students are at risk when there is no parental support at home. Other research has shown that parental involvement in their children's lives has reduced the dropout rate (Seaman & Yoo, 2001).

Most of the adults agreed that parents are somewhat involved and concerned about the students' academics from all six schools questioning the theory that parental support or the lack of it may have been a role in the schools that had high dropout rates. While the respondents agreed that parents are involved, however, they did admit that those are usually the parents of the children who always do well or they are the parents of children who have promising futures as related to sports and/or academics.

### Research Sub Question 3

*“What differences or factors exist between the compared schools that relate to culture and school environment?”*

The first of the eight questions inquired how they viewed their school. This appears not to be a factor for all comments were positive except a comment from a student from School Low2 who described the school as a jail and the students are prisoners. Suzanne Torryla (2003) found that students in her study were at risk for

dropping out because of a lack of a positive and caring environment at school. Also the SREB report (Goal, 1989) showed that high dropout rates exist in those schools that had morale problems and ineffective teachers. In a study of 20 youths by Kitty Epstein (1992), it was found that the most common themes in dropout interviews that she conducted spoke of the non-supportive atmosphere of the school. Guthrie (1993) added that because of being unhappy and dissatisfied with the school setting, the culture of the school, therefore, played a role in students' deciding to terminate their high school experience. School High1: The responses stated that the school was flexible, good, unique, non-traditional, with a relaxed atmosphere. School High2: The responses described the school as prestigious, proud and organized. Average School1: The respondents viewed the school as a small, rural, consolidated school with a high graduation rate. School Average2: The participants described the school as energetic, involved, and a good place to be. School Low1: The participants described the school as small, good, and consolidated. School Low2: The participants described the school as strict, small, unique, but a school with close relationships.

The second of eight questions asked participants about how they felt when they are at school. This question was for students only. Students from all six schools stated that they felt fine as it relates to the atmosphere and the environment of the school.

The third question was for the adults only: describe the culture of the school. All participants made positive comments about the perspective schools. The comments included that the culture was one that was safe, strictly business, proud and rich in history, data driven and one that goes out of its way to know students, conducive to learning, loving and warm, and possessing a good learning environment.

The fourth question was for adults also. It attempted to find out how they felt their school compared with other schools. The adults all made positive comments about their perspective schools indicating that they felt their schools rank fairly well among other good performing schools with the same demographics.

The fifth question of eight under sub question three of four which centered on the culture and environment of the school was for students only. It sought to find out how students felt about the way things are run and how they are treated at their schools. All of the students felt that the way they and other students are treated is fair, indicating no difference that relates to treatment being a variable. Only one student from a low dropout rate school indicated that students are not treated fairly; this was the same student who repeatedly gave almost negative comments about everything.

The sixth question of eight under sub question three of four which centered on the culture and environment of the school was also for students only. It sought to find out what students felt outside of sports or the band/choral program were the strengths of their schools. Research has shown that extracurricular activities in the school's culture also help reduce the dropout rates (Mahoney & Cains, 1997). The students' comments varied showing no major common theme or thread: School High2 and Low School11 cited educational factors are the strengths of their schools. A participant from School Average2 and a participant from School Low2 cited educational opportunities as well as the student government association as strengths of their schools. Students from the other schools mentioned that there were no exceptional or outstanding strengths.

The seventh question of eight under sub question three of four which centered on the culture and environment of the school was also for students only. This question

sought to find out what these students felt were their schools' weaknesses, other than sports or the band/music program. Students from School High2 and Average School2 felt that low test scores was a weakness. All other comments, again not being able to identify a common theme, varied that included such responses as a need to have a prom, the treatment of students by the security officers, not enough discipline, athletes getting away with too many "breaks" when other students are not given the extra privileges, lack of trust by the administration and teachers, overall poor and rude student behaviors, and the poor lunches.

The eighth and last question of eight under sub question three of four which centered on the culture and environment of the school was also for students only. It asked if they could change anything about their schools, what would that change would they make? Responses varied. Only two students (School High1 and School Low2) said that they would not change anything. Other comments varied from improving test scores to the attitude of the principal. Again, there was no common theme found.

