10-23-2025

Exploring Ex-Offenders' Perceptions of Their Learning Experiences and the Shape of Criminal Activity in Louisiana

Carla Buntyn
Walden University

Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Carla Buntyn

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. George King, Committee Chairperson,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Michael Salter, Committee Member,
Criminal Justice Faculty

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

Walden University
2025

Abstract

Exploring Ex-Offenders' Perceptions of Their Learning Experiences and the Shape of Criminal Activity in Louisiana

by

Carla Buntyn

MA, Walden University, 2014

BS, Kaplan University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of 12 formerly incarcerated males in Louisiana between the ages of 18 and 25, with a focus on their perspectives related to schooling, social environments, and involvement in criminal activity. Guided by general strain theory, the research explored how participants described their learning experiences under Common Core standards and whether they perceived connections between those experiences and their criminal activity. The research question asked: How do American male ex-offenders between the ages of 18 and 25 in Louisiana describe the relationship between Common Core learning experiences and their criminal activity? Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed thematically. Seven themes emerged, reflecting participants' accounts of educational engagement, peer influence, community environments, and perceived factors that contributed to or protected against criminal involvement. The findings indicate that while schooling and social environments were not described as direct causes of incarceration, participants associated disengagement from education, lack of support, and exposure to negative influences with increased vulnerability to criminal behavior. Conversely, extracurricular opportunities and positive relationships were described as protective factors. This study supports positive social change by promoting the development of programs and policies that provide support for justice-involved young adults.

Exploring Ex-Offenders' Perceptions of Their Learning Experiences and the Shape of Criminal Activity in Louisiana

by

Carla Buntyn

MA, Walden University, 2014

BS, Kaplan University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2025

Dedication

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who supported me throughout the process of completing this dissertation. First, I am deeply thankful to my staff at Compassion for Lives, whose understanding, encouragement, and patience allowed me the time and focus needed to complete this work. Your dedication to our mission continues to inspire me and makes this journey much more manageable.

To my family, friends, and especially my son, your constant encouragement and belief in me were invaluable. Mr. Gregory Young, I am deeply grateful for your unwavering support; on days I doubted my ability to continue, your guidance helped me persevere. All of your love and encouragement reminded me why this work was worth the effort. I am also profoundly thankful to my friend Vanessa Smith, whose steadfast support never allowed me to give up, even on the most exhausting days. Your encouragement carried me through moments of doubt and fatigue.

Completing this dissertation was not possible without the collective support of these remarkable individuals. Each of you contributed to this accomplishment in meaningful ways, and I will always be grateful for your encouragement, guidance, and belief in me.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere and profound gratitude to my chair, Dr. George King, for his guidance, knowledge, and mentorship. Your timely feedback, patience, and ability to meet me where I was in the dissertation process ensured that I fully understood each step and could move forward with confidence. Your support made this achievement possible, and I am truly thankful for your dedication and encouragement throughout this journey.

I also found a true friendship with Brenda Andrews, whom I met during the second residency. Brenda became my partner in completing the dissertation, and together we spent many long nights navigating prerequisite courses and the dissertation process, motivating and encouraging each other along the way. Our connection grew beyond academics, and we became confidants in life, supporting each other through challenges both in school and beyond.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Common Ground Community and the volunteers who participated in this research. Your willingness to share your experiences made this study possible and added depth and meaning to my work. Your contributions were invaluable, and I am truly grateful for your time, honesty, and collaboration.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Louisiana ranks fourth in the nation for crimes committed by youth (Chrastil, 2023). A significant disparity exists in convictions, with eighty-three percent of those convicted being Black, while the overall percentage of Black individuals in the prison population is 65% (Chrastil, 2023). Most crimes are committed before their 18th birthday (Chrastil, 2023). Education is known to reduce the likelihood of violence and crime (Bell et al., 2022). Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) said that education is an investment in yourself that can help you get better job opportunities in the future, which discourages participation in crime. Louisiana ranks fifth in the country for illiteracy rate and the highest crime rate, which demonstrates a link between educational inadequacies and criminality (Wisevoter, 2023).

In 2014, a new educational initiative known as the Common Core (CC) was implemented by the Louisiana Department of Education. After 2014, when CC was implemented, school dropout rates increased, crime rates increased, and teacher resignations increased. Research shows Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate, and about 6,000 students drop out of high school each year (Stein et al, 2022). Loveless (2020) states that CC failed to improve academic achievement and the standards that prompted states to raise benchmarks for student learning.

Over the past 16 years, Louisiana has had the highest incarceration rate (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021). The limited availability of employment opportunities, coupled with a lack of educational resources for returning inmates, significantly restricts their potential for securing gainful employment upon reintegration into their families. This

constrained employment landscape may contribute to an increased risk of recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals. Research indicates that men who complete high school between the ages of 21 and 25 have an arrest rate that is eight times lower compared to those who do not graduate (Ades & Mishra, 2021).

In this study, the focus is on examining how male ex-offenders perceive their learning experiences to determine if there is a correlation between education and criminal behavior. Research shows that a lack of education is a contributing factor to crime. Research by Bell et al. (2022) indicated that the relationship between education and crime continues to be characterized by disempowerment, showing no significant progress over time. Education can make it less likely for people to commit crimes (Lochner & Moretti, 2004). It can make individuals think more about the consequences of their actions and help them make better choices as adults. This paper analyzes the CC framework while exploring factors such as public-school investments, truancy, dropout rates, academic failure, and the level of family support. It also examines the role of social-emotional learning and grade retention, alongside the perceptions of male ex-offenders regarding the elements that contribute to criminal behavior. Additionally, this chapter introduces the research question and defines key terms.

Background

In 2014, CC following President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act and President Obama's Every Student Succeeds Act, was developed into national education standards. After a decade, the frequent studies of CC in the education system are still challenging to understand. The CC has established specific expectations for literacy, language, writing,

and mathematics. However, as noted by Bleiberg (2021), educators have not received adequate support for the effective implementation of these standards.

Superintendents have identified difficulties in securing sufficient staffing and funding for the implementation of CC activities. Effective professional development and alignment with CC standards are essential, particularly in early education settings. Abadie and Bista (2018) highlighted that certain math standards for kindergarten and first-grade students may set developmentally inappropriate expectations, indicating that students are expected to achieve benchmarks prematurely.

Moran et al. (2022) investigated how teachers perceive the intersection of politics and their professional responsibilities. Their findings reveal that educators feel a significant lack of ability to input regarding curriculum control, face ever-changing educational standards, and are affected by bipartisanship in education policy. Moreover, teachers expressed considerable mistrust toward those involved in the creation of CC. This mistrust raises concerns about students' comprehension of CC, suggesting a disconnect that may hinder effective learning outcomes.

Louisiana has the third-highest dropout rate and is ranked 41st in education nationwide. A quantitative study shows that 80% of respondents in Louisiana agreed that low educational attainment is influenced by socioeconomic factors that influence criminal behaviors (Akinbobola, 2021). Approximately 48% of individuals in incarceration lack a high school diploma or its equivalent, as indicated by data from the Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections (2023).

In mid-2020, a significant number of incarcerated individuals were aged 18 to 34, comprising approximately fifty percent of the incarcerated population; individuals aged 55 and older represented 7% of the population (Minton & Zeng, 2021). In Louisiana, the typical age of first incarceration aligns with late adolescence. Louisiana stands out as one of only four states where a substantial proportion of the incarcerated population (6% or more) has been incarcerated since 2006. A 2023 study by Human Rights for Kids highlights that Louisiana ranks among nineteen states where most incarcerated individuals who entered the system as juveniles belong to racial minority groups. Research by Armstrong and Kondkar (2022) indicates that over one-third of Louisiana's prisoners committed offenses before turning 25, with 5.6% incarcerated for crimes committed as minors. Today, the implementation of CC and the lack of education are still pressing issues in Louisiana for male ex-offenders. Research has not explored how ex-offenders perceive their learning experiences with the CC and its influence on their criminal behavior. This study is needed to understand the perceptions of formerly incarcerated males between 18 and 25 to provide an understanding of whether the CC is related to crime and delinquency.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in the literature is how people who have been in jail do not have a high school diploma or dropped out of school, and how this affects their chances of committing crimes. The CC in Louisiana represents an initiative aimed at raising academic standards in math and English to better prepare students for high school graduation and future success. The Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary

Education (BESE) has firmly adopted the CC standards, which were developed through the valuable contributions of state leaders. These standards clearly outline the essential knowledge and skills that every student must acquire at each grade level. However, the implementation of CC has resulted in unintended consequences, including increased truancy and dropout rates among students. Research indicates that chronic truancy may correlate with heightened risks of criminal involvement. Considering these concerns, the proposed study aims to explore the experiences of ex-offenders with CC and examine how truancy and dropout rates may have influenced their paths toward criminal activity.

Research on teachers' experiences with CC has been conducted (Abadie & Bista, 2018; Swanson & Chapin, 2020), but there remains a notable gap regarding ex-offenders' perceptions of their encounters with CC standards and their potential connection to their criminal backgrounds. This study aims to explore how ex-offenders in Louisiana perceive their experiences with CC and its relevance to their criminal activities. The findings are anticipated to contribute significantly to enhancing the public school system and mitigating crime rates in Louisiana.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceptions of American male ex-offenders, aged 18-25, regarding their learning experiences with CC standards and to examine the relationship between the presence or absence of these standards and criminal activity among this demographic following the implementation of CC in the State of Louisiana. The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in general strain theory (GST), which posits that strain leads to an emotional disconnection from learning,

thereby motivating criminal activity among American males in Louisiana. Strain theory posits that negative emotions arising from stress can drive individuals to engage in deviant behaviors, including criminal activities, as a means of coping (Jang, 2007).

Research Question

This research is guided by the following: How do American male ex-offenders between the ages of 18 and 25 in Louisiana describe the relationship of Common Core learning experiences to their criminal activity?

Theoretical Framework

The theory used for the foundation of this study is the GST. Broidy and Agnew (1997) developed GST using ideas from earlier strain theorists Robert Merton. Merton (1938) posits that societal strain results in criminal behavior, highlighting the disparity between economic goals and the means to achieve them. Building on this, GST examines various stressors that heighten negative emotions such as anger and frustration (Agnew, 2001). Earlier theories about stress contributed to general strain theories, especially by highlighting negative things like not reaching goals and facing obstacles. Agnew (2001) posited that crime can serve as a means to alleviate strain. This perspective informs the examination of the learning experiences of ex-offenders in the context of the CC Learning Standards.

GST primarily emphasizes the prevailing concerns of the population, providing a framework for understanding these issues and elucidating the processes by which they are addressed or resolved. In strain theory, a lack of education or income is a proposed pressure derived from social factors that drive individuals to commit crimes. Therefore,

the connection between GST and this study's nature is inherent in the learning experiences, particularly for American male ex-offenders in Louisiana, who have an opportunity to express their lived experiences for learning after the implementation of CC. In Chapter 2, the study will expand on the theoretical framework relevant to the research questions, including GST and CC standards, as well as their connection to criminal behavior and significance to the study's objectives and findings.

Nature of the Study

This phenomenological study conducted in-depth interviews with twelve male ex-offenders aged 18-25 in Louisiana to explore their experiences post-CC State Standards (CC) implementation and their potential link to their criminality. The study aims to gain insight into the lived experiences of this demographic, employing qualitative methods to capture their perspectives in detail. In-depth interviews facilitated a nuanced understanding of these individuals' motivations and viewpoints, which allowed me, as the researcher, to follow the respondents' narratives with flexibility. This approach is positioned as critical for phenomenological research, emphasizing the importance of understanding shared experiences within a specific context (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

For this study on the effects of the CC State Standards on participants' high school experiences, two ex-offenders were recruited through CC, a local nonprofit organization, while ten others were recruited through digital flyers and word-of-mouth communication. The research utilized face-to-face interviews to collect data, which were subsequently transcribed, reduced, and triangulated for analysis. The analytic approach

involved coding and categorizing the data to identify emerging themes. Participants were selected through purposive and secondary snowball sampling techniques until data saturation was achieved.

Definitions

Academic performance- grade point average, standardized test scores, and educational aspirations and attainment (Farb & Matjasko, 2012).

CC is a set of academic benchmarks, not a curriculum, that set expectations for what students should know by the end of each grade to ensure they are college- and career-ready by the time they graduate high school (Tulane University, 2015).

Criminal behavior- generally defined as any overt or covert law-breaking conduct in a given country or state, punishable upon conviction. The two main broad categories are *property* crimes (e.g., fraud, theft) and *violent* crimes (e.g., domestic violence, robbery, homicide, and sex crimes (Coulacoglou & Saklofske, 2018).

Delinquency - generally seen as the antisocial and illegal actions of youth, including bullying, cutting class, vandalism, substance use, selling drugs, and shoplifting. (Lai, 2009).

Disadvantaged- refer to segments of the population that experience greater obstacles to success or access to resources, services, and opportunities due to various systemic factors. (Omara-Eves et al., 2015).

Disciplinary- people with low socioeconomic status, socially excluded people. (Omara-Eves et al., 2015).

Dropout- a student who leaves school before graduating (American Psychological Association, 2024).

Emotional response- feelings or emotions: happy, sad, afraid, lonely, mad. (American Psychological Association, 2024).

General strain theory - to be recognized as an increasingly important explanation for violence at the individual level. (Warner & Fowler, 2003).

Grade retention- students who fail to reach the academic standards needed to continue into the subsequent school year must remain in the same grade for another year (Gonzalez-Nuevo et al., 2023).

Poverty- a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Public education- education in schools, colleges, and universities provided by the government (Oxford University Press, 2024).

Public investment- the money that a government spends on public services such as education and health (Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2024).

Socioeconomic status- encompasses not only income but also educational attainment, occupational prestige, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class.

Strain- force to make great (American Psychological Association, 2025).

Truancy- the habitual engagement in unexcused absences from school (Cardwell et al., 2019).

Violence- the intentional or unintentional use of force, whether physical or psychological, threatened or actual, against an individual, oneself, or against a group of people, a community, or a government (Rutherford et al., 2007).

Assumptions

In the study's development, various assumptions were made, signifying a qualitative methodology. In the context of how education relates to criminal activity, it is important to acknowledge the perspectives and experiences of formerly incarcerated males. Their perceptions can be complex and require in-depth exploration to fully understand. It is assumed that subjective in-depth interviews are believed to enhance the richness and depth of the interview.

Participants are expected to share their honest lived experiences despite potential concerns about confidentiality and discussing sensitive topics. The researcher's neutral role is needed to foster an environment where a variety of perceptions and experiences can be shared openly and honestly. The first researcher bias refers to when a researcher selectively focuses on data that aligns with their preconceived beliefs or expectations. In the study, I pledged to remain self-aware to avoid personal biases, ensuring objectivity.

Understanding the perception of criminal activity and whether it is linked to education could help prevent crime and reduce recidivism. The reflexive researcher aims to understand the viewpoints and feelings of the study participants, which could have affected their behavior. The focus was on previously incarcerated males who attended public high school in Louisiana. I aimed to identify the various factors leading to crime in the state. This research aims to elucidate the various factors contributing to the criminal

behavior exhibited by males aged 18 to 25 in Louisiana. The study's findings provide valuable insights that can inform local and state governmental bodies in their efforts to prevent crime and reduce recidivism.

The assumption behind this study encouraged the use of qualitative methodology to conduct in-depth interviews with men who have been in jail or prison in Louisiana to understand their subjective experiences. Comprehensively, these assumptions signify that the rationale for using a qualitative methodology in this study is to conduct in-depth interviews with formerly incarcerated males in Louisiana to understand their subjective experiences.

Overall, a qualitative methodology was chosen due to the complexity of the research topic and the need for in-depth interviewing of the subjective experiences and perspectives of ex-offenders and their criminal activity. By acknowledging these assumptions, the study aims to enhance transparency and reflexivity in the research process, contributing to the rigor and validity of the findings.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative phenomenological research will conduct face-to-face interviews with American male ex-offenders aged 18 to 25 from Louisiana, specifically targeting their educational experiences during their high school years. The study focuses on the risk factors: truancy, CC challenges, lack of family support in low-income families, school engagement, grade retention, and academic failure linkage to delinquency in Louisiana. The study aims to provide an understanding of the learning experiences of ex-

offenders in Louisiana to help with crime prevention by addressing challenges in education.

This study has some recognizable delimitations. The research is limited to ex-offenders between the ages of 18 and 25 in Louisiana, not considering the opinions of those currently incarcerated, teachers, staff administrators in schools, or outside organizations. The views from other sources are helpful, but not helpful because the study focuses on how ex-offenders' learning experiences led to criminal behavior.

This study is grounded in GST as proposed by Agnew (2013). In this study, several theoretical frameworks relevant to social issues and research problems were identified but not thoroughly examined, including social learning theory, narrative, and ethnography. As the researcher, I selected GST for its capacity to elucidate the connection between strain and criminal behavior, supported by research that strain is a significant factor contributing to crime involvement (Agnew, 2013).

The qualitative research included interviews with former offenders to gather their stories and gain insight into their personal experiences. While the qualitative approach will include in-depth interviews exploring the attitudes and behaviors for data collection, they may need to provide more objectivity to minimize researcher biases through structured data collection and analysis. I needed to consider potential biases that could affect the study results to ensure that the findings can apply to other contexts for transferability.

The study is limited to policymakers from the Departments of Corrections and the Department of Education. Louisiana was chosen due to its highest incarceration rate and

third-highest dropout rate in the nation. The study will look closely at the different themes and patterns in the lives of the country's highest population of ex-offenders. This focus enabled a deeper understanding of the systemic challenges affecting both education and incarceration in the state. The findings may also highlight opportunities for policy reform that can improve long-term outcomes for at-risk populations.

Recognizing that ex-offenders may have different views in different states based on their risk factors, such as social and economic disadvantages, truancy, lack of family support, school engagement, grade retention, and academic failure. As a researcher, I will strive to include diverse perspectives in the sample; however, the results will not reflect the entire population of ex-offenders aged 18 to 25 in Louisiana.

This study will outline the scope and limitations of the research. The goal is to be transparent about the research boundaries and limitations. Regardless of the delimitation, the study aims to provide helpful information for using CC in education, fighting crime, and reducing recidivism. Therefore, the findings suggest that the evidence may be relevant to the ex-offenders who participated but may not be directly transferable to other contexts without considering the specific factors and experiences involved.

Limitations

In this study, limited access to data can be challenging, and this limitation can become a problem. Securing male participants ages 18 and 25 who have attended high school in Louisiana might pose challenges due to finding participants willing to share their experiences. The participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be

individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding (Creswell, 2007).

Problems and pitfalls exist when utilizing in-depth interviews. Focusing only on the results from participants that support my main arguments could cause biases that could influence outcomes. Communicating honestly and openly with the participants is very important to ensure they want to participate. The participant should not feel pressured to participate in the study. As a researcher, it is crucial to select participants who are both willing and interested in mitigating the impact of subjective experiences. Researchers face challenges related to subjectivity and bias; therefore, it is essential to continuously reflect on their biases and positionality. This can be achieved through practices such as maintaining memos, journal writing, and engaging in peer debriefing. As a researcher, I will have to remain objective to avoid biases by focusing on the problem statement and data gathering.

For ethical considerations, data safekeeping and storage may present challenges that require careful planning and a comprehensive approach to information security. The privacy of the participants' lived experiences regarding their educational background is a sensitive topic, making anonymization important. To avoid ethical issues in the study, specific research questions will addressed for validity. Participants were required to give voluntary consent to be interviewed in the study.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that research involving participants is ethical and follows the rules. The ethics approval in the IRB process is more accessible for studies that use already existing data or have few risks. The limitations in

methodology and research was observed and interpreted by the IRB. As the researcher, I ensured privacy and confidentiality, no plagiarism of data, no fabrication of data, and no conflict of interest to strengthen my study for approval by the IRB.

Significance

This qualitative study aims to explore the learning experiences of American male ex-offenders aged 18-25 in Louisiana, emphasizing their perceptions of the community. Finishing high school can help prevent crime and lower the chances of people committing crimes. This study looks at how effective CC Standards work in education and how men who have been in prison feel about their experiences while attending high school.

By exploring the ex-offenders' perspectives, the research aims to uncover the link between education and crime that can inform and enhance the development, implementation, and improvement of programs in corrections, local, state, and federal government. It is essential to hear the perspective of formerly incarcerated men because they have committed crimes and attended high school after the implementation of the CC Standards. Their insights offer firsthand knowledge about challenges in school, criminal activity, limitations, and successes, thereby contributing significantly to the field of Corrections.

The significance of this study has the potential to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing perspectives on the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated males during their time spent in high school in Louisiana. By securing the firsthand experience and perceptions of the formerly incarcerated, the research offers insight that

may not fully be captured through a visual perception. The approach is to get an auditory perception for understanding how the formerly incarcerated explain the link between education and crime, which is crucial for reducing recidivism in Louisiana.

