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Administrators' Perceptions of Student Dropout Interventions

Jennifer Alden Holmstrom
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Jennifer Holmstrom

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Review Committee
Dr. Alberto Gonzales, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Robert Flanders, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Karine Clay, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Jennifer Holmstrom

MA, University of Wilmington, 2012

MA, Walden University, 2007

BA, Stockton University, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Educational leaders have implemented a number of programs and practices to reduce the number of students who drop out of U.S. high schools, yet little is known in the research literature and at the practice level about how administrators perceive these interventions. The problem that this study addressed was a lack of knowledge about which implemented school practices and intervention programs are effective for reducing dropout rates from the perspectives of administrators in a Mid-Atlantic state. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore administrators' perceptions concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs intended to reduce dropout rates. The research questions addressed asked about the programs of intervention and school practices administrators had implemented in their attempt to decrease the dropout rates in their high school. The next research question inquired about the various aspects of interventions and practices administrators believed did or did not assist with decreasing their school's dropout rates? A total of eight administrators were chosen through purposeful sampling and were then individually interviewed to extrapolate the study's data. Data were analyzed using NVivo's software to identify themes. The four themes revealed were that alternative schools, various classroom techniques, principal- staff relationship, and teachers that work to build relationships with students can affect and reduce school dropout rates. The study findings may assist educational leaders in identifying and addressing potential issues with programs and practices designed to promote student retention, which may lead to a decrease in the dropout rate. The implications of reducing the dropout rate include providing graduates with the skills necessary to participate in local job markets and communities with sources of revenue.

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Dedication

This has been quite a journey, and it would not have been possible without the continuous support of my amazing husband, Jason Holmstrom, and my three awesome children, Taylor Palm, Alex Holmstrom, and Zoey Holmstrom. My family has given me tremendous support throughout this doctoral journey. Jason, my husband, has been my rock and my constant support, and I could never have done it without him. My children who supported me with my late night and early mornings and who did not mind me carrying my computer EVERYWHERE! You bring my life more joy than you could ever understand, and I love you so much!

I would like to thank my dad, John C. Alden, who is no longer here, but who has always been a source of inspiration. I always hoped that you would see what I have done and that I would make you proud. My mom, Anna Alden, who drove me to dream big. My sister Liza Oliver Gallegos, a beautiful voice that soothes my soul; and my sisters Denise, Jaclyn, and Samantha, who have joined my dad and who have always been my angels on my shoulders. To Bonnie, Rick, Moriah, Sarah, Martin, Danielle, Tim, Uncle Teddy, and Bubbies--my family, who have always been huge supporters--thank you.

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A huge acknowledgment goes to my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Alberto Gonzalez. He has been so great in his feedback, support, and encouragement. It is truly a journey and a war of attrition. Thank you for taking up the armor with me. A huge thank you to my second committee member who jumped right in especially when I needed him to complete my study, Dr. Robert Flanders. Thank you so much!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In 2017, there were 2.1 million United States students who dropped out of high school without a diploma between the ages of 16 and 24 years of age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). This increase is also the case for the Mid-Atlantic state that served as the study setting, as exhibited in Figures 1 and 2. Research indicates that dropping out of school results in low paying jobs, increased unemployment, increased likelihood of substance abuse, higher crime rates, and failure to contribute to the economy (Iachini et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). In the 2016- 2017 school year, the dropout rate for the United States stood at 15.4% (Kerr & Boyington, 2019). Each high school dropout costs the United States more than $163,000 in lost tax revenue over their lifetime (American Public Health Association, 2018).

In the United States, multiple social issues exist in public school education that contribute to the dropout phenomenon (Allen et al., 2018; Sivakumar et al., 2016; Videnović & Lazarević, 2017). Childhood poverty is a prime example of a social issue that directly affects contemporary education and is associated with an increased risk of dropping out of school (Allen et al., 2018; Sivakumar et al., 2016; Videnović & Lazarević, 2017). Researchers have assessed these various factors and the likelihood of their contribution towards dropping out of school (Lee-St. John et al., 2018). Lee-St. John et al. (2018) explored the link between participation in comprehensive elementary school student support intervention programs and high school dropouts. Problems like this is a small example of the many social issues contribute to students dropping out of high school.

Figure 1

*Dropo*ut *Percentages for the Mid- Atlantic State High Schools in the County in the Study*

County Drop Out Rates by Individual High School
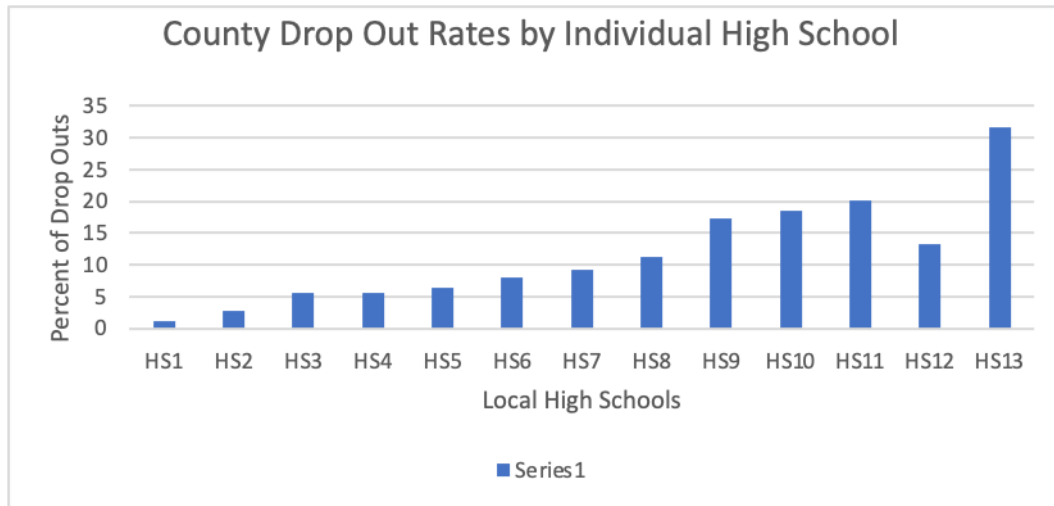
Note. The data were published by the state's Department of Education in 2018.

The Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, which gave authority over school improvement, teacher evaluations, and funding transparency back to states and districts, had also focused attention on U.S. schools and how school leaders address school dropout rates. Even with this control being handed back to local districts, there is no inquiry, according to my research, where the administrator of the school who is in charge of implementing new programs and practices is explored. Furthermore, despite the focus on processes within schools through ESSA, there is no research that exists, according to my review of the literature, on administrators' perceptions of successful strategies to reduce dropout rates.

I sought to fill a critical gap in the literature by examining administrators' perceptions regarding the barriers and the interventions that are effective for decreasing dropout rates. In this chapter, I provide background information on the research problem. Subsequently, the problem statement and the purpose of the study are presented, and the nature of the study is detailed. The chapter concludes with a summary and a transition to the literature review presented in Chapter 2.

Figure 2

The Trend in County Dropout Rates by Individual High School
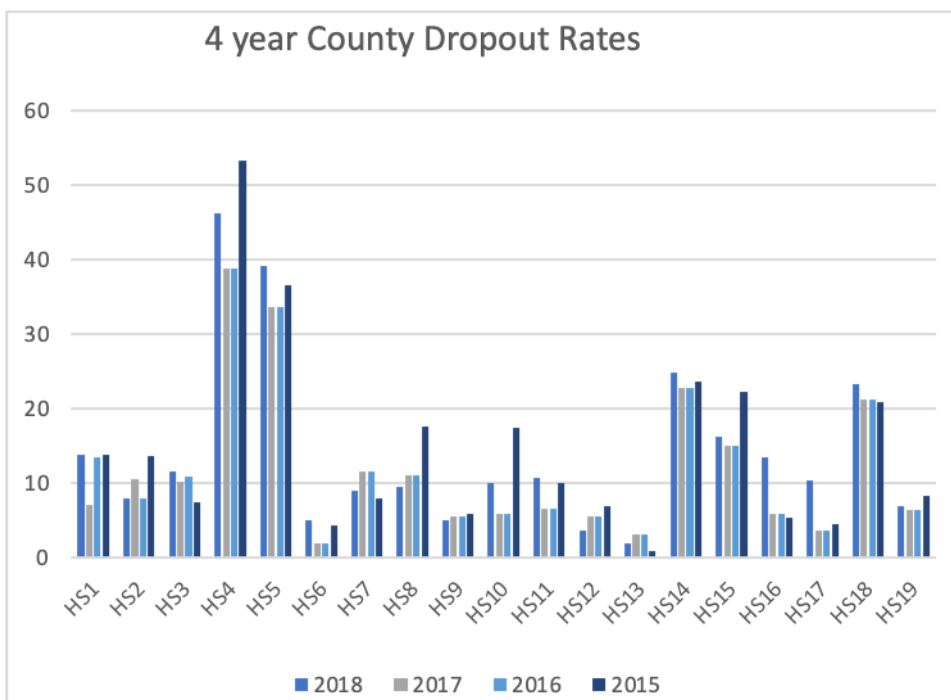
Note. Data were published by the state Department of Education in 2018.

Background

The issue of students dropping out from high school in the United States is a significant issue that has been addressed in the academic literature (see Pfeiffer et al.,

2019). The same types of issues are visible in the Mid-Atlantic state that served as the study setting, as shown in Figure 2. This figure represents the dropout rates from each public school in the county for the past four years. Prior researchers focused on interventions from educator perspectives and predictors of high school and middle school dropouts such as social and structural inequalities, poor teacher certification, and lack of mentoring for novice teachers (see Albright et al., 2017; Dupéré et al., 2015; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Maxie, 2001; McKee & Caldarella, 2016; Nairz-Wirth & Feldmann, 2017; Pfeiffer et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016). However, the perspectives of the administration towards interventions for reducing dropouts is absent in the academic literature I reviewed.

Several researchers have explored instructional models of reducing dropouts. Welch and Hodge (2018) demonstrated that intervention models present varied results for reducing dropouts due to the extensive scope of issues that may impact students (e.g., family issues, mental health, and academic performance). Other models are focused on administrative guidelines that can lead educators and staff to better models of instruction to reduce dropouts (Horsford & Powell, 2016). However, empirical evidence for administrative strategies and their perceptions of their effects is lacking in the academic literature (Horsford & Powell, 2016). As a result, the perspectives of the administrative leader of the school who is making decisions on the implementation of programs and procedures are not adequately known.

Most research concerns dropout-related predictors (Lee-St. John et al., 2018) and the instruments for reducing dropout, such as intervention programs (Hernæs et al.;

Welch & Hodge, 2018). However, these assessments are not frequently focused on administration, which is a critical figure in guiding positive outcomes for the school (Horsford & Powell, 2016). According to Horsford and Powell (2016), effective school leaders who share a vision with their staff that requires academic rigor ensure that the organizational structures support these high expectations. These researchers further identified that a positive school culture, which includes supportive leadership and staff, school-wide behavior programs, and engaging instruction, could minimize discipline issues and, in turn, increase a student's chance of completing high school (see also Hutton, 2017; Welch & Hodge, 2018). Ideally, schools should focus on a positive and safe learning environment and setting high academic and social expectations to ensure high academic gains, according to Lee-St. John et al. (2018), who contend that doing so would engage students enough to keep them in school. Another dropout factor is increasing poverty; therefore, it is critical to examine how administrators can decrease the dropout rate through program and policy implementation in their schools (Hutton, 2017).

Leadership within a school is critical to guiding staff and educators towards positive goals that will ultimately impact students (Ottosen et al., 2017). Researchers indicate that educators are most significantly guided by the efforts of principals that ensure that resources are provided that will aid in the quality education of children and prevent dropouts (Akin & Radford, 2018; Hunt et al., 2017; Ottosen et al., 2017). According to Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann (2017), the leadership of a principal or administrator has a direct correlation to student achievement. Nappi (2019) documented that administrator involvement has evolved due to increasing school resources and

professional development. In an earlier study, Witziers et al. (2003) analyzed 35 different studies published from 1986 to 1996 which suggested that leaders shape cultures.

Furthermore, Marzano et al. (2018) expressed that the U.S. educational system is meant to ensure that administrators can provide guidance and have an impact on student achievement and success. Researchers additionally noted that novice educators must be overseen by administrators who can ensure practices and resources are in place for meeting the educational goals of the school and ultimately preventing dropout rates (Matsko et al., 2020). However, the perspectives of administration regarding barriers, implemented school practices, and effective intervention programs are not available in previous literature. Thus, despite evidence that administration plays a key role in supporting educators and providing intervention programs (Heyne et al., 2019; Jordan & Miller, 2018; Soares et al., 2019), there is a lack of knowledge regarding administrators' perceptions of these programs.

Problem Statement

In a Mid-Atlantic state, it is not known what established student dropout intervention practices are effective in reducing high school dropout rates. The specific problem that this study addressed is a lack of knowledge about which implemented school practices and intervention programs are effective for reducing dropout rates from the perspectives of administrators. The gap in practice and literature established the need for further investigation of the school dropout phenomenon. Further, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the administrative perception of programs in the Mid-Atlantic area. Research is also lacking regarding barriers, school practices, and intervention programs

for reducing dropout rates from the perspective of administrators. Thus, in conducting this basic study, I sought to elucidate administrator perceptions regarding barriers, implemented school practices, and intervention programs for reducing dropout rates.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore administrative perceptions concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs that help reduce dropout rates. For this purpose, I gathered data from eight campus administrators regarding school practices and intervention programs that they have used to reduce dropout rates. The interview data was transcribed and thematically coded following the guidelines of Ravitch and Carl (2016). Emergent patterns were used to identify themes that addressed the research questions (RQs) stated in the following section. The findings of this basic study may serve as an educational tool to demonstrate current administrators' perceptions of successful programs that help to reduce the number of students who drop out from high school.

Research Questions

I sought to answer the following RQs in this basic qualitative study:

RQ 1: What programs of intervention and school practices have administrators implemented and found to be effective in their attempts to decrease the dropout rates in their high school?

RQ 2: What aspects of the interventions and practices implemented do administrators believe are effective with decreasing dropout rates?

Conceptual Framework

School leadership ultimately impacts educational outcomes, engagement of the students, and the efficacy of school programs and policies (Marzano et al., 2018). I used the Marzano school leadership evaluation model to assess administrators' perceptions. Specifically, I used the elements in the model to identify the perceived barriers to the successful or unsuccessful implementation of interventions to reduce dropout rates in high school.

Marzano et al. (2018) found that as administrators become more effective in their leadership roles, student achievement increases. Marzano et al. established the leadership model, which is used for assessing the effects of leadership on student achievement. The school leadership evaluation model is a leadership theory that was an ideal framework for this basic qualitative study. In this section, I will illustrate the pertinence of the model to the study.

The school leadership evaluation model includes an assessment of the role of the administrator as a leader for both adults and students. In this framework, a leader's influence on staff-student ability to learn is emphasized (Marzano et al., 2018). In this manner, the administrator affects students academically by driving a teacher's professional development and creating a vision for the school, which includes the implementation of a positive classroom environment (Eagle et al., 2015). Further, an educational leader can implement programs to maximize student engagement and increase attrition (Eagle et al., 2015). Ultimately, these areas impact a student's desire to

stay and finish school, thereby reducing the dropout rate (Eagle et al., 2015; Marzano et al., 2018).