#### Research Sub Question 4

*"Is the leadership behavior of the administration in some schools making the difference in who completes or drops out of school?"*

The first of six these six interview questions about the leadership behavior of the administration asked students and adults to describe the administration and to respond on how well they felt students supported the administration, the last of the six interview questions examined how students felt about the administration, and the second question asked how did they believe in and appreciate their administrators.

According to Martin (1995), a lack of encouragement and disagreement with school administrators contribute to reasons students drop out. Other research has found that youth who had stable relationships and conducted themselves appropriately in school with the administration were less likely to drop out as compared to those who had non-responsible, behavior problems at school (Brendt, Hawkins, & Jiao, 1999). Research has furthered added that students who drop out are those who have behavioral problems with either the school authorities or the police or both (McWhirter et al, 1998).

All of the participants stated that most students do support the administration. Again, this discredited the idea that possibly the schools with high dropout rates experienced those because of problems associated with leadership. Only one participant from School Low2 said that she and other students hated the principal and his rules, while all other participants from that same school agreed that the students supported the administration. Even if most students did not like this administration, this school does not have a problem with keeping students in school and therefore the unfavorable liking of this administrator has no consequences and is not a variable. Other comments from the students and adults included that while students felt that the rules and expectations are strict and high, respectively, they still respected the principals and supported the administrations.

All of the student participants said that most of the students like the administration and the rules expected of them to follow, except students from School Low2. They hate the administration and the rules of the school.

While the other student from this school agreed that most of the students do not like the teachers and the administration, she did say that students are glad that somebody

cares about them and their academic success; this included the concern of the teachers as well. This student added that negative comments are made by students when they have been cited or singled out when they are guilty of certain acts

Comments from a high dropout rate school supported that students do not believe in and support the administration while all other comments from students and adults from the same high dropout rate school and all other schools were favorable in saying that students do believe in their administrators and respect them for having their best interests in mind.

The third of six interview these six questions about the leadership behavior of the administration asked students and adults to describe the teachers as far as commitment, dedication, teaching styles, level of knowledge, and how they get along with students. Students' dissatisfaction with school that led to their dropping out, according to Arroyo, Rhoad and Drew (1999), was associated with teachers' demonstrations of a lack of caring, respect, and interest of the child's growth and achievement. Slavin (1998) reported that great success reduced dropout rates when students felt bonded with the teachers.

All of the respondents cited that their teachers at each school were committed; however, they gave little opinion as to whether the level of dedication affected who stays in school and graduates. Responses included that many teachers do not like the unacceptable attitudes of some students and therefore do not stay long at their schools, but while they are there, they are dedicated and the students appreciate them as well as the administrators. Respondents did comment that there are always a few teachers who are not giving as much as others but that number is a very small percentage.



The fourth of these six interview questions under the fourth and last sub question about the leadership behavior of the administration asked students and adults to discuss and describe their counseling identifying the role that the counselor plays. Again, research has shown that those who drop out of school showed a lack of encouragement from counselors (Martin, 1995). All of the schools commented that the counseling services were good, with the exception of a student from School Low2 who felt that counselors only looked at the needs of the seniors. While the other student from the same school, however, stated the counselors were doing a great job, a teacher from that school said that there was a need for improvement in that department, but here again, this is a school where dropping out is already way below the state's average.

Comments from other schools explained that because of the need for more counselors and a need to have more advisor/advisee sessions, the Georgia legislature has mandated that schools provide more services. Most participants added that in a sense everyone assumes the role of offering counseling services to students – hearing their cries and offering help in making decisions about both school and personal issues and matters. While most of the participants were very positive about the counseling services, the counselor participants felt that they are overwhelmed with the duties of the counselor that include often being test coordinators and the primary scheduling facilitator.