The study can potentially influence practice and policy changes in the criminal justice system in the school-to-prison pipeline. By identifying areas of improvement for the school-to-prison pipeline, the research can inform policy reform initiatives to enhance the safety and well-being of local citizens, reduce delinquency, and reduce recidivism in Louisiana. This study aims to support evidence-based suggestions based on the experiences of formerly incarcerated males. The study can help create positive social change by encouraging changes in antisocial behavior that lead to less crime.

Investing more money in public schools is aligned with broader goals to improve education and lower crime rates by leading to better job salaries. Combining crime prevention and criminal justice at all levels of education is essential to combat crime and violence in the future. Overall, this study contributes to the law being followed from a young age in schools to create safe and prosperous communities.

In summary, the significance of this study is the potential to inform policy and practice, fill a gap in existing literature, create positive social change, and contribute to the goals of reducing recidivism and crime prevention. Its focus is on enhancing the safety and well-being of local citizens, reducing delinquency, and reducing recidivism in Louisiana.

Summary

This study aims to investigate ex-offenders' perceptions of their learning experiences following the implementation of the CC. It will examine the potential factors that may have contributed to their prior criminal behavior and identify those influences. Louisiana ranks fourth in the nation for crimes committed by youth, with 83 percent of offenders being Black. Education has been shown to reduce violence and crime, with Louisiana ranking fifth in illiteracy and having the highest crime rate. CC, introduced in 2014, increased dropout rates, crime, and teacher resignations. Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate, and research shows that finishing high school reduces the likelihood of arrest. Lack of contributes to crime, and the link between education and crime remains unchanged. Louisiana inmates face limited job opportunities and a lack of education upon release, leading to recidivism.

Chapter 1 provided a comprehensive overview of the research topic, focusing on the perceptions of formerly incarcerated males in Louisiana. It introduced the research problem, objectives, and questions, setting the stage for subsequent chapters. Additionally, the chapter delved into the background of the study, emphasizing CC education standards, high school dropout rates, and the incarceration rate in Louisiana. The chapter discussed increased dropout rates, crime rates, new educational reform, and the link between education and crime, providing context for understanding the perception of formerly incarcerated males. The chapter also outlined the study's assumptions, scope, limitations, and significance, acknowledging potential challenges and highlighting the potential impact on policy and practice within the criminal justice system.

In Chapter 2, the literature review will shape what was introduced in Chapter One by analyzing existing research on different perceptions of ex-offenders' learning experiences. It will explore related factors of CC, public-school investment, education, truancy, dropout rates, and other factors related to crime and delinquency. By synthesizing these studies, Chapter 2 will provide insights into the current state of knowledge in the field and identify areas for further research and improvement in education related to crime. The literature review will provide context and insights into the perceptions of the formerly incarcerated in Louisiana, informing the subsequent chapters of the research study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study investigates the influence of the CC curriculum on criminal behavior by analyzing the experiences of ex-offenders. It focuses on Louisiana, which has the highest incarceration rate and one of the poorest education systems in the U.S. Research indicates that education significantly contributes to lowering criminal activity rates (Lee, 2021). No previous research has been done to determine if the CC affected ex-offenders' involvement in crime in the state of Louisiana. There is a lack of research addressing the learning experiences of ex-offenders concerning the CC State Standards in Louisiana. By synthesizing these studies, this review aims to provide insight into how students learned after the implementation of CC affected male academic outcomes and if they were more likely to commit crimes in Louisiana. This literature review explores various factors of how education is linked to criminal activity for ex-offenders aged 18-25, including truancy, CC challenges, lack of family support in low-income families, school engagement, grade retention, and academic failure linkage to delinquency in Louisiana.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review for this study was developed through a systematic strategy: I accessed relevant literature from numerous databases to identify literature, including the Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections and Louisiana Believes. The keywords used to perform this search included the Louisiana Department of Corrections and the *Louisiana Department of Education, high school drop-out, incarceration,* and *truancy.* These searches led to peer-reviewed and related articles in databases such as Google Scholar, Science Direct, Education Resources, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Sage,

ProQuest, JSTOR, Google Scholar, EBSCO, and the Walden Library. I searched the following terms: CC*, traditional learning, education, education behaviors, grade retention, socioeconomics, high school dropouts, criminal behavior, at-risk students, high school equivalency,* and *incarceration*.

There is no research on the perceptions of ex-offenders' learning experiences and their contribution to crime. However, research does illustrate how a lack of education contributes to crime. In my research, I utilized current literature and dissertations on this topic (Bell et al., 2022).

Theoretical Foundation

This study aims to investigate ex-offenders' perceptions of education in Louisiana and its potential link to emotional distress and subsequent criminal behavior among American males. Grounded in GST, the research posits that heightened emotional distress can lead individuals to commit crimes as a coping mechanism (Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Merton, 1938). Teachers have reported that the methodologies employed in teaching the CC have caused confusion among students and parents (Abadie & Bista, 2018). Notably, following the implementation of CC in 2014, there has been a reported increase in criminal activity. Agnew, 1997). Teachers faced significant challenges communicating the CC curriculum to students, and students experienced strain in obtaining a high school diploma successfully.

Strain theory, as explored by Professors Broidy and Agnew (1997), highlights the higher incidence of crime among males compared to females, emphasizing the relationship between strain and criminal behavior. Their research indicates that negative

emotions, including depression, anger, and frustration, are linked to an increased likelihood of criminal behavior. According to GST, men often exhibit anger in response to stressors, which can lead to deviant behavior (Broidy & Agnew, 1997). The theory highlights how inadequate education can lead to emotional responses such as self-directed feelings of depression and other-directed feelings of anger when faced with strain. Strained individuals engage in various coping mechanisms to manage negative outcomes. The primary objective of education is to achieve academic success, but barriers can arise that hinder this goal. These barriers may stem from the pursuit of other valued objectives like respect, masculinity, autonomy, and the thrill of excitement (Brezina, 2017). Feelings of unhappiness can lead to negative behavior, which may stem from academic underachievement (Brezina, 2017). Research by Alexander et al. (2001) and Harlow (2003) highlighted a notable link between academic underachievement, school dropout rates, and subsequent engagement in criminal behavior.

GST. identifies three primary types of strain that individuals may experience: the inability to achieve personal goals, negative interactions or relationships with peers and authority figures, and involuntary exposure to criminal activities or undesirable circumstances. Students must perform satisfactorily in all classes and assessments to graduate from high school. The concept of GST highlights that students may experience feelings of being stuck and disappointment when they fail to meet their expectations (Brezina, 2017). As a result, increased distress in individuals correlates with a higher propensity to commit crimes. Exploring the impact of CC on young men in Louisiana,

aged 18-25, reveals a potential link between educational strain and engagement in criminal activity.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Sources of Strain Due to Social/Economic Disadvantages

National data shows that students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, face a twenty-percentage-point increase in the likelihood of dropping out of high school for each week of missed school (Rios et al., 2020). Research by Jaggers et al. (2016) highlighted that poverty and academic disadvantages can significantly increase the risk of future incarceration and involvement with the adult justice system, utilizing administrative data from the Louisiana Department of Education, the Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, and the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (LADOC). The main strength of the research is evidence that poverty and academic disadvantages are risk factors for crime among urban youth. The researcher was able to form an effective framework utilizing a hierarchical, mixed-effects logistic regression model by exploring whether youth later encountered the LADOC and were incarcerated, and whether they committed a violent crime leading to their contact. The weakness of the research study is the mixed-effects logistic regression model does not explore the lived experience of the participants to discover other risk factors associated with criminal behavior. The in-depth interviews and questions can provide data using the mixed-effect logistic regression model.

The study by Kizilgol and Selim (2017) identified significant patterns linking social disadvantages to crime, highlighting factors such as joblessness, impoverishment,

lack of tuition, family, inequality of income, labor market skills, poor employment records, and low legitimate earnings.

Agnew (2013) posited that GST suggests that individuals may resort to criminal behavior due to their inability to fulfill their basic needs. Furthermore, education is identified as a factor that can positively influence the attainment of these basic needs. Education is commonly perceived to influence an individual's level of socialization and access to opportunities, which in turn can lead to an enhanced standard of living (Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018).

The increase in crime rates in Western countries, coupled with recent social and economic challenges, has sparked modern research in the field (Dicolo, 2022). Bleiberg (2021) highlighted that CC has a notably positive initial impact on economically advantaged students, while no significant effect is observed for students from low-income backgrounds. Teachers have lower expectations for black and low-income families (Bleiberg, 2021; Ferguson, 2003; Gershenson et al., 2016).

Poverty serves as a significant predictor of academic success among students in educational settings. According to Youth.gov (n.d.), approximately 50% of students entering residential juvenile justice facilities possess academic skills that are below the expected grade level for their age. Staff members in high-poverty districts expressed lower confidence in their ability to effectively implement the CC (Bleiberg, 2021). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds face significant disparities in academic achievement, often being outperformed by their wealthier peers (Davis, 2021).

Research by Jerald (2008) indicated that in the United States, disadvantaged and low-achieving students often receive a diluted curriculum and are placed in larger classrooms with less qualified educators. Impoverished neighborhoods experience elevated crime and unemployment rates, largely attributed to limited access to education and opportunities (Sethi et al., 2020). Schooling has the potential to decrease criminal activity by fostering employment opportunities, as many jobs in current social institutions necessitate educational qualifications (Sethi et al., 2020).

The strain refers to the connection between economically disadvantaged individuals who face financial hardship, failure, and stress, which drive them towards engaging in criminal activities. Students who come from economically disadvantaged families experience strain, which leads to poor performance in school. Nath and Das (2019) discovered significant links between indicators of socioeconomic status and the incidence of violent and property crimes. They found that young individuals born into low socioeconomic status families were over three times more likely to engage in criminal activities later in life compared to those born into families with high socioeconomic status (Nath and Das, 2019). Limited opportunities can lead individuals to engage in criminal behavior as they seek alternative, illegitimate means to achieve success (Sethi, 2020).

Recent research shows national economic disparities in states adopting the CC (Davis, 2021). Even though standards have become rigorous over time, states with higher poverty levels had lower test scores than wealthier states during the 12-year study (Davis, 2021). Current economic challenges have led to heightened poverty and unemployment

in Louisiana communities, posing significant obstacles to educational attainment. Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) demonstrated that a 1-year increase in a state's average education levels correlates with a reduction in state-level arrest rates by at least 11 percent. Offering improved school options to high-risk youth can lead to reductions in crimes that result in arrests, yielding an estimated social savings of USD 16,000 for victims over a seven-year period (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012). Families with higher socioeconomic status often demonstrate better success in preparing their young children for school, attributed to their access to resources that foster and support child development (Nath & Das, 2019).

The Population of Poverty in Louisiana

According to the 2024 US Census Bureau (2025), Louisiana's poverty rate stands at 18.7%, notably higher than the national average of 10.6% (Invest Louisiana, 2025). Louisiana has been in an economic slump. In 2023, Mueller referenced a report by Louisiana Legislative Auditor Mike Waguespack, which indicated that during the 2021-2022 academic year, Louisiana schools had an enrollment of 775,583 K-12 students. The racial composition of this student body was approximately 48% White, 37.8% Black, 8.6% Hispanic, and 5.6% from other racial minorities (Mueller, 2023). The audit revealed that a significant 71% of students in Louisiana's public schools are living below the poverty threshold (Mueller, 2023). Davis (2021) provided support that explains poverty as a contributing factor to failed academic achievement in reading and mathematics among students in grades 6-9 in North Carolina. The author found that students from lower-income families at schools with higher poverty rates tended to have lower scores

on reading and mathematics when compared to schools with lower poverty rates after CC implementation. Warner and Fowler (2003) discovered that living in a disadvantaged and unstable neighborhood leads to experiencing more stress in the neighborhood.

Secondly, the stress experienced at a neighborhood level had a significant impact on the amount of violence that occurs in communities described as having low levels of social support. Researchers Jiang et al. (2020) found that social connections link economic difficulties with bad behavior in teenagers. Researchers Fredricks et al. (2004) explain that not doing well in school can lead to bad behavior, but doing well in school can help prevent bad behavior. Furthermore, considering the relationship between poverty, academic achievement, and behavior, evaluating potential strategies and policies is essential.

Factors Relating to the CC to Crime and Delinquency

The contribution of truancy, dropout, CC curriculum, and disciplinary problems can contribute to crime and delinquency. Scholars have suggested evidence that truancy contributes to educational underachievement among socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Studies also show that African American students in truancy are at significant risk of receiving a delinquency petition (Rubino et al., 2020). In Louisiana, truancy rates have significantly risen from 22% to 40% over the past 5 years (Sentell, 2022). The implementation of CC in Louisiana adversely affected teacher-student relationships, resulting in increased truancy and dropout rates (Abadie & Bista, 2018). Skipping school during adolescence is linked to negative consequences, like a higher chance of getting in trouble as a teenager and as an adult (Rocque et al., 2017). Research has found that

truancy is the first sign of delinquent behavior among adolescents (Mazerolle et al., 2019). Rocque et al. (2017) found that truancy predicts the likelihood of getting into trouble with the law until the age of 50, even when taking other risks factors into account.

Studies have shown that poor academics contribute to high school dropout rates. In their study, Alexander et al. (2001) determined that academic performance played a role in 41.6% of student dropouts, while 35% of dropouts happened before reaching the 10th grade. Louisiana has the third-highest dropout rate in the nation (Avery, 2024). Stein et al. (2022) found that 9.6% of residents in Louisiana aged 16 to 24 were high school dropouts, significantly exceeding the national dropout rate of 6.0%.

The change in teacher standards in Louisiana impacted students' success in Math and English after implementing CC in 2014. Educators implementing CC aimed to assist their students in achieving established standards (Loveless, 2020). The implementation of the CC curriculum posed significant challenges for numerous educators. In 2016, Kamil (2016) found that CC needed more explicit instructions and different intense instructions to meet set goals. A decade following the implementation of the CC standards, research findings indicated a lack of significant positive outcomes (Loveless, 2020). Louisiana is currently ranked 40th in education among all state schools and the District of Columbia, according to the Department of Education (2023).

Research has shown a substantial relationship between learning and discipline motivation (Senjaya et al., 2020). School disciplinary challenges are shown to be among the contributing factors that lead to a delinquency petition. School behavior problems can result in suspensions and might involve the Juvenile Justice System and crime.

Researchers Hemez et al. (2020) examined men and women between the ages of 18 and 26 by their suspensions in school. Less than 1% of the men and women grades in 7 through 12 were never suspended or experienced incarceration. At the age of 18, around 2.5% of the men and women who had been suspended had been incarcerated, and this percentage increased to 4.5% when they reached 26 years old (Hemez et al., 2020). Additionally, the issues highlighted above underscore the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address the prevalent violence and crime in Louisiana, particularly its impact on the education system.

The Intersection of Violence and Education

The alarming surge in violence and crime across Louisiana constitutes a critical menace to its education system. Today, the quality and quantity of education are paramount. Education can help you earn more money and have better chances in life. People with higher levels of education are less likely to get into trouble and might use their time wisely (Lochner, 2004). Research indicates that a one percent increase in the high school completion rate among men ages 20-60 could result in annual savings of up to $1.4 billion for the United States, stemming from decreased costs associated with crime impacting both victims and society at large (Lochner, 2004).

In 2022, Louisiana recorded the highest violent crime rate in the United States (Stebbins, 2022). In 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that Louisiana had a homicide rate of 19.9 per 100,000 individuals (Bruhl, 2023). Violent crimes include robbery, rape, aggravated assault, and homicide in 2022 (Bruhl, 2023). Louisiana state prisons, among the most overcrowded in the nation, saw only a 10.25%

reduction in their population from March 2020 to July 2021, according to the Prison Policy Initiative (2021). As reported by the Prison Policy Initiative in 2021, Louisiana had the highest incarceration rate among democracies worldwide, with 1,094 individuals imprisoned per 100,000 population. This figure encompasses various correctional facilities, including prisons, jails, and juvenile justice institutions, highlighting a significant societal concern regarding criminal justice in the state.

As of 2021, Louisiana's local jails recorded annual bookings of at least 86,000 different individuals (Prison Policy Initiative, 2021). According to the Louisiana Uniform Crime Reporting Program, Louisiana is the third most dangerous state in the United States (Stebbins, 2022). Since 2019, there has been a notable increase in gun violence among youth in Louisiana. The most common crimes committed by young people in Louisiana are fighting, stealing, skipping school, shoplifting, having drugs, and damaging property. The FBI reported in 2021 that the number of young people involved in serious attacks is the highest in three cities: New Orleans has 2,608 cases, Baton Rouge has 1,299 cases, and Shreveport has 1,000 cases.

In 2021, a total of 15,598 incidents of violent crime, along with 18,358 reported offenses, were documented in Louisiana by 136 law enforcement agencies that contributed data to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). This data represented coverage of approximately 71% of the state's total population.

In a study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics in 2019, Louisiana public high schools exhibited the highest dropout rate in the United States between 2013 and 2017 (Stein et al., 2022). According to research conducted by Stein et

al. (2022), approximately one in nine seventh-grade students in Louisiana discontinued their education in public schools before reaching the 12th grade. Approximately 48% of individuals in correctional facilities lack a high school diploma or its equivalent, highlighting a significant gap in educational attainment within this population (Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections, 2023). Younger individuals may engage in fewer criminal activities due to their commitment to education, which limits their free time compared to older individuals who have dropped out of the school system. This makes it harder for them to do illegal things (Bell et al., 2022). A study indicates that the age at which crime peaks and the subsequent decline vary based on factors such as crime type, locality, race, gender, and education levels (Matthews & Minton, 2018). As of January 2023, the Louisiana Department of Corrections reported a total incarcerated population of 27,385 individuals, comprising 14,428 inmates in local jails and 12,957 in state facilities (Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections, 2023). Based on data from the LA DPS&C (2023), the demographic composition of Louisiana's local jails and state prisons is predominantly male (94.7%), with a racial breakdown of 64.7% Black and 34.99% White. Research indicates that interventions during this critical phase of potential criminal development have the capability to significantly influence the trajectory of criminal behavior (Minh et al., 2013).

In Louisiana, African American youth experience a disproportionate representation in various forms of custody and supervision relative to other racial demographics. In the second quarter of 2022, Louisiana documented a total of 813 juvenile custodial cases, with breakdowns of 405 in secure custody, 369 in non-secure

custody, and 39 categorized under Families in Need of Services (FINS) custody, according to the State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice. Considering the correlation between education and crime rates, it is evident that addressing the challenges in the education system, including those related to the CC, is crucial for mitigating the impact of criminal behavior in Louisiana.

CC Challenges

Despite initial resistance and skepticism, implementing CC standards (CC) in Louisiana has proven to be a necessary step toward improving the state's education system, but several challenges remain to be addressed. The CC standards, established in 2014, serve as a framework for mathematics and English language arts education. Abadie and Bista (2018) indicated that the state's adoption of the CC was predicated on the belief that students in Louisiana have capabilities comparable to their peers nationwide. Despite this assertion, in 2014, Louisiana ranked 44th in English language arts and 46th in math at the national level (Abadie & Bista, 2018). Louisiana acknowledged that the CC standards for English Language Arts and math were more demanding than the state's previously established grade-level expectations, which last saw an update in 2004 (LDOE, 2014). The new method of teaching using CC changed how teachers instructed and how students learned.

CC is facing various difficulties (Bleiberg, 2021). Abadie and Bista (2018) explained that one challenge is helping students and teachers adjust to the curriculum. Additionally, the standards set by CC are not clear and specific. Lastly, no alternative or modified version of CC is available (Abadie & Bista, 2018). The implementation of CC

standards in Louisiana has yielded mixed results, prompting a need for further investigation and potential adjustments (Abadie & Bista, 2018). Louisiana demonstrated a lack of readiness in successfully implementing the CC State Standards, as indicated by various reported outcomes. The state lacks prior experience or capability to support teachers, parents, and students in adapting to and developing academically under CC standards.

Meador (2019) outlined various advantages and disadvantages associated with CC, highlighting an ongoing debate regarding the curriculum's importance. The implementation of CC e demonstrates international benchmarks that align favorably with global standards, resulting in reduced development costs for testing (Meador, 2019). Additionally, it establishes uniform standards across the state, promotes stability, and provides educators with assessments that serve as valuable tools for monitoring student success (Meador, 2019). Equivalency tests for students with special needs and traditional textbooks have become outdated due to rising costs associated with technology for assessments and a surge in standardized testing practices. CC is specifically linked to Math and English, while other subjects in Louisiana are guided by distinct standards and assessments set by the state (Meador, 2019). High-quality professional training for teachers and ensuring the lesson is aligned with the CC standards is essential (Abadie & Bista, 2018).

When Abadie and Bista (2018) studied what Louisiana teachers thought about the CC standard, they discovered that teachers felt that their training and educational materials needed to be better to meet these standards. The implementation of the CC

necessitated a transformation in instructional practices among teachers, requiring them to align their teaching methods, curricular resources, and assessment techniques with the new educational standards to effectively evaluate student performance (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013). Louisiana undertook deliberate reforms in its educational frameworks, focusing on the enhancement of curricula, assessments, and teacher training to ensure the successful adoption of CC standards.

Several studies conducted in Louisiana have examined the experiences of teachers undergoing the transition from traditional learning methods to the implementation of the CC State Standards (CCSS). Abadie and Bista (2018) conducted a study analyzing public and private school teachers in Louisiana. Public school teachers expressed frustration regarding their exclusion from the development of the constantly evolving curriculum known as CC in their district, which necessitated adjustments in their teaching styles and methods (Abadie & Bista, 2018). Public schoolteachers experienced pressure due to their exclusion from the implementation of the new CC programs. In their study, Abadie and Bista (2018) highlighted the challenges faced by public school teachers, noting a lack of preparation time, absence of instructional manuals during the summer, and inadequate professional development opportunities. The private school educators expressed satisfaction with the new curriculum, as it allowed for incremental implementation by subject and provided them with an opportunity to participate in the selection process (Abadie & Bista, 2018). During the summer, private school teachers had the opportunity to engage in material review and attend workshops designed to enhance their understanding of CC standards (Abadie & Bista, 2018).

Researchers are exploring how politics influence job satisfaction among educators working under the CC framework. Moran et al. (2022) examined educators' views on the impact of politics, highlighting their feelings of a lack of control, the challenges posed by evolving curricula and standards, and the effects of bipartisan influences. Moran et al. (2022) note that teachers expressed feelings of limited involvement in the creation and implementation of CC standards, alongside a significant lack of trust in the individuals and organizations responsible for these developments. The experience highlighted a deficiency in teacher buy-in, which negatively impacted students' comprehension and learning under the CC standards. Teachers support the notion that students will not understand CC standards. Moreover, the challenges posed by implementing the CC standards had a significant impact on public school investment in Louisiana.

Public School Investment as it Relates to Crime

Investment in education from the beginning to the end is the key to social and economic advantages. Mitra (2011) found that schools with more funding had teachers with more significant experience and higher salaries. The schools demonstrated superior academic performance and behavioral outcomes, leading to increased pursuit of higher education among students. Getting a good education helps people make more money. Research indicates that students from better-funded schools experience a 15% reduction in the likelihood of arrest by age 30 (Mitra, 2011).

Public education funding comes from local, state, federal, and other sources such as grants and philanthropists. Louisiana, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Oregon have similar population numbers. The population in Louisiana is 4.5 million, Oklahoma has 4 million,

Kentucky has 4.5 million, and Oregon has 4.2 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Louisiana spends an average of $12,990 per student, Oklahoma spends an average of $10,510, Kentucky spends an average of $14,040, and Oregon spends an average of $18,140 (Educationdata.org, 2024).

Louisiana has had the highest incarceration rate in the United States for the last decade (Hassan, 2023). However, in 2018, Oklahoma had even more people incarcerated than Louisiana. According to the Louisiana Department of Corrections, state and local spending on Louisiana prisons and jails is about $800 million a year. The cost of incarcerating one individual per day is $70, a total cost of $25,500 annually in Louisiana per person (Louisiana Department of Corrections, 2023). According to data from the Bureau of Justice, the US spends more on an inmate, an average of $31,286 per year, compared to an average of $12,756 on a student per year (Rodriguez, 2023).

There is scant research linking increased school funding to crime reductions (Hyman et al., 2022). A study conducted by Hyman et al. (2022) found that students who received a 10% increase in funding during grades K-3 were 50% less likely to miss significant amounts of school by 8th grade. Furthermore, there was an increased likelihood of graduating from both high school and college. Research has shown that additional primary school funding reduces adult crime (Hyman et al., 2022). Research done by Hyman et al. (2022) explains that improving the quality of public schools can be effective in the long-run crime prevention strategy in the U.S. Furthermore, public school investment plays a crucial role in shaping the future of our society, and understanding its link to crime is essential.

Education as it Relates to Crime and Delinquency

A study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics in 2019 revealed that from 2013 to 2017, Louisiana public high schools ranked third highest in the nation for dropout rates (Stein et al., 2022). In 2014, Louisiana adopted CC standards in public schools' education. A comprehensive study of the factors contributing to the lack of educational attainment and criminal behavior in Louisiana is necessary for developing evidence-based policies and interventions. Quality education for students fundamentally relies on the presence of excellent public schools. Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) indicated that analyses comparing violence and educational outcomes across various states and cities have often yielded erroneous conclusions. The jurisdiction's choice to give money to the education system or law enforcement could affect education and crime. Many researchers study the factors that influence whether someone chooses to continue going to school after being involved in crime to prevent mistakes in their research. Hjalmarsson (2008) found that if young people are arrested or incarcerated for crimes, it can make them leave school before they finish.

High school completion rates have a direct impact on crime rates in Louisiana. According to Stein et al. (2022), one out of every nine seventh graders in Louisiana left public school before finishing twelfth grade. Louisiana graduation rates and scores are below the average on every National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report (McBirney, 2019). Louisiana experienced a decline in the high school dropout rate in the school year 2009-2010 to 3.5 percent (Chawla, 2011). According to the American Community Survey released by the U.S. Department of Education in 2014, Louisiana's

high school dropout rate increased to 10.6%, the highest in the nation (McFarland et al., 2019).

Bell et al. (2022) posited that juveniles in school are less likely to engage in criminal activity compared to those who have left school and subsequently experience increased idle time, which may lead to a higher propensity for crime. Increasing the mandatory dropout age may lead to a decrease in crime rates, according to research by Bell et al. (2022). Research from the FBI and US Census Bureau suggests that there is a notable relationship between educational attainment, specifically the completion of high school and further education, and the prevalence of violent crime. California, with one of the lowest educational attainment rates in the nation, experiences a higher incidence of violent crime compared to states like Minnesota, which enjoy both greater educational success and lower crime rates (Bernard, 2022).

Boessen et al. (2023) conducted a study analyzing the relationship between violence and education in St. Louis neighborhoods over 40 years. The study by Boessen et al. (2023) revealed a significant correlation between educational attainment and violent crime rates, demonstrating that individuals holding a bachelor's degree engage in 22.41% fewer violent crimes than those without such an educational credential. A bachelor's degree requires a high school diploma or equivalent as a prerequisite. The study found no significant difference in violent crime rates between individuals possessing a high school diploma and those lacking one. The study shows a high school diploma in the late 1980s and 1990s in the majority black neighborhoods in north St Louis helped to lower violent crime. The study showed that the attainment of a high school diploma in predominantly

black neighborhoods of north St. Louis during the late 1980s and 1990s was associated with a reduction in violent crime rates (Boessen et al. 2023).

The impact of education on reducing crime rates has been a topic of interest for many researchers. The relationship between education and crime is complex and can be analyzed from various unique perspectives, despite appearing to be a straightforward correlation. Researchers considered this subject from numerous distinctive points of view. The absence of education significantly diminishes employment opportunities, which can lead to increased criminal activity due to heightened hiring criteria (Ehrlich, 1975). Laurito et al. (2019) highlighted the correlation between rising crime rates in a community and the decline in educational quality in local schools, noting that such an environment adversely affects student attendance.

Research in criminology suggests that as individuals experience improvements in their standard of living, their propensity to engage in criminal or deviant behavior decreases (Campbell, 2006). The implementation of CC serves as a significant educational framework designed to enhance students' opportunities for upward mobility in academia. For some students facing adverse social and economic circumstances, CC often acts as an obstacle to achieving improved outcomes rather than facilitating them. The challenges of truancy and high school dropout rates are closely linked to social and economic barriers, creating a complex intersection between education, crime, and delinquency.

Truancy/Dropout Rates as it Relates to Crime, Delinquency, and Education

Truancy and dropout rates have a major impact on crime rates in the communities in Louisiana. Zhang et al. (2007) defined truancy as the habitual engagement in unexcused absences from school, and it is related to other risk factors for violent offending. In 2003, research showed that about 2.2 million juveniles were arrested, which accounted for 16% of all arrests and 15% of all violent arrests (Zhang et al., 2007). In Louisiana, more students are truant in schools. The number of students missing school increased by 22% in public schools (Sentell, 2023). Truancy is considered a juvenile crime in the state of Louisiana. Children under 18 who skip school a lot or stop going to school can be charged with truancy. Also, 4 out of 10 public school students are considered truant (Sentell, 2023). Any student in Louisiana who is an absentee with more than eleven absences may be retained in their current grade (Louisiana Department of Education, Louisiana Believes, 2023). Juvenile violent offending in Louisiana is on the rise. Louisiana ranked fourth in total number of people in prison for crimes they committed as youth, with 2,227 (Chrastil, 2023).

Truancy is a complex issue influenced by various factors, including academic difficulties, levels of parental engagement, specific characteristics of family and community environments, and school conditions. School truancy, defined as chronic absenteeism, serves as a significant early warning sign of various adverse outcomes, which may include increased risks of teen pregnancy, substance abuse, criminal behavior, and ultimately, academic failure leading to dropout (Jaggers et al., 2016). Research indicates that juveniles who begin offending in childhood are likely to continue such

behavior into adulthood. Jaggers et al. (2016) further identified predictive factors for academic dropout, discipline issues, school suspensions, and interactions with law enforcement.

The truancy rate in Shreveport, Louisiana, has been identified as a significant crisis by the District Attorney. In 2022, Caddo Parish reported an enrollment of approximately 32,000 students, with over 1,500 students in grades 6 through 12 missing more than 25 days of school, and more than 3,500 students in grades K-5 missing over ten days (Stewart, 2022). The Louisiana high school graduation rate has increased from 77.5% in 2015 to 82.7% in 2022; however, it remains low by national standards (Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.). After the CC standards implementation, the graduation rate declined, and the dropout rate increased in Louisiana. Stein et al. (2022) found that 9.6% of Louisiana residents aged 16 to 24 were high school dropouts, significantly exceeding the national average of 6.0%. Truancy is a complex issue influenced by various factors, including academic challenges, levels of parental involvement, and specific characteristics of families, communities, and schools. School truancy, characterized by chronic absenteeism, serves as a significant early warning sign and predictor of various issues, including adolescent pregnancy, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, and an increased risk of academic failure and dropout (Jaggers et al., 2016). Research indicates that early criminal behavior in juveniles often persists in adulthood. Jaggers et al. (2016) highlighted that factors such as discipline issues, school suspensions, and interactions with law enforcement are significant predictors of dropout rates among this population.

In recent years, truancy rates and juvenile crime rates have been rising, posing challenges for law enforcement. In 2020, Louisiana observed a significant rise in juvenile violent crimes and a corresponding increase in truancy rates, as noted by Stewart (2022). In Louisiana, the number of truant students increased from 194,031 in 2013, reflecting a 25.4 percent truancy rate, to 218,161 in 2015, with a corresponding truancy rate of 28.18 percent, according to the Louisiana Department of Education. Lochner et al. (2004) found that higher levels of education, particularly completing high school, are associated with a notable decrease in incarceration rates. The decline is more pronounced at the high school graduation level compared to earlier educational milestones. Research by Balfanz et al. (2003) indicates that over 400 ninth graders who were incarcerated had significantly low school attendance, attended barely half of the time, and struggled academically, failing most of their courses before their incarceration.

A study by Jaggers et al. (2016) highlights a significant correlation between inadequate education, low literacy rates, and increased participation in the justice system. Jaggers et al. (2016) identify the age of onset as a significant predictor of criminal behavior. Offenders 12 years of age and under are two to three times more likely to become severe and violent offenders (Jaggers et al., 2016). Habitual truancy among juvenile offenders is associated with a higher likelihood of committing more serious crimes compared to adult offenders, resulting in increased pressure on the criminal justice system (Donnelly, 2021). Bell et al. (2022) described that younger people may not have the time to commit crimes while in school, preventing them from committing crimes as older dropouts who have more available time for criminal activity.

By offering students the necessary support to maintain regular attendance, Louisiana's truancy court system can mitigate the adverse effects of truancy. These effects include higher dropout rates, lower academic achievement, and increased juvenile delinquency. Students at risk of dropping out of school and engaging in criminal activity often exhibit similar behavioral signs, such as truancy, performing poorly academically, and displaying poor behavior. In Louisiana, truancy courts, overseen by law enforcement, ensure that students maintain regular school attendance. The Louisiana State Legislature (2022) enacted a law aimed at ensuring the accountability of parents, tutors, or other individuals responsible for a child's school attendance. Violating the law may result in a fine of up to $250, imprisonment for a maximum of 30 days, or both penalties. Truancy Court serves as a valuable case study for investigating racial and ethnic disparities within the educational system. The insights presented are crucial for shaping policies and practices within the juvenile justice system (Rubino et al., 2020). Scholars, including Rubino et al. (2020), employed a three-model approach that accounted for variables such as age, gender, and Youth Level of Service/Case Management subscale scores. Rubino et al. (2020) indicate that Black/African American juveniles in truancy court face a higher likelihood of receiving a delinquency petition within two years of their initial risk assessment compared to other racial groups. Moreover, it is crucial to consider how truancy rates and academic failure are linked to delinquency.

Academic Failure Linked to Delinquency in Louisiana

Researchers have found a strong link between academic failure and juvenile crime. Louisiana currently holds the 40th position in terms of education performance

among all states and the District of Columbia, according to the Louisiana Department of Education (2023). The implementation of CC standards in Louisiana may contribute to school failure, resulting in increased stress for both teachers and students. Research by Abadie and Bista (2018) found that some elementary teachers felt that English Language Arts standards used in the CC implementation process were challenging. Changes in teaching styles and instructional methods pose significant challenges for teachers, particularly when such changes are not initiated by them (Kamil, 2016). Teachers and students in American schools need to know more about how to follow the CC curriculum. Stress negatively impacts students, potentially leading to academic failure and increasing the likelihood of delinquent behavior. Hirschfield (2018) suggested that school failure could increase delinquency by straining school bonds and exposing students to deviant peers. Academic assessments are a significant source of stress for secondary school students, as evidenced by research conducted by Putwain in 2005. Investigating the stress, anxiety, and worry experienced by schoolchildren regarding their academic performance and assessments is crucial due to its potential negative impacts on health, emotional well-being, and educational outcomes (Putwain, 2005). A study by Gallagher and Millar (1996) asked 3,983 students who were 13 to 18 years old in Northern Ireland about the things they worry about using a questionnaire with 138 questions. The scales measured different aspects relating to personal life and social concerns. It included worries about home, school, money, and relationships with the opposite sex. The study found that of the top 10 worries, six were about schoolwork. In the academic context,

students were primarily concerned about the pressure of passing their exams, with a significant concern about the potential ramifications of failing on their future aspirations.

The primary concern among scholars regarding educational perspectives is not the direct impact of schooling on illegal behavior, but rather the mechanisms through which these influences manifest (Hirschfield, 2018). Research indicates a correlation between education levels and future crime rates, as discussed by Lochner and Moretti (2004). Many young individuals in the juvenile justice system have faced challenges related to academic performance, lack of engagement in their education, and disciplinary issues in school (Youth.gov, n.d). In Louisiana, 17 areas showed little progress and a drop in student performance from elementary to high school, reflecting a concerning trend in educational outcomes (Skinner, 2022).

Behavior problems among adolescents in schools indicate a relationship between academic difficulties and future criminal activities. Early behavioral issues may serve as indicators of future criminal activity and defiance. Research identifies two primary categories of developmental risk factors contributing to crime and delinquency: individual characteristics, which include disruptive behaviors such as opposition, impulsivity, hyperactivity, aggression, and family characteristics, encompassing parental deviance, family structure, rejection, discord, ineffective discipline, and inadequate supervision (Juon et al., 2018).

Criminal activity often occurs when students perform below academic achievement standards in Louisiana. A high rate of private school enrollment is one factor affecting school performance in Louisiana (Mueller, 2023). Resources are being

taken away from public schools and given to private, religious, and charter schools (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.). In 2022, Mueller explained that teachers don't get paid much, they feel stressed at work, worry about safety issues because of school shootings, and have public health concerns. They also don't have enough training, so not enough teachers have professional certifications. The limitation of having fewer good teachers lessens the opportunity for academic achievement for students. An analysis confirmed that increased academic achievement is related to significant reductions in self-reported violent and property crimes (Lochner & Moretti, 2004).

The public school system in Louisiana consistently underperforms in educational outcomes when evaluated against other school systems across the United States. The rigorous requirements of CC make it increasingly difficult for families in poverty to attain academic success. Achieving academic goals fosters positive emotions such as happiness, while failing to meet these objectives can lead to disappointment and discouragement. Additionally, engagement of families in education is essential for reducing rates of juvenile delinquency, highlighting the importance of their involvement in the educational process.

Lack of Family Support, School Engagement, and Crime

Families' engagement in education is important to help decrease juvenile delinquency. Research indicates a correlation between parental education levels and student retention, suggesting that parents with higher educational attainment are less likely to have children who drop out of school. This emphasizes the impact of parental educational background on children's academic persistence. Wilson and Petersilia (2011)

emphasized the critical role families play in the prediction of criminal behavior. Research shows that family resources, including size, structure, income, and parental education, are linked to subsequent violence (Juon, 2006). Farrington et al. (1996, as cited in Wilson & Petersilia, 2011) found that having a convicted family member—father, mother, brother, or sister—predicts male delinquency, with each relative serving as a significant and independent predictor. Parents play a crucial role as the primary educators and role models for their children

Many parents lack sufficient education about the CC, hindering their ability to engage in meaningful discussions and collaborations with schools and states (Ellison, 2017). Meanwhile, Louisiana is facing a rise in criminal activity alongside a decline in academic performance. People sometimes learn bad behavior from their family members, which can affect their behavior in school. Criminal behavior can stem from conduct disorders learned from family members. According to Wilson and Petersilia (2011), offending trends within families can be attributed to six explanations. The first explanation highlights intergenerational issues such as poverty, family disruption, young parenting, and residing in underprivileged neighborhoods.

The second explanation focuses on the effect of parental criminal convictions on children's likelihood of offending. The third factor involves the influence of family members on one another, while the fourth pertains to inadequate supervision by young parents. The fifth factor highlights the inheritance of certain behaviors from parents to their children. Moreover, the sixth is when family members commit crimes (Wilson & Petersilia, 2011).

Family dynamics, which refer to how a family interacts with each other, play a significant role in influencing a person's criminal behavior. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are connected to trauma and abuse in childhood (Hesselink, 2023). These experiences can be passed down to their children, creating a harmful cycle of ACEs. The ACEs can also affect their families, schoolwork, friendships, and community. Young people who have been abused or neglected are 47% more likely to commit crimes (Freeze, 2019). This influence comes from various factors in the person's environmental surroundings. For instance, the state of Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate. Incarceration has been linked to adverse family and economic outcomes for many men, as policies within correctional facilities can negatively affect their family dynamics and earning potential (Perry & Bright, 2012).

Additionally, criminal behavior can be learned through associations with family, friends, and one's environment. In essence, fostering a supportive educational atmosphere that emphasizes social-emotional learning can serve as a protective factor against the transmission of criminal behavior across generations.

Social-Emotional Learning is Related to Failure and Crime

Feelings and reactions are important in understanding how doing poorly in school can lead to committing crimes. Emotions and feelings significantly influence behavior and decision-making processes, as noted by Schreuder et al. (2016). Setting clear rules and a lesson plan is important to help students know what is expected of them and to avoid behavior problems. In a study, it was discovered that teachers in Louisiana were not able to effectively teach students after the implementation of the CC in 2014 because

they did not have a daily aligned curriculum (Abadie & Bista, 2018). Negative emotions, including concern, fear, frustration, and loneliness, have been identified by scholars as detrimental to both learning and behavior (Peterson & Skiba, 2000).

Students will feel worried, upset, and scared about CC if the school's performance is poor. Feelings are very important for how children get involved in school, work hard, and do well in their studies. Students will become concerned, frustrated, and fearful of CC if the school's achievement is a failure. A student's feelings are very important for children to stay interested in school, work hard, and do well in their studies (Durlak et al., 2011). Beliefs regarding the likelihood of failure can manifest in behaviors that are influenced by emotions. Behaviors may encompass acts of violence and criminal transgressions (Karstedt et al., 2011).

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) can prevent criminal activity by promoting positive behaviors and emotional regulation among at-risk populations. Durlak et al. (2022) provided a study that suggests SEL programs should encourage relevant educational policies and practices. The study found that administrators at all levels should establish systems that provide the necessary support and incentives for school districts to learn about the potential value of SEL (Durlak et al., 2022).

Teaching and learning in schools involve three essential aspects: social, emotional, and academic (Zin et al., 2004). Social and emotional learning (SEL) serves as an effective framework for enhancing educational practices and fostering a positive learning environment within the classroom setting. It plays a crucial role in mitigating student misconduct, which includes behaviors such as engaging in side conversations,

arriving late or departing early, academic dishonesty, physical altercations, bullying, inappropriate use of electronic devices such as laptops and cellphones, making derogatory comments, and soliciting favorable considerations regarding grades. Yeager (2017) explained that adolescents can benefit from SEL when academic work becomes more complex and friendships less stable because the brain's method of processing emotions undergoes a dramatic transformation.

The teachers in Louisiana had difficulties with daily assignments after implementing CC, which resulted in negative experiences for students. Teachers were worried about how the CC standards affected students at each phase of CC implementation, even after professional developmental training (Abadie & Bista, 2018). Educators across the nation experience similar challenges in terms of resources and time limitations in providing professional development to students (Smiling Mind, 2023). In 2024, the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education decided to change the references to "social and emotional learning" in the state's early education standards to "interpersonal skills" (Larose, 2024). This decision was made because conservative people criticized SEL for leading to discussions about racial justice, social justice, and fairness (Larose, 2024).

Additionally, students did not receive enough social and emotional learning because there was no effective curriculum in place in Louisiana. The Louisiana Policy Institute for Children recommends using SEL as a guide to help students in the workforce and become good citizens rather than a curriculum. According to Durlak et al. (2011), high-quality social and emotional learning instruction not only facilitates opportunities

for students to engage meaningfully within their classroom, school, and community but also fosters a sense of satisfaction, belonging, and increased motivation derived from such involvement. Secondly, SEL programming promotes students' social-emotional growth by creating a safe and caring learning environment, fostering peer and family involvement, enhancing classroom management and teaching practices, and encouraging whole-school community-building activities (Durlak et al., 2011).

Education cultivates patience and acts as a deterrent to criminal behavior by enhancing individuals' comprehension of the potential consequences and punitive measures associated with engaging in criminal activities (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012). In the field of criminal justice, emotions are often associated with the core traits of human nature (Karstedt et al., 2011). Evidence suggests that individuals who commit crimes frequently demonstrate a stronger inclination for emotional responses over rational thought, and many crimes inherently contain an emotional component (Karstedt et al., 2011). Researchers have found that when children learn and do SEL in schools and at home, it makes them less aggressive, less violent, and less likely to get arrested at school (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Consequently, integrating SEL into school curricula may serve as a vital strategy not only to enhance academic performance but also to mitigate the long-term risks associated with grade retention and promote positive life outcomes."

Grade Retention as it Relates to Crime and Delinquency.

Repeating a grade in school may impact the likelihood of at-risk youth engaging in criminal activities in Louisiana. Grade retention refers to the practice in which students are required to repeat a specific grade level due to their failure to achieve the requisite

benchmarks or meet the established academic standards associated with that grade. Research indicates a causal relationship between grade retention and adult criminal convictions, which can be attributed to test-based accountability policies (Eren et al., 2021).

CC represents Louisiana's rules for testing and accountability in schools. Gonzalez-Nuevo (2023) found that when students are held back a grade, they may do better in school at first. However, over time, they often struggle with their feelings, and their schoolwork gets worse, which leads to many of them dropping out. Students who struggle to succeed academically under CC are often required to repeat a grade level (Povich, 2023). Eren et al. (2021) explained being held back in school made it more likely for people to be found guilty of a violent crime and for them to commit more violent crimes. Studies have shown the negative effects of retention on behavior problems, substance abuse, and earlier age of sexual (Xia & Glennie, 2005).

Student performance levels in math and English in Louisiana significantly influence grade retention decisions. In Louisiana, a student needs to get at least a "Basic" score in either English or math and "Approaching Basic" in other subjects to move up to ninth grade. This rule can be changed if the student qualifies for an exception or is put in a transitional ninth-grade program (Louisiana Department of Education, 2021. Eren et al. (2018), suggested that to help keep students from dropping out, teachers should use the test score limits set by the State of Louisiana for moving up to 9th grade. This means that if a student fails the math or English test given in July, they have to repeat 8th grade.

Eren et al. (2018) evaluated the effects of failing an exam and 8th-grade retention

in an instrumental variable framework that imposes the additional assumption that the only reason test failure in the eighth grade is related to crime is because of grade retention. In this way, test-based advancement causes harm to some students, and the impact continues into adulthood. In a study done in Louisiana by Eren et al. (2018), results demonstrated that an increase in violent crimes caused by students repeating grades leads to societal expenses ranging from $2.6 to $184 million for the three groups of students.

Students are prone to take advantage of non-educational activities if there is a grade retention issue. Formerly incarcerated individuals are nearly twice as likely to have no GED or High School Diploma in Louisiana. African American students are more likely to be retained in grade based on their performance on high-stakes tests (Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline, 2016). After CC implementation, teachers found it hard to use a rubric they felt was unsuitable for the students' ages. Studies have found that children from families with lower education levels tend to underperform in school and are more likely to have to repeat a grade (Diaz et al., 2021). Numerous incarcerated youths have a history of truancy and grade retention (Youth.gov, n.d.).

Furthermore, research by Eren et al. (2018) provided evidence that being retained in eighth grade has long-run effects on the likelihood of being convicted of a crime by age 25 and on the number of criminal convictions by age 25. The findings suggested that not passing the English Language Arts state and math exam and being held back in 8th grade leads to the idea that the only reason failing the test is linked to crime is because of retention.

Summary and Conclusion

The literature review offers a broad perspective on education related to crime and other key concepts. It explores perspectives about how violence and education are connected, the challenges of CC Standards, and how public-school investment is linked to crime, truancy rates, dropout rates, grade retention, lack of family support, academic struggles, and other key issues. Primarily, it focuses on the significance of stressors that can contribute to anger and deviant behaviors.

The study examines the gap in whether CC affected male ex-offender's ages 18-25 academic outcomes and the likelihood of committing crimes in Louisiana. It focuses on the perceptions of ex-offenders and their relation to stressors and risk factors. Additionally, it examines the relationship between failure-related stressors and deviant activities. Research signifies a rise as of 2015 in incarcerated males and high school dropout rates after CC implementation in Louisiana.

In conclusion, the literature review explains ex-offender's perception of how education influenced their involvement in crime following the implementation of CC in Louisiana. Emphasizing how stress from underachievement motivates criminal activity will help with the understanding of why males are more likely to commit crimes in Louisiana. By combining information from various sources, the review explores why students might do poorly in school, drop out of school, and other factors linked to criminal behavior. This may help prevent crime and reduce repeat offenses in the state with the highest number of people in prison in the United States.

Chapter 3 includes the research methods, research design, and interview questions to guide the study. Finally, as the researcher, I will describe the target population and the method by which data were collected.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the learning experiences of ex-offenders and whether they influence the criminal activity of ex-offenders. In this chapter, I will outline the methodologies, encompassing the research framework, the research problem, formulated to explore the research question, and the justification for employing a qualitative approach in the study.

This chapter outlines the research design, detailing the study's rationale concerning the research questions and objectives. The rationale will focus on hermeneutic phenomenology, which aims to notice and understand the small things in our lives that we usually overlook to find clear and precise meaning and understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Hermeneutic phenomenology concerns how people experience and live their lives (Shahbazian, 2015). A hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative research design provides ex-offenders with perceptions of their learning experiences after implementing the CC.

In Louisiana, from 2014 to 2022, there were 27,563 males incarcerated between the ages of 18 and 25 (Department of Corrections, 2023). This study is conducted to understand whether ex-offenders' learning experiences contributed to their criminal activity. This chapter will explain in detail how the study will be designed and how the participants for the study will be chosen. In this chapter, the following areas will be covered: the researcher's role, data collection methods, samples, descriptions, and data analysis.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question for this study was developed to explore the perception of ex-offenders' educational experiences in high schools in Louisiana after the implementation of CCand criminal activity. The following research question guided the study: How do American male ex-offenders between the ages of 18 -25 in Louisiana describe the contribution of the CC learning experiences to their criminal activity?

Various qualitative research methodologies were examined in selecting a research framework, including social learning theory, narrative, and ethnography. Social learning behavior suggests that people learn new behaviors by observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1977). Narrative inquiry in qualitative research focuses on narratives that reflect various aspects of human experience, including culture, historical context, identity, and lifestyle, as noted by Butina (2015). Ethnography involves researchers observing or interacting with the target population, which is crucial for obtaining useful cultural information (Sharma & Sarkar, 2019).

Wulfert (2024) posits that the primary objective of social learning theory is to elucidate the mechanisms by which behavior is developed, sustained, and altered through various processes. The interaction between external factors, such as rewards and punishments, and internal factors, including thoughts, expectations, motivation, and beliefs, creates a complex system that influences behavior (Wulfert, 2024). The question in this approach is whether or not a person has self-efficacy, which is to regulate the belief that one has the ability, with one's actions, to bring about a certain outcome

(Bandura, 1977). Ethnography focuses on a specific cultural group and does not align with the purpose of this study.

This study will be grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology and informed by the GST (Agnew, 2013). Research has identified significant limitations within the GST, particularly its neglect of individual and environmental influences that could affect the relationship between the strain and offending behavior (Barbieri et al., 2019; Kushner & Fagan, 2022). No prior research is available explaining the relationship between the CC, crime, and delinquency in Louisiana.

The study aims to understand the different perspectives of the ex-offender experience. Nigar (2020) asserted that within the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, every experience must be interpreted in the context of our backgrounds. The goal of hermeneutic research is to understand what the participants mean when they share their experiences and how those experiences are interpreted when they are put together (Nigar, 2020). The essence of the hermeneutical circle is the relationship between the whole and its parts (Gadamer, 1977). The different parts cannot be understood alone, and the whole thing is understood by how the pieces fit together (Gadamer, 1977).

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative study focusing on male ex-offenders in Louisiana, the researcher will explore their learning experiences in high school and criminal activity. I will interview approximately 15 male ex-offenders, or until saturation is reached, who attended high school in Louisiana. As the researcher, I will collect data face-to-face by asking participants questions and documenting the answers. The interview questions are

purposefully designed to be open-ended, inviting participants to share their insights and experiences in-depth. This approach encourages richer responses and fosters a more engaging dialogue. I will ensure that I remain neutral to avoid biases while interviewing. Patton (2015) suggested a middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding. The researcher must avoid personal biases in the interviewing process to avoid a conflict of interest. The researcher will prioritize ethical considerations while exploring ex-offenders' perceptions of their lived and learned experiences. According to Patton, evaluators' research aims for balance, fairness, completeness, and positive connotations such as trustworthiness in qualitative research.

As emphasized by Creswell and Creswell (2017), the researcher serves as a steward of ethical conduct throughout all stages of the study, ensuring the ethical treatment of participants. Rubin and Rubin (2012) started using in-depth qualitative interviewing as one of the critical naturalistic research methods. Researchers engage with individuals who possess knowledge or experience related to the issue being studied. According to Rubin and Rubin, researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own through such interviews. According to Patton (2015), qualitative inquiry means going into the field and the real world of programs, organizations, neighborhoods, and street corners and getting close enough to the people and circumstances there to capture what is happening.

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher must include participant confirmation and interview transparency. Ensuring that the answers are understood with clarity is imperative in data collection. Researchers can implement member checking in interviews by echoing, paraphrasing, and seeking further clarification on respondents' comments where there is ambiguity and, in so doing, allow interviewees an opportunity to confirm or correct the interviewer's interpretation of their words (Coleman, 2022). The final role of the researcher is to ensure that the reader can validate the reliability of the study. Coleman (2022) showed how the research has been done and decisions made so that the reader can conduct an audit trial in research for reliability.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

In this qualitative study, the targeted research population is ten to fifteen formerly incarcerated males, 18 to 25 years of age, who attended public high school from 2014 to the time of this study. The methodology in this study on criminal activity is essential to understanding the importance of education in assisting crime prevention and reducing recidivism. This section will explain the approach to collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand the concepts, opinions, and experiences. By endorsing a qualitative methodology, the research aims to explore in-depth the lived experiences and perspectives of ex-offenders, offering an understanding of the reasons and motivations behind their criminal activity and offering insight that can inform policy, practice, and future research.

In addition, the design will include thematic analysis coding to identify patterns, recurring themes, and the significance of the qualitative data. A sample size of ten to fifteen participants, or until saturation is reached, should be sufficient to capture experience and identify repetitive data for the research question. Participants will be recruited by utilizing digital flyers on social media and a nonprofit organization that services ex-offenders. This methodological approach allows for exploring secondary education and the risk factors that are linked to criminal activity in Louisiana.

The relationship between saturation and sample size is critical in qualitative research, as saturation indicates the point at which additional data collection yields no new themes or insights. Generally, a larger and more diverse sample size can facilitate achieving saturation, especially in complex or heterogeneous populations. However, the specific sample size needed for saturation varies based on factors such as the research question, the diversity of the participants, and the method of data collection. Researchers often engage in an iterative process where they collect and analyze data concurrently. This process allows them to adjust their sample size based on emerging findings. In simpler studies, saturation might be reached with fewer participants, while more nuanced topics may require larger samples to capture the breadth of experience (Guest, Bunce, Johnson, 2006). Through these interviews, participants' experiences and perceptions regarding CC standards and their relationship to criminal activity.

Instrumentation

The research design of this qualitative study will use questions during in-depth, face-to-face interviews with ex-offenders. I will interview participants who are not aware

of the topic to avoid biases and have a good sense of memory of their past educational experiences. The primary instrument for collecting data will be 10 interview questions (see Appendix A). By adopting a qualitative methodology, the research aims to delve deeply into the lived experiences and perspectives of ex-offenders, offering rich insights that can inform policy and practice in the Department of Corrections.

The follow-up questions will be used if the answers are too short or do not answer the questions and will be recorded utilizing REV.com. Open-ended questions will be used alone as the interviewing technique until saturation is reached. Questions are written to uncover the ex-offenders' experiences after CC implementation to understand the most challenging classes, teacher and student relationships, truancy issues, criminal charges, and the decision-making regarding the crime committed.

Data Collection Instruments

The development of the interview questions is the overall research goal. The research questions will help to understand how ten to fifteen ex-offender's experiences in high school affected their criminal behavior. To capture answers in the interview, the interviews will be recorded by Rev.com, a transcription service. REV is a transcription of a speech-to-text service founded in 2010 by Jason Chicola. As found in Appendix A, 10 open-ended interview questions will be posed to ex-offender participants during face-to-face interviews.

To ensure construct validity, the study participants will carefully be chosen to ensure they have all experienced the phenomenon in question and choose willing and interested participants. Drawing upon established guidelines for qualitative inquiry

(Patton, 2015), the questions are deliberately crafted to encourage participants to reflect on various facets of their experiences, including their strengths, weaknesses, implementation challenges, and areas for improvement.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The participant selection process will involve collaboration with a Shreveport-based local non-profit organization. For the research study, the non-profit organization will advise and refer ex-offenders to the study as participants. I will also use digital flyers on social media for volunteers to participate in the research study with ex-offenders. The digital flyers will include my name, contact phone number, and the criteria for participation. Data for the study will include interviews with formerly incarcerated males regarding their experience when committing criminal activity after attending the public school system.

Purposive sampling will be used to select male ex-offenders of varying ethnic and racial backgrounds to ensure diverse perspectives. This approach will help to capture a wide range of experiences and viewpoints within the research. Additionally, the snowball sampling technique will be utilized to leverage existing connections and referrals from initial participants, thereby expanding the pool of potential participants. During the recruitment process, participants will be informed about the study's objectives and voluntary participation, and confidentiality will be assured to ensure transparency and encourage engagement and participation.

Upon securing participation, selected individuals will be provided with detailed information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, and potential implications.

Informed consent forms will be read and signed by each participant before data collection, reaffirming their voluntary involvement and rights as research subjects. Data collection will primarily involve conducting in-depth interviews with participants, utilizing semi-structured interview guides designed to elicit comprehensive insights on their perceptions and experiences of learning utilizing CC standards and factors contributing to criminal activity. These interviews will be conducted with the participant face-to-face, with predetermined questions to help explore in more detail, for thirty minutes to an hour. Data collection will continue until thematic saturation is reached, ensuring the comprehensive exploration of emergent themes and concepts.

Throughout the interview, the researcher will adopt active listening to ensure that what others are saying, so that participants can share their experiences completely, without interruption. After participation, the researcher will explain the rationale and purpose of the study and allow questions from the participants to discuss the overall research. All interactions and discussions will be audio-recorded utilizing REV.com with participants' consent, supplemented by detailed field notes to capture contextual nuances and non-verbal cues. By adhering to these procedures, the study aims to gather rich qualitative data that offer meaningful insights into the perceptions of ex-offenders' lived experiences and criminal activity.

Once the interviews are completed, the researcher and the participants will be given an opportunity to review the transcript of their interview to ensure accuracy. Participants will be thanked and informed of the process for obtaining a copy of the study

upon completion. Follow-up interviews will be completed if necessary to ensure accuracy. Follow-up interviews will be completed if necessary to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis Plan

Data will be gathered from face-to-face interviews with ex-offenders who attended public high school after 2014 in Louisiana. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed using transcription software (Rev). Journal and field notes will be maintained to assist and validate transcriptions. Interview guide protocols will be utilized. NVivo coding and thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data in my research using codes, categories, and themes. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021) and Saldana (2021), thematic analysis entails recognizing commonalities, disparities, and connections within the data. Categorizing codes to generate themes is based on the relationship between codes, which are reference, occurrence, and sequence.

After the first coding cycle, the researcher will find the frequencies of specific codes assigned and the meaning of group codes (Adu, 2013). The coding methods in the second cycle will be narrowed down to a few major themes, categories, concepts, and one theory narrative. The participants' words are used to label data segments instead of words created by the researcher. Categorizing and connecting are used to examine similarities and differences when analyzing coding carefully. I will choose topics and initial findings, then compare codes and categories to develop a theme.

In this study, a sufficient sample size of 12-15 male ex-offenders will address potential outliers, ensuring a representative reflection of the population. During data collection, patterns will be identified to facilitate accurate interpretation. Additionally,

reflexivity statements will be incorporated to acknowledge the researcher's influence on data interpretation and to enhance transparency regarding potential biases or preconceptions affecting the analysis.

The participant's words label data segments instead of researcher-created words or phrases using NVivo coding software (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I will utilize NVivo software during the transcription process, which will aid in generating themes and patterns for coding to construct results and findings. To avoid discrepancies, my responsibility as the researcher remains to meticulously input the data line by line to ensure accuracy and represent the resulting findings.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In ensuring the study of how male ex-offenders ages 18-25 in Louisiana are trustworthy in in-depth interviewing, various methods are utilized to enhance the credibility, reliability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research. This involves prolonged engagement for credibility, making results and data interpretation applicable in transferability, ensuring data consistency over time and conditions for dependability, establishing data and findings interpretations for confirmability, and assessing whether results can be reproduced using the exact measurements for reliability. It is essential to address the research goals, expectations, process, roles of responsibilities, and access to data to avoid threats to validity and biases.

Secondly, member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a method used to assess the credibility of research results. This technique involves returning the data or results to participants to verify accuracy and resonance with their

experiences. Triangulation, however, involves using multiple data sources or methods to support findings and strengthen the credibility of the study's conclusions. This method bolsters the validity and trustworthiness of the research.

Researchers argue that qualitative researchers are responsible for employing validity and reliability by interweaving verifiable strategies that guarantee self-correction throughout the process of inquiry (Morse et al., 2002). Researchers should establish a practice of external checks for high-quality coding (Creswell, 2014). Strategies for reliability can be addressed by how the researcher uses quality recording devices to record interviews and the detailed way the interviews are transcribed, including behaviors unseen by the reader, such as pauses and overlapping information (Creswell, 2013). In addition, I will maintain all trustworthiness in the entire research study process and meet the required criteria by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Ethical Procedures

The reliability and validity of the research study minimize the risk to participants. The advantage of using in-depth interviewing is the detailed information available, other than in surveys and other data collection. Before commencing the study, the researcher will seek informed consent from all participants involved in the research. This process will entail providing clear and comprehensive information regarding the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. This will be codified by using a printed "Informed Consent" that the participants will read and sign. The researcher will prioritize the protection of the participant's confidentiality and privacy by implementing measures to

anonymize and securely store all data collected on a Universal Serial Bus (USB) for at least three years, as required by the IRB. Access to the data will be restricted to the research team, and the data will be locked in a safe and secure room.

Furthermore, participants' identities and findings shared will be protected by anonymity. Before starting data collection, the research protocol will undergo review by the institutional review board or ethics committee to ensure compliance with ethical standards. The review will assess the study's ethical implications and participant protection measures. Upon obtaining approval from the IRB or ethics committee, the researcher will proceed with obtaining approval from the non-profit organization to engage with participants. Any modifications to the research protocol will be promptly communicated to the IRB or ethics committee for review and approval.

Throughout the research process, the researcher will prioritize minimizing harm to participants and ensuring beneficence by maintaining open lines of communication, respecting participants' autonomy, and prioritizing their well-being. Careful attention will be paid to power differentials between the researcher and participants. Any potential risks associated with participation will be mitigated to the greatest extent possible, and appropriate support mechanisms will be provided to participants as needed. Additionally, the researcher will adhere to principles of cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity, recognizing and valuing the unique perspectives and experiences of all participants involved in the study.

Summary

This qualitative study aims to explore how the learning experiences of ex-offenders influence their criminal activity. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a research method that aims to understand people's experiences. It has been used to learn how ex-offenders view their learning experiences since the CCwas introduced in Louisiana. The study aims to understand whether these learning experiences contributed to the criminal activity of ex-offenders. It will detail the research design, participant selection criteria, and data analysis methods.

The research will employ a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, emphasizing the interpretation of participants' experiences and the relationship between the whole and its parts. The study will use in-depth qualitative interviewing to explore the perspectives of individuals with knowledge or experience related to the problem of interest. The approach involves delving into real-world scenarios to capture authentic insights. The study seeks to address the gap in prior research regarding the correlation between the CC, crime, and delinquency in Louisiana. Through the hermeneutic phenomenological lens, the research aims to interpret participants' experiences and understand the interplay between different components.

In the context of crime prevention and reducing recidivism, the aim is to make significant contributions to local and state governments. The goal is to contribute significantly to the advancement of knowledge in the Department of Corrections and the Department of Education. The primary data source is in-depth qualitative interviewing to

gain insights into individuals' experiences, motives, and viewpoints, emphasizing the importance of seeing the world from perspectives other than the researchers' own.

Chapter 4 will provide a comprehensive analysis of the findings and data derived from the interviews conducted.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the findings from interviews conducted with 12 American male ex-offenders, aged 18 to 25, who were educated in Louisiana during or after the implementation of the CC State Standards (CCSS). Through a qualitative analysis using NVivo, key themes and patterns were identified about participants' educational experiences and any potential links to their criminal behavior. The chapter is organized by research questions, with each section highlighting the voices of participants and the themes that emerged from their responses.

This study addressed the following research questions and their corresponding hypotheses: How do American male ex-offenders between the ages of 18 and 25 in Louisiana describe the relationship of CClearning experiences to their criminal activity?

The data collected is related to research questions to explore the perceptions of 12 American male ex-offenders, aged 18-25, regarding their learning experiences with the CC standards and to examine the relationship between the presence or absence of these standards and criminal activity among this demographic following the implementation of CC in the State of Louisiana.

In Chapter 4, I present the demographic details of the participants, explain how the data were collected, describe each participant's experience, outline the steps of data analysis, address the trustworthiness of the findings, report the results, and summarize how the findings relate to the research questions.

Setting

I used purposive sampling to select American male ex-offenders from Louisiana who were formerly incarcerated, no longer on probation or parole, to ensure a broad range of perspectives. To expand the participant pool, I also employed snowball sampling, relying on referrals from initial participants to reach others with relevant experiences. Participants reported mixed experiences with the shift to the CC. Five of the twelve participants noticed a distinct change in curriculum style and instructional methods after the implementation, often describing it as more structured but also more difficult to follow.

I reached out to the Executive Director of Common Ground Community to request a meeting where I could discuss my study and seek approval to conduct research and use their facilities to recruit participants. After receiving approval from the Executive Director, I proceeded by placing flyers on the inside of four doors visible to individuals entering, as well as in the breakroom for staff and volunteers. (See Appendices A and B for the flyer examples.)

Each participant who volunteered for the study agreed to be interviewed at scheduled appointments. Before the interviews began, I thoroughly explained the interview process, reviewed the consent forms, and obtained signed consent from all participants. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. After each interview, participants were debriefed and allowed to share any additional insights or thoughts about the study. Furthermore, to ensure their well-being, each participant was provided with referral information for a crisis hotline in

case they needed support after participating in the research. (See Appendix E for the referral details.)

Demographics

The study included 12 male participants, ages 18 to 25, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including African American and White. All had been recently released from jail or prison in Louisiana and were no longer on probation or parole. To protect their identities, only first names and ID codes were used.

The racial and ethnic composition of the group reflected the local demographics, with eight participants identifying as African American and four identifying as White. Educational attainment varied among participants, but all had been educated within the public-school systems of northwestern Louisiana. Most had dropped out of school prior to completion, with only five participants earning a high school diploma. The remaining seven reported leaving school between the 10th and 12th grades. Shreveport, Louisiana, was the most frequently reported location for their last school attended, with one participant completing schooling in neighboring Bossier.

Data Collection

Twelve male participants from various ethnic backgrounds met the criteria to participate in this study. I conducted 12 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, which included information on the experience of learning in school and a series of open-ended interview questions. The interview questions were designed to elicit an exploration of their experiences with mathematics, English, the teacher-student relationship, challenges in school, and truancy. These participants for this study were from different ethnicities,

African Americans and Whites. Using a hermeneutic phenomenology approach gave the researcher an in-depth understanding of the perception of the formerly incarcerated men. The participants' feelings about education were used to interpret their feelings about education to explore whether their learning experiences shaped their criminal activity.

Participant recruitment and interviews for this study began on May 16, 2025, and concluded on June 16, 2025. A flyer was posted at Common Ground Community, a local nonprofit in Shreveport, Louisiana. I also shared a digital version on my Facebook and Instagram pages to help recruit participants. Data collection started after Walden University's IRB approved the Letters of Cooperation from Common Ground Community and granted approval for the digital flyer. On May 16, 2025, I made initial contact with the first participant, who agreed and agreed to be interviewed the same day.

On May 17, 2025, snowball sampling began when that participant shared the study opportunity with others. I screened seven individuals in person, all of whom met the study criteria and provided on-the-spot consent to be interviewed through this referral process. That day, I conducted six interviews with men, each spaced one hour apart and lasting at least 10 minutes per participant. The final day of data collection included interviews with four more participants, completing the data collection phase of the study.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with 12 participants at two locations in Shreveport, Louisiana: The Common Ground facility and the local library. Before each interview, participants provided a signed consent form. I reviewed the purpose of the study with each participant to ensure they understood it and gave them the opportunity to ask questions before beginning. The interviews lasted between 10 and 30 minutes. Some

participants were more engaged and focused, which made their interviews slightly longer. All participants completed the entire interview without skipping questions or withdrawing.

Table 1

Interview Lengths

Participant ID	Length of interview (Time)	Length of interview (page number)
1	10 Minutes	2 Pages
2	13 Minutes	3 Pages
3	12 Minutes	3 Pages
4	10 Minutes	2 Pages
5	11 Minutes	2.5 Pages
6	15 Minutes	7 Pages
7	12 Minutes	4 Pages
8	17 Minutes	9 Pages
9	13 Minutes	3 Pages
10	14 Minutes	4.5 Pages
11	17 Minutes	9 Pages
12	10 Minutes	2 Pages

Each participant was interviewed once. I used Rev.com to audio record each interview and took shorthand notes to capture key responses, body language, and physical expressions during certain questions. Interviews were conducted in private conference rooms at both locations. After each session, I informed participants that they would receive a copy of their transcript once it was completed. I first transcribed each interview by hand, then typed it into Microsoft Word documents. All transcripts were saved in a password-protected data collection folder and backed up on a flash drive.

The data collection process I described in Chapter 3 ultimately involved snowball sampling rather than purposive sampling during fieldwork. All twelve participants were

recruited through referrals from other participants. Two were referred by individuals from the Common Ground Community. In addition, I posted digital flyers on Facebook and Instagram. In response, the director of a local park contacted me with four volunteers wanting to be interviewed. Those four participants referred to three friends, who then referred to three more, creating a chain of participant recruitment.

Due to the quick and enthusiastic response, I requested permission from the program directors at both the local park and the Common Ground Community to use private rooms, offices, or conference spaces to conduct the interviews as planned. All participants were informed that the interviews would be audio recorded and that they could stop at any time. The interview protocol consisted of seven open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses (see Appendix C).

The interview questions for ex-offenders were designed to understand their educational experiences while attending school in Louisiana, and whether those experiences influenced their involvement in criminal activity. I encouraged each participant to share their story in their own words. All participants appeared comfortable with me and were open about their learning experiences. The data collected revealed detailed insights into their experiences with subjects like mathematics and English, challenges they faced in school, issues with truancy, relationships with teachers and peers, and how these factors influenced their decision-making related to crime.

Interviews were transcribed after the data collection was completed. To stay organized, each transcript included the participant's first name and an ID code. Audio recordings were labeled numerically, starting with "1" for the first recording, and stored

in folders using the same numbering system (e.g., Recording 1 in Folder 1, then 2, 3, and so on). The transcription process took two weeks to complete. I listened to each recorded interview multiple times to transcribe every word accurately. As I listened, I could recall each participant's face, body language, and expressions, which helped me better interpret their words during transcription. I highlighted specific comments and significant statements that were relevant to the research questions.

In addition to noting what was said, I also remembered the emotional tone of each interview: who was serious, who gave brief responses, and who expressed pride in participating. I used NVivo coding during the transcription process to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes. Data saturation was reached after twelve participants, as commonalities in their school experiences began to repeat consistently. There were no discrepant cases during data collection. This section includes summaries of each participant and background information relevant to the study. Data collection proceeded without any unusual circumstances.

Table 2

Participants

Participant	Race/ethnicity	Age	Incarcerated at age	Education level	School location
1	African American	24	18	Drop-out (10th grade)	Shreveport, LA
2	African American	25	17	Drop- out (10th grade)	Shreveport, LA
3	African American	24	17	Drop-out (11th grade)	Shreveport, LA
4	African American	24	20	High school graduate	Shreveport, LA
5	African American	22	17	Drop-out (11th grade)	Shreveport, LA
6	African American	24	19	High school graduate	Shreveport, LA
7	African American	23	18	High school graduate	Shreveport, LA
8	White	20	17	Dropped out (12th grade)	Bossier, LA
9	African American	25	18	High school graduate	Shreveport, LA
10	White	24	18	Drop-out (11th grade)	Shreveport, LA
11	White	22	16	Drop-out (10th grade)	Shreveport, LA
12	White	23	17	High school graduate	Shreveport, LA

Data Analysis

Recorded interviews were transcribed with a total of 51 pages of transcription. All transcriptions were open-coded, using participants' exact words and phrases to capture their lived experiences and perspectives. The data were analyzed using applied thematic analysis coding cycles (Saldana, 2013). The researcher applied basic coding, which is used to identify the interview questions and responses. This inductive data generated themes and patterns, which Saldana (2013) defines as a phrase or sentence that identifies what the data means.

The descriptive words and phrases highlighted repeated patterns through text search, word frequency, and coding comparison. This allowed the researcher to identify categories to name 14 themes that emerged, such as some teachers were good, some teachers didn't care, struggled in math, comprehension problems in English, dropped out of school, skipped class, environment, choices, and possession with intent. This theme represents the meaning and stories of individuals' experiences. There were no discrepant cases identified. However, I did eliminate" you know" and" umm" when transcribing the data. These were unclear statements that were removed and not considered. The identified coding references were 216 comments with textual descriptions for the 52 themes. A total of six themes and one subtheme were identified, which formed the basis for the compiled reports representing these seven combined themes. No discrepant cases were observed or subjected to further analysis.

Table 3

Theme 1: Student Learning Experiences

Thematic codes	Initial code(s)	Category	Participants	Notes
"Experiences were good."	Overall positive school experience	Positive Experiences	Participant 8	General satisfaction with school environment and learning.
"Good teachers."	effective instruction, support	Positive Experiences	Participant 10	Points to teacher quality as a key factor in learning success.
"Good at math but not English."	subject-specific confidence, imbalance	Mixed Experiences	Participant 5	Strengths varied by subject, indicating inconsistent learning experiences.
"Good at multiplication."	early math confidence	Positive Experiences	Participant 6	Positive perception of foundational math skills.
"Easy in middle school."	middle school simplicity	Positive Experiences	Participant 1	Suggests confidence and comfort before academic demands increased.
"School became harder."	academic difficulty progression	Negative Experiences	Participants 2, 4, and 9	Difficulty likely increased with grade level and/or curriculum shift.
"Written and timed tests were difficult."	testing anxiety, time pressure	Negative Experiences	Participant 11	Standardized assessments were a common challenge.
"Challenging."	academic difficulty, struggle	Negative Experiences	Participants 3,7, and 12	General feeling of being overwhelmed or unsupported in learning.

Table 4

Theme 2: Academic Confidence Post-Common Core

Thematic codes	Initial code(s)	Category	Participants	Notes
"Real simple before CC."	simplicity, pre-reform ease	Pre-Common Core	5,11, and 12	Indicates higher academic confidence and less struggle before the curriculum change.
"It was easy before 2014."	pre-Common Core clarity	Pre-Common Core	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9	Suggests the shift to Common Core marked a turning point in difficulty.
"Oversimplified."	overly basic pre-Common Core content	Pre-Common Core	10	Some may view earlier content as insufficiently challenging.
"English was harder after the Common Core."	increased difficulty, subject-specific	Post-Common Core	11 and 12	Notable subject-specific decline in academic confidence.
"Confused all the time."	confusion, lack of comprehension	Post-Common Core	1,2,4,6 and 9	Signals a persistent struggle post-reform.
"Felt like teachers did not care."	teacher disengagement, post-reform gap	Post-Common Core	5, 7, and 8	Suggests instructional or emotional support may have declined with the shift.
"Easy in middle school became difficult in high school."	transition difficulty, curriculum jump	Post-Common Core	3	Students experienced a sharp learning curve after the reform.

Table 5

Theme 3: Student–Teacher Relationships

Thematic codes	Initial code(s)	Category	Participants	notes
"Good student-teacher relationship."	supportive relationship	Positive Relationship	12	Reflects mutual respect and engagement.
"The teacher helped more because she knew I struggled."	teacher support, personal attention	Positive Relationship	11	Personalized support improved academic experience.
"The teacher made sure I understood my assignments."	academic support, follow-through	Positive Relationship	6	Suggests care for comprehension and student success.
"The coach was my algebra teacher, so I did well in math."	mentorship, trust, dual role	Positive Relationship	4	Connection with a coach created academic motivation.
"The teacher knew I was good at math."	Teacher awareness, limited interaction	Neutral Relationship	7	Teacher recognized ability but didn't build a deeper relationship.
"Neutral relationship with my teacher."	emotionally neutral, low engagement	Neutral Relationship	9	No harm, but also no meaningful connection.
"Teachers were only there for the money, not the students."	lack of passion, transactional teaching	Negative Relationship	1	Perceived disinterest or lack of authentic care from staff.
"Teachers were not helping."	lack of support, academic neglect	Negative Relationship	5	Frustration with unresponsive or disengaged educators.
"Teachers became frustrated a lot."	impatience, poor emotional control	Negative Relationship	2	Teachers' reactions likely worsened student outcomes.
"Teachers didn't know what they were talking about."	lack of competence, mistrust	Negative Relationship	3	Perception of teachers as unqualified or disconnected from content.
"The teacher did not understand how to teach us."	instructional mismatch, misunderstanding	Negative Relationship	8	Suggests a cultural or pedagogical disconnect between students and teachers.

Table 6

Subtheme Theme 4: Participant Criminal Categories

Thematic codes	Initial code(s)	Category	Participants	notes
"Possession with Intent to Distribute (2020)"	drug trafficking	Drug-Related Offenses	4	Indicates engagement in mid-level drug distribution.
"Possession of Schedule I with Intent to Distribute"	possession with intent	Drug-Related Offenses	3 and 8	Reinforces the pattern of drug-related criminal activity.
"Possession of Schedule I (standalone)"	drug possession	Drug-Related Offenses	1 and 10	Lower-level offense, still within the drug-related category.
"Illegal Use of a Weapon"	weapon use	Firearm-Related Offenses	7 and 9	Suggests the use of firearms during criminal acts.
"Possession of a Firearm (multiple mentions)"	firearm possession	Firearm-Related Offenses	6	Recurrent themes are across participants, often in combination with other charges.
"Possession of a Firearm as a Delinquent Juvenile"	juvenile firearm offense	Firearm-Related Offenses	5	Indicates early access to weapons and involvement with the justice system.
"Aggravated Flight from an Officer"	evasion, flight	Flight/Evasion	2	Shows risk-taking behavior and avoidance of law enforcement.
"Theft"	property crime	Theft & Robbery	11 and 12	Basic theft offense suggests material need or opportunity-driven behavior.

Table 7

Theme 5: Lack of School Impact/Disengagement

Thematic codes	Initial code(s)	Category	Participants	notes
"They were teaching nothing."	irrelevant curriculum, disengagement	Lack of School Impact	3,4, and 7	Students felt classroom content lacked value or relevance.
"Acted like they did not care."	Teacher apathy, lack of support	Lack of School Impact	2 and 5	Perceived indifference from staff contributed to disconnection.
"I don't think the school level affected my life."	perceived irrelevance, detachment	Lack of School Impact	8,11, and 12	School seen as having little to no influence on life trajectory.
"I was not focused on school."	Student disengagement, lack of motivation		1, 6, and 10	

Table 8

Subtheme 6: Influence of Social Environment

Thematic codes	Initial code(s)	Category	Participants	Notes
"My decision came from the kids I hung around with."	peer influence, group dynamics	Influence of Peer/Social Environment	6, 2,4,9	Highlights how peer groups shaped behavior and decision-making.
"It came from my social environment."	social environment pressure	Influence of Peer/Social Environment	1,3, 5, and 7	General acknowledgment of the environment as a behavioral influence.
"Different environment."	change in surroundings, context shift	Influence of Peer/Social Environment	8, 10, 11, and 12	Suggests behavior was shaped by or changed due to a different setting.

Table 9

Subtheme 7: Absence from School

Thematic codes	Initial code(s)	Category	participants	Notes
"No support system"	lack of support	Negative	1 and 3	Students lacked personal or academic support structures.
"How the teachers treated and handled us"	negative teacher-student relationships	Negative	5	Suggests feelings of being mishandled or disrespected by staff.
"I'd probably be messing with somebody and have to be kicked out of class."	behavioral issues, disciplinary removal	Negative	2	Disruptive behavior led to exclusion from class.
"Used to always be outside of class and never go"	chronic absenteeism	Negative	4	Habitual skipping as a form of disengagement.
"Skipping and late"	truancy, tardiness	Negative	10, 11, and 12	Reflects patterns of absentee behavior.
"Teachers were bad."	teacher ineffectiveness, disengagement	Negative	9	Perception of poor teaching quality as a contributing factor.
"Started playing sports, seriously, then all that went away."	Sports as a positive intervention	Positive	6	Sports created structure and motivation to attend school.
"Suspended"	school discipline, exclusion	Negative	7	Formal removal from school reinforces absentee patterns.
"Skipped a lot in my freshman year."	Freshman year truancy	Negative	8	Early disengagement in high school.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I used qualitative methods grounded in systematic, in-depth fieldwork and techniques designed to produce high-quality data (Patton, 2015). As outlined in Chapter 3, I followed established protocols to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the research throughout data collection and analysis. I applied data triangulation and a structured analytic approach to identify patterns, extract themes, and assign codes, supporting the study's credibility and consistency (Patton, 2015). Participant collaboration played a key role in enriching the study.

Transferability

As described in Chapter 3, data triangulation facilitated transferability between me and the participants. The data collection process included interviews with formerly incarcerated males from diverse ethnic backgrounds, age groups, educational levels, and incarceration histories. Rich, detailed descriptions were obtained through multiple interviews, audio recordings, written notes, and cross-compared data. These chains of evidence were established to ensure the study's integrity and transferability. I entered the data into NVivo for analysis and interpretation.

Dependability

As described in Chapter 3, I adhered to Walden University's research guidelines for working with human subjects. I followed all specified steps in the research process to enhance the reliability of the study. Detailed reporting of the data collection and analysis procedures was used to demonstrate and support dependability.

Confirmability

According to Patton (2015), confirmability in qualitative research means that findings are shaped by participants' input rather than researcher bias. As detailed in Chapter 3, I followed the outlined strategies without deviation to maintain the confirmability of the study. I used reflective journal notes to capture insights on participants' emotions, body language, and feelings as they shared their experiences in reentry programs. I also applied triangulation to reveal multiple perspectives on key issues and strengthen the overall quality of the research.

Results

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with male ex-offenders in Louisiana between the ages of 18 and 25. The focus of the study was to explore how these individuals describe the relationship between their experiences with CC learning standards and their involvement in criminal activity.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of young male ex-offenders in Louisiana concerning their exposure to CC standards in school. Specifically, the study examined whether participants identified a connection between their educational experiences, particularly during the rollout of CC standards, and their later involvement in criminal behavior. This research addresses a gap in current literature and policy, especially within Louisiana's Department of Corrections and state education systems, where little data exists on the educational experiences of incarcerated youth during the CC implementation period. By giving voice to this population, the study also aims to promote positive social change in a state with the highest incarceration rate

in the United States for more than 16 years. The following sections, which will be divided into themes based on the data analysis, will provide context, insight, and perspective into the formerly incarcerated learning experiences after the CC implementation.

The five primary themes that were identified during the data analysis are: learning experiences in mathematics and English, academic confidence post-CC, student-teacher relationships, crime, and lack of school impact/disengagement, to explore the perceptions of formerly incarcerated individuals. In addition to the five primary themes, two secondary themes were also identified. Two secondary (sub)themes emerged as cross-cutting influences that shaped participants' educational and criminal pathways: Impact of External Factors and chronic absenteeism.

Theme 1: Learning Experiences in Mathematics and English

All twelve participants, whether describing positive or negative learning experiences, provided responses that revealed strong commonalities. Before exploring their individual experiences, I made sure each participant understood that the CC was implemented in the school system in 2014. This provided a clear timeframe for them to reflect on and helped ground their responses in the context of educational changes that occurred during that period. Establishing this information ensured that participants were aware of when the shift in standards took place and could better relate their experiences to the curriculum transition. It also allowed for more accurate recollections and comparisons between pre- and post- CC instruction.

A group of participants, specifically Participants 5, 6, 8, and 10, gave relatively vague responses even after follow-up questions. While their answers were brief, a few clear themes emerged. These participants often attributed positive experiences to having "good teachers" or being "good at math but not English." Some recalled success with basic math skills, like multiplication, which suggests they had a solid foundation in early math education. However, their responses lacked deeper reflection on how instruction or curriculum changes may have impacted their overall learning.

In contrast, Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, and 12 offered more detailed accounts. These individuals consistently described school as easier during the middle school years, with a noticeable increase in difficulty once they entered high school. Several pointed to written and timed tests as particular sources of stress, and many noted that the shift in academic expectations left them feeling overwhelmed or unsupported. Their responses reflected in their body language as an emotional and mental strain that came with adapting to those demands, especially within the structure of the CC.

Theme 2: Academic Confidence Post Common Core

Participants consistently characterized the pre-CC era in math and English as straightforward and uncomplicated. Statements like "Real simple before CC" (Participants 5, 11, 12) and "It was easy before 2014" (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) reflect a widespread perception that the curriculum before CC was easier to understand and navigate. This shared view suggests a general sense of clarity and accessibility in instruction before the reform. For many, this simplicity was positive; learning felt manageable, and expectations were more transparent.

However, Participant 10 described the earlier content as “oversimplified,” and his shrugging gesture appeared to indicate that the material before CCwas easier. His non-verbal behavior suggested he perceived the pre-CC curriculum as less challenging. This perspective reflects one participant’s view on the instructional content prior to the implementation of new standards.

All twelve participants expressed some form of hardship in their experiences with math and English following the implementation of CC. While the specifics varied, the overarching theme was one of increased difficulty and emotional strain. Several participants pointed directly to subject-specific challenges. For example, Participants 11 and 12 noted that “English was harder after the CC,” emphasizing a noticeable shift in complexity. Others, like Participants 1, 2, 4, 6, and 9, described being “confused all the time,” revealing how the new standards introduced uncertainty and a lack of clarity in daily learning.

Aside from the academic difficulties, personal and social factors also became apparent. Participants 5, 7, and 8 reported that they “felt like teachers did not care,” indicating a sense of disconnection or disengagement in the classroom environment post-reform. This point is not just about curriculum changes, but about a broader shift in the student-teacher dynamic. Participant 3 highlighted the difficulty of transitioning through the new system, stating that what was “easy in middle school became difficult in high school.”

Theme 3: Student–Teacher Relationships

Participants shared a wide range of experiences with their teachers, with relationships falling into three general categories: positive, neutral, and negative. Four participants described positive relationships with their teachers. Participant 12 simply stated a *"*good student-teacher relationship," while Participant 11 highlighted that *"*the teacher helped more because she knew I struggled," pointing to personalized attention and empathy. Similarly, Participant 6 noted that *"*the teacher made sure I understood my assignments," signaling consistent academic support. Participant 4 shared a unique experience in which their algebra teacher was also their coach, creating a foundation of trust that contributed to their success in math.

Two participants reported neutral relationships, neither positive nor negative. Participant 7 recalled that *"*the teacher knew I was good at math," but there's no evidence of deeper engagement. Participant 9 described the dynamic as "neutral," indicating limited interaction or emotional connection.

More troubling, five participants described negative relationships. Participant 1 claimed, "Teachers were only there for the money." Others described ineffective instruction ("Teachers didn't know what they were talking about," Participant 3), emotional instability ("Teachers became frustrated a lot," Participant 2), and neglect ("Teachers were not helping," Participant 5). Participant 8 summed up the disconnect by stating, "The Teacher did not understand how to teach us."

Theme 4: Participant Criminal Categories

All 12 participants had experienced incarceration as juveniles or adults, though none were under current legal supervision at the time of the study. Their criminal records included a range of offenses, such as drug-related charges, firearm possession, and property crimes. These patterns indicate early involvement with the legal system. This information provides context for understanding their backgrounds and experiences. It also reflects the types of legal issues encountered by the participants before the study.

Drug-related offenses were the most common, with multiple participants charged with possession or distribution. Participant 4's charge of "Possession with Intent to Distribute (2020)" and similar charges for Participants 3 and 8 highlight a pattern of mid-level trafficking. Others, like Participants 1 and 10, faced lower-level charges such as simple possession. These cases reflect both individual involvement and systemic exposure to drug economies, often within marginalized communities.

Firearm-related charges also appeared frequently, pointing to early and repeated access to weapons. Participant 6 had "multiple mentions" of firearm possession, while Participants 7 and 9 were charged with "illegal use of a weapon." Participant 5's charge, *"*Possession of a Firearm as a Delinquent Juvenile," underscores how early this access began. The presence of weapons, even in non-violent offenses, signals both risk and vulnerability.

Participant 2 was charged with "Aggravated Flight from an Officer," which involves fleeing from law enforcement in a manner that poses danger to others. This offense reflects more than a legal violation; it can also indicate a deep-seated fear or

distrust of police. This behavior suggests a pattern of impulsive decision-making, especially when under stress or perceived threat. Rather than acting with calculated intent, the individual may have responded reflexively to the situation. This highlights the complex relationship some individuals have with authority, shaped by personal experience or broader social dynamics. authority figures rather than purely criminal intent.

Lastly, Participants 11 and 12 had charges related to "Theft," pointing to offenses potentially driven by material need, peer pressure, or survival strategies. These types of charges often reflect underlying socioeconomic struggles rather than purely criminal intent. While theft is generally considered less severe than violent crimes, it still represents a breakdown in lawful social engagement and trust. The motivations behind such offenses may be complex, rooted in circumstances of desperation or influence from one's environment. Understanding these factors provides important context for interpreting the participants' actions and potential pathways for rehabilitation.

These legal histories, though diverse specifically, converge around themes of systemic instability, early exposure to crime, and high-risk decision-making. Together, they offer critical context for understanding each participant's educational and social experiences, especially about school disengagement and institutional distrust.

Theme 5: Lack of School Impact/Disengagement

All 12 participants described some form of school disengagement. Participants 3, 4, and 7 stated "they were teaching nothing," a blunt dismissal that reflects not just boredom but a deeper sense that what was being taught had no practical value. Teacher

behavior also played a significant role. Participants 2 and 5 said staff "acted like they did not care," interpreting adult apathy as a signal that their presence and performance didn't matter.

Several participants went further, explicitly denying that school had any meaningful impact. Participants 8, 11, and 12 claimed, "I don't think the school level affected my life," signaling a complete emotional and developmental detachment. Others pointed to internal disengagement. Participants 1, 6, and 10 reflected simply, "I was not focused at school," citing a lack of motivation or mental presence. Whether due to personal circumstances, trauma, or boredom, their disengagement still fits within a broader pattern of lost connection.

Theme 6: Subtheme: Influence of Social Environment

Participants described a range of social environments that deeply influenced their choices, behaviors, and eventual outcomes. For several participants, peer groups were a direct influence. Participant 6 said bluntly, "My decision came from the kids I hung around with," a sentiment echoed by Participants 2, 4, and 9. These responses demonstrate how group dynamics influenced individual actions, particularly during adolescence, when conforming to the crowd often led to engaging in risky behavior.

Others reflected more broadly on the power of their social surroundings. Participants 1, 3, 5, and 7 all pointed to "my social environment" as the driving force behind their decisions. While less specific than peer-group references, these statements suggest exposure to environmental pressures like poverty, instability, or community norms that pushed them toward criminal activity or school disengagement. A different set

of participants, 8, 10, 11, and 12, described how a “different environment” affected them, signaling either a change in setting or a shift in perspective. These shifts could imply transitions between neighborhoods, schools, or home dynamics, and in some cases, may reflect positive turning points or moments of instability.

Theme 7: Absence From School

Absenteeism was a near-universal experience among participants, with 11 out of 12 reporting some form of school avoidance, truancy, or disciplinary removal. For many, behavioral issues and classroom dynamics played a role. Participant 2 admitted, “I’d probably be messing with somebody and have to be kicked out of class.” Participant 7 cited simply being “suspended,” while others, like Participant 4, described “always being outside of class and never going,” showing a pattern of active disengagement. Freshman-year truancy (Participant 8) and repeated “skipping and late” behavior (Participants 10, 11, and 12) reflected how quickly poor attendance habits became routine.

Some participants directly linked their absenteeism to negative relationships with teachers. Participant 5 highlighted “how the teachers treated and handled us,” while Participant 9 said plainly, “Teachers were bad.” These perceptions fed into a broader sense of alienation from the school environment. For others, the issue stemmed from a lack of support. Participants 1 and 3 cited “no support system,” showing how absenteeism was less about defiance and more about the absence of guidance, either at school, at home, or both. Only one participant, Participant 6, described a positive turning point, saying, “Started playing sports, seriously, then all that went away.” Sports became

a stabilizing force, offering motivation, structure, and likely a sense of belonging that reconnected them to school.

Summary

This study addressed the research questions: How do American male ex-offenders between the ages of 18 and 25 in Louisiana describe the relationship of CC learning experiences to their criminal activity? This was accomplished using interviews to collect qualitative data from formerly incarcerated males. This study also addressed the problem statement from Chapter 1, which is how people who have been in jail do not have a high school diploma or dropped out of school, and how this affects their chances of committing crimes. The perceptions suggest that experiences with CC education, along with other contributing factors, may influence the likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior.

In theme one, pre-CCe implementation, education was broadly described as simple and accessible. Most participants found the curriculum easy to follow, though one noted it was overly basic. The second theme explained the experiences after implementation of the CC, which showed an increase in academic difficulty, confusion, and emotional distance. Participants frequently cited a lack of teacher support. The third theme varied between positive and negative relationships. These dynamics often influenced student engagement. The fourth theme revealed that all participants had been incarcerated, with offenses ranging from drug-related charges and firearm possession to theft and flight from law enforcement.

In Theme five, eleven out of twelve participants reported skipping school, being suspended, or feeling unmotivated. Contributing factors included teacher apathy, irrelevant curriculum, and lack of personal support. Only one participant described a positive turnaround due to structured involvement in sports. The sixth theme played a critical role. Most participants said their behavior and decisions were shaped by peers or their broader surroundings. Some pointed to specific social shifts, such as a new environment, as turning points, for better or worse. Chapter 5 interprets the study's findings about the research questions, highlighting how the major themes align with participants' experiences. It also identifies one unexpected theme involving the positive impact of structured activities like sports. While the study has limitations, such as a small sample size, these do not affect its validity or transferability. The chapter concludes with recommendations for the Department of Corrections and the Department of Education to better address early disengagement and support at-risk youth.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of 12 formerly incarcerated males regarding their educational curriculum, with a particular focus on the CC standards. Additionally, the study examined factors related to their criminal activity, including school truancy, teacher-student relationships, and decision-making abilities, to better understand whether these factors influenced their involvement in crime. Participants, aged 18 to 25, shared their reflections on their learning experiences within the Louisiana education system.

A total of 12 formerly incarcerated males participated in semi-structured interviews to share their opinions, thoughts, perceptions, and lived experiences related to their educational journey under the CC standards. This study also explored whether these educational experiences may have contributed to or influenced their involvement in criminal activity. The purpose of this qualitative research was to examine the perceptions of American male ex-offenders, 18 to 25, regarding their learning experiences with CC standards and to investigate the potential relationship between the presence or absence of these standards and subsequent criminal behavior among this demographic, particularly following the implementation of CC in the state of Louisiana.

A phenomenological approach was employed, providing the most appropriate framework for understanding the depth and complexity of the participants' lived experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with formerly incarcerated males between 18 and 25. The responses were then transcribed, coded, and organized into categories, subthemes, and overarching themes, as presented in Chapter 4.

The research questions posed in this study were answered through data analysis of interviews conducted with formerly incarcerated males between 18 and 25. The findings addressed significant gaps in the existing literature, as outlined in Chapter 2. Specifically, the study examined participants' perceptions of their educational experiences under the CC curriculum and whether those experiences contributed to their involvement in criminal activity. This area had not been previously explored in depth.

The study also offered insights into truancy, decision-making, teacher-student relationships, academic challenges, and social disengagement. While some participants described the CC curriculum as challenging and rigorous, some found it easy to follow. Importantly, participants generally reported that the curriculum played little to no direct role in their criminal behavior. Instead, contributing factors such as chronic absenteeism, lack of social engagement, poor relationships with educators, and broader environmental influences appeared to play a more substantial role in shaping their paths toward criminal activity.

By addressing a gap in the literature, this study aims to support positive social change by exploring the experiences of formerly incarcerated males aged 18–25. The goal is to contribute to efforts to reduce recidivism and prevent crime. The findings highlight areas within education that can support these goals, specifically by improving public safety, reducing youth delinquency, and lowering recidivism rates in Louisiana. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of understanding how educational experiences are perceived by those directly affected. Future research with larger and more diverse samples may further validate these findings and expand their applicability.

The findings of this study address the research questions and provide insight into the participants' learning experiences, student-teacher relationships, challenges, and criminal involvement. The first theme explored the perceptions of formerly incarcerated men regarding their learning experiences in mathematics and English. The second theme examined their confidence levels following the CC curriculum exposure. The third theme assessed the nature of student-teacher relationships during their time in school. The fourth theme focused on the types of criminal charges participants received and the timing of those charges. The fifth theme highlighted a general lack of school engagement during their educational journey. The sixth theme, a subtheme, captured how participants described the range of social environments they experienced. The seventh theme addressed the issue of absenteeism that occurred during their school years.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study addressed the research questions by exploring the lived experiences of 12 formerly incarcerated males between the ages of 18 and 25. It focused on their perceptions of learning, relationships with teachers, and involvement in criminal activity within the context of education under the CC curriculum. This study employed a theoretical framework grounded in GST Theory to interpret the data collected. Initially introduced by Merton (1938) and later expanded by Agnew (2001), GST examines how various stressors, such as academic failure, lack of support, and adverse social conditions, can produce negative emotions like anger and frustration, which may lead to delinquent or criminal behavior.

Theme 1: Learning Experiences in Mathematics and English

The findings from this study demonstrate that the formerly incarcerated students had mixed but generally struggling experiences. Participant 5 said when asked about his learning experiences, “good at math but not English.” Participants 3,7, and 12 stated the opposite, “academic difficulty and struggle.” Participant He continued to explain vicarious trauma as, “Probably not only the way that they’re treated, but the way that others treat them.” Participant E1J6S described vicarious trauma, saying: “It’s probably different things to different people, but to me it’s, you’ve got to deal with it individually with the individual victim.”

Among the 12 formerly incarcerated male participants, four distinct definitions of positive school experiences emerged. Seven participants described their learning experiences as increasingly challenging, noting that school became more difficult as they advanced through grade levels. One participant reported a neutral perception of school, stating it was relatively easy during middle school. Overall, learning experiences varied among participants, and the reported difficulties may have stemmed from grade-level progression and/or shifts in curriculum demands.

Among the 12 formerly incarcerated individuals interviewed, Participants 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 shared similar perspectives regarding their educational experiences. While these participants generally expressed satisfaction with certain aspects of their schooling, notably the support received from teachers and success in foundational subjects like mathematics, they also reflected negatively on specific challenges they encountered. Several participants described school as difficult, highlighting written timed tests and

complex coursework. These reflections underscore the dual nature of their educational journeys, marked by moments of confidence and achievement, and periods of struggle, discouragement, and disengagement.

Overall, the participants' perspectives on what constituted a "good" or "effective" learning experience align closely with the definition presented by the American Psychological Association (APA), which emphasizes the importance of a supportive educational environment, effective teaching practices, and the development of academic self-efficacy. Participants highlighted that positive relationships with teachers, individualized support, and clear investment in their academic growth contributed to stronger motivation and engagement in school. Conversely, when these factors were lacking, such as when teachers were perceived as disengaged, impatient, or disconnected from students' needs, participants reported experiences of frustration, academic neglect, and disengagement from the classroom. These findings suggest that teacher–student relationships and culturally responsive teaching approaches may play a critical role in shaping educational outcomes. While the sample size limits broad generalizations, the consistency of these perspectives underscores the value of supportive and responsive educational practices in influencing student engagement.

The absence of a supportive educational environment can contribute significantly to negative learning experiences and long-term academic challenges. Each participant interviewed in this study attended school in Louisiana before their incarceration, during a time span both before and after the implementation of CC standards. All participants currently reside in Louisiana and are between 18 and 25. The lack of consistent

educational support, in terms of academic instruction and emotional encouragement, poses a serious issue. Without a strong foundation in school, students, particularly those facing socioeconomic or behavioral struggles, may become more vulnerable to academic failure, disengagement, and eventually, involvement with the justice system.

Theme 2: Academic Confidence Post-Common Core

Eleven of the 12 participants interviewed for this study reported experiencing higher academic confidence and less struggle before the curriculum changes. They suggested that the shift to CC marked a turning point in the level of difficulty. One statement that made an impact was by Participant 10, who explained his learning experience as "oversimplified," meaning it was basic pre-CC. During the interviews, all participants appeared to have similar responses regarding their learning experiences before CC.

The statements were similar regarding experiences prior to CC. This theme originated with Participants 5, 11, and 12, who described their learning experiences as "really simple before CC." The other eight participants stated that "it was easy before 2014," reflecting a similar experience for all eleven participants, while one participant did not comment on experiences prior to CC.

All 12 participants described their learning experiences post–CC. Participants 5, 7, and 8 stated that they "felt like teachers didn't care," while Participants 1, 2, 4, 6, and 9 reported being "confused all the time." Participants 11 and 12 shared that "English was harder after the CC," and Participant 3 noted that it was "easy in middle school but became difficult in high school." Collectively, these responses suggest a subject-specific

decline in academic confidence, a persistent struggle following the reform, and the possibility that instructional or emotional support may have diminished during the transition.

Theme 3: Student–Teacher Relationships

Participants described a range of experiences with educators. Positive relationships were characterized by mutual respect and engagement, with personal support improving academic experiences and fostering care for comprehension and student success. Connections with coaches were noted as motivating and encouraging. Some participants reported neutral relationships, where teachers recognized their abilities but did not develop deeper connections, resulting in relationships that caused no harm but lacked meaningful engagement. However, negative experiences were also reported, including perceptions of staff disinterest and a lack of authentic care. Frustration with unresponsive or disengaged educators was common, and some participants viewed teachers as unqualified or disconnected from the content. These negative interactions suggest a cultural or pedagogical gap that may have contributed to worsened student outcomes.

In addition to other negative experiences, five of the 12 participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8) described negative relationships with teachers. They reported issues such as perceived lack of competence, impatience, poor emotional control, insufficient support, academic neglect, lack of passion, and misunderstanding, stating: “Teachers did not know what they were talking about,” “Teachers were only there for the money, not

the students," "Teachers were not helping," "Teachers became frustrated a lot," and "Teachers did not understand how to teach us."

Overall, the findings suggest that the quality of teacher–student relationships, ranging from supportive to disengaged, significantly impacted learning outcomes, motivation, and overall educational experiences, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive and engaged teaching practices. Positive relationships fostered confidence and persistence, while negative or neutral interactions often left students feeling disconnected and unsupported. These results emphasize that teachers' attitudes, skills, and engagement play a central role in shaping meaningful educational experiences beyond curriculum and policy changes.

Subtheme 4: Participant Criminal Categories

Participants reported a range of criminal charges, which were categorized into drug-related offenses, firearm-related offenses, property crimes, and flight/evasion. Drug-related offenses were the most prevalent, including "Possession with Intent to Distribute" (Participant 4), "Possession of Schedule I with Intent to Distribute" (Participants 3 and 8), and standalone drug possession (Participants 1 and 10). Firearm-related offenses included "Illegal Use of a Weapon" (Participants 7 and 9), "Possession of a Firearm" (Participant 6), and "Possession of a Firearm as a Delinquent Juvenile" (Participant 5). Other offenses were "Aggravated Flight from an Officer" (Participant 2) and property crimes such as theft (Participants 11 and 12).

The criminal charges committed by the formerly incarcerated males indicate a range of behaviors and patterns. Mid-level drug distribution charges suggest active

involvement in organized drug activity and reinforce a broader pattern of drug-related offenses. Lower-level drug offenses, while less severe, still fall within this category. Firearm-related charges point to the use of weapons during criminal acts and indicate early access to firearms, often occurring alongside other offenses. Recurrent themes across participants, such as risk-taking behavior and evasion of law enforcement, further illustrate their engagement with the justice system. Property crimes, including basic theft, suggest material need or opportunistic behavior. These findings provide insight into the participants' legal experiences and contextualize the social and educational challenges they faced.

This subtheme is critically important as it illustrates the crimes committed and highlights behavior patterns, risk-taking, and interactions with the justice system that provide context for understanding participants' educational experiences and social challenges. Together, these findings offer critical context for understanding the social, behavioral, and educational challenges of formerly incarcerated participants. The analysis suggests that crime does not occur in isolation, but rather alongside other personal and environmental factors. Overall, this subtheme contributes to a broader understanding of the complex interplay between education, social context, and involvement in the justice system.

Table 5: Lack of School Impact/Disengagement

Participants consistently described a perception that school had minimal influence on their academic or life trajectories. Several participants (3, 4, and 7) felt that classroom content lacked value or relevance, leaving them disengaged from the learning process.

Others (2 and 5) reported that perceived indifference from teachers and staff contributed to feelings of disconnection and diminished motivation. Participants 8, 11, and 12 viewed school as having little to no impact on their long-term outcomes, while Participants 1, 6, and 10 echoed similar sentiments, highlighting a broader sense of detachment. These responses indicate that participants struggled to find meaning and support in their educational experiences, underscoring the need for more engaging, relevant, and responsive school environments.

Theme 6: Influence of Social Environment

Participants reported that school had limited influence on their academic and life trajectories, with many feeling disengaged or unsupported. Participants 3, 4, and 7 indicated that classroom content lacked relevance, while Participants 2 and 5 noted that perceived indifference from teachers contributed to feelings of disconnection. Participants 8, 11, and 12, along with Participants 1, 6, and 10, described school as having little to no impact on their long-term outcomes, highlighting a broader sense of detachment from the educational system.

In contrast, the social environment emerged as a significant factor shaping participants' behaviors and decision-making. Participants 6, 2, 4, and 9 emphasized the influence of peer groups, whereas Participants 1, 3, 5, and 7 acknowledged more generally that their surroundings affected their actions. Participants 8, 10, 11, and 12 reported that behavior changed when placed in different settings, demonstrating that environmental context played a central role in shaping life choices. These findings suggest that while school experiences were often perceived as ineffective, social and

environmental factors strongly influenced behavior, highlighting the importance of supportive, engaging, and structured contexts for positive development.

Subtheme 7: Absence From School

Absence from school emerged as a significant barrier to learning, often linked to feelings of neglect, disconnection, or poor relationships with staff. Participants 1 and 3 explained that the lack of academic or personal support contributed to their disengagement, while Participant 5 described feeling mishandled or disrespected by staff. Similarly, Participant 2 shared that disruptive behavior often led to exclusion from class, and Participant 4 admitted to skipping school to cope with disinterest and frustration. Participants 10, 11, and 12 reflected on persistent absentee patterns, describing school as a place with little relevance to their lives. Participant 9 further connected absenteeism to poor teaching quality, while Participant 8 recalled disengaging early in high school, marking the beginning of long-term detachment. Participant 7 added that formal removal from school reinforced his absence and disconnection.

While absenteeism was overwhelmingly described negatively, one participant highlighted a contrasting perspective. Participant 6 explained that involvement in sports provided structure, discipline, and motivation to attend school consistently. This positive experience underscores the extracurricular activities' role in fostering engagement and offsetting negative academic experiences. ~~Collectively,~~ These accounts suggest that absenteeism was both a symptom and a consequence of broader systemic issues. However, opportunities such as sports demonstrated the potential for schools to re-engage students when meaningful support and motivation were present.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of formerly incarcerated males, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the findings are based on a small, purposive sample of twelve participants. The results cannot be generalized to all formerly incarcerated individuals. The study aimed to examine lived experiences and perceptions rather than to produce broad representative findings.

Second, the study relied on open-ended interviews in which participants articulated their experiences through personal narratives. While this approach yielded rich and nuanced data, the reliance on memory and retrospective accounts introduces the possibility of recall bias and selective interpretation. Participants' recollections of school experiences, peer influences, and pathways to incarceration may have been shaped by hindsight, current circumstances, or personal bias.

Third, the study was conducted within a specific geographic and cultural context in Louisiana. Educational structures, community dynamics, and criminal justice practices differ across states and regions; therefore, the findings should be interpreted cautiously when applied to broader populations. Additionally, participants voluntarily shared their experiences, and their reflections are based on personal recollections, which may be influenced by memory or perception. These factors highlight the importance of considering the findings within the study's specific context and recognizing that further research is needed to explore these topics in wider populations.

Finally, this study represents a cross-sectional exploration of perceptions at a single point in time. While it provides insight into the experiences of formerly

incarcerated males, it does not capture potential changes in perspectives over time. Participants' views may evolve as they continue to reflect on their educational and social experiences. Their perceptions may also shift as they progress through reentry and reintegration into society. As a result, the findings should be considered within the context of this temporal limitation.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the literature by centering the voices of formerly incarcerated males and examining how they perceived their schooling experiences, social environments, and barriers concerning their lives. While participants did not directly link these factors as pathways to incarceration, their narratives highlighted the role of criminal activity as the central driver of justice involvement. These perspectives provide valuable insight into how educational disengagement, social context, and individual choices intersect with criminal behavior, offering a foundation for reimagining prevention and support systems that address both educational and behavioral dimensions of incarceration.

Recommendations

The results of this study identified three key areas for consideration: education, social environment, and access to resources and support systems. These areas reflect consistent themes reported by formerly incarcerated participants. Together, they provide context for understanding factors that may intersect with criminal behavior and involvement with the justice system. Examining these areas can help identify points where interventions or support may be beneficial. This framework can inform strategies aimed at supporting individuals during reentry and reintegration into society.

First, within the area of education, it is recommended that schools, districts, and policymakers continue to examine teacher-student relationships and classroom engagement strategies critically. Participants in this study frequently described a lack of connection, investment, or support from school staff, which they perceived as contributing to disengagement and diminished educational experiences. Strengthening teacher–student relationships is not only a matter of improving classroom climate and ensuring that students feel valued, respected, and understood in their learning environments.

One potential avenue is through professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy, which can help educators better address the diverse needs of their students, as well as trauma-informed practices that recognize and respond to the impact of adverse experiences on student learning and behavior. Additionally, school systems may benefit from reviewing disciplinary policies and instructional approaches to ensure they do not unintentionally marginalize or exclude students. While these approaches hold promise, further research is needed to identify the most effective models, determine how they can be implemented sustainably, and explore how they can be adapted to different educational contexts. By addressing these areas, schools may be able to more effectively foster engagement, promote equity, and support long-term student success.

Second, about the social environment, community organizations, schools, and policymakers could explore the potential benefits of mentoring initiatives, extracurricular programming, and structured peer support networks. The findings indicated that peers and environmental contexts influenced participants' behaviors and decision-making

processes. This suggests that when young people are embedded in positive, structured, and supportive environments, they may be more likely to engage in constructive activities and less likely to be drawn toward delinquent or high-risk behaviors. Mentoring relationships have the potential to provide guidance, accountability, and encouragement, while extracurricular activities can foster belonging, skill development, and discipline.

Similarly, peer support programs may serve as protective factors by creating communities that reinforce pro-social behavior and resilience. However, it is important to note that such programs, their implementation, and their evaluation require careful consideration. More research is needed to examine which models are most effective, how they can be tailored to meet the needs of diverse populations, and how long-term sustainability can be achieved. By addressing these questions, future interventions may more effectively leverage the social environment as a tool for prevention and positive youth development.

Third, at the policy level, attention may be directed toward the accessibility of rehabilitative and reentry resources. Expanding opportunities for education, vocational training, and counseling within correctional and community settings may provide potential benefits. However, further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness and scalability of such programs. Enhancing access to these resources could support individuals in successfully reintegrating into society. Policy considerations should be informed by evidence-based practices and ongoing evaluation to ensure meaningful impact.

Finally, future research should expand the scope by including larger and more diverse samples, such as educators, family members, and community stakeholders. Comparative studies across regions and demographic groups could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how educational experiences, social environments, and systemic factors relate to involvement in criminal activity. Such research may help identify patterns and protective factors that are consistent across populations. Incorporating multiple perspectives could enhance the applicability and generalizability of findings. Overall, broader studies can contribute to more informed strategies for supporting at-risk individuals and promoting successful reintegration.

In summary, these recommendations are not prescriptive but highlight potential avenues for practice, policy, and research informed by participants' perspectives. They offer a foundation for further exploration of strategies aimed at improving educational engagement, enhancing social support systems, and supporting reentry processes. By considering these areas, stakeholders may identify approaches that address the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals. The findings underscore the value of incorporating the lived experiences of participants into efforts to inform interventions and programs. Overall, these recommendations guide ongoing research and practice without implying a single, definitive solution.

Implications

There was a total of 12 participants in this study, consisting of nine African American and three White formerly incarcerated males. According to the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPS&C, 2025), as of June 2025,

incarceration rates remain significant among young adult age groups. Specifically, there were 139 males incarcerated at age 18, 1,633 individuals between the ages of 19 and 20, 1,893 individuals between the ages of 21 and 24, and 2,424 individuals between the ages of 25 and 29. This study documented participants' perceptions of schooling, social environments, and their involvement in criminal activity. It also situated these perspectives within broader incarceration patterns in Louisiana, where young adults represent a considerable proportion of the prison population. Recognizing these perceptions, this study has significant potential to enact positive social change through reducing recidivism by informing more effective prevention, intervention, and reentry strategies.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated males, focusing on their perceptions of schooling, social environments, and factors related to their involvement in criminal activity. The study provides insight into how participants experienced and interpreted their educational and social contexts. Their perspectives illustrate the challenges faced without attributing a single cause to their incarceration. Examining these experiences highlights areas that may inform educational practices, social support, and reentry programs. Overall, the findings contribute to understanding the complex factors associated with criminal justice involvement.

The first change that needs to be made is to create stronger school support systems. Many participants felt disconnected from teachers and staff, contributing to a lack of interest in learning. Schools that focus on building meaningful relationships, offering mentoring, and making learning feel relevant can help students stay engaged. By

keeping students connected, schools can play a stronger role in preventing disengagement that sometimes leads to risky choices.

The second area of change relates to the social environment. Participants often spoke about the influence of peers and communities on their behaviors. Positive peer groups, structured activities, and safe community spaces could provide alternatives to negative influences. Programs such as after-school activities, mentoring, or skills training can give young people more options and better guidance. This type of support could help them avoid decisions that might increase their risk of incarceration.

A third area of focus is providing access to opportunities after incarceration. Many formerly incarcerated individuals encounter barriers when reentering society, including challenges in securing employment, housing, and educational opportunities. Addressing these challenges may help reduce the likelihood of reoffending. Reentry programs that provide connections to resources, skills training, and mental health support can support individuals in building stability. Enhancing access to these resources may contribute to more successful reintegration and lower recidivism rates.

These changes not only benefit individuals but also extend to families and communities. When people are given opportunities to succeed, they are more likely to contribute positively to their households and neighborhoods. This can lead to stronger family relationships, less strain on social services, and safer communities overall. The impact of support systems can therefore extend beyond the individual to benefit multiple generations.

Finally, these efforts can promote long-term social change by reducing cycles of incarceration. Society addresses the factors contributing to repeated involvement with the justice system by focusing on prevention, support, and reentry. While more research is needed to identify the most effective approaches, the participants' perspectives in this study highlight key areas for improvement. Investing in these areas can create lasting changes that benefit both individuals and the broader community.

Larger studies could expand on the findings of this study by providing a broader understanding of how formerly incarcerated individuals perceive schooling experiences, social environments, and patterns of criminal activity. While this study identified key themes based on the narratives of twelve participants, a larger sample could help determine whether these themes are consistent across more diverse populations and contexts. Expanding the sample size may also allow for comparisons across regions, age groups, and demographic factors. Such research could provide more generalizable insights into the factors that influence educational engagement, social interactions, and post-incarceration outcomes. Ultimately, larger studies may strengthen the evidence base for developing policies and programs aimed at supporting reentry and reducing recidivism.

Additionally, larger studies could improve the reliability of findings by incorporating a broader range of perspectives, including variations across geographic regions, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and age groups. This expanded scope would support the identification of patterns in participants' perceptions and experiences. In particular, it could provide deeper insight into the influence of education, peer

relationships, and community support on behavior and reentry outcomes. By capturing diverse experiences, researchers could better understand common challenges and protective factors. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive evidence base for informing policy, practice, and interventions.

Finally, expanding the research could help validate the study's interpretations and provide stronger evidence for developing interventions and policies aimed at reducing recidivism and supporting successful reintegration. Larger studies would increase the diversity of perspectives, making the findings more representative of broader populations. This approach could enhance the applicability of results to different contexts and communities. By incorporating a wider range of voices, researchers can better understand the factors that influence post-incarceration outcomes. Overall, larger studies would strengthen the foundation for evidence-based practices and policies in reentry and rehabilitation.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the experiences of twelve formerly incarcerated males between the ages of 18 and 25 in Louisiana, focusing on their learning experiences and involvement in criminal activity. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, providing flexibility and conversational depth in capturing participants' perspectives. The analysis illustrated how participants described their schooling, social environments, and decision-making processes. Additionally, the study revealed both challenges and supports that influenced their trajectories.

While the participant sample for this study was limited to 12 formerly incarcerated individuals, the findings are supported by comparable themes reported in another peer-reviewed research. This consistency with prior scholarship enhances the credibility of the results and suggests that the experiences and perspectives shared by participants may reflect broader patterns within similar populations. Although the study was narrow in scope, its alignment with existing literature underscores its relevance to ongoing discussions about the connections between education, social environments, and criminal activity.

Future studies with larger and more diverse groups of participants could build on these findings, providing a broader understanding of how educational experiences, social environments, and access to resources influence the experiences of justice-involved populations. Such research may also evaluate the effectiveness of targeted interventions and support systems. The results could inform evidence-based practices and policies aimed at promoting rehabilitation, reducing recidivism, and supporting successful reentry into society. Expanding the research scope would allow for more generalizable insights across different regions, demographics, and contexts. Overall, these studies could contribute to a stronger foundation for strategies that address the complex challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals.

References

Abadie, M., & Bista, K., (2018). Understanding the stages of concerns: Implementation of the Common Core state standards in Louisiana schools. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 3*(1), 20–30.

Ades, J., & Mishra, J. (2021). Education and crime across America: Inequity's cost. *Social Sciences, 10*(8), 283. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10080283

Agnew, R. (2013). When criminal coping is likely: An extension of general strain theory. *Deviant Behavior, 34*(8), 653–670. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2013.766529

Akinbobola, B. A. (2021). Socioeconomic factors that contribute to criminal behaviorsin Louisiana: Policy implications. Public Policy and Administration Research 11(7), 32-39. https://doi.org/10.7176/PPAR/11-7-04 iiste.org+1

Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Kabbani, N. S. (2001). The dropout process in life course perspective: Early risk factors at home and school. *Teachers College Record, 103*(5), 760–822. https://doi.org/10.1111/0161-4681.00134

Alliance for Excellent Education. (2013). Common Core State Standards 101. https://s-gl.cengage.com/assets/downloads/ccss/commoncore101report.pdf

Amato, A. (2022). Progress Made for Louisiana Formerly Incarcerated individuals securing jobs. *Via Nola Vie.* https://www.vianolavie.org/2022/08/18/progress-made-for-louisiana-formerly-incarcerated-individuals-securing-jobs/

American Federation of Teachers. (n.d.). Why is Louisiana ranked so low in education? https://utno.la.aft.org/news/why-louisiana-ranked-so-low-education

American Psychological Association. (2025). Emotional Response. https://dictionary.apa.org/emotional-response

Armstrong, A., & Kondkar, M. (2022). Louisiana justice: Pre-trial, incarceration, & reentry (PWF Data Report). Incarceration Transparency. https://www.incarcerationtransparency.org/wp content/uploads/2022/10/PWF-Data-Report-Final-Compressed-Nov- 2022.pdf

Avery, K. (2024). Louisiana ranks third-highest state with high school dropouts in US, study shows. https://www.brproud.com/news/louisiananews/louisiana-ranks-third-highest-statewith-high-school-dropouts-in-us-studyshows/#:~:text=Louisiana%20ranked%20third%20with%207.36,in%20the%20naion%20in%20education.

Bakkalbasioglu, E. (2020). How to access elites when textbook methods fail: Challenges of purposive sampling and advantages of using interviewees as "fixers." *The Qualitative Report, 25*(3), 688–699.

Balfanz, R., Spiridakis, K., Neild, R. C., & Letgers, N. (2003). High-poverty secondary schools and the juvenile justice system: Howneither helps the other and how that could change. *New Directions for Youth Development, 99*, 71–89. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.55

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033295X.84.2.191

Barbieri, N., Clipper, S. J., Narvey, C., Rude, A., Craig, J. M., & Piquero, N. L. (2019).

Assessing general strain theory and measures of victimization, 2002–2018. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 49*, Article 101304. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.06.005

Bell, B., Costa, R., & Machin, S., (2022). Why does education reduce crime? *Journal of Political Economy, 130*(3), 732-765. http://doi.org/10.1086/717895

Bernard, M. (2022). The Clear Correlation Between Education and Crime. https://esfandilawfirm.com/correlation-between-education-and-crime/#:~:text=FBI%20violent%20crime%20statistics%20and,ranking%20state%20on%20the%20educational

Bleiberg, J. (2021). Does the Common Core have a common effect? An exploration of effects on academically vulnerable students. *AERA Open, 7*. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211010727

Boessen, A., Omori, M., & Greene, C. (2023). Long-term dynamics of neighborhoods and crime. The role of education over 40 years. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 39*(1), 187–249. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-021-09528-3

Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). *Conducting in-depth interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input.* Pathfinder International.

Bradshaw, C., Cohen, J., Espelage, D., & Nation, M. (2021). Addressing school safety through comprehensive school climate approaches. *School Psychology Review, 50*(2-3), 221–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2021.1926321

Brezina, T. (2017). *General strain theory.* In *Oxford research encyclopedia of criminology and criminal justice.* Oxford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.249

Broidy, L., & Agnew, R. (1997). Gender and crime: A general strain theory perspective. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 34*(3), 275–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427897034003001

Bruhl, A. (2023). *Louisiana's homicide rate second-highest in the US, report shows*. BRProud. https://www.brproud.com/news/louisiananews/louisianas-homicide-rate-second-highest-in-us/

Butina, M. (2015). A narrative approach to qualitative inquiry. *Clinical Laboratory Science, 28*(3), 190–196.

Campbell, D. (2006). *What is education's impact on civic and social engagement*. https://www.oecd.org/education/innovation/37425694.pdf

Cambridge University Press & Assessment (2024). Public Investment. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/public-investment

Coulacoglou, C., & Saklofske, D. H. (2017). *Psychometrics and psychological assessment: Principles and applications*. Academic Press. https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9780128022191/psychometrics-and psychological-assessment

Cardwell, S. M., Mazerolle, L., & Piquero, A. R. (2019). Truancy intervention andviolent offending: Evidence from a randomized controlled trial. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 49*, 101308. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.07.003

Chrastil, N. (2023). Louisiana leads nation in percentage of people in adult prisons for crimes they committed as kids. https://thelensnola.org/2023/05/10/louisiana-

leads-nation-in-percentage-of people in-adult-prisons-for-crimes-they-committed-as-kids/

Chawla, K. (2011). Dropout rates decline across Louisiana. https://www.wafb.com/story/14317581/dropout-rates-decline-across-louisiana/

Coleman, P. (2022). Validity and Reliability within Qualitative Research in Caring Sciences. *International Journal of Caring Sciences, 14*(3), 2041-2045.

Davis, L. (2021). Poverty and Middle Level Achievement in a Common Core State: What are we missing? *Middle Grades Review, 7*(3).

Deas, K. (2018). Evaluating Common Core: Are uniform standards a silver bullet for education reform? *The Journal of Educational Foundations, 31*(3 & 4).