In considering the factors of the Marzano framework with the current teacher evaluation model, researchers can explore factors that may contribute to the reduction of the administrators' influence regarding student achievement (Marzano et al., 2018). Still, researchers have yet to employ this theory for exploration of how administrators can serve to reduce dropout rates through policies and interventions designed to increase engagement and interest (Korman, 2020). As such, the use of this model will serve to further the understanding of the framework and to guide the understanding of how an academic leader directly influences teacher pedagogical practice and, ultimately, various student outcomes, (Marzano et al., 2018).

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative study design to explore administrators' perceptions. I gathered primary data from semistructured interviews with eight campus administrators who have had direct dealing with factors that may affect the dropout rates. The interviews were transcribed and thematically coded to analyze the data. For the coding procedure, I followed the guidelines of Ravitch and Carl (2016) to assess similar words, phrases, and sentences manually. Ultimately through coding, emergent patterns were identified to address the RQs (Saldaña, 2016).

Definitions

Adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR): A method used by school district leaders to track a group or cohort of students who enter high school together as first-time ninth graders and graduate on time with a regular diploma (DePaoli et al., 2016, p. 87).

Pull factors: Dropout factors that are school related such as attendance and discipline (Doll et al., 2013).

Push factors. Dropout factors that are external and internal issues, such as family, jobs, lack of interest in school, and high mobility (Doll et al., 2013)

Assumptions

I assumed that the participants would answer the interview questions honestly and candidly. Though it is not possible to ensure participants' honesty, I made every effort to ensure participants' confidentiality and comfort during the interviews. A second assumption was that the participants would be genuinely interested in research participation and would provide detailed information to further the knowledge of unsuccessful intervention models for decreasing high school dropout rates.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was limited to a region in the Mid-Atlantic part of the United States; therefore, it is difficult its findings to project to the broader U.S. population. As such, the findings of this study will not be generalizable beyond this study region. I obtained data by conducting interviews with high school administrators whose high schools witnessed increasing dropout rates. The rationale for the scope of this study

was that the study focused on the perceptions of the administrator on choosing what programs and practices will directly positively impact the dropout rates.

The delimitation was necessary for the scope of this study, which focused on administrators' perceptions of programs and practices and their impacts on dropout rates. This study was further narrowed concerning time, resources, and location. The study period was the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. I conducted participant interviews during the months when the building leadership team was in operation and available.

Limitations

The main limitation of this basic qualitative study was that the findings cannot be extended to the more extensive population outside of this study. Nevertheless, the findings of this study may serve to encourage future researchers to explore the same phenomenon in differing localities.

Significance

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of how programs implemented by educational leaders were successful or unsuccessful in decreasing high school dropout rates. Ideally, a better understanding of this issue can lead to the development of more appropriate school retention programs for reducing the inequalities identified in previous implementation methods. Furthermore, sharing successful programs and initiatives may encourage stakeholders and policy makers to fund intervention strategies at schools struggling with student retention. This qualitative study may further contribute to social change by providing local administrators with

information about programs that offer successful or unsuccessful models for decreasing student dropout.

A secondary impact of this study may be to provide additional knowledge to address the current gap in practice regarding models for reducing dropout through administrator-implemented programs. Previous researchers have sought to understand factors that contribute to dropout rates; however, there is a disconnect between research-based knowledge and its implementation by educators who develop rich classroom practice (Broekkamp & Van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Guldberg, 2017; McIntyre, 2005). Thus, the information from this study may serve to decrease this knowledge gap and provide added information that can be used for educator and administrator implementation.

The gap in practice highlights how the United States has struggled to reach students at risk of dropping out. Recent governmental efforts to change standardized testing by increasing expectations have failed to reduce high school dropout rates ((New Jersey Department of Education, 2015). Thus, the aim of this study was to provide insight on how administrators perceive their efforts to reduce dropout rates. Ideally, the findings of this study could be used by educational leaders to attempt various programs to reduce dropout rates. Further, this study may be useful for administrators to identify programs that their peers have found to be unsuccessful.

Summary

Education and dropout rates are a concerning phenomenon in the United States (Eagle et al., 2015; Marzano et al., 2018). In this chapter, I provided background

information on the problem of dropout rates. The purpose of this basic qualitative study

was to explore administrators' perceptions concerning implemented school practices and

intervention programs that help reduce dropout rates. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the

previous empirical literature regarding the structural inequalities in the United States

educational systems. I will also explore previous methods that have used globally to

reduce dropout rates and the role of external and internal factors in increasing dropout

rates.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore administrators' perceptions concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs that help reduce dropout rates among high school students. This purpose addressed the problem, which is that it is not known which implemented school practices and intervention programs are effective for reducing dropout rates from the perspectives of administrators. Student school dropout is a problem as students who drop out of school experience low paying jobs, increased unemployment, higher crime rates, and failure to contribute to the economy (Iachini et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). To address the research problem, I examined administrators' perceptions regarding these practices. This gap in practice and the literature supported further investigation of the school dropout phenomenon. This research may assist administrators in recognizing that their leadership can influence dropout rates, as argued by Marzano (Marzano et al., 2018).

I used the Marzano school leadership model (Marzano et al., 2018) as the conceptual framework for this study. More specifically, I used elements of the Marzano school leadership evaluation model to assess participating administrators' perceptions of the barriers to the successful or unsuccessful implementation of interventions to reduce dropout rates in high school. This model provided a foundation for understanding how school administration can be used as a means of increasing student outcomes by reducing dropout rates in high schools. Further, the use of the model provided information regarding the interaction of administrative leadership and student dropout rates.

In this chapter, I first present the literature search strategy, followed by the conceptual framework. The literature review that follows is organized around four key topics: (a) dropout rates in the United States; (b) demographic and structural inequality in the United States; (c) methods for reducing dropout rates; and (d) three subsequent subsections regarding culturally responsive teaching, student-teacher relationships, and early intervention models. The chapter concludes with a summary that emphasizes the gap elucidated in the review of the literature and the most salient points presented.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted the search for current (2015-2020) peer-reviewed articles mostly via Walden University's online library. The databases I searched included Academic Search Complete, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), and Sage Journals. Google Scholar was also utilized to locate open access articles. I used the following search terms to locate articles specific to this study: *high school dropout*, *dropout prevention programs*, *graduation rates*, *dropout characteristics*, *job placement*, *dropout programs*, *dropout interventions*, *program effectiveness*, *program improvement for high school dropout*, *intervention programs*, *dropout programs*, *dropout characteristics*, and *intervention program effectiveness*. Variations of these terms were used to ensure exhaustive search results. A total of 125 articles were found that were published between 2015 and 2020. I also used twenty articles published before 2015 due to their significance to the primary literature of this topic.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used for this study was the Marzano (Marzano et al., 2018) school leadership evaluation model. Marzano et al. originally developed this model as a means of evaluating the current school leadership models for increasing student achievement. The model includes five domains that are used for assessing leadership in the United States: (a) a data-driven focus on student achievement, (b) continuous improvement of instruction, (c) a guaranteed and viable curriculum, (d) cooperation and collaboration, and (e) school climate. Marzano advocated in each of these domains that the leader can increase their policy guidance to ensure student achievement. Therefore, the model was appropriate for this study of perceptions of administrative leadership.

Marzano et al. (2005) presented the original development of the model in *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results*. In this model, the authors proposed that, based on previous experience and empirical research, there was a need to assess how administration in the United States directly impacted student achievement. Later, Marzano et al. (2018) regarded the nature of their findings as critical to future research, stating "our meta-analysis of 35 years of research indicates that school leadership has a substantial effect on student achievement and provides guidance for experienced and aspiring administrators' alike" (p. 13).

The work of Marzano et al. (2018) has subsequently been employed across multiple academic settings as a means of guiding leadership assessment and framing the understanding of how leadership skills in an academic setting contribute to student outcomes. For example, Sun and Leithwood (2015) explored school leadership practices

and their resultant effectiveness using the guiding models of Marzano et al. (2018). In reviewing literature from the past 10 years, I found other studies in which the school leadership evaluation model was used to explore school leadership. Such explorations range from exploring culturally responsive teaching (Khalifa et al., 2016) to assessing administrative leadership (Hvidston et al., 2016) and assessing the ideal traits of an administrator (McKinney et al., 2015). In terms of exploring how the administration can be useful for reducing dropouts, through policies and practices, research has yet to be conducted, based on my review of the literature. Next, I will review the issue of dropouts in the United States through an understanding of relevant literature.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

In the United States, dropout rates are notably increasing (Dupéré et al., 2015; McKee & Caldarella, 2016). The term *dropout* refers to the phenomenon of leaving school for various reasons without completing classes and a degree (Bachler et al., 2017; Corry et al., 2017; Rumberger, 2020). Pfeiffer et al. (2019) noted that in the United States a sum of 500,000 students is documented as dropping out of high school during the 2018-2019 academic year. As such, multiple researchers have examined the cause of dropout and proposed possible intervention models.

Previous researchers have focused primarily on the factors that influence dropping out of high school. This research is predominantly focused on external factors, such as family life or problematic friends (Rumberger, 2020). Research indicates that the home life and socioeconomic status of the child serve as factors that can reduce the ability of the child to finish school. For example, Ambrose et al. (2017) conducted a multiyear

study and reported an increase of dropout rates for students who needed to hold jobs outside of school to support themselves or their families. Furthermore, Bachler et al. (2017) reported that dropout rates increase if the child is in place with a problematic family that includes abuse, substance abuse, or neglect. Many of these issues contribute to sociocultural inequalities, which will be discussed further in the following sections.

The economic impact of dropping out is also a factor that researchers consider as problematic. Rumberger (2020) assessed dropouts and found that if students' complete school, they are more likely to generate $200,000 more individually in economic contributions. Similarly, Gauthier (2020) noted that dropout rates should be a concern for all citizens, as the decrease of education and increased debt of students who do not finish high school impact taxpayers. Further, Sharkey and Torrats-Espinosa (2017) noted that the decrease of a high school education is statistically correlated with increased crime, which ultimately leads to the increase of cost for taxpayers and, in some cases, a burden of death or assault.

Previous research provides a dearth of information regarding the trends for students that did drop out and the methods that were previously employed to reduce dropout rates. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) provided a contemporary review of the current understanding of school dropout trends and intervention and prevention methods. The authors found that significant empirically research exists to explore models that are tailored for each student. In this model, the authors argued that students are more likely to feel supported. Still, educators are also likely to feel overwhelmed at assessing prevention and intervention models for each child in large bodies of students due to the specificity of

instruction. Then, in contrast, research from large-scale assessments in the past decades indicates that successful prevention models are tailored to the needs of each student. Despite these contradictions, how administrations can best assess and implement such sophisticated intervention strategies remains unclear. Also, Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela (2016) also further suggested that teacher training for behavior management can be one model that incorporates the educators and administrators in preventing dropout through teacher education. In these manners, teachers can be the first-line defenders against the internal risk for dropouts and can also serve to monitor for students that may need to be targeted for intervention. Ecker-Lyster and Niileksela's (2016) work is critical as it provides an up-to-date overview of the current strategies for prevention and intervention. However, in terms of this study, an exploration of how these are successfully or unsuccessfully employed from administrative perspectives is lacking.

Researchers also indicate that one model of prediction is the likelihood or current use of prescription medication abuse in the United States. McCabeet al. (2018) explored the issue of drug misuse, substance abuse, and high school dropout rates in the United States. For their study, the authors employed data from the 2009-2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health from a sample of 160,845 young adults that ranged in age from 18-24. The respondents were categorized towards past substance abuse, prescription abuse, and their record of dropping out of school. Prescription abuse included the use of opioids, stimulants, and tranquilizers. The authors found that 11.9% of the students reported using opioids, 5.8% used tranquilizers, or a separate form of substance abuse

while in school. Resultantly, those students were most likely to drop out of school compared to nonusers.

Additionally, the use of substances and prescriptions was most significantly correlated with the likelihood of future addictive behaviors, theft, assault, or jail. McCabe et al. (2018) argued that one concern for educators should be how to reduce drug and prescription abuse in schools. Thus, through early identification and intervention, some high school retention can be achieved; but how administrative staff can employ this was not discussed.

Family structure is also an issue that may play a role in decreasing student's ability to maintain employment in the future and drop out of high school. Vázquez-Nava et al. (2019) explored the possible connection between family structure and high school dropouts. In particular, the authors wanted to assess if status as a female Hispanic increased this risk. As such, the authors explored a sample of 765 teens that reported dropping out of high school. The authors used a cross-sectional assessment and a survey delivered to the teens. The authors then explored teach variables through multivariate regression analysis. Resultantly, Vázquez-Nava et al. (2019) reported that Hispanic females with low-income family structures or absent parents were more likely to report smoking, drinking, sexual activity, and becoming pregnant at a young age.

Further, these same students were less likely to obtain a GED and move into college. These same children were more likely or did drop out of high school as a result of their experiences. The authors noted that based on these findings and the statistical results that high schools should consider if children are at risk due to family structures

and if so, should develop intervention strategies and support structures. Still, which preexisting models' administrators employed for this suggestion was not a focus of the study and was thus not explored.

In the same vein, parenting styles are also linked to the likelihood that a child will drop out of school. Majumder (2016) assessed parenting styles and the outcomes on the educational status of children in the United States. The author explored data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and explored differences in reported parenting styles and educational outcomes using logic regression analysis. Further, a simulated report of the likelihood of the child to dropout was discussed. Majumder (2016) found that children who lived with authoritarian style parenting were more likely to report poor academic performance and drop out. Those students that did not dropout were also less likely to obtain a college degree. Thus, the author concluded that parents with authoritarian styles were 5.5% more likely to witness children that would drop out of school. Thus, indicating a need to explore how parenting styles can interact with the school system and how the administration can offset a variable that is not controllable within the school system. Nonetheless, it is notable that the author pulled data from a dated survey set, which brings to question if the data would be different if a more recent sample set were examined.

Increasing dropout rates also ultimately impact the health of the public and students. Lappan et al. (2020) indicated a statistically significant increase in substance abuse for students that failed to finish high school. Further, Lansford et al. (2016) indicated that risk factors increased for students that failed to finish school. Such risk

factors included the increased likelihood of behaving in risky behavior, such as unsafe sex, self-harm, suicide, and drug and substance abuse (Lansford et al., 2016; Lappan et al., 2020).

In considering dropout rates, researchers indicate that it is essential not to place blame on these children. At the age of dropout, the brain is underdeveloped. Further, such students are typically unsupported and suffering from various personal issues that make finishing school appear to be impossible. Lansford et al. (2016) indicated that it is the central role of the educator and the administration to support children and retain them within the education system (Coa & Patrick, 2016; Greenberg et al., 2017). Ultimately, there are a variety of factors that contribute to the issue of dropping out of school (Bachler et al., 2017; Corry et al., 2017; Rumberger, 2020). First, these issues will be explored in the following section to assess the demographic and social inequities that contribute to the dropout rates in the United States.