In the fifth of these six interview questions associated with whether dropping out was related to leadership behavior of the administration making a difference in who completes or drops out of school, the adults were asked about the tenure of the principal and the retention of veteran teachers. There was a review of literature that dealt with the

experience of the administration or the teaching staff as being variables in keeping students in school.

According to the adult participants, four of the six schools have had the same administration for at least three to five years, if not more. Only School Low1 and School Low2 have had a change of administration over the past four years. School Low1 has seen three principals in five years, and School Low2 has seen two in five years. The teaching staffs at both of these two low dropout rate schools have shifted from year to year as well. At School Low2, the change in administration was due to the former principal being labeled as a tyrant and someone who did not support the teaching staff. It is unknown why the principal at the other low dropout rate school left.

While the leadership at the other four schools has not changed, neither have these schools had a big turn over in their teaching staffs. From School Average1, a teacher attributed the low turnover due to the commitment and care of the staff. While both schools with the lowest dropout rates have seen the greatest turn around in leadership and teaching staff, it is hard to argue that keeping the same administration and staff are the keys to keeping students in school.

### Conclusions

At the crux of the researcher's paper was the overarching question as to why is that some schools have low dropout rates while other schools with similar demographics have higher dropout rates. The subjects of the qualitative study were students and staff members from six high poverty schools in the state of Georgia, five from each school. More definitively stated, there were five participants from each school: two students (seniors), two veteran teachers of education (having at least three years of experience),

and an administrator or a counselor. All participants were optimistic in their responses except one student from a low dropout rate school whose responses were generally negative on all subjects.

After looking at the responses of the senior students and the adults along with the researcher's observations and the schools' policies and manuals, several common variables were identified that could help reduce the dropout rate as identified in this study. One questionable observation is the high turnover in teaching staff and administrators at the low dropout rate schools as compared to the more consistent staff and administration at the average and high dropout rate schools (Item 25 in Table 4.2 for teachers and Item 5 in Table 4.3 for tenure of principals). School Low1 and School Low2 respectively employed an average of 12% and 22% new teachers between the years of 2003 and 2006 while School High1 and School High2 respectively employed an average of 6% and 2% new teachers for those years. The average dropout rate schools employed few new teachers as well, as seen in Average School1 and Average School2 reporting an average of 3% and 2% new teachers, respectively.

The data support that many of the teachers at the high and average dropout rate schools do not leave; the veteran teachers remain whether they are effective or ineffective as instructors and/or mentors/advisors. Too, the principals at the high and average dropout rate schools have not changed in the last five years, while the low dropout rate schools have had at least three new principals at each school in the last five years (Item 5 in Table 4.3). While the data are too small to explain why the turnovers are happening and if the turnovers in leadership and staff greatly impacted the low dropout rates, it could be speculated that the change in leadership almost yearly gives at risk students

another flicker of hope to return and continue their education coupled with the fact that new teachers will bring fresh teaching styles or new relationships that these students did not establish or did not gravitate to from the leaders or teachers who left.

As far as chronic absenteeism, the review of literature cited that this is a major factor in who stays in and who drops out of school. The high dropout rate schools (School High1 and School High2) had an average of 38% and 33%, respectively, for years 2003-2006 for students who had missed 15 or more days (Item 26 in Table 4.2). The low dropout rate schools had the lowest of all six schools in this study, School Low1 with 11% and School Low2 with 9%. Average School1 and Average School2 had an average of 20% and 32%, respectively. Clearly the data show that students at the low dropout rate schools were in fact in school much more than the students at the average or high dropout rate schools.

The students from the low dropout rate schools, especially after considering that they are being compared to the students from the average and high dropout rate schools in this study who were all demographically grouped with the same characteristics associated with being high poverty and at risk, came to school much more often even though the review of literature named them as potentially becoming dropouts because of non-school issues such as having siblings who may have dropped out and coming from high poverty, single-parent households. There must have been a reason why they still wanted to come to school. And there was; they enjoyed being loved, appreciated and having someone to talk to as explained in the data below.