Díaz, J., Grau, N., Reyes, T., & Rivera, J. (2021). The impact of grade retention on juvenile crime. *Economics of Education Review, 84*, 102153. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2021.102153

Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy. (2016). *Dismantling the school-to prison pipeline*. Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy.

Donnelly, M. (2021). Juvenile delinquency/truancy. In *Salem Press Encyclopedia*. Salem Press

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Schellinger, K. B., & Taylor, R. D. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. Child Development, 82(1), 405–432. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x

EducationData.org. (2025). *U.S. public education spending statistics*. Education Data

Initiative. https://educationdata.org/public-education-spending-statistics

Ehrlich, I. (1975). On the relation between education and crime. In T. Juster (Ed.), *Education, income and human behavior* (pp. 313–338). McGraw-Hill.

Ellison, T. (2017). The matters of parents' stories: Urban African American mothers' counter-stories about the Common Core State Standards and quality teaching. *Urban Education, 54*(10), 1431–1461. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917702199

Eren, O., Lovenheim, M., Mocan, N. (2018). The Effect of Grade Retention on Adult Crime: Evidence From A Test-Based Promotion Policy. NBER Working Papers, 1-54.

Esker, F. (2021, March 22). *Study ranks Louisiana as third least educated state*. The Louisiana Weekly. http://www.louisianaweekly.com/study-ranks-louisiana-as-3rd-least-educated-state/

Evans, J. (2014). *The Common Core should be eliminated*. The Fordham Observer. https://fordhamobserver.com/17654/opinions/the-common-core-should-be-eliminated/

Farb, A. F., & Matjasko, J. L. (2012). Recent advances in research on school-based extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Developmental Review, 32*(1), 1–48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2011.10.001

Federal Bureau of Investigation. (n.d.). *Crime/Law enforcement stats (Uniform Crime Reporting Program)*. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Retrieved October 11, 2025, from https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/more-fbi-services-and-

information/ucr

Ferguson, R. F. (2003). Teachers' perceptions and expectations and the Black-White test score gap. *Urban Education, 38*(4), 460–507. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085903255137

Fredericks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(1), 59–109. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059

Freeze, C. (2019). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Crime. file:///C:/Users/cdbun/Downloads/Adverse%20Childhood%20Experiences%20ad%20Crime%20%E2%80%94%20LEB.pdf

Furqan, M., & Mahmood, H. (2020). Does education reduce homicide? A panel data analysis of Asian region. *Quality & Quantity, 54*, 1197–1209. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-00981-z

Gadamer, H. G. (1977). *Philosophical hermeneutics*. University of California Press.

Gallagher, M., & Millar, R. (1996). A survey of adolescent worry in Northern Ireland. *Pastoral Care in Education, 14*(1), 26–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0122.1996.tb00052.x

Gallagher, M., & Millar, R. (1996) A survey of adolescent worry in Northern Ireland. *Pastoral Care in Education, 14*, 26–32.

Gershenson, S. (2016). Linking teacher quality, student attendance, and student achievement. *Education Finance and Policy, 11*(2), 125–149. https://doi.org/10.1162/EDFP_a_00180

Goldhaber, N. D., & Brewer, T. J. (2018). Does teacher certification matter? High school teacher certification status and student achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 2*(2), 129–145. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373718759591

Gonzalez-Nuevo, C., Postigo, A., Garcia-Cueto, E., Mendez-Aller, A., Muniz, J., Cuesta, M., Alvarez-Diaz, M., & Fernandez-Alonso, R. (2023). Grade retention impact on academic self-concept: A longitudinal perspective. *School Mental Health*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-023-09573-2

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Hanson, M. (2023). *U.S. public education spending statistics*. EducationData.org. https://educationdata.org/public-education-spending-statistics

Harlow, C. E. (2003). *Education and correctional populations* (Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ Report No. 195670). U.S. Department of Justice. https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ecp.pdf

Hassan, K. (2023). *Louisiana's over incarceration is part of a deeply rooted pattern*. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/louisianas-over-incarceration-is-part-deeply-rooted-pattern-2023-02-01/

Hemez, P., Brent, J. J., & Mowen, T. J. (2020). Exploring the school-to-prison pipeline: How school suspensions influence incarceration during young adulthood. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204019880945

Hesselink, A. (2023). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the link to antisocial,

delinquent, and criminal behavior. In *IntechOpen*. https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen

Hirschfield, P. J. (2018). Schools and crime. *Annual Review of Criminology, 1*, 149–169. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-032317-092358

Hjalmarsson, R., & Lochner, L. (2012). The impact on crime: International evidence. *CESifo DICE Report, 10*(2), 49–55. ifo Institut – Leibniz-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung an der Universität München.

Hyman, J., Vasquez, B., & Baron, J. (2022). Public school funding, school quality, and adult crime. *VoxEU*. https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/public-school-funding-school-quality-and-adult-crime-0

Invest Louisiana. (2025). *Treading water: Louisiana lags on income and poverty*. https://investlouisiana.org/treading-water-louisiana-lags-on-income-and-poverty

Jaggers, J., Robison, S., Rhodes, J., Guan, X., & Church II, W. (2016). Predicting adult criminality among Louisiana's urban youth: Poverty, academic risk, and delinquency. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research, 7*(1), 89–116. https://doi.org/10.1086/686925

Jennings, G. (2005). Business, social science methods used in. In *Encyclopedia of social measurement*. https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-12-369398-5/00270-X

Jerald, C. D. (2008). *Benchmarking for success: Ensuring U.S. students receive a world-class education*. National Governors Association. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211010727

Jiang, S., Dong, L., & Jiang, C. (2020). Examining the link between economic strain and

adolescent behavior: Roles of social bonds and empathy. *Journal of Adolescence, 84*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.07.015

Jones, C. (2022, June 20). *Louisiana's prison population has doubled in 30 years, study finds*. Philanthropy News Digest. https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/louisiana-s-prison-population-has-doubled-in-30-years-study-finds

Juon, H. S., Doherty, E. E., & Ensminger, M. E. (2006). Childhood behavior and adult criminality: Cluster analysis in a prospective study of African Americans. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 22*(3), 239–260. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-006-9009-1

Kamil, M. L. (2016). Common Core State Standards and adaptive teaching. *Theory into Practice, 55*(3), 234–241. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2016.1173991

Kanu, H. (2023). *Louisiana's over-incarceration is part of a deeply rooted pattern*. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/louisianas-over-incarceration-is-part-deeply-rooted-pattern-2023-02-01/

Karstedt, S., Loader, I., & Strang, H. (2011). *Emotions, crime and justice*. Oxford University Press.

Kendall, J. S. (2011). *Understanding Common Core State Standards*. ASCD.

Kizilgol, O., & Selim, S. (2017). Socio-economic and demographic determinants of crime by panel count data analysis: The case of EU and Turkey. *PressAcademia*, 3(2). https://doi.org/10.17261/Pressacademia.2017.383

Kushner, M., & Fagan, A. A. (2022). The effects of victimization on offending: An

examination of general strain theory, criminal propensity, risk, protection, and resilience. *Victims & Offenders*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2022.2077495

Lai, M. H. (2009). Toward an integrative and collaborative approach to Asian American and Pacific Islander youth violence research, practice, and policy. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 14*(6), 454–460. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2009.07.006

Larose, G. (2024). *Far-right activists push changes to Louisiana's early childhood education*. The LA Illuminator. https://lailluminator.com/2024/03/05/early-childhood/

Laurito, A., Lacoe, J., Schwartz, A. E., Sharkey, P., & Ellen, I. G. (2019). School climate and the impact of neighborhood crime on test scores. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 5*(2), 141–166. https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2019.5.2.08

Lea, C. H., Malorni, A., & Jones, T. M. (2019). "Everybody is an artist": Arts-based education and formerly incarcerated young Black men's academic and social-emotional development in an alternative school. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 64*(3–4), 333–347. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12378

Leavitt, R. (2017). *Teachers left behind by Common Core and No Child Left Behind*. ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1173568.pdf

Lebouef, S. (2021). *WalletHub study: Louisiana has most at-risk youth in the country*. The News-Star. https://www.thenewsstar.com/story/news/2021/07/29/louisiana-named-state-most-risk-youth-wallethub/7995543002/

Lee, B. (2021). *Louisiana flunked out again; We have the 2nd worst school system*.

KPEL 96.5. https://kpel965.com/louisiana-flunked-out-again-we-have-the-2nd-worst-school-system/

Lochner, L., & Moretti, E. (2004). The effect of education on crime: Evidence from prison inmates, arrests, and self-reports. *American Economic Review, 94*(1), 155–189. https://doi.org/10.1257/000282804322970751

Louisiana Department of Education. (n.d.). *School and school system attributes*. https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/school-system-attributes

Louisiana Department of Education. (2023). *Child welfare & attendance resource guide*. Louisiana Believes. https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/links-for-newsletters/child-welfare-and-attendance-reference-guide-2022.pdf?sfvrsn=c38a6218_2

Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections. (2023). *History of reentry programs*. https://doc.louisiana.gov/imprisoned-person-programs-resources/transition-reentry/

Louisiana State Legislature (2022). School Attendance. http://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/Law.aspx?d=80276

Loveless, T. (2020). Common Core has not worked. *Education Next, 20*(2), 73–79. https://www.educationnext.org

Maimon, D., & Browning, C. R. (2010). Unstructured socializing, collective efficacy, and violent behavior among urban youth. *Criminology, 48*(2), 443–474. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2010.00193.x

Matthews, B., & Minton, J. (2018). Rethinking one of criminology's brute facts: The

age–crime curve and the crime drop in Scotland. *European Journal of Criminology, 15*(1), 3–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370817731706

Mauss, M. (2009). *Manual of the ethnography* (D. Lussier & N. J. Allen, Eds.). Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books.

Mazerolle, L., Bennett, S., & Antrobus, E. (2019). Disrupting the pathway from truancy to delinquency: A randomized field trial test of the longitudinal impact of a school engagement program. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 35*, 663–689. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-018-9395-8

McBirney, J. (2019). *The implementation and impacts of reforms in Louisiana*. Thomas B. Fordham Institute. https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/implementation-and-impacts-reforms-louisiana

McFarland, J., Cui, J., Holmes, J., & Wang, J. (2019). *Trends in high school dropout and completion rates in the United States*. National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018117.pdf

Meador, D. (2019). *What are some pros and cons of the Common Core State Standards?* ThoughtCo. https://www.thoughtco.com/common-core-state-standards-3194603

Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review, 3*(5), 672–682. http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=fa75ec09-d429-47a4-8822-0b5705eff4a4%40sessionmgr115&vid=0&hid=118

Minh, A., Matheson, F. I., Daoud, N., Hamilton-Wright, S., Pedersen, C., Borenstein, H., & O'Campo, P. (2013). Linking childhood and adult criminality: Using a life

course framework to examine childhood abuse and neglect, substance use, and adult partner violence. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 10*(11), 5470–5490. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph10115470

Minton, T., & Zeng, Z. (2021). *Jail inmates in 2020: Statistical tables*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/ji20st.pdf

Mitra, D. (2011). *The social and economic benefits of public education*. Pennsylvania State University.

Moran, R. M. R., Hong, H., Keith, K. J., Fisher, S., & Wood, L. (2022). Top-down policy and the intersection of teacher belief and action: A photo elicitation study of the impacts of Common Core State Standards. *Critical Questions in Education, 13*(3), 228–244.

Mueller, W. (2023, January 31). *Another study links poverty to poor results at Louisiana schools*. The LA Illuminator.

Nath, B., & Das, P. (2019). Role of socio-economic conditions on students' education. *Clarion: International Multidisciplinary Journal, 8*(2), 56–61. https://doi.org/10.5958/2277-937X.2019.00020.0

Nigar, N. (2020). Hermeneutic phenomenological narrative enquiry: A qualitative study design. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 10(7), 819–825. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337187016_Hermeneutic_Phenomenological_Narrative_Enquiry_A_Qualitative_Study_Design/citation/download

O'Mara-Eves, A., Brunton, G., Oliver, S., Kavanagh, J., Jamal, F., & Thomas, J. (2015).

The effectiveness of community engagement in public health interventions for disadvantaged groups: A meta-analysis. *BMC Public Health, 15*, 129. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-1352-y

Ou, R., & Reynolds, A. J. (2010). Childhood predictors of young adult male crime. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*(8), 1097–1107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.02.009

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Perry, A. R., & Bright, M. (2012). African American fathers and incarceration: Paternal involvement and child outcomes. *Social Work in Public Health, 27*(1–2), 187–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2011.629856

Peterson, R. L., & Skiba, R. (2001). Creating school climates that prevent school violence. *Social Studies, 92*(4), 167–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377990109603997

Physiopedia. (2021). *Behavioral problems in children*. https://www.physio-pedia.com/index.php?title=Behavioral_problems_in_children&oldid=28323

Prison Policy Initiative. (2021). *Louisiana profile*. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/LA.html

Povich, E. (2023, May 7). *Debate over holding back third graders roils state legislatures*. The LA Illuminator. https://lailluminator.com/2023/05/07/third_graders/

Putwain, D. (2007). Researching academic stress and anxiety in students: Some methodological considerations. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(2),

207–219. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701208258

Quinlan, C. (2022). Child poverty rates highest in states that haven't raised minimum `wage. Retrieved from https://lailluminator.com/2022/12/23/more-childrenlive-in poverty-in-states-that-havent-raised-minimum-wage/

Rentner, D. S. (2013). Year 3 of implementing the Common Core State Standards: An overview of states' progress and challenges. Center on Education Policy.

Rios-Mireles, R., Rios, V., & Reyes, A. (2020). Pushed out for missing school: The role of social disparities and school truancy in dropping out. *Journal Name*, *Volume*(Issue), pages. https://doi.org/xxxxx

Rocque, M., Jennings, W. G., Piquero, A. R., Ozkan, T., & Farrington, D. P. (2017). The importance of school attendance: Findings from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development on the life-course effects of truancy. *Crime & Delinquency, 63*(5), 592–612. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128716660520

Rodriguez, K. (2023, April 20). The government invests more for each inmate than for each student. Broadcast Reporting. https://broadcastreporting.org/the-government-invests-more-for-each-inmate-than-for-each-student/#:~:text=April%2020%2C%202023%20Kiara%20Rodriguez,of%20%242%2C756%20per%20student%20annually

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Rubino, L. L., Anderson, V. R., & Campbell, C. A. (2020). An examination of racial/ethnic disparities in truancy court. *Crime & Delinquency, 66*(1), 33–58.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128719847456

Rutherford, A., Zwi, A. B., Grove, N. J., & Butchart, A. (2007). Violence: A glossary. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 61*(8), 676–680. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2005.043711

Oxford University Press. (2024). *Public education.* In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries.* https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/public-education

Schreuder, E., Erp, J., Toet, A., & Kallen, V. (2016). Emotional responses to multisensory environmental stimuli: A conceptual framework and literature review. *SAGE Open, 6*(3), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016630591

Senjaya, P., Ong, F., Kotamena, F., & Andika, C. (2020). School environment influences, student discipline, and learning motivation toward increasing senior high students' achievement. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology, 5*(1), 123–131. https://ijisrt.com/assets/upload/files/IJISRT20JAN605.pdf

Sentell, W. (2022). Rate of students missing classes on the rise; schools in many ways became optional. *The Advocate.* https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/education/rate-of-students-missing-classes-on-the-rise-schools-in-many-ways-became-optional/article_c3e78bb81403-11ed-bad4-cf26e18eb24a.html

Sentell, W. (2023). Louisiana education leaders consider sweeping changes to address student truancy. *NOLA.com.* https://www.nola.com/news/education/report-

student-truancy-requires-quick-fixes/article_72832be8-8fa9-11ed-900b-7fc442770513.html

Sethi, A., Muth, K., MacDonald, S., & Tsepel, T. (2020). *The relationship between crime and socioeconomic status.* ArcGIS StoryMaps. https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b5ab6df3741649c4bcc0a5fbd9e3b45b

Shahbazian, M. (2015). *An introduction to hermeneutic phenomenology.* ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312324059_An_Introduction_to_Hermeneutic_Phenomenology

Sharma, H. L., & Sarkar, C. (2019). Ethnography research: An overview. *International Journal of Advance and Innovative Research, 6*(2), 1–5.

Skinner, V. (2022). Seventeen Louisiana school districts showed no improvement or decline in academic performance. *The Center Square.* https://www.thecentersquare.com/louisiana/article_f385cb5a-1755-11ed-835b-3bc11ef1577c.html

Skinner, V. (2022). Study ranks Louisiana public schools near the bottom nationally in both quality and safety. *The Center Square.* https://www.thecentersquare.com/louisiana/study-ranks-louisiana-public-schools-near-the-bottom-nationally-in-both-quality-and-safety/article_d9479196-0c43-11ed-909d-47e9fbbc059b.html

Smiling Mind. (2023). *Overcoming the barriers to implementing SEL.* Smiling Mind Blog. https://blog.smilingmind.com.au/overcoming-the-barriers-to-implementing-sel

Stebbins, S. (2022). Louisiana has the nation's highest violent crime rate, according to FBI. *The Center Square.* https://www.thecentersquare.com/louisiana/louisiana-has-the-nation-s-highest-violent-crime-rate-according-to-fbi/article_29f89106-ae63-5f04-a3b7-7c67495f4763.html

Stein, M. (2021). *GIS analysis of dropout in Louisiana public high school.* Baton Rouge City GIS. https://city.brla.gov/gis/pdfs/GIS_Day_BR_2021_Stein_Michael.pdf

Stein, M., Leitner, M., Trepanier, J. C., & Konsoer, K. (2022). A dataset of dropout rates and other school-level variables in Louisiana public high schools. *Data, 7*(4), 48. MDPI. https://doi.org/10.3390/data7040048

Stewart, J. (2022, August 7). James Stewart: Truancy is a problem that must be answered. *The Shreveport Times.* https://www.shreveporttimes.com/story/opinion/2022/08/07/james-stewart-truancyproblem-must-answered-shreveport/10236512002/

The Sentencing Project. (2021). *Trends in U.S. corrections.* https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/08/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf

Tittle, C. R., Antonaccio, O., & Botchkovar, E. (2012). Social learning, reinforcement, and crime: Evidence from three European cities. *Social Forces, 90*(3), 863–890. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sor020

Town Charts. (2022). *Shreveport, Louisiana education data.* https://www.towncharts.com/Louisiana/Education/Shreveport-city-LA-Education-data.html

Tulane University, Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives, Hand, D., & Sims, P. (2015). *Common Core State Standards: What Common Core means for New Orleans and Louisiana* (Issue Brief No. 3). Cowen Institute. https://www.coweninstitute.com/publications

U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *How the Census Bureau measures poverty.* U.S. Department of Commerce. https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html

United States Census Bureau. (2020). Quick facts. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/shreveportcitylouisiana,opelousascylouisiana,US/PST045223

U.S. Census Bureau. (2025). *Income, poverty, and health insurance coverage in the United States: 2024* (Report No. P60-287). U.S. Department of Commerce. https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2025/demo/p60-287.html

Vera Institute of Justice. (2019). *Incarceration trends in Louisiana.* https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-louisiana.pdf

Warner, B. D., & Fowler, S. K. (2003). Strain and violence: Testing a general strain theory model of community violence. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 31*(6), 511–521. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2003.09.002

Wilson, J., & Petersilia, J. (2011). *Crime and public policy.* Oxford University Press.

Wilson, H. S., & Hutchinson, S. A. (1991). Triangulation of qualitative methods: Heideggerian hermeneutics and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research,*

1(3), 263–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973239100100206

Wisevoter. (2023). *Literacy by state.* https://wisevoter.com/state-rankings/literacy-rate-by-state/#:~:text=New%20Mexico%20has%20the%20lowest,literacy%20rates%20%20the%20US

Xia, C., & Glennie, E. (2005). *Grade retention: A flawed education strategy.* ERIC. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED492017.pdf

Xu, Z., & Cepa, K. (2018). Getting college-ready during the state transition toward the Common Core State Standards. *Teachers College Record, 120*(6), 1–26. https://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=22579

Yeager, D. S. (2017). Social and emotional learning programs for adolescents. *Future of Children, 27*(1), 73–94. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44219019

Youth.gov. (n.d.). *Youth involved with the juvenile justice system.* https://youth.gov/youth-topics/juvenile-justice/youth-involved-juvenile-justice-system

Zhang, D., Katsiyannis, A., Barrett, D. E., & Wilson, V. (2007). Truancy offenders in the juvenile justice system: Examinations of first and second referrals. *Remedial and Special Education, 28*(4), 244–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325070280040401

Zajacova, A., & Lawrence, E. (2018). The relationship between education and health: Reducing disparities through a contextual approach. *Annual Review of Public Health, 39*, 273–289. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publichealth-031816-

044628

Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Building academic success on social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* Teachers College Press.