Demographic and Structural Inequality in the United States

In the United States, there has been a significant increase in child poverty levels due to shifting demographics. Researchers illustrate that the issue of poverty and inequality is disproportionately are illustrated across the United States (Corry et al., 2017; McCabe et al., 2018; Young-sik, 2018). From 1992-2017, child poverty decreased across the country but rose in the Northeastern state from 20.5% to 32% (Corry et al., 2017; McCabe et al., 2018; Young et al., 2018). In this sample, 27% of children are Hispanic, and 13% are African American (Corry et al., 2017; McCabe et al., 2018; Young et al., 2018). Furthermore, these groups account for a disproportionally higher percentage of children living in poverty who dropout (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Demographic Comparison School's Dropout Rates
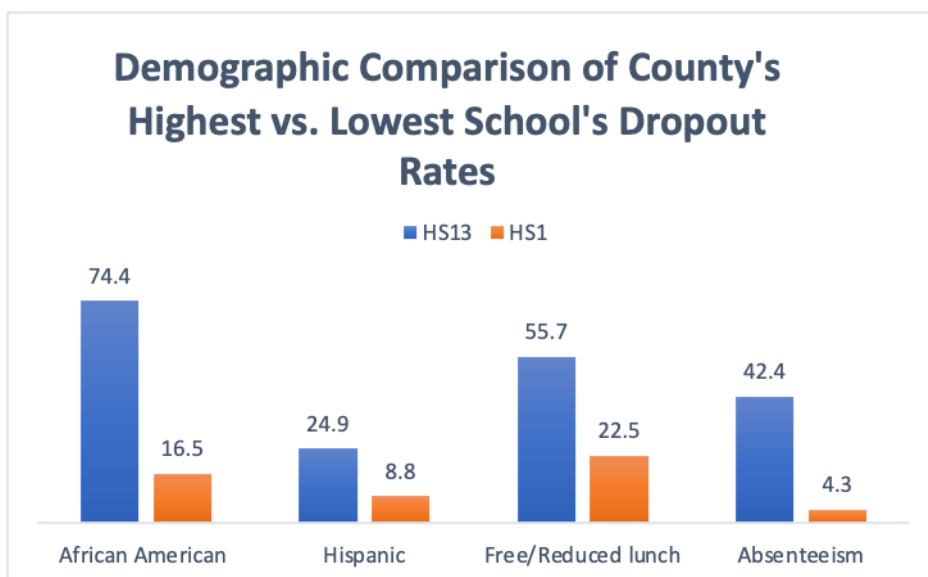
Note. Data were published by U.S. Census Bureau, 2017

The local urban level within this same state provides an example of this racial discrepancy within poverty (Fisher & Smeeding, 2016; Young et al., 2018). In high school with the lowest dropout rates in the county, the demographics include 8.8% of Hispanic and 16.8% African American student populations (Education, 2018). For these students, the free and reduced lunch rates are at 22.5% of the student population (Education, 2018). Comparatively, the high schools as identified by the state with the highest dropout rates where the demographics are 24.9% Hispanic, and 74.4% are African American, and the free and reduced lunch rates are 55.7% (Education, 2018). These statistics further represent the disparity and social inequity being identified as a potential issue.

Smaller subgroups represent a more substantial proportion of chronic absenteeism and free and reduced lunch (Education, 2018). All these issues are symptomatic of a population living in poverty (Gottfried, 2019). Researchers illustrate that these alarming statistics to point to structural inequities plaguing student populations (Domina et al., 2018; Mozer et al., 2019).

Structural inequality is built into educational organizations, which creates a system of privilege (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016; Van Praag et al., 2019). Researchers such as Van Praag et al. (2019) provide significant research regarding the prevalence of structural inequalities in the United States education system. For example, students of color and in lower socioeconomic status are more likely to experience hardship and difficulty in school (Melesse & Molla, 2018; Van Praag et al., 2019). In the northeastern state, structural inequalities are widely recognized. The northeastern states

have developed a counsel to assess the interventions for creating equitable access (Baker & Weber, 2016; Moayedi & Davis, 2018). When researching various challenges within the educational system in this state, the *State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access* plan cited structural inequalities of great concern (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015). Poverty and race are two key examples cited as being one of these categories in which these structural inequalities affect development and education (Baker & Weber, 2016; Burkholder et al., 2016; Van Praag et al., 2019). The Report included structural inequalities that include teachers not being highly qualified, teachers teaching outside of their field, and novice teachers (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015).

      One factor noted to contribute to the perpetuation of social inequities is the weak certification and quality of current educators in this Mid- Atlantic state (Lipuma & Reich, 2017). Certifications, while being the necessity of new teachers, continues to be the main factor that is perpetuating this social inequity to continue to exist (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015). The report indicated that in 2004, 13.7% of high poverty teachers were not highly qualified as teachers as compared to low-poverty areas where 3.7% lacked proper qualifications. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015, pg. 16). Additionally, what these numbers indicate is that teachers in these areas do not qualify under the No Child Left Behind definition of being highly qualified. These comparisons continue to show that the educational system is failing to provide students with the best opportunity for success. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015). To correct this discrepancy, the state reduced the percentage of those teachers who were not highly qualified. By 2013, the number of highly qualified teachers decreased to 0.3% of

high poverty areas being taught by teachers who were not deemed highly qualified as compared to low poverty areas where it decreased to 0%. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015, pg. 16). Outside of this official report, empirical research is lacking regarding the need for increasing teacher certification as a means of reducing structural inequality.

In addition to the lack of highly qualified teachers, another structural inequality includes teachers in this state who are teaching in areas to which they are not certified (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015). This state has labeled this "teachers teaching out of their field" (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015). Data shows in 2013, 55.3% of teachers who service predominately Hispanic and African American populations did not hold the correct certification in the area for which they were teaching (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015). The Statewide Educator Equity Plan states that solving the out of field placement for students of color and low socioeconomic students alone would eliminate the achievement gap and 75% of the discrepancy between white and non-white students (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015, p. 18). These statistics suggest that when comparing the levels of properly placed teachers, students in high poverty areas are at a disadvantage to those low poverty counterparts.

In addition to lacking proper certification and teaching out of their field, teachers in high poverty areas are typically new or novice teachers. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015). During the 2013- 2014 school year, one-third of this state's teachers had less than one year of experience, and 65% of the state's teachers had less than four years' experience or novice teachers (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015, pg.6).

In other words, over half of the teaching population were novice teachers. Of those percentages, 28.4% of white students had a first-year teacher compare with 32.8% of African American students and 29.1% of Latino students (New Jersey Department of Education, 2015).

Outside of New Jersey, researchers further corroborate that deficient teacher certification and lack of experience can lead to decreased student outcomes (Figure 3). The data supports the assertion that new inexperienced teachers are more prevalent in high poverty school districts (Albright et al., 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016). The significance of this inequality is that research consistently demonstrates that experience plays a significant role in teacher effectiveness (Albright et al., 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016). Therefore, the need for more experienced teachers can assist in reducing the social inequality that could have a potential effect on assisting in reducing dropout rates.

Figure 3

Dropout Rates and Teacher Experience
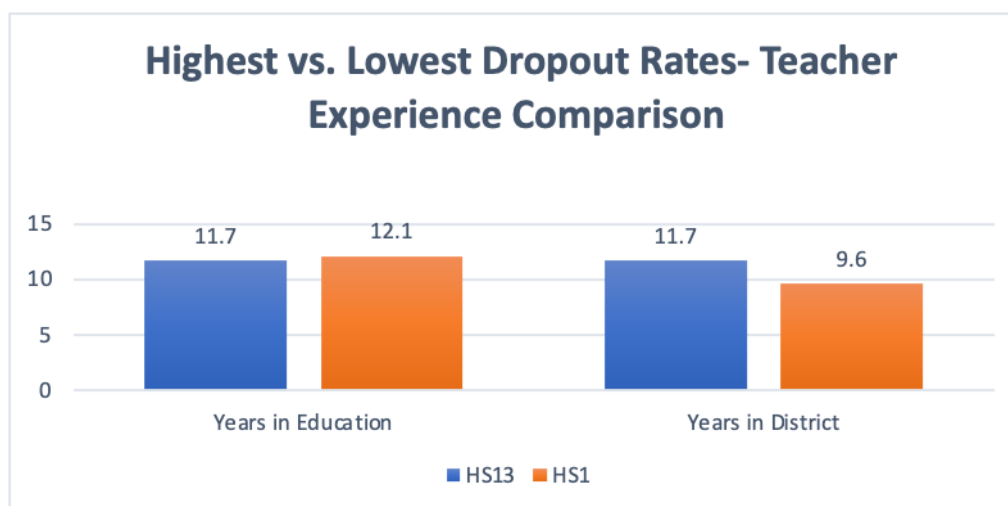
Note. The data were published by the Maxie, 2001

In sum, previous research indicates that poor certification models and novice educators are one element that leads to furthered inequalities within the current educational system (Martin et al., 2016; Sowell, 2017; Zembytska, 2016). Thus, improvement within the education system can be achieved through fielding teachers, encouraging novice teachers to obtain development, and ensuring that student education is not reduced due to educational inequalities. By decreasing teacher deficits, dropout rates may be reduced due to improved educational environment and quality. There are multiple methods presented in academic literature regarding the reduction of dropout rates, which is explored in the next section.

Strategies for Addressing the Dropout Problem

Dropout Characteristics

Multiple factors are related to the likelihood of students dropping out. Researchers indicate that variables of school climate can increase dropping out for some children (Kotok et al., 2016). Additionally, students that are engaged in substance abuse at a young age are more likely to drop out than students that are not involved in risky behavior (Kristensen et al., 2018). Secondary factors include mental illness and ADHD (Chacko et al., 2017), incarcerated parents (Nichols, Loper, & Meyer, 2016), and disability physically and mentally (Myhr et al., 2016). Literature additionally indicates that the variables that impact high school dropout may be unique to the geographic region and the local family environment (Warren, 2016).

Dropout Programs

As a result of the increasing dropout of students in the middle to high school grade ranges, programs to address the needs of these students are provided across the United States (Heppen et al., & Pohl, 2018). Dropout programs include mentoring and home-schooling based provisions (Heppen et al., 2018). Additionally, some programs are targeted at identifying at-risk students before dropping out of school (Hofflinger & von Hippel, 2020). Literature indicates that programs in high schools and middle schools that target the needs of at-risk students are more likely to reduce dropout rates than schools that do not provide such programs (Rumberger, 2020).

Intervention Programs

Intervention programs are designed to address at-risk students and find the ideal solution to prevent them from dropping out of school (Reschly, 2020). Reschly (2020) indicated that dropout prevention programs increase the engagement of students as a means of reducing the risk of leaving the school. Mendenhall, Bartlett, and Ghaffar-Kucher (2017) additionally noted that dropout intervention programs have a positive history of impacting at-risk students and providing them with additional resources to stay enrolled. Carter et al. (2017) further noted that ensuring that students feel safe to express their opinions and concerns for their future is an ideal method for assessing how to prevent them from dropping out.

Job Placement and Training

Job placement and training is one option to offer students who are considered at-risk for dropping out. This job training and placement can provide students access to career opportunities that could encouragement them to remain in high school (Balcazar et

al., 2018; Ghignoni et al., 2019). Additionally, job training methods can increase the technical skills of the students and provide an opportunity for their future. Job programs are noted to aid in the ability for dropout students to make connections and increase their engagement in their future (Balcazar et al., 2018). Further, job placement programs can aid in the transition from the school to work, which increases the motivation for students to gain their GED and later join college (Ghignoni et al., 2019). Further, some authors noted that the inclusion of these programs could also be placed as intervention programs as a means of illustrating the need for education to screed in the modern work environment (Blazer & Gonzalez Hernandez, 2018).

Nontraditional Education

For some dropout students, a nontraditional educational route is chosen. These methods include enrollment in vocational schools or charter-based schools that are guided towards GED obtainment (Tieben, 2020). These programs greatly vary according to the geographic region and the needs of the student (Chen & Kesten, 2017). For example, nontraditional learners, such as dropout students, can receive their GED in special programs (Chen & Kesten, 2017; Tieben, 2020). Other programs also include vocational training, such as working towards apprenticeships (Frost, 2019).

Program Effectiveness and Improvements

Programs to address the needs of high school dropouts are frequently discussed in terms of effectiveness within academic literature. Previous literature demonstrates that the techniques used in the programs vary ineffectiveness. For example, Emm- Collison (2016) found that motivational interviewing can be useful for engaging at-risk children.

However, Heppen et al. (2018) note that mentoring is more effective than group-based programs. Ultimately, there is a gap in the current literature of the most effective general strategies for providing interventions, training, and mentoring for at-risk students and those that are already dropped out of school (Blazer & Gonzalez Hernandez, 2018).

Other Methods for Reducing Dropout Rates

The models presented in academic research regarding the appropriate models for the reduction of dropout rates will now be introduced. Literature concerning appropriate models for the reduction of dropout rates is significant, as such, sub-sections are designated to assess each of these variables. First, absenteeism monitoring is reviewed.

Absenteeism Monitoring

The role of the school is crucial in assessing why a student is likely to drop out of high school. As such, researchers Jordan and Miller (2018) reviewed research regarding absenteeism and the resultant correlation with student performance. The authors identified that at least 27 states that defined high absenteeism as missing 10 percent or more of school (Jordan & Miller, 2018). Furthermore, 36 states eliminated chronic absenteeism as Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates. Thus, schools used absenteeism as one model to identify potential dropouts and reduce punishment for external life issues (Jordan & Miller, 2018). In corroboration, Soares et al. (2019) and Heyne et al. (2019) noted that increased absenteeism, and subsequent school punishment, fail to support students in need. As such, one model for the reduction of dropout is assessing absenteeism (Heyne et al., 2019; Jordan & Miller, 2018; Soares et al., 2019).

In sum, school policies need to be reviewed so as not to be counterproductive in the goal of the whole school reform (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Researchers Wilkins and Bost (2016) and Heyne et al. (2019) indicate that the integration of decisions based on risk factors and ideal interventions is a more appropriate model for dealing with student behavioral issues. Further, through identification, administrative staff can assess how to prevent students that present as at-risk for dropping out of school (Wilkins & Bost, 2016).

School Initiatives

School initiatives are also a critical factor in reducing dropouts. Researchers, Rinka et al. (2016), identified schools that implemented multiple initiatives improved their graduation rates from a 16.7% to 31.3% increase over four years. These schools were successful by focusing heavily on policy changes that specifically dealt with being late to school, handing in work on time, and reducing high suspension rates (Rinka et al., 2016). Nevertheless, identified schools that changed the entire school culture had the most significant changes (Rinka et al., 2016). By focusing on reducing out-of-school suspensions, reducing the credit hour requirements, hiring a graduation coach, implementing an online credit recovery system, and providing buses for afterschool tutoring, these schools saw a change in their school's culture (Rinka et al., 2016).

Extra-Curricular Activities

Researchers also indicate that one intervention strategy can include extracurricular activities. Neely and Vaquera (2017) assessed the relationship between high school dropout rates and extracurricular engagement. For the author's assessment, data from the 2002 Education Longitudinal Study was used to assess differences in

extracurricular involvement, social bonding, and dropout rates. For statistical analyses, correlation and logistic regression assessments were employed. Neely and Vaquera (2017) reported that students with decreased social bonding and engagement in extracurricular activities were more likely to drop out. The authors further noted that these statistics were increased for African American students. Thus, indicating that involvement in activities that encourage engagement after school may be a model for offsetting external factors (e.g., family support) that educators and administrators are unable to control. Neely and Vaquera's (2017) work are useful as it illustrates one model that can serve to engage students further and keep them in school until degree completion.

Resource Attainment

Likewise, resource attainment is also one factor that researchers, such as Bäckman (2017) indicate, can increase the retention of students until degree completion. Bäckman (2017) noted that previous literature indicates a connection with criminal convictions and dropout rates in the United States. However, literature exploring resource attainment to prevent dropping out of school is absent. As such, the author assessed Propensity Score Matching (PSM) using administrative data in a Swedish sample. The author then assessed if the resources provided to men and women was effective in reducing their propensity to commit and be convicted of a crime and drop out of school. The author found that resource attainment, either through support or financial welfare, was a key to reducing crime conviction and ensuring that students remained in school. Still, the study was conducted outside of the United States, which limits the

generalizability towards an American sample; nevertheless, the results still find the promise that providing resources and support to students can be one model for the reduction of high school dropouts.

School Interventions and Support

Similarly, intervention and support provided as young as elementary grades can be key to reducing high school dropouts. Lee-St. John et al. (2018) provided a contemporary exploration of how to reduce high school dropout. The author assessed intervention models at elementary schools in large urban and high-poverty regions. Data was drawn from 2001-2014 and included survey assessments from 894 students. The authors also compared these findings with graduation rates to compare if the students that did receive intervention models at elementary age were more or less likely to drop out than students that did not receive these interventions. For statistical analysis, the author employed propensity score-weighted analysis. Resultantly, Lee-St. John et al. (2018) reported that students who did receive early elementary intervention had 50% less likelihood of dropping out. Thus, students who received the intervention were 9.2% likely to drop out compared to 16.6% of students that did not receive an intervention. The authors argued that school administration should consider individually tailored interventions at a young age to reduce drop out at high school grades. The findings of the authors are critical as it provides an assessment that is unique to previous studies. In particular, the authors collected data over the entire grades of the children that did and did not receive interventions. Thus, indicating that empirical evidence exists for administrative efforts to reduce dropouts through early assessment models.

School Climate Initiatives

Multiple intervention models have been proposed for the reduction of high school dropouts. One model is addressing needed changes in school climate. Orpinas and Raczynski (2016) explored the association of school dropout with school climate for tenth-grade students. In their assessment, the authors explored 368 tenth graders that were involved in the Healthy Teens Longitudinal Study in Georgia. In the assessment, the students were surveyed to see their likelihood of dropping out of school.

Additionally, these surveys were correlated with the reported school climate, which was based upon six dimensions that measured school climate styles. The authors then performed logistic regression analysis for assessing dropout predictors. Orpinas and Raczynski (2016) reported that boys (22.1%) were more likely than girls (14.4%) to report risk for dropping out of school.

Further, those students that experience increased victimization, bullying, poor relationships with teachers, and poor school climate were more likely to drop out of school. The authors noted that students with increased relationships with their school, peers, and teachers were less likely to drop out. Thus, the authors recommended that school interventions should be one ideal model for addressing students that may be more likely to drop out of school. The author's work is critical in illustrating the complexity of factors that impact a student's likelihood of leaving school before graduation.

Teachers also created small learning communities, student-centered environment, created an advisor program, and implemented a new first-year academy (Rinka et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the most significant changes seen were when schools used staff

development to increase the creation of engaging lessons and hiring teachers who were passionate about teaching (Rinka et al., 2016). Indicating that in corroboration with previous researchers (e.g., Heyne et al., 2019; Jordan & Miller, 2018; Soares et al., 2019), that assessment of school policies and interventions can serve as one model for reduction of dropout rates.

Student Engagement and Educator Struggles

In the same vein as school policies, researchers suggest that assessing methods for exploring how to engage students can be a model for the reduction of school dropout rates (Tran & Buckman, 2016). Tran and Buckman (2016) indicated that student absenteeism, family problems, and the failure of schools to engage students are the most significant indicators of a potential dropout. Similarly, academic researchers indicated that teachers could have a substantial impact on reducing dropout rates by supplying quality, engaging instruction (Tran & Buckman, 2016). This study found that restructured teacher's salaries showed a decrease in student high dropout rates (Albright et al., 2017; Krane et al., 2016; Tran & Buckman, 2016).

High engagement for students is also linked to teacher burnout and struggle with teaching and connecting with students. Teachers felt the increased dropout rate was a result of their struggle to find a balance between teaching curriculum and building connections with students (Ottosen et al., 2017). Ottosen et al. (2017) revealed that a troubling teacher-student relationship was the primary determinate of whether a student dropped out (Ottosen et al., 2017). Further, a troubled transition to the upper school had a negative impact on high dropout rates (Ottosen et al., 2017). Ottosen et al. (2017)

recommended that schools should implement a counselor or professional who could assist students' emotional needs, and the study further revealed the importance placed on the connection between the teacher and the student (Ottosen et al., 2017).

Social-Emotional Initiatives

Similarly, Hunt et al. (2017) linked student social-emotional state to high absenteeism. Hunt et al. (2017) investigated the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) or traumatic stress for children in middle childhood. Despite most research is linked children with high ACEs scores to physical health issues like having higher risks of acquiring chronic disease (cancer, liver disease, depression, heart disease), mental health disorders, and reduced quality of life, Hunt et al. (2017) attempted to, in addition, show the connection to high dropout rates. Of the many results that this longitudinal study of 4,898 children between the years 1998 and 2000 study revealed, the one area that stood out most t was the study's ability to show a link to the more educated the mother was, the fewer ACE scores their children would obtain (Hunt et al., 2017). Thus, showing that dropping out can have a cyclic effect on high dropouts' rates (Sahin et al., 2016)

In addition to the need for counselors by Ottosen et al. (2017) identified the importance of staff connecting to students has vital results on a student's self-esteem and mental health (Akin & Radford, 2018). Added research done by Akin and Radford (2018) showed that teenagers learn through their social interactions and connections to their teacher. This study sought to determine how educators could aid students in building

resilience and self-esteem, which could result in staying in school (Akin & Radford, 2018).

Student-Teacher Relationship

As educators, the importance of connection is threaded through numerous studies (Ottosen et al., 2017; Sumbera, 2017). Sumbera (2017) illustrated that increased engagement could serve to close the achievement gap for minority and low socioeconomic students through their research, which explored 83 high schools with at-risk students (Sumbera, 2017). Sumbera (2017) indicated that their research revealed that programs, policies, and practices were useful only if administrators organized a welcoming and safe relationship through building a therapeutic school environment (Sumbera, 2017).

School Mentoring

MacIver et al. (2017), examined how mentoring can serve as a model for ensuring that students are supported and are at a decreased risk for dropping out. A check and connect approach (e.g., where the mentors meet with their mentees regularly) was used to build relationships with students (MacIver et al., 2017). By implementing this relationship, mentors actively sought the opportunity for conversations about the importance of completing high school (MacIver et al., 2017).

Foresi (2015) noted that an in-school mentoring program in Canada resulted in increasing student leadership roles and decreasing dropout rates and reducing high-absenteeism. Overall, students who were mentors taught how to be leaders for others, and they felt a more reliable connection to school (Foresi, 2015). Researchers also indicated

that by sixth grade and 9th grade, a school could identify potential dropouts by identifying

students with high ABCs (e.g., attendance, behavior, and course failure; MacIver et al.,

2017). Thus, if a student does not make a connection with a caring adult at school by 9th

grade, they have a higher propensity to drop out (MacIver et al., 2017). Former students

that dropped out indicated that if a teacher had connected to them that they would have

stayed (MacIver et al., 2017). Thus, further corroborating previous research regarding the

critical importance of the student and teacher relationship (Gehlbach et al., 2016; Gregory

et al., 2016; Quin, 2017). A key strength of this research was that it provided insights into

the use of mentors showing a significant impact on a student's social-emotional outcomes

by reinforcing trust in adults (MacIver et al., 2017).

In sum, there are multiple models explored as possible methods to reduce student

dropout rates in the United States. In this section, this included absenteeism monitoring,

which multiple research suggested can aid in identifying students that are likely to drop

out (Heyne et al., 2019; Jordan & Miller, 2018; Soares et al., 2019). Further, school

initiatives can be models to address students at risk and provide credit recovery and

coaching to prevent dropout rates (Rinka et al., 2016). Lastly, the role that the educator

plays in engaging students was noted to be one model that could reduce dropout rates

(Albright et al., 2017; Krane et al., 2016; Tran & Buckman, 2016). However, researchers

also noted that educator burnout and difficulty connecting with the student, due to

curriculum load, can prevent the critical connection between the student and the teacher

(Akin & Radford, 2018; Hunt et al., 2017; Ottosen et al., 2017). Despite the equitable

impact built into the educational system, many educators set out at the beginning of their

teaching journey to make a difference. New educators want to help students; however, through time, new teachers start to feel alone, overwhelmed, and frustrated (Matsko et al., 2020). Teachers are not alone, and the goal of educational leaders is to assist teachers by providing examples and practices that will motivate their students. Following, the role of culturally responsive teaching is discussed as a connection to decreasing student dropout rates.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Researchers indicate that teachers who incorporate culturally responsive practices may see that this could help assist in connecting to students (Abacioglu et al., 2019; Tripp et al., 2018). The relationship between culturally responsive educations practices and motivational theory; yet these also share culturally responsive practices with examples that will positively impact motivation and explain to the administrators that one northeastern state's school district uses to address the culturally responsive practices within the organization. Thus, culturally responsive teaching is an essential consideration for decreasing dropout rates (see Abacioglu et al., 2019), but also for the purpose of this study.

A culturally responsive teacher must address hurdles within the teaching profession (Abacioglu et al., 2019). Motivation is vital in the learning process and can drive students to excel, but also fail if absent (Clinkenbeard, 2012). Motivation is described as an activity that is goal-directed and continuous as students move through the learning process (Salvin, 2019). Therefore, the link between motivation and culturally responsive teaching is critical for increasing student achievement. According to David

Cavallo of *One Lab top Per Child Founder* (Ames, 2016), the learning initiative for

developing the highest potential is the belief that education requires steady

transformation, substantial change, a vision, and the courage to make a difference. Thus,

this belief will increase as culturally based barriers are reduced, and motivational support

is instilled in students (Laureate Education, 2012).

One culturally responsive practice to increase motivation is to "build" a

connection through inclusive practices within the classroom (Capper & Young, 2014). A

teacher should work to connect into a student's culture, tap into their experiences and

their lives (Capper & Young, 2014). A key, culturally responsive practice to increase

motivation is to build a "bridge" by creating a classroom community (Delpit, 2006).

Teachers can create this bridge by motivating students to share stories, opinions, values,

and interests (Delpit, 2006). Through a created sense of community, culturally based

biases are reduced among students, and compassion is furthered (Delpit, 2006). Students

may understand or learn better when taught through a method that guides them to express

their beliefs or understandings (Kieran & Anderson, 2019). Thus, learning will be

increased when a student-centered environment in which they know that their teacher

cares and will encourage them to take risks in their learning is provided (Capper &

Young, 2014; Kieran & Anderson, 2019).

A useful example of this model is found in a northeastern superintendent report

by Salvo (2018). In this assessment, the superintendent of a northeastern high school

illustrated an example of community practice in a large-scale context. To connect with

students, he felt that teachers needed to learn where their students came from and about

their surrounding community (Salvo, 2018). The superintendent offered new employees a

local tour of the community during the first few days of school (Salvo, 2018). The

superintendent wanted his teachers to see the school's surrounding community in order

for teachers to connect with the students on a higher level, build empathy, and understand

the actual needs of their students (Björk et al., 2018). Resultantly, he worked to create a

bridge for teachers to visit the surrounding communities to have a better understanding of

the needs of their students.

An additional model of creating a culturally sensitive practice is motivation by

holding the "brain" accountable with teachers demanding high expectations of their

students. This type of thinking allows a teacher to create an environment where

communicating these high standards put students on notice that they will need to work

hard (Capper & Young, 2014). Students, in turn, will work to meet their teacher's

expectations by working hard and putting in the extra effort (Cholewa et al., 2020). Thus,

teachers intentionally communicate their beliefs in their students, which then can

contribute to an increase in a student's self-worth, which can push them even further

(Cholewa et al., 2020).

In sum, the guiding principles that encompass culturally responsive teaching are

vital to an organization, especially its leadership. Leadership should work to influence

inclusive board policies and reduce social inequalities by using culturally responsive

teaching practices (Newcomer & Cowin, 2018). Thus, the administrator stands at the

center of leading educators and students towards a culturally sensitive administrator. In

turn, these further education objectives, increasing student engagement and build a

student to teacher bonds (Chunoo & Callahan, 2017). Following, the early intervention models will be explored as one model that is connected to the reduction of drop -out rates.

Early Intervention Models

Preventative measures are critical, far beyond high school (Dupéré et al., 2015). Researchers Dupéré et al. (2015) identified that the effects of a child not attending preschool could have devastating effects on a student's ability to begin school on the same level as their peers who did attend a preschool program. Further, Dupéré et al. (2015) noted that previous empirical research found that 77% of intervention groups receiving mentoring graduated as compared to 60% of children who did not receive an early intervention model (Dupéré et al., 2015). Dupéré et al. (2015) also cited preventive approaches, such as a focus on high-risk youth and whole-school reform. Thus, indicating that behavioral students tend to receive more attention from school as they struggle to maintain behavior, which can partially be assessed by the implementation of school-wide changes and early intervention models (Dupéré et al., 2015).

One model for interventions is the Aspire Program, which researchers, Iachini et al. (2016) illustrated as a useful intervention model. The Aspire Program included a school-based early intervention program for students repeating the ninth grade. Iachini et al. (2016) corroborate that the ninth-grade year was a pivotal year in the school's graduation rate. Thus, through a goal-oriented program broken four key processing areas were assessed, which included engagement, focused interventions, evoked executive functioning skills, and planned work sessions while working on four individualized skills.

A key strength of this program was the use of structured lessons that dealt with student's motivation through goal setting. Further, such an intervention was ideal for ensuring that students had the necessary skills to reach high school versus assuming that they would make educational goals.

In sum, researchers indicate that early intervention models are critical for reducing dropout rates and assessing at-risk students (Dupéré et al., 2015; Iachini et al., 2016). Researchers such as Iachini et al. (2016) presented specific programs that can aid in this process; but how these models are used by administration is unclear in academic research. In the following section, the summary, conclusion of this literature review, and the gap in the reviewed literature are discussed.

Summary

High school dropout rates are increasing in the United States (Bachler et al., 2017; Corry et al., 2017; Rumberger, 2020). Problematically, researchers indicate that social and structural inequalities serve to compound further the issue of high school dropout (Albright et al., 2017; Sutcher et al., 2016). Researchers illustrate that elements of poor teacher certification (Maxie, 2001; Peterson et al., 2018), lack of mentoring programs for novice teachers (Martin et al., 2016; Zembytska, 2016) are a few internal issues that further complicate the issue of high school dropout rates. As such, models for reducing these rates were explored in this chapter. Absenteeism monitoring was advocated as a possible approach for reducing dropout rates (Heyne et al., 2019; Jordan & Miller, 2018; Soares et al., 2019). Further, increased school initiates, such as mentoring and development was critical for increasing the ability to asses' at-risk students (Rinka et al.,

2016). Further, increasing student engagement and student-teacher relationships was one model that was illustrated as effective for the reduction of dropout rates (Albright et al., 2017; Krane et al., 2016; Tran & Buckman, 2016). Still, in reviewing the collective literature, there is a lack of examination that demonstrates models for administrators to use for reducing dropout rates. Thus, this study proposes to fill a notable gap in the literature and provide information that may be directly useful to administrators regarding their perceptions of these practices, which could lead to a decrease in the dropout rates.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore administrators'
perceptions concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs that help
reducing dropout rates among high school students. The following were the RQs for this
basic qualitative study: RQ1:

RQ1: What programs of intervention and school practices have administrators

implemented in attempts to decrease the dropout rates in their high school?

RQ2: What aspects of the interventions and practices implemented do

administrators believe are effective with decreasing dropout rates?

In this chapter, I will present the methodology and research design and rationale.
The types of data and information sources, the data analysis plan, and issues of
trustworthiness and the ethical procedures underlying this study are presented. First, the
research design and rationale are presented in the following section.

Research Design and Rationale

I considered qualitative and quantitative methodologies and their appropriateness
to the study purpose. A qualitative methodology involves collecting and analyzing data
that are specific to a phenomenon as reported by participants or observed through
interactions and survey data (Tracy, 2019). Further, qualitative methodology is focused
on explorations of the data (e.g., exploratory analyses) rather than presenting
explanations for the variables involved (Tracy, 2019). Conversely, a quantitative
assessment is a statistical exploration using a hypotheses regarding a specific population
or sample which is then tested (Tracy, 2019). As the goal of this study was to gain the

reported experiences of administration regarding intervention and program elements that have been unsuccessful in decreasing high school student dropout rates, a quantitative assessment was not suitable. Moreover, I did not seek to collect statistical data or explore testable hypotheses within this examination. As such, a quantitative exploration was not chosen.

I chose a qualitative approach because it was appropriate for exploring a phenomenon that was specific to the lived experiences of individuals (e.g., administration) to a specific phenomenon (e.g., high school dropout interventions). Regarding the research design, there are multiple options in qualitative research (Tracy, 2019). Research design options include ethnographic observation, phenomenological assessment, and a basic study (Tracy, 2019). An ethnographic observation includes observing a group of people in a specific setting to learn more about their cultural habits and behaviors. As cultural processes were not a focus of this study, I did not choose an ethnographic observation. Next, a phenomenological assessment includes conducting interviews with participants to reconstruct meaning from their reported experiences (Tracy, 2019). This model was not chosen as the goal of this study was to explore a phenomenon within a specific site setting and review processes within the site (e.g., the school). I decided on a basic study approach. A basic study approach includes exploring a specific phenomenon through reported participant experiences and secondary data sources (e.g., school records) at a specific site or organization (Alpi & Evans, 2019; Tracy, 2019). This approach was appropriate because I sought to explore administration intervention strategies in place at multiple schools and by reviewing secondary data

regarding dropout rates for the same schools. I chose a basic study design because it allowed for a comparison of the intervention strategies across three separate schools.

Role of the Researcher

For this qualitative study, I served as the primary data collection instrument. I received Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and site approval, recruited participants, conducted interviews, transcribed interviews, and performed the analysis of the interview data. I do not have a supervisory relationship with participants.

To assess for researcher bias, I used bracketing as a means of documenting my personal reflections during the data collection process. Bracketing involves the use of a field journal to note cases of personal bias or reflections that could interfere with the data analyses objectivity (Chan et al., 2013). Bracketing is completed immediately after each interview, or upon noting a point of bias (Chan et al., 2013). The process of noting personal bias is essential for ensuring transparency as well as trustworthiness of the presented research. For this examination, I had personal bias due to my involvement within the education system. As an educator, I have witnessed the struggles that many students face in achieving graduation, which leads to administrative frustration. As such, I took steps to mitigate my personal bias through the process of bracketing to ensure that these personal opinions do not interfere with the presentation of findings.

Methodology

For this section, participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment, and the data analysis plan will be addressed. The Education Administration and Leadership for experienced administrators (AEAL) program has set up a blanket IRB preapproval for

case studies falling within the data parameters after approval is gained from the IRB

(Walden University, 2019).

Participant Selection

The participants were administrators who could provide information that

addressed the primary research purpose. These administrators included principals,

directors of curriculum, and assistant superintendents who are responsible for

implementing programs and curriculum that will aid students in acquiring the necessary

knowledge to graduate. For this basic qualitative study, I collected primary data from

interviews with administrators in five different schools that have increased attrition

despite efforts to reduce dropout rates. The participants were intentionally selected based

on their location (county) and their position as educational leaders (e.g., directors or

principals). These leaders included the principal, directors, and those involved in the

selecting programs and curriculum. Therefore, I used purposive sampling. Purposeful

sampling is useful when the researcher selects a sample based on their specific

knowledge (Babbie, 2017).

Justification for Number of Participants

I pursued a minimum of eight interviews with high school principals or

administration, who could include assistant principals, directors of curriculum,

supervisors of curriculum, and assistant superintendents in a Mid-Atlantic state in the

United States. According to Crouch and McKenzie (2006), exploratory studies are best

completed in small sample groups. I looked at similar basic qualitative studies to

determine an adequate sample size. While researching several basic qualitative studies,

Wolpinsky (2014) used a sample size of four in his educational basic study, and a sample

of eight participants was deemed appropriate for Cahoon et al. (2017). Further, according

to Fusch and Ness (2016), saturation for qualitative research involves collecting data until

no new themes are revealed. As such, eight was the target number of participants as

similar qualitative studies revealed that rich, thick data can be achieved with this number

of participants (see Creswell, 2012; Mason, 2010).

Instrumentation

The primary instrument for this study was an interview guide that I developed

(see Table 1). The interview guide included a list of questions that were asked during the

interview. The questions were aligned with the RQs.

Table 1

Interview Questions to Address Research Questions

Research qu*estion*	*Interview* questions
1. What programs of intervention and school practices have administrators implemented in attempts to decrease the dropout rates in their high school?	1. What programs have you implemented that have served as interventions for decreasing dropout rates? Please elaborate. 2. What school practices have you implemented that have served as interventions for decreasing dropout rates? 3. What is your role in influencing and providing support to teachers who implemented these programs and practices? How is this communicated and monitored? 4. What actions through positive school culture do you believe are necessary to support students to remain in school? Please elaborate. 5. Describe your leadership style in relation to supporting at-risk students

and teachers who work to implement these programs and practices, and why?

6. Describe the type of professional development you provided to implement these programs and practices, and why?

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2. What aspects of the intervention and practices do administrators believe do and do not assist with decreasing dropout rates?

1. Why do you believe the programs and practices implemented have not yielded the highest results? Please elaborate.

2. What can administrators do in retrospect? How would you better implement or improve these rates?

3. Which pieces or practices have or have not worked? How have they worked, and why?

4. What are your plans for improvement moving forward?

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The first step in the research methodology is to obtain site approval. I contacted the superintendents of the districts to obtain site permissions. Next, the IRB permission for conducting this study was requested. This involved contacting the public high school superintendents and administrators for each school and providing them with a formal letter discussing the purpose of the study, the IRB approval, and information regarding the requested interview.

To be considered for this study, participants are required to meet a basic set of criteria: potential interview candidates needed to be (a) currently or more than 2 years recently retired in the participating district, (b) were assigned to work in the high school, and (c) were employed in the district for at least 2 years in the administrative position.

After receiving site permissions, I personally contacted these administrators to invite their participation in the study. Through this communication, the purpose was described, the time needed for their direct participation, and the way the data results would be used. I as the researcher further assured their confidentiality and explained the informed consent documents. Any questions the participants had were addressed, as well.

After obtaining approval from the administrators, I reached out to them (via phone or email) to have them consent to the informed consent forms that discussed the voluntary nature of their participation. I ensured that informed consent forms would be provided to and signed by each participant before conducting any interviews. These consent forms were provided electronically via email by the participants responding, "I consent." Further, I inform all that participants in this study that their participation was

voluntary, remind them that personally identifiable information would not be shared, I will also set up a time and a location either virtually.

This basic study used interviews as the data source (Percy et al., 2015). Due to the recent pandemic, I used the audio section of the recorded online interviews through the Zoom's online software. After discussing a suitable time for the interview, I conducted a minimal of eight separate interviews that lasted for 45- 60 minutes, which will be one to two different administrators from each of the five high schools. Immediately after the interviews, transcription commenced. Confidentiality was secured for each participant by ensuring that a pseudonym is applied to each of the interviews. All personal names and identifiers were removed throughout each of the interviews.

Finally, member checking was employed to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflected the information in the interview. The transcribed interviews were emailed to the participants. Errors that have been identified by participants, if any, during transcription were then revised to ensure that the data analyses reflected the exact participant reflections (Tracy, 2019). Participants were debriefed and - reminded that they are at liberty to still withdraw from the study. Lastly, after this meeting, I informed participants that I may contact them through email if I have any questions after going through the transcripts to clarify their responses.

Data Analysis Plan

After interviews were conducted, transcription commenced by the researcher. The interview transcripts and document reviews used a combination of priori and open coding with thematic analysis (see Table 1). After transcription was complete, the transcripts

were read and re-read by the researcher to gain further familiarization with the data as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016).

The coding methods that were used were the methods proposed by Ravitch and Carl (2016). Coding, according to Ravitch and Carl (2016), is not analyzing but breaking down data into manageable segments. After gathering data, I placed information in categories or families (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this part of the process, the researcher determined how they may be related or how they fit together based upon exploring similar words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs (Saldaña, 2016).

For this process, the organizational software NVivo was used for data analysis through open coding. NVivo serves only as an organizational tool but provided the researcher with options such as "nodes" that allow for tagging analogous texts for open coding. As such, the researcher read the transcripts and analogous tag words, phrases, and sentences. For example, similar words and phrases were tagged with "nodes," which allowed the researcher to access them quickly through electronic software. However, it is essential to note that the software only serves as a tool, and the researcher will be conducting the coding process entirely (Tracy, 2019).

At the same time, an initial code list was developed based on this process. The code list was reviewed, refined, and create common categories. During this process, there is a possibility that elements of data do not fit within the coded text and be identified as discrepant cases. As this process evolves, these elements of text will be tagged within the software and included in the presentation of findings and interpret the results as discrepant data. These discrepant data was reported within the study. Afterward, these

categories were assessed for emergent themes (Saldaña, 2016). Resultant themes were compiled for each interview based on the participant's reported experiences (Saldaña, 2016). The themes from each interview were then combined in order to compile a master list of themes. The themes were presented in chapter four alongside detailed tables that illustrate the production of transcripts, to codes, to the emergent themes that were used to address the research questions and the purpose of the study.

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Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, four elements develop the trustworthiness of the

researcher (Tracy, 2019). These include credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability. To ensure the transparency of the research and to illustrate the

dependability of the methods employed by the researcher, each of these elements is

critical. To be trustworthy, the use of triangulation can help to ensure credibility, which is

described in the next section along with internal validity (Shenton, 2004; Ravitch & Carl,

2016).

Credibility

For this study, credibility refers to the reported accuracy of the results based on

the methods and design employed for data collection and analysis. For this process,

member checking was employed (Connelly, 2016) to ensure that participants could

review the transcribed data for errors before data analysis. Errors that occurred, if any,

during transcription were then be revised to ensure that the data analyses reflected the

exact participant reflections (Tracy, 2019). To ensure credibility, bracketing was used to

document personal biases. This process involved documenting personal bias during data

collection and analysis processes and reflexively considering possible personal biases

through a reflexive journal.

Transferability

Transferability is the process of ensuring that the results are adequate for

application to a similar setting. For this study, the findings were limited to the schools in

one county that have seen continuous high dropout rates. The participants were high

school administrators who are directly involved in selecting the curriculum and

interacting with students. Nevertheless, the findings are not generalizable to all settings

outside of the noted geographical region. However, they can be identified as useful to

readers who identify similar aspects of the participants and setting to their own location. I

provided details regarding the setting and related demographic descriptions when Chapter

4 is completed.

Dependability

Dependability is critical to ensuring that the researcher processes and results can

be repeated by future researchers (Tracy, 2019). An audit trail produces dependability

because it traces through a researcher's logic and determines whether the study's findings

will be relied upon as a platform for further inquiry (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The audit

trail will include the coding process, which will have a description of how specific codes

emerged to become themes and an explanation for what codes clustered together to form

these themes. This analysis followed a logical path, dependent on the participants'

narratives. This study also triangulated the interviews, state performance reports, and

various programs and curriculums recently implemented. In this type of study, other

influences could have affected the responses of the participants. The longer the research

takes, other forces could likely affect the outcome. Therefore, this study occurred no

more than four months.

Confirmability

Researchers remain neutral and are explicit in any biases that may exist (Ravitch

& Carl, 2016). To overcome this, one would have to acknowledge how our preferences

may extend into our interpretation of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this basic study, the passion of the researcher may have strengthened the impact of these programs due to their own school district's need to reduce their dropout rates will make it more difficult for others to replicate the study findings. Also, a copy of those transcripts were provided to those who participated in the interviews, which allowed them to correct the interpretation and challenged what they perceived to be 'wrong' interpretations.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical procedures for this study included obtaining IRB (11-11-20-0015846) and site permission before conducting data collection or analysis. The site approval was requested from the Superintendents initially by email. In this communication, a letter was provided that included the purpose of the research project, the time required of participants, and ways data results will be reported and used. After the initial request, a follow-up phone call was performed to discuss the proposed research project and answer any questions. Next, participants were sent a request for interviews as well as a follow-up call to explain the purpose of the study further. Before conducting research, they were required to acknowledge and sign the informed consent forms that indicated that they were voluntarily participating in this study and that they had been informed that responses were confidential by responding to the email by saying, "I consent".

Next, during data collection and analysis, I coded each participant to ensure that personal identifiers were not present in any portion of the transcripts. All data will be kept on a password encrypted USB drive that is only accessible by the researcher. Per

IRB requirements, any printed transcript will be kept in a locked cabinet and permanently destroyed five years after the publication and approval of this dissertation.

Summary

The purpose of this proposed basic qualitative study was to explore administrative perceptions concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs that are effective for reducing dropout rates. In this chapter, the methods and justification for researcher design were provided. For this purpose, a qualitative methodology with a basic study design was chosen. Further, the site permission, data collection, and data analysis plan were presented throughout this chapter. The following chapter will discuss the results of the data collection and present the transcript and secondary data findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore administrators'

perceptions concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs that help

reduce dropout rates among high school students. It is unknown what established student

dropout intervention practices effectively reduce high school dropout rates in a Mid-

Atlantic state. Specifically, it is not known which implemented school practices and

intervention programs effectively reduce dropout rates from the administrators'

perspectives. I explored school administrators' perspectives on which programs and

practices reduce students' high school dropout rates in their schools. Research is needed

regarding barriers, school practices, and intervention programs for reducing dropout rates

from administrators' perspective (Marzano et al., 2018; Korman, 2020). I chose

purposeful sampling and collected data from eight administrators to explore their

perspectives in reducing dropout rates. From that data, I identified four themes.

The conceptual framework that I used was Marzano's school leadership

evaluation model. I used the model to assess participants' perceptions and to identify the

perceived barriers to the successful or unsuccessful implementation of interventions to

reduce dropout rates in high school. I also used concepts from Marzano's conceptual

framework to develop the RQs, which were:

RQ1: What programs of intervention and school practices have administrators

implemented and found to be effective in their attempts to decrease the dropout rates in

their high school?

RQ 2: What aspects of the interventions and practices implemented do administrators believe are effective with decreasing dropout rates?

To answer the RQs for this basic qualitative study, I collected data from semistructured interviews. In this chapter, I describe the setting of the data collection and the participants' demographics. I describe the techniques of collecting, analyzing, and presenting the data. The chapter will end with a summary of the results.

Setting

The research study took place in a Mid- Atlantic state in the United States. I emailed the district's superintendent to gain district consent from the five participating school districts, whose leaders shared information on eight participants. I then emailed those potential participants by sharing Walden's Consent Agreement. All eight agreed to take part by replying to the email with the words "I consent." When the participants agreed, I created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with the participants' information. The participants met the criteria by currently working in the participating district's high school either by being the principal or the director of curriculum for that high school and were employed in the district for at least two years in the administrative position. I scheduled the interviews by accommodating the participants' schedules. Last, no personal or organizational condition influenced the participants' responses as to my knowledge. Table 2 includes key participant demographics.

Table 2

Demographics of the Participants

Participants	Years in education	Current position	Gender
P1	19	Principal	Male
P2	24	Director of curriculum	Female
P3	28	Principal	Female
P4	19	Principal	Male
P5	20	Director of curriculum	Male
P6	30	Assistant superintendent of curriculum	Female
P7	29	Principal	Male
P8	25	Principal	Male

Data Collection

Following Walden's IRB guidelines, I contacted five superintendents who agreed to conduct the study in their district. After Walden's IRB approved my study (No. 11-11-20-0015846.), I emailed the potential participants who received the informed consent invitation through email. If willing to be a part of the study, each participant responded with "I Consent" through email and offered convenient times that they were available. After receiving the participant's emailed consent, I contacted each one via email to confirm the scheduled time and date of their Zoom meeting and thank them for agreeing to take part. Five principals, two directors of curriculums, and one assistant superintendent of curriculum agreed to participate in the study. Their experiences ranged from 19 to 30 years in various districts. At the time of the study, the participants'

experience in their present district ranged from 4 to 17 years. I grouped the participants according to their schools. In order words, I have three schools that provided two people from their school. Figure 5 shows the dropout rates for the schools that were included in this study.

Figure 5

Dropout Rates for the Study Schools
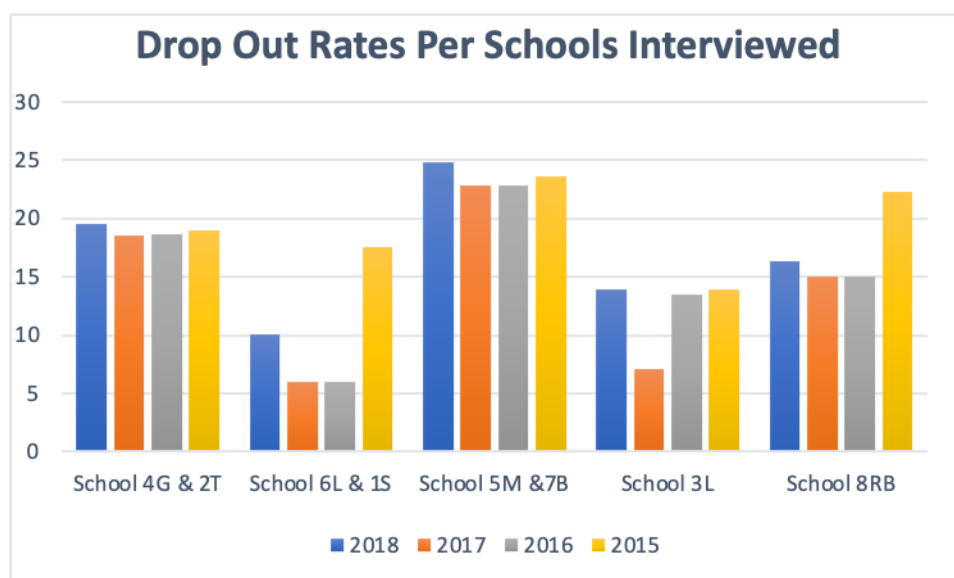
I audio-recorded the individualized Zoom interviews. The audio-recording device used had a built-in universal serial bus (USB) drive to prevent potential loss of data. The participants were reminded that this was a voluntary study and that they could ask to be withdrawn at any time. I explained the purpose of the study, the interview protocol, the approximate time involved, and the benefits of this study. I further explained the importance of the recording and asked for their permission to continue. Moreover, I explained that their interview would be transcribed and how the practice of member

checking would be applied. They all consented to the recording, agreed to the time and date of the interview, and acknowledged the member checking process.

The participants were informed that the interviews were confidential and that all identifying terms would be redacted from the transcription. I informed them that no one would have access to their personal information and that pseudonyms would be used to safeguard their identities. I also informed them that all recordings and notes transcribed would be password protected.

The one-to-one interviews took place from November 17, 2020, to November 24, 2020. The time ranged from 47 to 58 minutes. I used prewritten self-created questions but also asked added questions for clarification during the interviews. I took notes during the interviews to ensure accuracy.

The recorded interviews were uploaded to the password protected Sonix site, where they were transcribed by the software. I went through each transcription and removed any mentions of a person's name, district, school, or coworkers' names. While reviewing each transcription for accuracy, I listened to each recorded session. The participants received a transcribed copy of their interview for their input to ensure accuracy. They were informed to offer clarification or respond with "this information is accurate" within 72 hours.

Each participant accepted the opportunity for me to contact them for additional clarification. However, the data collected was thorough enough so that there was no further communication required. Therefore, all participants exited the study after the member checks were completed. Next, I read each transcription several times to get a

sense of the interviews' patterns and trends. I completed all transcription by November 28, 2020.

Data Analysis

The study's goal was to explore the administrative perceptions concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs that reduce dropout rates. Data analysis occurred following data collection and member checking. I analyzed the transcripts by reviewing the answers to the research questions and thoroughly reading them multiple times. I also used open NVivo's open coding software. Using NVivo allowed for the transcript's data to be confidential and password protected. Saldana (2016) recommends a method for analyzing and coding data. Saldaña suggests that each line is analyzed to identify the theme. Research, Saldana says, should identify codes to emerge while analyzing the data (2016). Minor themes emerged according to the categories during the data analysis portion of the research. I reviewed the transcription several times and used open coding with thematic analyses.

Also, I used this information to interpret the data and reflected on their responses as they had various populations, years of experience, and varied success rates. I listened to their perspectives, recorded their conclusions, and heard about their experiences as they processed their thoughts and reflected on their beliefs about their school's needs.

Results

This study's findings explored administrator perceptions regarding barriers, implemented school practices, and intervention programs for reducing dropout rates. The purpose of this proposed basic qualitative study is to explore administrative perceptions

concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs that help reduce dropout rates. Major themes emerged from the data. From minor themes, major central themes formed from each research question.

The overarching themes that arose from Research Question 1: What programs of intervention and school practices have administrators implemented and found to be effective in their attempts to decrease the dropout rates in their high school?

• Alternative Schools can affect and reduce school dropout rates

• Various Classroom Techniques can affect and reduce school dropout rates

• Principal- Staff Relationship Impact Student Dropout Rates

•Teachers building Relationships with students support them staying in school

This study's first research question intended to understand the administrator's perspective on the programs and practices used as interventions to reduce the dropout rates. During the data analysis of participants' interview transcripts, several common themes and patterns appeared.

Theme 1: Alternative Schools can affect school dropout rates. The first thematic label was drawn from 7 out of 8 participants. Interview questions that led to this theme included:

- What programs have you implemented that have served as interventions for decreasing dropout rates?

- What school practices have you implemented that have served as interventions for decreasing dropout rates?

- Describe the type of professional development you provided to implement these programs and practices, and why?

Principal, director, and assistant superintendent responses represent similar responses leading to the theme. Principal 1S stated that the alternative program allowed for his school to be "able to preserve summer school so that it is free to kids, which I am thankful for, like another life raft for them to be successful." The Assistant Superintendent 6L from the same district went further to say that the current alternative program was moved during her tenure and placed in the high school. It was an incredibly successful program that served both students and adults from the community looking to come and complete their high school diploma. The Asst. Superintendent further stated that when the program was moved to an in-house alternative plan, the graduation rates decreased. Although both agreed a shortened day was necessary to succeed, the inability to have, this school housed outside their building decreased its effectiveness. When outside the typical high school environment, both agreed students were more successful. The teachers and administrations were better able to adapt to these students' needs, whether it be something as simple as having a hat or arriving a few minutes late. However, due to finances and building issues, the district moved the program to the regular high school to save money. Both 1S and 6L also shared the belief that it "takes a different type of a teacher" to run this type of [dropout] program." Both administrators stated that they used to handpick teachers to teach in the dropout program. This practice is no longer used. Additionally, 6L said that once they stopped dedicating students and a guidance counselor to that program, it just continued to a "slow death." 1S stated that her

one career regret was "I wished I had fought hard to keep it [dropout program] intact just the way it was prior."

Principal 8R shared the same belief that the students were unsuccessful in the regular high school, and they moved their program to be housed in their local County College. Principal 3L's school is also housed in their local community college. However, she shared that this alternative placement is too new to gain real, accurate data, especially during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Both principals shared that the community college houses several programs, which allows an estimated total of 50 students per program. Each school sends approximately eight to 12 severely under-credited students. Principals are involved in reviewing and sharing teachers' concerns, ensuring on having teachers there who are creative in helping students through the courses. The data showed the schools were split between having their programs either inside or outside of their buildings. All the dropout programs had shortened days, and there was a mix of 50% split on in-school versus after school hours.

Theme 2: Various Classroom Techniques can affect school dropout rates. The second thematic label was drawn from 7 out of 8 participants. Interview questions that led to this theme included:

- What school practices have you implemented that have served as interventions for decreasing dropout rates?
- Describe the type of professional development you provided to implement these programs and practices.

- What is your role in influencing and providing support to teachers who implemented these programs and practices? How is this communicated and monitored?

Principal, Director, and Assistant Superintendent responses stand for similar responses leading to the theme. The most prominent theme revealed that all schools need to look at how they assess students. Principal 7B's school, which had the highest Dropouts Rates, had recently moved to quarterly assessments instead of midterms and finals. He felt it was necessary" because you can adjust instruction as you make them Project-Based."

In contrast, Principal 1S, whose dropout rates are the lowest, shared, "We find different ways to remediate, ways to support, ways to accommodate and modify. We take what is truly is essential. For example, if you look back at Unit one of English, what is absolutely essential to indicate that the kid has gotten to a satisfactory level of mastery of those skills? Make sure you carve out opportunities for kids to succeed in their own way." The Assistant Superintendent from the same school continued by saying, "I have to set aside money because I need them to learn geometry, algebra, and measurement. I am going to do it from birdhouses, benches, crazy Christmas trees, and whatever we need to have them learn something a different way."

Director of Curriculum 2T, whose dropout rates have stayed steady, agreed by saying, "We have got to get better as teachers for students to be able to show us they know how to do something. That is kind of deviating from the standard norm of how education operates. Our assessments have to change."

Principal 3L has made questions and higher order thinking a priority, "we have put a requirement for expectations on how teachers need to question and develop focus and higher-level questions daily."

The overarching themes that arose from Research Question 2, **"What aspects of the interventions and practices implemented do administrators believe are effective with decreasing dropout rates?"** The following major themes were developed from participants' responses to the interview questions:

- Principal- Staff Relationship Impact Student Dropouts Rates

- Teachers building Relationships with students support them staying in school

The intention of the second research question of this study to figure out the aspects of the interventions and practices implemented do administrators believe effectively decreases dropout rates. During the data analysis of participants' interview transcripts, several common themes and patterns emerged.
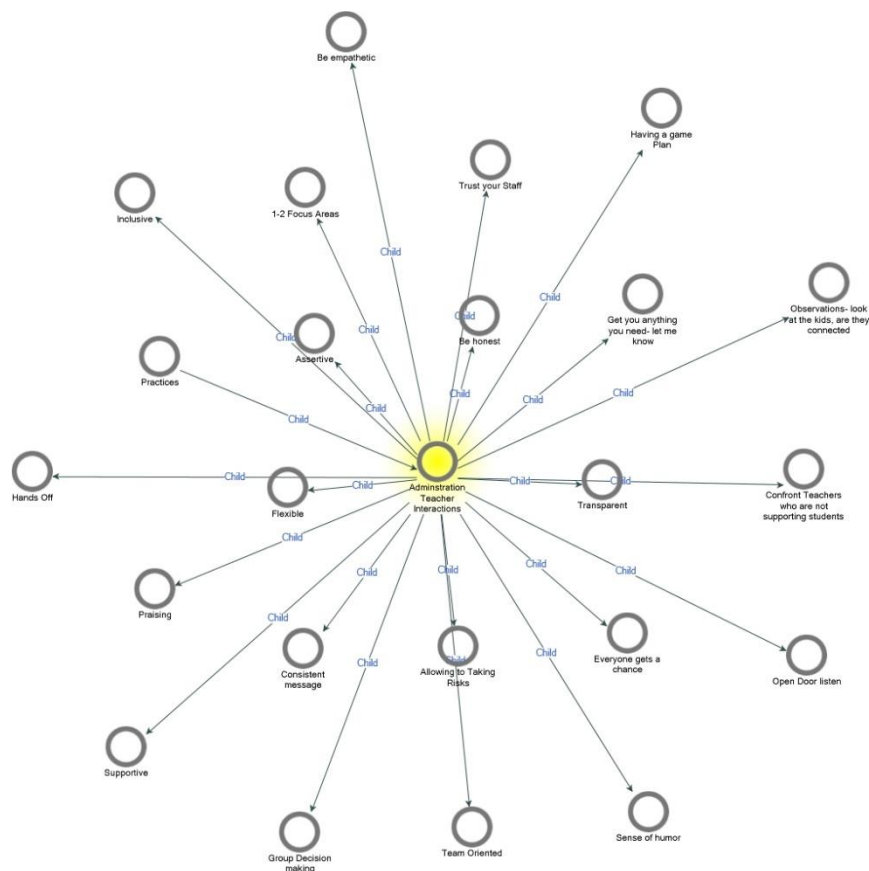
Theme 3: Principal- Staff Relationship Impact Student Dropout Rates. The first thematic label was drawn from 7 out of 8 participants. Interview questions that led to this theme included:

- What is your role in influencing and supplying support to teachers who implemented these programs and practices? How is this communicated and monitored?

- What actions through positive school culture do you believe are necessary to support students to remain in school?

- Describe your leadership style concerning supporting at-risk students and teachers who work to implement these programs and practices and why?

Principal, director, and assistant superintendent responses represent similar responses leading to the theme. One attribute that these administrators felt made a considerable impact on decreasing dropout rates was running a team-oriented building and supporting your staff. Principal 1S termed it as a "partnership piece." He states, "The partnership or teams amongst our staff that we are all working together to make the kids educational experience as successful, positive, and impactful as it could be. We are all working together to make our school as great as it can be."

All participants believed that committee work would help them reach their end goal of assisting students in succeeding. Principal 7B established an Equity Committee while both 7B and 8R both created Climate and Culture Committees. Any program or practice implemented was established through committee work in every school interviewed. For example, Assistant Superintendent 6L stated, "to build consensus. You have to be team-oriented." She went on to say, "everything is always a collaborative decision. Even if I am going to do it, I still throw it out there to them and discuss it. This is what we would like to do. Give me your thoughts. Give me your questions. Give me your concerns. I will develop a committee."

The next area that tied with setting up a team-oriented approach was to trust and support your staff. Director of Curriculum 2T added evidence of the importance of trust by sharing, "letting the teachers have the freedom to guide the kids by trusting your teachers. I would hope that educators and administrators would see the value and be OK
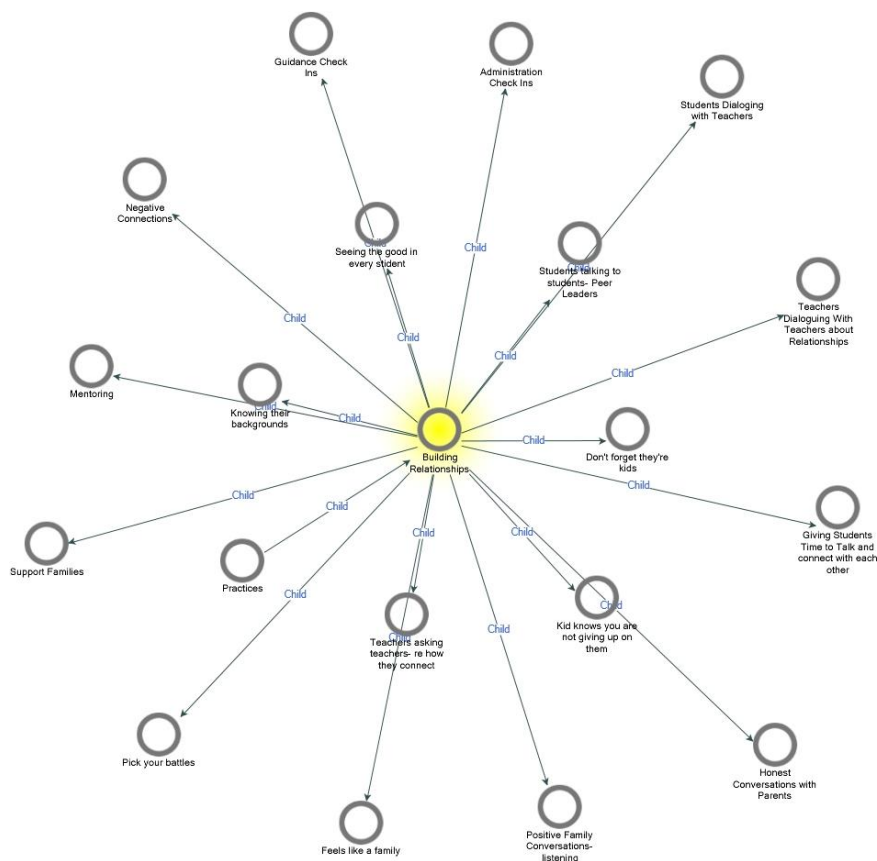
with that. There are guidelines, but if you could show me an alternative way that you know how to do this, I trust you." Principal 5G, from the same district, stated, "I have always believed in trusting your people." Director of Curriculum 5 M further supported evidence of this theme, "you earn a lot of people's trust, but you have to trust them too." Principal 7B from the same district expanded on supporting staff by stating, "what has made me successful is treating them nice, treating them like human beings, and treating them respectfully. "

The need to support your staff will translate into decreasing dropout rates is supported by Principal 1S stating, "We serve the staff well by trusting them. We cultivate the climate and culture by building relationships, sharing the expectation that we are all in this together, and that we are working together. We are growing in the same direction, and we must end up helping our students." Principal 3L furthers this belief by sharing that "I think it is important because if the teachers are not taken care of, they cannot take care of your kids." Then Principal 4G added, "You have to build those relationships. At my faculty meetings, I just praise them, thank them, let them do their thing, and just be a support system."

Participants shared that support is shown by supplying teachers with what they need. Several participants said that if a teacher asks for supplies, they rarely say no. More specifically, Assistant Superintendent 6L supports this by saying that "she provides teachers with support by getting them the materials they need, and listening to them." Principal 7B continues, "I always got a smile on my face, the door is always open, anybody can walk down here, and they all have my cell phone number. Every day, it is

always about what is best for the kids. In the same token, we do that by also doing what is best for the teachers."

The interviews revealed that principals believed their thoughts and actions towards teachers had a tremendous impact on their ability to lead and connect with students. Of the participants, 50% said that giving teachers the autonomy to take risks would significantly change students. Director of Curriculum 2T stated, "An administrator who is overseeing that program needs to tell them to take risks. It is essential." Assistant Superintendent 6L agrees, "They wanted to build the stuff. I still do not know what it is, but they are happy with it. We have an outstanding teacher who takes recycled things, and the kids make things out of hangers. They build items, and he takes risks. The kids are learning and incorporating math and science into their projects. It is great to see". Principal 7B further supported allowing teachers to take risks is essential by stating, "Listen, give it a chance. Let us get that first group through and try it. Trust your people." Principal 8R added to this theme by stating, "I encourage them to take chances when it comes to things they want to do. I always encourage teachers to take risks. If you think something would work, map it out and give it a try."

Diagram nodes: Guidance Check Ins, Administration Check Ins, Students Dialoging with Teachers, Negative Connections, Seeing the good in every student, Students talking to students- Peer Leaders, Teachers Dialoging With Teachers about Relationships, Mentoring, Knowing their backgrounds, Building Relationships, Don't forget they're kids, Giving Students Time to Talk and connect with each other, Support Families, Practices, Teachers asking teachers- re how they connect, Kid knows you are not giving up on them, Pick your battles, Honest Conversations with Parents, Feels like a family, Positive Family Conversations- listening

Theme 4- Teachers building Relationships with students support them

staying in school. The first thematic label was drawn from 7 out of 8 participants.

Interview questions that led to this theme included:

- What is your role in influencing and supplying support to teachers who

   implemented these programs and practices?

- What actions through positive school culture do you believe are necessary to

   support students to remain in school?

- Describe your leadership style concerning supporting at-risk students and

   teachers who work to implement these programs and practices.

- Do you believe the programs and practices implemented have yielded the highest results?

Principal, Director, and Assistant Superintendent responses represent similar responses leading to the theme. The second attribute that these administrators felt made a considerable impact on decreasing dropout rates was the staff's focus on building relationships with students. All participants felt that if the students found an adult in the school that they felt connected to, they would have a reason to come to school. Principal 4G described it as a "relationship piece," and Assistant Superintendent 6L added that even establishing an "elective that helps them build a relationship with the teacher and gives them additional support" is something she said is worth creating within a school. She continues, "Student-centered instruction and building a climate of belonging are essential to keeping students in school." Principal 8R commented on how relationships can affect students and teachers. He explains, "It is all about relationship building and includes the staff. You need to relieve the stress off the teachers, too". He continued, "get kids to buy in, that it is important, and I say to them [the students] when they are doing stuff. If I see kids throwing trash around, I will pull them aside and ask if they throw trash in your house. When they respond no, I tell them this is your house. This is your home. They get it."

All participants spoke about guidance counselors having student check-in, but administrators also need to have student check-in. Principal 1S explains that students "who fail three or more classes will have administration meet with them individually and contact the parent. "Principal 3L shares her, Vice-Principal and herself also meet with the

students. She goes on to reveal, "I think it is just a matter that they know I am here. I received emails from kids every single day. They are comfortable reaching out to the administration. They are comfortable reaching out to their teachers". Principal 8R supports this notion as well. He stated that "Grade level administrators there are working hard on attendance. I have each of the student's deans and teachers who are there, on their duty work with attendance."

The one area in building relationships that every participant discussed was that it was vital to know their students' backgrounds. They stressed it is vital to know where your students come from, what they are dealing with outside of school, and making them feel a part of something bigger when they come to school. Director of Curriculum 2T expanded on this theme by saying, "it is imperative to know their backgrounds, without exposing their backgrounds as being a negative thing. If there is a teacher who innately knows about them, allows dialogue to happen." She continues, "[the dialogue] can mean the world of difference." This is supported by Principal 3L, who shared, "this is human nature, especially when you're talking about rapport building and trying to get to know the kids. Some of my teachers have no idea where my kids come from. As much as I can throw statistics and things like that at them, I try to explain what it means to be in their shoes, and you have to really kind of identify with them. You have to know your population of kids."

This same perception is shared by the Director of Curriculum 5M, who explains the need for "a general push to have teachers be professionally developed in trauma-informed instruction. To understand their backgrounds, some of the teachers struggle

with what the kids in front of them are like." His school has had professional

development in trauma-informed instruction. In his same district, principal 7B expands

on this thought by sharing, "They speak no English and their last known grade at 16 years

old was third grade. The last time he wrote his name was five years ago. So, they are here

to get a job, go to school for a little while, and then go out to get a job."

Principal 7B continues by explaining that he has had many discussions with the

Principal from the middle school in his district where they discuss transfer students who

are academically in middle school but are of high school age. Principal 7B will agree

with his middle school colleague that they will move the students to high school.

Principal 7B explains, "I just want to give them a chance. I want to get my hands on them

and help them. The overall dropout rates at that moment are not on my mind. I just want

to help that student." Principal 8R added, "I tell teachers all the time, you don't know

what they're doing at home or what kind of homework they have, and you have to be

compassionate and give kids chances." Principal 1S, who has the lowest dropout rates

among the participants, shared the following,

> "So much of the spirit of those meetings are collectively and culturally
>
> believing that kids deserve chances. Every kid's life and every family's life are not
>
> black and white. It is impossible to say, well, you know, they do not deserve
>
> another chance because they did this to themselves. You just continuously are
>
> trying to meet kids and their families where they are and give them opportunities,
>
> not give things away for free, but give them opportunities."

Principal 1S has shared he will spend much of the 3rd marking period visiting students' homes with the guidance counselors to keep students coming to school. He knows them by name, he knows their families, and he knows how to keep them is to know them.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

This study established the trustworthiness of data by implementing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies. These four elements help to establish trustworthiness (Tracy, 2019).

Credibility

Each participant understood the study was voluntarily and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. This practice is a method to ensure the credibility of the results. Additionally, the methods and design of the data collection and the analysis contribute to the credibility of the study.

Before the interview began, I established a rapport by sharing my professional background, the problem, and my topic's purpose. I shared that their perceptions were essential to the research and could serve to help others. The participants were encouraged to be open and honest in their responses during the interviews. Throughout the interview, I asked the participant to elaborate with probing questions to understand their responses better. I also repeated and confirmed some of their responses to ensure the accuracy of the statements.

Also, I further ensured credibility by member checking through allowing the participants to read their transcripts, offered them the opportunity to clarify, and change

their responses. Additionally, using a reflexive journal, potential personal biases were reduced.

Transferability

To ensure transferability, which ensures that the results are adequate for application in a similar setting, I have explained through several graphic representations the demographics of the schools interviewed. The participants were all administrators directly involved in promoting change in their high schools. The details of each school include the number of students in each school (Figure 6), student demographics (Figure 7), and Student Classification (Figure 8) of each school, which includes the number of economically disadvantaged students, percentage of English language learners, percentage of special education, and percentage of homeless students. Although these findings are not generalizable to all settings outside of this geographical area, this information is provided for readers to decide if their environment is a similar enough situation for the study's findings to be applied.
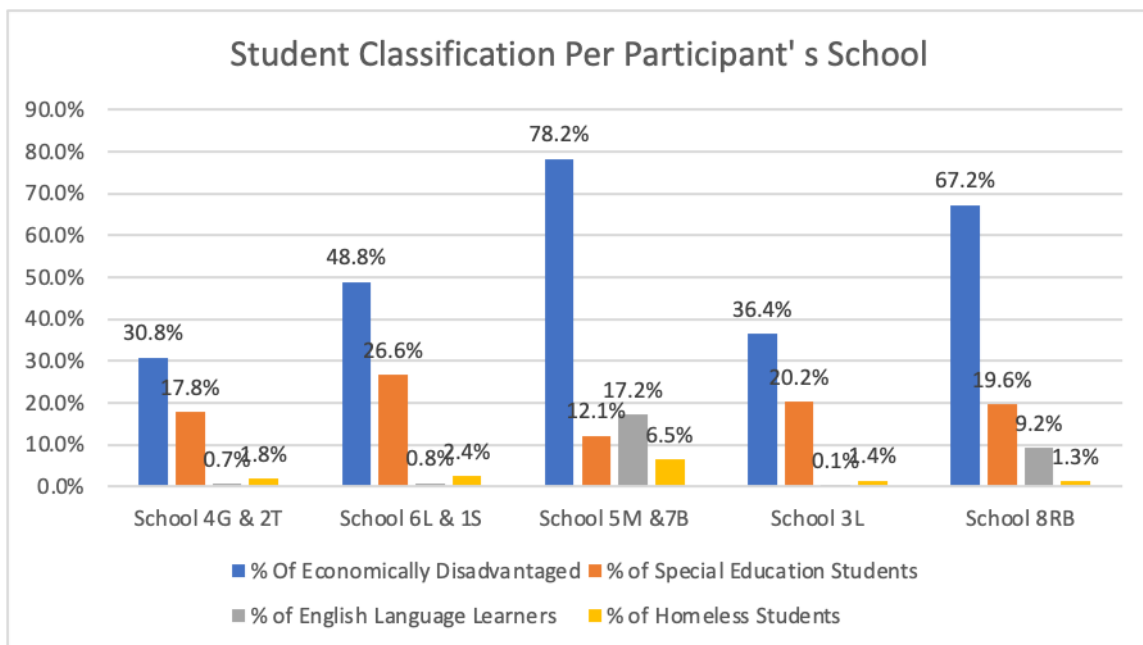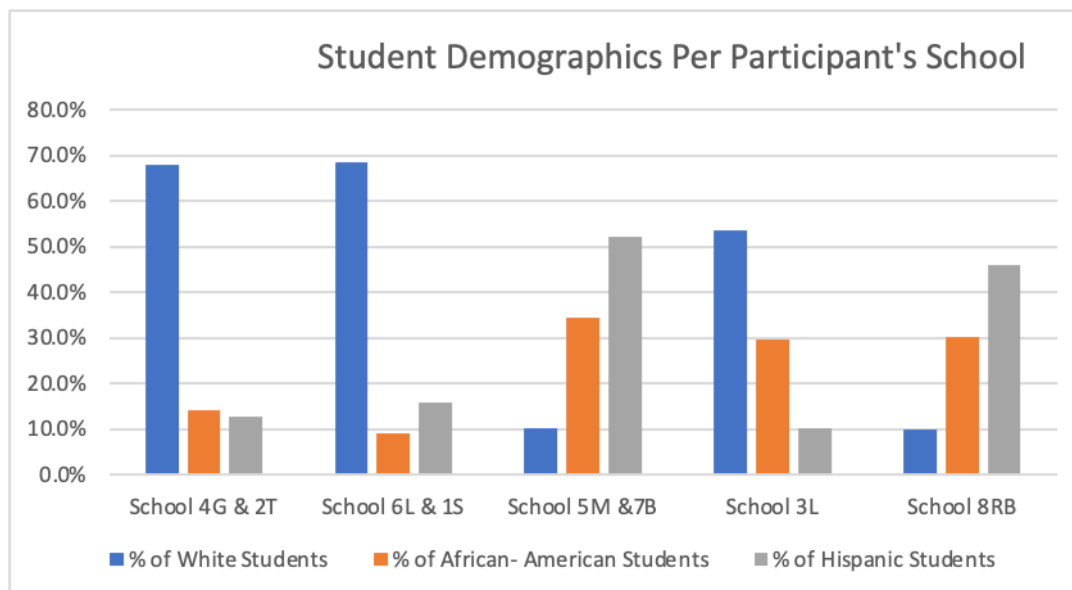
Figure 6

Total Number of Students per Participant's School
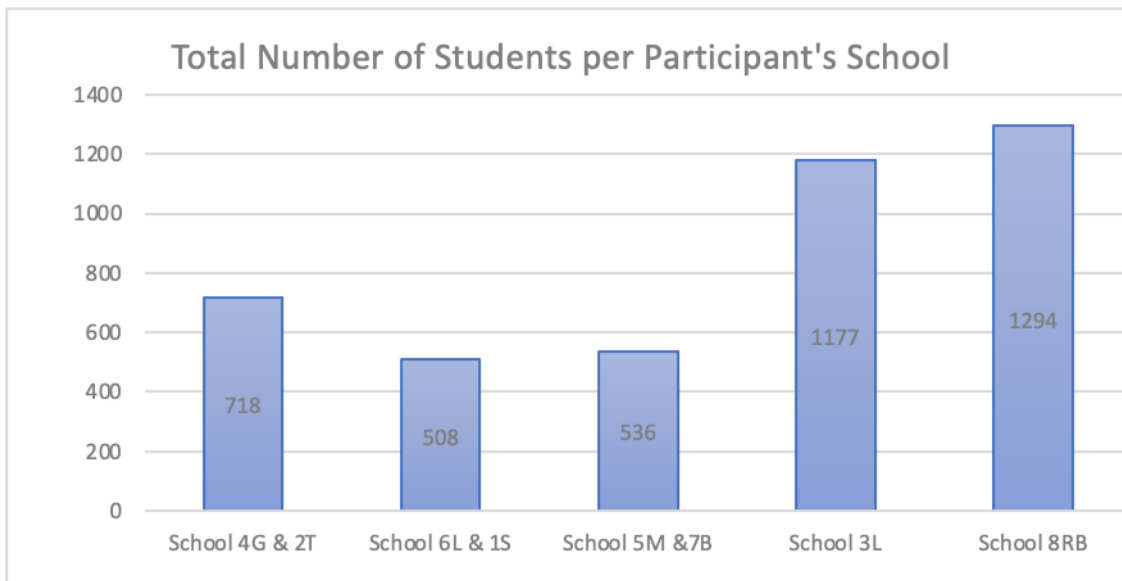
Figure 7

Student Classification Per Participant's School

Figure 8

Student Demographics Per Participant's School

Student Demographics Per Participant's School

Legend: % of White Students, % of African- American Students, % of Hispanic Students

Dependability

Dependability is critical to ensure that the research process and results can be repeated by future researchers (Tracy, 2019). To overcome this, I used an audit trail that included the coding process. I also addressed dependability by using detailed steps taken during this research process. These descriptions included the transcripts, how the data was analyzed, and how the researcher corresponded with the participants. I used the parent and child codes in NVivo. These codes emerged to become themes due to these codes clustering together. My study used data from the interviews, data from the state performance reports available on the Department of Education website, and investigated various programs, including website information on the County College alternative

program. Also, to overcome potential participant influences, the study took three weeks

to complete.

Confirmability

Confirmability concentrates on the integrity used for this study and the need to

remain neutral (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It was imperative that, as the researcher, I

overcame this by recognizing how my preferences may extend into the interpretation of

the data. I sought to ensure confirmability by examining my assumptions using a

reflexivity journal.

In qualitative studies, researchers are expected to collect data and analyze and

interpret participants' responses, perspectives, and experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I

used an audit trail to analyze the data as it relates to the study. I recorded and took notes

during the interview. Also, I used a reflexive journal to examine my assumptions. This

journal was used to document the process of coding, my thoughts, and how the

determination of themes emerged. In this journal, I could reflect and be careful that my

own biases and positions did not disrupt the data's integrity.

<center>**Summary**</center>

In this chapter, I sought to explore the problem or gap in practice that this study

addressed because it is unknown which implemented school practices and intervention

programs effectively reduce dropout rates according to the administrators' perspectives.

The purpose of this proposed basic qualitative study is to explore administrative

perceptions concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs that help

reduce dropout rates. This study was limited to a sample size of eight participants, whose

experience ranged from 19 to 30 years, and included five principals, two directors of

curriculum, and one Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum in a Mid-Atlantic state. Data

was analyzed from interviews that were recorded in the Zoom online platform,

transcribed using the Sonix inline platform, and codes were analyzed in NVivo's

platform. All these sites are individually password protected. While using NVivo, open

coding and thematic analysis were employed, and through these four themes emerged.

Themes include: Alternative Schools can affect and reduce school dropout rates, Various

Classroom Techniques can affect and reduce school dropout rates, Principal- Staff

Relationship Impact Student Drop Out Rates, and Teachers building Relationships with

students support them staying in school.

Chapter 5 will interpret the study's findings and describe the study's limitations,

recommendations, and implications of this study. Lastly, I will provide a conclusion to

the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore administrators'

perceptions concerning implemented school practices and intervention programs that help

reduce dropout rates among high school students. I used a basic qualitative study design

to explore participating administrators' perceptions. I obtained primary data from

semistructured interviews with eight campus administrators who directly dealt with

factors that may affect dropout rates. The interviews were transcribed and thematically

coded to analyze the data. I followed Ravitch and Carl's (2016) guidelines to assess

similar words, phrases, and sentences manually for the coding procedures. The coding

procedures provided a means of identifying emergent patterns that addressed the RQs

(see Saldaña, 2016).

This study's significance explored the leadership's perceptions of programs and

decided if they were successful or unsuccessful in decreasing high school dropout rates.

The study's secondary impact is from its provision of renewed knowledge to address the

current gap in practice regarding models for reducing dropout. Walden's belief in

promoting social change (Walden University, 2019) was the driving force behind my

efforts to be an agent of social change. I am not looking to solve the dropout problem but

understand what has already been tried, whether successful or not, and share the

information with others. I am hopeful that the time and effort put into this research will

assist those in the educational field who may not have the time or may not know where to

begin to find the answers. Therefore, the study has the potential to foster positive social

change and contribute to achieving Walden's mission. Last, I sought to present how

practicing administrators are trying to reduce dropout rates. Ideally, the study findings

may help other administrators identify programs that their peers have found successful or

unsuccessful.

In this chapter, I interpret the findings by reviewing each RQ and the themes that

emerged from the interview data. Next, the limitations of this study will be shared as well

as the recommendations for further studies. The study's conclusion will follow discussion

of the implications of this study for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study's results provide insight on the participants' perspectives on programs

and practices that reduce dropout rates as well as extend the education discipline's

knowledge of the dropout issues challenging U.S. schools. As part of the leadership

evaluation model, Marzano identified "21 Responsibilities of the School Leadership,",

which crystallize various responsibility traits that leaders must focus on to propel student

achievement forward (Marzano et al., 2005). The findings of this study are in line with

these traits.

The first interview question asked, "What programs of intervention and school

practices have administrators implemented and found to be effective in their attempts to

decrease the dropout rates in their high school?" The participants stated that alternative

schools located outside the school, with reduced hours and scheduling during the day,

could effectively reduce dropout rates. They also stated that using various classroom

techniques can affect and reduce school dropout rates. Some of these included using

multiple ways to assess students. Traditional multiple-choice and true-false questions are

no longer sufficient, the participants stated. Allowing students to be creative, using project-based learning, and varying questioning techniques to develop high-order reasoning by teachers will enable the educator's the ability to assess students' knowledge in many different ways. The courses should focus on the essential items necessary for showing mastery and keeping it simple.

Marzano (2005) shared that ruling with "an iron fist" is not conducive to the strong culture in the "21 Responsibilities of the School Leadership," which include flexibility. Adapt to a fluid situation's needs allowing those staff members to speak openly about their concerns, be comfortable with change, and know when it is time to be directive and move forward. In my study, the need for a leader to be flexible is essential in assessments. Assistant Superintendent 6L referred to this in her interview when she said she would go into evaluate a teacher during a classroom observation she needed to be open to the various ways teachers were assessing the students. She shared, "That the students made wire hanger creations using math and science. They were "outside" of the box thinking projects, but the kids were learning." She explained that administration should allow teachers to teach in ways that reach all students in their own learning styles.

The second question asked, "What aspects of the interventions and practices implemented do administrators believe effective with decreasing dropout rates?" The participants' responses indicated that principal and staff relationships have an impact on student dropouts' rates. Principals who support a team approach collaborate, trust, support, and focus on supplying teachers with what they need have shown to affect

students dropping out rates. Principals who trust their staff and allow them to try many ways to teach and assess affect dropout rates.

Furthermore, Marzano's Leadership Evaluation Theory noted communication as being among his 21 Responsibilities of the School Leader (Marzano et al., 2005). Marzano described this "strong line of communication" as the "glue" that keeps all other responsibilities together (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 46). Marzano expanded on this by saying that a school administrator communicates not only by being accessible to teachers but developing ways teachers can communicate with each other. Effective communication can be seen through collaborating, and supporting teacher (Marzano et al., 2005).

The data in my study also revealed that every participant agreed on the importance of knowing a student's background. Every participant spoke of where their students came from, their struggles, and their various situations. The administrators talked about the teachers who struggled the most in their schools. Those teachers were the ones who could not understand the student's environment and see the various obstacles the students were trying to overcome.

Marzano (Marzano et al., 2018) also referenced fostering a positive school culture as a top priority. This does not mean just handing out tangible rewards to students. It means that the school leader promotes the interconnectedness amongst staff, and the leader has a positive demeanor, cultivates an understanding of the purpose for staff, and not only creates but also shares a vision for the school with staff. Marzano' 21 Responsibilities of the School Leader also includes relationships in the list of his

leadership responsibilities. Marzano shared that relationships may include knowing their staff's personal needs, acknowledging significant events in their lives, and simple gestures such as saying "hi" in the hallway (Marzano et al., 2005).

The participants in this study focused not on packaged curriculum programs but the importance of teacher practices. The administrators spoke of how vital it was for teachers to communicate and connect with students. Many of the participants were unable to share that any programs were utterly unsuccessful. The participants of this study shared that even if a teacher or school implemented practices or programs, the participants helped a small number of students, even one or two. This study's participants shared that they could never reflect on the program as a failure because the few students were worth the effort. The administrators were satisfied with the results, no matter how small.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a sample size of eight participants, which included five principals, two directors of curriculum, and one assistant superintendent of curriculum in a Mid-Atlantic state. The study may not represent a larger sample of other administrators in other parts of this or other states. Also, I used only the public-school administrator's perspective and not any private or charter schools. Due to these limitations, this poses a possible opportunity for future study, extension, and generalizability.

Recommendations

Based on these results and the limitation of this study, I have determined that several topics warranted additional research. This would include exploring a technical or

magnet school principal's perspective is worth studying. I would like to explore a school that has incorporated the technical school curriculum that the principals in my students felt would be an attribute they could provide, keeping students from dropping out. Principal 1S shared this idea of a possible extension of a research project by stating, "I wish we could bring back shop classes," and Director of Curriculum 5M further supported this by saying, "I would like to open a series of centers for students who either struggled or did not complete the high school level. They can now go learn some useful trade that will help them get a job."

Additionally, this study had only eight administrators and all-in public schools taking part, therefore a study with administrators who were charter school leaders where students "choose" to go. This potential study could be expanded upon to see if different themes would emerge when students are in an environment where they actively apply and choose to go. Furthermore, exploring the same district's middle school programs and practices may better understand the effects on decreasing dropout rates. In the interview with the Director of Curriculum 2T, she mentioned that her district's middle school had a block of time that teachers use for their passion projects. The first forty-five minutes of the day is dedicated to an ungraded class period where students choose to go to a teacher and learn about their passion projects. It has ranged from crocheting to yoga to book clubs. The response from students has been tremendous. It has created an environment where students love to come to school and are excited to participate in these projects. This passion project hour would be worth exploring to see if it translates into a positive start to high school, giving students enough stamina to complete high school.

Implications

Social change, in my opinion, has one primary objective, which is to help others. As Doctoral students look to research problems in the educational world, our ultimate goal should have the same goal. When starting this research, I intended that the time and effort I put into this research would assist those in our field who may not have the time or may not know where to begin to find the answers to effective programs and practices.

In the researching role as a student at Walden, our purpose is to create social change, but in order to achieve this, graduate students need to understand what this truly means. As described in the 2010 article, "Transforming 'Apathy into Movement': The Role of Prosocial Emotions in Motivating Action for Social Change" by Emma F. Thomas, Craig McGarty, and Kenneth Mavor described advantaged versus disadvantaged groups. These authors proposed that the term disadvantaged is typically interpreted as a negative term; however, through a positive lens, these researchers describe the two groups as helping one another. The advantaged group learns to focus on their group's emotions, and through this emotion, they can recognize there are members of their group that are less fortunate or disadvantaged (Mavor et al., 2010). The research revealed that the advantaged group becomes driven to encourage more equity amongst its members, which creates apathy and leads to positive social action for the disadvantaged group (Mavor et al., 2010).

While completing this research in combination with Walden University's Vision for social change, my research goal was to learn what administrators had seen first-hand that has made the most significant impact on their students. Ideally, this study may help

administrators identify programs and practices that their peers have found unsuccessful and use that information to steer away from potentially problematic programs and practices.

Lastly, I believe this study will be essential to gain insight into unsuccessful programs and practices and how another school might learn from its administrators. Based on the data gained from this study, those reading this study may then implement the programs and practices differently to gain more positive results. If the results of this study are used to help even one student, its intention has been achieved.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, data was collected from interviews with eight administrators in a Mid- Atlantic state. These interview transcripts were analyzed to explore public high school principals' perceptions of what programs and practices they felt helped reduce dropout rates in their schools. A thorough analysis of the data was performed, and I concluded that administrators felt that alternative schools with shortened days, housed outside of the primary high school's building made the most significant impact when it pertains to specific programming. Furthermore, teachers who understand the need to build relationships with their students, know their students' backgrounds, which includes where they come from and what they may be dealing with outside of school, can impact students finishing their high school careers.

These same connected teachers who see the value in teaching and assessing students "differently" by allowing students to "show what they know" in a project-based manner will see more students graduate from high school. Also, the relationship between

an administrator and their teachers can affect students. For teachers to build relationships with students and assess them in a unique way they need, an administrator who supports actively seeks items teachers need and allows their staff to take risks. All these areas combined can change the trajectory of a child's life. Future studies should focus on similar student demographics who attend either a magnet or a technical school and could explore the effects a middle school may have on decreasing dropout rates. This study may not compel students to stay in school, but it certainly sheds some light on what schools can do right now with minimal costs involved to influence them to stay.

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