Responses from the students and adults from the low dropout rate schools explained why these students want to come to school. Their responses revealed that the

teachers at these low dropout rate schools were more than teachers; responses indicated that they were caregivers and providers, people who did for them when no one else did; they were people who took their places and treated them to out of school exposure (Item 10 in Table 4.4)

The researcher's notes indicated how emotional both the students and the adults were as they talked about how appreciative the students were who received that special attention from teachers and staff; they said teachers were very committed and nurturing. The researcher's field notes included notations how pleasant and polite custodians and clerical workers were at the low dropout rate schools which adds to the atmosphere of care and concern that permeates at these low dropout rate schools. The researcher's field notes indicated that there was a banner in one of the low dropout rate schools hanging in the office that indicated that the school was one big family.

Responses from the interviews revealed that teachers go many "extra miles." They take them to expensive restaurants like Red Lobster; they buy them things that they need or are lacking. An administrator even said that she had taken female students home for the weekend while responses from the high dropout rate schools were not as engaging, stating that some teachers were committed and some were not; some were there just to collect a paycheck (Table 4.4).

While a sense of care and concern was exhibited by the staffs at all schools and all participants agreed that their schools have committed teachers, the low dropout rate schools indicated additional recognition for outstanding academics that included teachers and staff taking a more personal interest in the total child to include performance in the classroom and outside of the classroom. They indicated that students looked forward to

such tangible rewards such as outside dining at restaurants like Red Lobster and Chiles to include school-wide, administrator-sponsored, or teacher sponsored events.

Worthy of mentioning is the level of tolerance for unacceptable behavior at all of the six schools. School High1, School High2, and Average School2 all have a Zero “0” tolerance policy, which results in automatic suspension or expulsion for unacceptable behaviors that could range from drawing pictures of weapons, making “simple” threats, bullying, fighting, bringing weapons or cigarette lighters or tobacco products to school, or receiving a certain amount of minor referrals ranging from not following directions to being tardy to class (Item 10 in Table 4.2). These three schools all have high averages of absenteeism of 15 days or more for the last three years with 38%, 33%, and 32%, respectively. In the low dropout rate schools that do not have a Zero “0” tolerance policy (as well as Average School1), the absenteeism is very low, 11% and 9%, School Low1 and School Low2, respectively (Item 26 on absenteeism in Table 4.2). School Average1 also does not have a Zero “0” tolerance policy and its average is 20% from 2003-2006, which is still lower than the high dropout rate schools that have the policy in place. Again, the low dropout rate schools have found a way to keep students in school by not suspending or expelling them in contrast to the high dropout rate schools.

While the high dropout rate schools had the lowest teacher to pupil ratio (Item 9 in Table 4.2), the low dropout rate schools had the highest which suggests that their enrollment probably is maximized for the number of students each teacher is allocated to have by state regulations while the high dropout rate schools have lost students (due to chronic absenteeism) making their ratios lower. The students at the low dropout rate schools are actually in school making their ratios higher and more on state level

mandates. Teacher to student ratios are determined at the end of the school year based on the number of students at the end of the school year divided by the number of teachers employed; therefore, high dropout rate schools who lost students during the school and by the end of the school year will reflect a lower teacher to student ratio than projected.

When looking at why students fail, repeat, and then why students become discouraged and drop out of school, both the student and adult responses were very similar. There was a correlation with their reasons as to why people fail and repeat classes with their reasons as to why students become discouraged and likely drop out of school. While most of the students stated that students were not focused and didn't apply themselves, they also attributed peer influence as a major contributor (Items 6 and 7 in Table 4.3). They stated that because of some students' desires to conform with their peers' lifestyles, students often procrastinate when completing assignments, and as a result do poorly if they do the assignment at all. Still associated with peer influence, many students lose purpose, are often in trouble, and eventually fail classes, grades, and give up on school after falling behind (Item 7 in Tables 4.3 and 4.4)

Adults at all six schools made similar comments about students' poor choices that result in poor performance in the classroom that led to failing classes, repeating grades, and giving up on school; however, adults went a step further. Many of the adults attributed failure in the classroom to the inability to read, making it almost impossible to make passing grades (Items 5, 6, and 7 in Table 4.3). These adults added that those students who can barely read experienced that deficiency before coming to high school and had already been retained in elementary and middle schools, factors that the high schools have no control over other than offering tutoring services of which all do.

Having already failed in the past and coming into high school already behind has made it even more difficult to catch up and proceed on a continuum of success when they did not start at the same point in the race to graduate. While there was no data collected from the schools' files, comments made from the adults at the high dropout schools support that these ninth graders who are usually the ones who drop out. Because these students at those schools enter the ninth grade already 14-16, failing classes or repeating the ninth grade would make them 18 before they finish their sophomore years. Because they were not successful in performing academically and the fact that students at the high dropout rate schools are already much older than ninth graders typically are, adult participants from the high dropout rate schools indicated that these students were socially promoted. There was no data available in this study on the status of social promotion at the other schools.

Worthy of mentioning, too, is that these two high dropout rate schools were both inner city whose middle and elementary feeder schools were located in public housing neighborhoods, unlike any of the other four schools whose students came from low poverty neighborhoods, but not public housing units. There appears to be a link between students who are behind with those who primarily come from public housing.

Again as research has indicated and as students and adults commented, many students who are at risk of dropping out are faced with many variables, both external and internal. External factors that they cited included those of little or no support at home, having to work, teenage moms taking care of their babies, and the influence of siblings who dropped out of school, therefore, continuing the cycle of unsuccessful educational completion (Items 7 and 8 in Tables 4.3 and 4.4).



Most interestingly noted, however, was that most of the participants stated that those students who are at risk of dropping out stay in and do not drop out because of an intrinsic factor or variable, having a personal goal or dream to fulfill (Item 9 in Tables 4.3 and 4.4).

Research confirms that schools for the most part do not have any control over the external factors, but they do have control over the internal factors. All participants added that all schools focus on highlighting achievement and rewarding outstanding academic and non-academic excellence in the form of such things as publishing honor rolls and recognizing perfect attendance. All participants confirmed that schools offer tutorial time, either after or during school and even on Saturdays, to assist students who are struggling academically.

The culture and school environment at all schools appeared to be very conducive to learning and promoted a positive tone, as commented by all participants, except the one student from a low dropout rate school. This student's responses on most everything was very negative as if nothing was positive or if things were not going well at all, which did not support the fact that her school has one of the lowest dropout rates in the state, regardless of demographics. Participants did not specify how the level of concern and commitment or lack of these characteristics from teachers impacted the culture and school environment; however, the low dropout school students said that while they and other students do complain about most things, they would not change anything about their schools which supports that they love their schools.

Most of the schools' culture and environment questions were asked of students. Most were pleased with the overall culture of their schools. Two students from an

average dropout rate and a low dropout rate school named educational opportunities and the student government associations as strengths, outside of the athletic or band/choral programs which are usually named as the strengths of many schools.

The administration of the six schools was well-liked and appreciated by most participants. Only one student from the low dropout rate school indicated that students do not like the administration. She felt that the rules were too strict and that students were treated like prisoners, not as students. While that student's views were negative, the other student's comments indicated that the strict nature of the administrator was for their good in preparing them to be responsible and accountable for their actions. This student indicated that students did not like the new style of firmness of the administrator but it would make them better citizens. Most of the staff at the schools in this study were said to be qualified, equipped, and dedicated.

The counseling department was said to play a great role in creating the positive culture and environment that exists. Again, the only negative comment about the counselors came from the student from one of the lowest dropout rate schools. Participants commented that establishing an open relationship where students can talk about concerns and seek advice is the goal of their schools which exceeds the role of the traditional counselor; everyone serves as a mentor or advisor.

Of all six schools, the two low dropout rate schools were the only two that had experienced a change in leadership over the last three years. This, the researcher is sure, explains the negative responses that the student from the low dropout rate school where it was commented that the previous administrator was removed because he was too relaxed and not firm enough.

## Implications

Based on the findings of this study, several implications are noted for using this study's results. The implications are provided as follows:

1. High dropout rate schools should conduct a self-assessment on their strengths and weaknesses on relationships and then consider staff development for their schools that focus on building meaningful relationships with students that would help teachers and students develop a bond in hopes to make students want to trust, support, and believe in them at a greater level.
2. High dropout rate schools with a high rate of absenteeism (as determined by missing 15 days or more) due from out of school suspensions should consider in school suspension to help reduce the number of absences.
3. Any system that has a Zero "0" Tolerance policy should eliminate such policies as these just put students further behind as they accumulate missed days and increase the likelihood of dropping out; schools should consider In School Suspension.
4. High dropout rate schools may want to consider offering more tangible rewards for academic and non-academic achievement and excellence such as dining out at known establishments as Red Lobster or Chiles for those who have demonstrated outstanding performances so that students can feel an appreciation for their accomplishments and continue to make strides to excel.

5. Local school boards may need to assess their policies of retention or social promotion to consider giving all students a fair age advantage as incoming freshmen so that they will not be “too old” or “too far behind” to complete high school by the age of 19 or 20. If incoming freshmen are already 17 years old and for whatever reasons have to repeat ninth grade, they will be 18 years of age in the ninth grade and the finish line, graduation, will soon become a distant memory and other external factors will take priority.
6. Schools and systems that have high dropout rates with principals who have remained in those roles for periods of time exceeding five years or more should identify options for rotating principals and some teachers to those schools that have low dropout rates as both low dropout rate schools in this study had principals and some teachers with low tenure while the high dropout rate schools had principals and staff with relatively long tenures.
7. High dropout rate schools should examine their data and determine early those targeted ninth graders who fail as their potential “at-risk” students and consider implementing a ninth grade academy as is currently implemented at one of the low dropout rate schools and has been implemented at an average school in this study; it is a system of support to meet their needs and concerns both academically and behaviorally in making a smoother transition from middle to high school.

## Recommendations

The research findings suggest the following recommendations for fellow researchers:

1. Further study should be done to determine whether or not it is the norm for incoming freshmen at high drop out rate schools to enter at an average three years behind their counterparts.
2. Further research should be conducted that compare the academic status and/or dropout rate of students of high poverty whose schools serve public housing occupants with those students that do not come from public housing units.
3. Further study should be done into how high dropout rate schools and low dropout rate schools reward and punish students both for academics and behavior.
4. Middle schools and elementary schools should examine their data and target those students who are repeatedly failing one or more classes year after year and provide a system of support through the counseling department for those students so that they will not fall too far behind and failure becomes a norm for them.
5. Further study should be done on how schools implement their advisor/advisee programs, the strength or weaknesses of it.
6. Further study should be done on the “relationship” variable within the school between students and all staff.

7. Further study should look into schools with frequent teacher/principal turnovers and low dropout rates to see if this is a correlation.
8. If this study is replicated, more than two students from each school should be selected so that there would be a wider spectrum of student responses per school that will allow for more objectivity and less subjectivity.

#### Dissemination

The results of the study should be reviewed by elementary, middle, and high schools that are poverty-stricken. The students and adults who were interviewed for the study provided a lot of knowledge and insight on dropouts and the concerns that are associated with those who are in danger of passing classes and graduating. Their testimonies can serve as great resources for those who are faced with the dilemmas of staying in or dropping out of school. The researcher will discuss the results of this study with colleagues at local high schools that are plagued with high dropout rates. The researcher will share results of this study to the professional literature in the field of dropouts. The researcher will write articles on this subject matter to be submitted to professional organizations on the dropout epidemic.

#### Concluding Thoughts

While the data collection part of this research project was monumental, it provided the researcher with in depth, concrete data that explains why some schools have low dropout rates and others do not. In the search for answers as to why students drop out, it is imperative that one remembers that the potential dropouts are those at risk students coming from impoverished homes, who are constantly in trouble and have

societal issues, who are chronically absent from school, who come from one-parent with basic or little education households, and those who have siblings who have dropped out.

As the nation searches for ways to keep students in school so that they can be educated, it is imperative that we change the things that we can change, accept the things we cannot change, and appreciate the wisdom in knowing the difference.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
PANEL OF EXPERTS

:

Dr. Molly Howard, Principal  
Jefferson County High School  
1147 Warrior Trail  
Louisville, Georgia 30434

Mr. Anthony Smith, Principal  
Mundy's Mills High School  
9652 Fayetteville Rd.  
Jonesboro, GA 30238

Dr. Roger Williams, Principal  
Warren County High School  
1253 Atlanta Highway  
Warrenton, Georgia 30828

Cynthia Freeman-Small,  
Director of Counseling Services  
Clayton County Board of Education  
1058 Fifth Avenue  
Jonesboro, GA 30236

Monica McGahee, Teacher  
Josey High School  
1701 Fifteenth Street  
Augusta, Georgia 30901



APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Interview Questions for Teachers and Administrators

1. Tell me about your school.
2. How do you think your school compares with other high schools?
3. Describe the culture and atmosphere of your school
4. Have there been any major organizational or leadership changes in the past five years?
5. How long has the principal been the principal and are there many new teachers every year?
6. What do you think about the students who attend this school?
7. Why do you think that some students fail or repeat classes?
8. Why do you think some students eventually drop out of school?
9. Why do you think that some students (who may be at risk as defined by coming from single-parent households, having chronic absences, being socio-economically deprived, having other sibling who dropped out, and being in trouble frequently in and out school) still do not give up but remain in school and graduate?
10. What types of incentives do teachers and the administration give to students to encourage continued attendance and/or excellence?
11. Are there additional programs offered for failing students such as after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school, to name a few?
12. Is the community involved in education and how are they involved?
13. Are parents actively involved in the students' academics?

14. Describe the administration. Do you think that students support the administrators?
15. How well do the students believe in" and "appreciate" their administrators?
16. Describe the teachers as far as commitment, dedication, teaching styles, level of knowledge, and rapport.
17. Describe your counseling services. What role does the counselor play with students?

### Interview Questions for Students

1. Tell me about your school.
2. Talk about how you feel when you're here at school (culture and atmosphere of the school).
3. What do you think about the way things happen here and the way that you are treated at this school?
4. Other than sports or music (like band or chorus), do you consider your school as having any major strengths?
5. Other than sports or music (like band or chorus), do you consider your school as having any major weaknesses?
6. What do students say or how do they feel about the teachers and the administration of the school?
7. Why do you think that some students fail or repeat classes?
8. Why do you think some students eventually drop out of school?
9. Why do you think that some students (who may be at risk as defined by coming from single-parent households, having many absences, being poor, having other sisters or brothers who dropped out, and being in trouble frequently in and out school) still do not give up but remain in school and graduate?
10. What types of incentives or what things do teachers and the administration give to students to encourage them to attend school regularly and/or make good grades?
11. Are there additional programs offered for failing students such as after school tutoring, mentoring, and Saturday school, to name a few?
12. Is the community involved in education and how are they involved?

13. Do you think parents are involved enough in the students' life at school?
14. Describe the administration. Do you think that students support the administrators?
15. How well do they "believe in" and "appreciate" their administrators?
16. Describe the teachers as far as commitment, dedication, teaching styles, level of knowledge, and how they get along with students.
17. Describe your counseling services. What role does the counselor play with students?
18. If you could change or add anything to this school, what would it be and why?

APPENDIX C  
IRB APPROVAL

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board (IRB)	
Phone: 912-681-5465	Administrative Annex P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460
Fax: 912-681-0719	Ovsight@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

**To:** Michael Lewis  
P.O. Box-185  
Louisville, GA-30434

**CC:** Dr. Charles Reavis  
P.O. Box-8013

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Date:** October 5, 2007

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H07226**, and titled "**Factors That Affect The Dropout Rate**", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



N. Scott Pierce  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs