

2016

# A High School Dropout Prevention Program for At-Risk Students

Cynthia M. Wallace  
*Walden University*

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Cynthia Wallace

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

A High School Dropout Prevention Program for At-Risk Students

by

Cynthia M. Wallace

MS, Walden University, 2007

BS, Alcorn State University, 2004

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

January 2016

## Abstract

Dropping out of high school is an issue that has faced the educational system for years. At a high school in Mississippi, the dropout prevention plan implemented was not beneficial to all at-risk students because it mainly focused on academic issues. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand why students dropped out of high school and to gather strategies for a dropout prevention plan. The conceptual framework was based on 5 factors: general deviancy, deviant affiliation, family socialization, structural strain, and academic quandary. The research questions inquired about experiences that caused students to drop out and suggested strategies for a new dropout prevention plan. Data collection methods included interviews with 18 teachers, 3 counselors, and 20 former students who dropped out between 2007 and 2012. Interpretive data analysis was used to analyze data. Open and axial coding was used to develop themes about why students dropped out of high school. Those themes included behavioral issues, peer and work-related influences, family structure, school environment, and academic problems. Data analyses indicated that tutoring, staff development, mentoring, counseling, parental involvement, teenage mother programs, and alternative options were useful in preventing students from dropping out. These findings were used to develop a high school dropout prevention plan to benefit at-risk students. The overall goal for this project was to decrease high school dropout rates. By implementing the high school dropout prevention plan, schools may enable more students to further their education and become productive citizens within their communities.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project study to my family and friends. To my family, especially my parents, thank you for all the support, encouragement, and love that you have given me throughout my entire life. You all have always been there for me to cheer me on in everything that I have done. With every obstacle that I had to face, you always had faith that I would overcome it. I truly appreciate and love each one of you dearly.

To my friends, thank you for your constant support. In every educational journey that I set out on, you all were right there to make sure I did not quit, and for that I thank you. I love each of you with all my heart.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

High school dropout rates are a problem in the educational system. There are approximately 7,000 students who drop out of high school each day nationwide (Miller, 2009). These students drop out for a variety of reasons. This study focused on why students drop out of high school, past interventions to assist with this problem, and the development of a new high school dropout prevention plan at G High School, a pseudonym. Section 1 includes a description of the high school dropout crisis and how it has affected local communities.

### **Definition of the Problem**

In the state of Mississippi, the dropout rate was 17% in 2011, which was up from the 16.7% for the previous year (Mississippi Department of Education, 2011). The state of Mississippi is ranked 47<sup>th</sup> in the number of high school graduates (Sims, 2007). The Mississippi Delta is in the northern portion of the state and is the largest geographical area in Mississippi. G High School is one of the many high schools in the Mississippi Delta. This school serves approximately 1,700 students. There is an estimated number of 170 teachers at this high school and eight administrators (G Public School, 2009). A major problem at G High School is the high dropout rate, with an average of 28.4% of students dropping out annually (Mississippi Kids Count, 2008). G High School is currently utilizing a high school dropout prevention plan that consists of a senior mentor program, service learning, and an afterschool mentoring curriculum (G Public School, 2009). The components of this program are used to assist students who are failing

academically and are at risk of dropping out at G High School. The review of literature provided details about high school dropout rates and what past studies suggested as being the reasons why students drop out of high school.

### **Rationale**

Students who drop out of high school are a concern throughout the state of Mississippi. An estimated 14,000 students drop out of high school each year in Mississippi (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2008). There are several factors contributing to this problem, among which are teen pregnancies, student discipline problems, gang-related activity, and low academic levels among students (Azzam 2007; Bowers, Spratt, & Taff, 2012; Bridgeland, Dijulio, & Morison, 2006; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Terry, 2008). Some high school dropouts utilize the time normally spent in school in an unproductive manner. Some may engage in criminal activity as a lifestyle (Kirk & Sampson, 2013). In Mississippi, approximately 1,000 youths are arrested every month for committing crimes (Mississippi Department of Corrections, 2008). Once students drop out of high school, their life choices are limited regarding lifestyle, job availabilities, and living environments. This study contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address high school dropout concerns by determining possible factors associated with at-risk students at G High School.

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

At G High School, the graduation rate has fluctuated throughout the years. In 2007, the graduation rate was 60.8% and by the year 2009, it was up 4%. Within those same years, the dropout rate has also escalated, rising from 22.7% in the year 2007 to

36% in the year 2009. Approximately 40% of all the students at G High School are two or more grades behind (G Public School, 2009). At the high school level during the 2009 school year, 10% of students had failed more than one grade, 53% of students had more than five absences, 12% of students had over 12 absences and there were 6,254 discipline reports (G Public School, 2009).

The high school dropout prevention plan used by G High School focuses mainly on resolving academic issues by using remedial techniques, such as after school tutorial sessions (G Public School, 2009). Unfortunately, not all students drop out due to academic problems. According to Joyner (2007), many students drop out due to pregnancies, discipline issues, and family situations. Until those issues are addressed, helping a student academically will not lower the dropout rate.

### **Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature**

Finishing high school is an important step to a productive and meaningful life; it is a requirement to higher education, and it is a supplement to a successful career (Featherston, 2010). Therefore, it is imperative to create a system or plan that will effectively keep students throughout the nation in school. If that does not happen, there is a high probability that the high school dropout rate will continue to plague the nation and cause many problems throughout society.

The United States graduation rate has never been higher than 70% and yet for minorities it has always been between 50-55% (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007; Steinberg, Johnson, & Pennington, 2006). One in ten American high schools are *dropout factories* (Joyner, 2007). Dropout factories are high schools where at least 60% of incoming

freshmen do not graduate. Two thousand high schools in America produce more than half of all high school students who drop out of school (Joyner, 2007). There has been an increase in dropout rates. Thomas and Date (2006) estimated that approximately 2,500 high school students dropped out of school every day in the United States in 2006. In 2007, Whittle (2007) estimated that one of four high school students end their educational by dropping out of high school. In 2009, Miller found that approximately 7,000 students were dropping out each year. Students who drop out of high school affect communities across the world in areas such as the economy, crime rates, and poverty levels (Berzin & Marco, 2010; Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, Palma, 2009). Students who drop out of high school are at risk of being unemployed or having low-income jobs. They are also more likely to be on public assistance or end up in prison (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007; Cohen, Piquero, & Jennings, 2010). If the number of high school dropouts reduced by 700,000 students each year, the economy would improve (Henry & Rouse, 2012). Within 11 years, the economy would see an increase of an estimated one trillion dollars because of these working graduates (Henry & Rouse, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to understand the characteristics of at-risk students and comprehend their possible reasons or experiences related to dropping out of G High School. My goal is also to develop a new dropout prevention plan and implement it at G High School. The development of new programs must include solutions that work toward strengthening students in both their academic and personal lives. Through the successful implementation of a new dropout prevention plan, at risk high school students will have the possibility of completing high school.

## Definitions

Several terms are important to define in the context of this study. Comprehending these terms will help others fully understand all the areas associated with the high school dropout phenomenon.

*Academic quandary:* Academic dilemmas or performance at low academic levels (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000).

*At risk student:* A student who has a high probability of failing academically or one that is in danger of dropping out of high school (Lemon & Watson, 2011).

*Deviant affiliation:* Peer influence or active involvement in gang-related activity (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Staff & Kreager, 2008).

*High school dropout:* A student who is enrolled in the current school year but did not return to school within the school start window, was not expelled, did not graduate, did not receive a general educational development (GED) diploma, begin college, or begin school in another school district (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007; Rumberger, 2004; Verdugo, 2011).

*Dropout interventions:* Initiatives designed to provide educational alternatives for students who have already dropped out of school (University of California, Los Angeles, 2007).

*Dropout prevention programs:* Programs that provide students with assistance in school and encourage them to complete their high school education (University of California, Los Angeles, 2007).

*Dropout rate:* The number of students who drop out of high school in any particular school district, grade, gender, or ethnic subcategory as compared to the total enrollment in that particular subcategory (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

*General deviancy:* Delinquency, drug use, felonious attitudes or behavior, or sexual activity (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000).

*Family socialization:* The significant influence of family background, such as parental behavior control, parents or guardians' educational levels, or family stress (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Terry, 2008).

*Structural strains:* Specific demographic factors, school-related influences, and individual characteristics (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2005; Peguero, 2011).

### **Significance**

This study is important to educational professionals and students who are at risk of dropping out of school; but it is also important to the society as a whole. It is anticipated that educational professionals will better identify students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. If better prevention and intervention methods are developed in the future, more students may have a greater opportunity to complete high school successfully, go to college, and succeed in life (Plank, Deluca, & Estacion, 2008; Shore, 2003; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009). Parents will understand how to be involved effectively in their children's education and help to encourage them to stay in school, which is important to a student's educational success (Epstein, 2005; Sander, 2010; Williams & Sánchez, 2012).

Students will have an opportunity to become productive and active members of society. These students will be able to develop productive pathways that will lead them into successful and meaningful lives (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008; Staff, Schulenberg, & Bachman, 2010; Yeager & Bundick, 2009). Students who graduate and become productive citizens have the advantage of assisting their communities because they have the opportunity to help support and build economic development and political stability in society (Hickman et al., 2008; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2004). Overall, the solution for this problem will be significant to the growth of communities. With more students graduating, society will have more individuals who are being productive.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this project study is to understand why students are dropping out of high school in order to develop a dropout prevention plan that will address this phenomenon. The research questions were developed in order to gain an understanding about the reasons why students drop out. For this project study, the main research questions are:

What experiences cause students to drop out of G high school?

What strategies are needed for an effective dropout prevention program?

In this study, I investigated what can be done to prevent at-risk students from dropping out. The interview process allowed me to understand the experiences that caused former high school students to drop out, the rationale behind their final decision, how that decision has affected their lives, and strategies for dropout prevention plans. This

information will help provide insight into the variety of reasons why students drop out of high school in order to help create ways to keep students in school.

### **Conceptual Framework**

There are numerous reasons why students drop out of high school. To help categorize some of those individual causes, Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) divided the reasons why students drop out into five categories. These categories include general deviancy, deviant affiliation, family socialization, structural strains, and academic quandary. Each of these categories contains related, but individual reasons for dropping out. When developing these five categories, Battin-Pearson et al. placed these reasons into more specific and defined categories with the intention of providing greater comprehension. Their primary objective was to assist in decreasing high school dropout rates.

There has been limited research to back up or determine the validity of the specific categories developed by Battin-Pearson et al. (2000). No literature was found analyzing the work of Battin-Pearson et al., but many studies have been conducted on why students are dropping out. Several researchers have suggested reasons why students drop out of high school, and some of those studies will be discussed in the literature review, but there is a lack of research that categorizes reasons for dropping out. There is also limited research to determine what strategies are most effective when assisting students who are affected by the factors that have been identified in the categories. To determine the validity of these five categories and to address the relationship between the reasons why students drop out and the strategies to prevent them from dropping out, this phenomenology and case study was conducted to explore the dropout phenomenon at G

High School. This study was designed to understand why students are dropping out of school and to create strategies that address those specific issues. This study also allowed the opportunity to compare findings with those from Battin-Pearson et al. to determine the validity of the research within this study.

### **Review of Literature**

Using the above categories as a guide, I researched what is causing students to drop out of high school within these different categories. To find information on these five categories, I used Walden University's library to gain access to the ERIC database. Within the ERIC database, I used key terms such as *high school dropout*, *reasons for dropping out*, and *negative effects of dropping out of high school* to search for information. With this database, I was able to search many peer-reviewed sources that pertained to my study. These sources provided me with a broader description for each category as well as information on some of the effects of dropping out of school due to the reasons identified in these categories.

### **Dropout Factors**

Many factors contribute to the reasons why students drop out of high school. Those factors include some of the following: living in poverty, staying in violent neighborhoods, facing continual peer pressure, and having a lack of positive adult role models (Bowers et al., 2012; Isserman, Feser, & Warren, 2009; Joyner, 2007; Meeker, Edmonson, & Fisher, 2009). Often, these students attend high schools that are located in socioeconomically depressed neighborhoods, which do not attract effective teachers (Jordan, Kostandini, Mykerezi, 2012; Mayer, 2010). Additionally, dropout rates are influenced by past failure, possibly influencing below average grades, missing too many

days in school, disciplinary problems, low self-esteem, disabilities, substance abuse, pregnancy or having a child, or family-related issues (Joyner, 2007; Lund, 2010; Pyle & Wexler, 2012). A school system's negative school climate, uncontrolled school violence, or an ineffective discipline system can influence a student to drop out of school (Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010; Porowski & Passa, 2011; Schargel, Thacker, & Bell, 2007). Many high school students who drop out stated that they dropped out of high school because the classes were not interesting, they were not motivated, or their parents were not involved (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012). Reasons for dropping out of high school are discussed in the sections below using the following five categories: general deviancy, deviant affiliation, family socialization, structural strains, and academic quandary (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000).

### **General Deviancy**

General deviancy relates to students who have behavioral issues. Some general deviancies that students may face include violence, disruptive behavior, or drug usage (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Students who do not like school, do not get along with teachers or peers, do not respect authority, are consistently suspended, are involved in substance abuse, or students who purposely come to school to create violence are at risk for dropping out of school (Adams, 2007; Hawkins, Jaccard, & Needle, 2013; Townsend, Flisher, & King, 2007). Because of these circumstances, student discipline and violence issues are among the top five major issues in the educational system (Ehrenreich, Reeves, Corley, & Orpinas, 2012; Stover & Cook, 2009).

During the 2007–2008 school year, there were 1,332,400 violent incidents in 83,000 schools nationwide (Neiman & DeVoe, 2009). Students who have violent

behavior or attitudes are not focused on their school work and normally come to school with the personal goal of starting trouble (Ikomi, 2010; Leech, 2012). These students are consistently suspended, expelled, or placed in alternative school settings (Lee, Cornell, & Gregory, 2011). When these students do not receive effective mentoring for their problems, they often dropout of high school before Grade 11 (Archambault, Janosz, & Morizot, 2009; Schargel et al., 2007).

Teen pregnancy is another issue in the general deviancy category that plays a significant role in the female dropout population (Strunk, 2008). In the United States, more than 360,000 teen girls give birth to babies each year. In 2012, 305,388 babies were born to women between the ages of 15 and 19 years old (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Only 40% of these teen mothers will graduate from high school (Duncan et al., 2008; Frisco, 2008). Some teen mothers who drop out of high school will have children who will also dropout (Ziomek-Daigle, 2010). Teen mothers have the right to the same education as their peers, but many are not encouraged to stay in school and some are objects of gossip from their peers, causing these young mothers not to want to attend school any longer (Erdmans, 2012; Pillow, 2006).

### **Deviant Affiliation**

Students' deviant affiliations also cause students to drop out of high school each year. Deviant affiliation includes peer pressure or gang-related activity. Peer groups have a major effect on the academic outcome of a high school student (Drewry, Burge, & Driscoll, 2010). Studies show that peer groups are more influential than parents (Hartnett, 2008). Students who are at risk of dropping out of high school are usually associated with antisocial groups (Neely & Griffin-Williams, 2013; Park, Lee, Bolland, Vazsonyi, & Sun,

2008). Students who are a part of these antisocial groups normally influence their friends to skip school, encourage them not to complete class assignments, or persuade them to join particular gangs (Burton & Marshall, 2005; Sander 2010). When students actually join these gangs, they bond to feel a sense of belonging or a sense of family. Some students are pressured into joining gangs, whereas others join for financial gain, excitement, protection, or for identity (Staff & Kreager, 2008). Teen gang members generally range between the ages of 12 and 18. Once students join gangs, their abrasive behaviors begin to follow them from the streets into the classroom (Koffman et al., 2009). As these behaviors occur, students usually lose interest in academic achievement, begin to fail in class, and some choose to drop out of school (Li, Lynch, Calvin, Liu, & Lerner, 2011). Students who are not accepted in school and do not have peers to associate with at school are 25% more likely to drop out of high school (Li et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2005; Staff & Kreager, 2008). These students typically perform at low academic levels in school and are at risk of committing suicide (Sharaf, Thompson, & Walsh, 2009).

### **Family Socialization**

Behavioral problems are not always the reason students drop out of high school. Family socialization also plays a major role in students dropping out of high school (Whannell & Allan, 2011). The influence of family background suggests that a student begins thinking about dropping out early in life. (Próspero, Russell, & Vohra-Gupta, 2012). An estimated 42% of students who drop out of high school have parents who have no high school education (Berzin & Marco, 2010; Joyner, 2007). In addition, students who do not have parents involved in their education are most likely to drop out of high

school versus students who have involved parents (Williams & Sánchez, 2012). Students who must help raise younger siblings, take care of an elder family member, or get a job to help support their families are also at risk of dropping out of high school (Brown, 2009; Joyner, 2007; Lee & Staff, 2007). Many of these students cannot withstand the stress or responsibilities of taking care of educational and family matters; therefore, they drop out of high school thinking they are making the right decision.

### **Structural Strains**

Structural strains relate to students who have specific demographic factors, school-related influences, and particular individual characteristics. These characteristics can include factors such as gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). Studies show males are more likely to drop out of high school than females by a small proportion. In 2009, 47% of males dropped out of high school compared to 43% of females (McNeal, 2010; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Ethnicity is also associated with high school dropout rates (Tavakolian & Howell, 2012). Hispanics are most likely to drop out of high school, especially if they are not fluent in English. In 2009 an estimated 30% of Hispanics, 12% of blacks, and 9% of whites dropped out of high school in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2009; Próspero et al., 2012).

Socioeconomic status is also a determining factor for high school students who drop out of school. Students with a low socioeconomic status are more likely to become a high school dropout than students who have a higher socioeconomic status (Joyner, 2007; Leech, 2012). Statistics show that 48% of all students who drop out of school come from

families in the bottom quarter of the socioeconomic status (Hughes et al., 2007). People who are struggling financially tend to put more focus on work instead of education, which is something educators will have to find a way to address without causing any additional issues.

### **Academic Quandary**

Academic quandary plays a significant role in the high school dropout dilemma. Academic quandary can include the following: students who are not interested in school, have failed more than one grade, have learning disabilities, or have missed an excessive number of days from school (Scheel, Madabhushi, Backhaus, 2009; Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007; Trampush, Miller, Newcorn, & Halperin, 2009). These issues cause these students to have a risk of dropping out of high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Stearns, Moller, Potochnick, & Blau 2007). Students who repeat one or more grades or students who are two or more years older than their peers are twice as likely to drop out of high school (Ou & Reynolds, 2010; Stearn et al., 2007; Vang, 2005). Students who have trouble passing the exit or state exams also are at risk of dropping out of school (Hemelt & Marcotte, 2013).

Attendance is also a form of academic quandary because students who are frequently absent from school normally make below average grades, which can cause them to fail that school year, and for some, give up on education (Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Scheel et al., 2009). Students who dislike school have higher absenteeism and truancy rates than other students, which make them highly likely to drop out of high school (Hallinan, 2008; Landis & Reschly, 2011; Marvul, 2012). Studies suggest that students who miss more than 10% of school days should be monitored so they will not fall in the

at risk category (Gottfried, 2009; Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Studies also suggest that the ninth grade year is the most important year during a student's high school years when dealing with high school completion (Gasper, Deluca, & Estacion, 2012; Langenkamp, 2010; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Attendance during a student's ninth grade year can be a determining factor to whether that student will complete high school (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008). More high school students fail ninth grade than any other grade (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenburg, 2008; Vang, 2005).

When a student is unhappy or not motivated, he or she can also fall into the academic quandary category. Some reasons why students become discontent at school include school demographics, classroom environment, and peers' behaviors including bullying (Christle et al., 2007). These reasons can result in students becoming less and less involved in their school activities, which can consequentially lead to poor grades or high absenteeism (Christle et al., 2007; Cornell, Gregory, & Huang, 2013; Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Students drop out of high school for a variety of reasons. There is not one set reason why students drop out of school, so there cannot be one set solution. It is important to understand all the issues associated with students who drop out of school in order to create a comprehensive plan. The next section discusses current strategies that address the dropout issue.

## **Current Prevention Strategies**

### **Local Level**

G High School's district designed a dropout prevention plan in 2008 that was approved by Mississippi's Department of Education. The goal for this plan was to increase the graduation rate within five years. At the high school level, administrators implemented a subject area-testing program, Parent and Teacher Association (PTA), senior mentoring, service learning, and afterschool remediation programs to address the high school dropout rates (G Public School, 2009). Each of the programs listed above is designed to provide students with remediation and assist in increasing parental involvement. The district provides subject area testing programs, and it offers remediation to help low performing students meet requirements to pass state tests. PTA is designed to foster better relationships between the school and home. PTA provides parents with an opportunity to become involved in their child's education and with other school-related activities (Cheung, 2009). The service-learning program is designed to promote positive social change by engaging high school students in classroom learning activities (Dymond, 2007). It also provides service-learning placement experience and student-designed participatory action research projects that address a need specified by community-based organizations. These organizations work to enhance student learning by providing students with the resources that they need in the classroom.

The senior mentoring program is a part of the service-learning program for social change. Students in the mentoring program are all high school seniors. These high school mentors are trained in conflict resolution and must pass the mentor placement test. They are assigned to an elementary or middle school to help underachieving students, as well

as build the students' self-esteem (Karcher, 2008). The mentors tutor elementary students in areas where the students are failing. After school programs are for high school students. The after school programs offer students the opportunity to receive instruction on skills that were taught, but not mastered by the student. The program also builds a stronger relationship with the school community (Butcher, 2010). Students have the opportunity to stay after school to receive extra assistance on particular benchmarks in which the students failed.

### **National Level**

Many programs also have been created nationally to deal with the reasons why students drop out of high school and help to prevent others from doing the same. For example, the New High School Initiative Program, designed for struggling youths, specifically Hispanics, provides a variety of funds and programs to help assist schools in keeping students in school (Aspey & Sanchez, 2005). The No Child Left Behind Act is a legislative program designed to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn with the use of highly qualified teachers and needed resources. This act was also created to increase high school graduation rates (Price, 2010). The National Education Association (NEA) has also developed a dropout prevention plan, which is called the NEA's 12 Dropout Action Steps. Some of those steps include establishing high school graduation centers for high school students who are between the ages of 19 and 21, providing students with individual attention, and having a plan that involves parents and students, learning at school and at home. It also includes continually monitoring student's academic progress in school and involving the entire community in the dropout prevention program (NEA, 2006; Pascopella, 2007). Other programs such as Job Corps

or GED programs help assist students with alternative school settings that will allow them to complete their program and receive a high school completion certificate (Bloom, 2010).

Programs, like the ones listed above, are designed specifically to help increase high school graduation rates, but educational leaders need to find dropout prevention plans that will be effective for the high schools in their district, fully implement the programs, and make necessary adjustments as needed. This will not only assist the school system, but it will benefit and help the students who need it the most.

### **Effects on Society**

Students who drop out of high school face several risk factors in life that affect themselves as well as their society. Some of these factors include the following: poverty, shorter life span, and prison time. Students who drop out of high school earn approximately \$19,000 annually compared to high school graduates who can begin earning up to \$28,000 annually (Levin, 2009; Thomas & Date, 2006). Students who drop out of high school are twice as likely to be unemployed (Graves, 2009; Low & Weiler, 2012). Students who drop out of high school are also 3.5 times more likely than graduates to become incarcerated (Treadwell & Nottingham, 2008). According to studies, 75% of state prison inmates and 59% of federal inmates were individuals who dropped out of high school (Hirschfield, 2009; NEA, 2006). Due to criminal activity and poverty, on average, a student who drops out of high school decreases his or her life span by nine years (Thomas & Date, 2006).

The impact in Mississippi is just as great as the impact in the nation. The graduation rate for the state of Mississippi is only 75%, which is one of the lower rates in

the United States (Mississippi Department of Education, 2013). An estimated 40 students per day give up on school (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2008). Some of the students who drop out of school turn to crime as their way of living, which results in many youths going to jail. In the year 2012 there were approximately 14,690 juvenile offenders in Mississippi; some of these youths were high school dropouts (Mississippi Department of Human Services, 2013). Some individuals who drop out of high school are financially unstable because they do not have employment. Currently, Mississippi ranks fiftieth in unemployment rates with 7.3% of Mississippi citizens being unemployed (United States Department of Labor, 2014). These same issues affect the communities surrounding G High School. By decreasing the high school dropout rates, there is the potential to have more students who graduate high school, go to college, and become productive members of their society.

### **Implications**

An improved high school dropout prevention plan can assist in making a change for G High School. The prevention plan developed in this study is composed of multiple components that will provide students with academic remediation, counseling and alternative routes. With the development of a plan that incorporates these components, there is a possibility many positive effects will occur for students and their community. Students will have the opportunity to graduate, enter college, get a better job, and live a more productive life with an education (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2013). It is estimated that in a lifetime a high school graduate will make 1.2 million dollars, a student with an associate's degree will make 1.6 million dollars, and students who earn their bachelor's degree will make 2.1 million dollars (Christeson, Lee, Schaefer, Kass, & Messner-Zidell,

2008; Levin, 2009). By not dropping out of high school, students will have a chance to gain economic stability, which will also help stabilize their community through taxes.

Crime rates have the potential to decrease in communities when graduation rates increase (Huck, 2011). When students are being productive within their communities, there is a lower chance for them to participate in criminal activity (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Christeson et al. (2008) stated that increasing graduation rates by at least 10% could potentially prevent over 300,000 murders and nearly 175,000 aggravated assaults in the United States each year because there will be more productive individuals. Finding ways to keep students actively involved in school lowers truancy rates, which means more students, are in their classes learning instead of missing school and participating in unlawful activities (Huck, 2011). When students focus on their education and graduation, they are less focused on disruptive or criminal behavior and that reduces the number of offenses that occur (Winton, 2013). In Mississippi, the increase of graduation rates could prevent 75 murders and 870 aggravated assaults (Christeson et al., 2008). With more students graduating, there is a possibility for less crime to be committed and an increase number of individuals working, which aids in the growth of communities.

### **Summary**

Being a high school dropout not only affects the individual as well as the community. G High School and other schools have concerns with the dropout phenomenon that causes issues within its community. Some of the communities surrounding G High School face high juvenile crime rates and poverty levels. Unfortunately, these types of factors can be associated with the dropout phenomenon. In

order to address issues such as crime and poverty, one must first understand the factors that can lead to them such as dropping out of school.

Education is one of the most important components of a productive society. Many students do not understand the power of knowledge that develops through education. If the educational system is going to overcome the high school dropout problem, everyone must be willing to work together. Each school must have prevention strategies that have been proven to work and an organization designed to work with every problem that students encounter (National High School Center, 2008). There are many reasons why students drop out of school; therefore, there should be preventative tactics for each of those reasons to help students remain in school. At G High School, students are dropping out, and it is important that educators inquire about why these students are dropping out so that solutions can be created to decrease this phenomenon.

Section 2 will describe the methodology, the specific research design, and the approach. In addition, an explanation of instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, assumptions, limitations, and forms of protective measures for participants will be described.

## Section 2: Methodology

### **Introduction**

I designed this study to gain a better understanding and answer the question about what experiences cause students to drop out of G High School. By researching these reasons, the ultimate goal will be to develop a prevention program that will enable at-risk students to understand the benefits of staying in school, the negative effects of dropping out of school, and the assistance they need to be successful. To be successful in this endeavor, I took careful measures to collect data properly. Section 2: Methodology will describe the qualitative approach that was used, the participants who were involved, data collection methods, the researcher's role, and the methods used for analyzing the data that were gathered. The goal at the end of the process is to understand why students drop out of high school and to provide them with the essential tools needed to become high school graduates.

### **Qualitative Tradition**

I used the qualitative research method for this project study. Qualitative research begins with assumptions and then leads to the study of research problems or questions inquiring into the meaning of individuals' social dilemma (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology and case study were the qualitative research methods used for this study. Phenomenology helped me gain an understanding about the experiences faced by students who dropped out of high school. The case study provided an opportunity to obtain educators' perspectives about the dropout issues that faced G High School.

Phenomenology is a form of inquiry used to comprehend the experiences of everyday life (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Merriam, 2002). Phenomenological research

involves studying the personal experiences of individuals related to a particular phenomenon. This type of qualitative research allows phenomenologists an opportunity to explore individuals' behavior in order to reveal the meaning of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). For this project study, it was important to gain an increased understanding of the nature and challenges of the phenomenon of dropping out of high school from individuals who dropped out of school. This understanding assisted in creating a better prevention plan. The qualitative phenomenological methodology was the approach for this study. This approach allowed me to understand the phenomenon of dropping out of high school from another person's personal perspective. It was imperative to understand these experiences in order to develop a high school dropout prevention plan that would focus on these issues.

The second qualitative method used for this study was the case study. Case study inquiry involves studying a specific topic through one or more cases within a controlled organization. Through case study research, the researcher explores that system in order to report a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007). With the case study method, I was able to explore the teachers and counselors' perspectives on the dropout issue at G High School. Teachers interviewed had been in the G High School system for at least 10 years and were able to provide a personal perspective about the dropout phenomenon at G High School.

Other methods may have been effective for this research, but would not have provided the level of interpretation needed for this project. Narrative research addresses the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of an individual. This method gives an account of events that chronologically linked to that individual (Creswell, 2007).

Because this study does not address the life and experiences of one individual, it was not an effective form of research. Grounded theory research generates a theory. Grounded theory is a design in which the researcher develops a description of a process that was formed based on the views of a large number of participants (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, this method was not appropriate for this study because the study is not attempting to form a theory. Ethnographic research is a qualitative design in which the researcher gains understandings about the values and behaviors of a culture (Creswell, 2007). This research design was not effective for this study because cultural values were not the focus.

I interviewed participants who had dropped out of high school to determine why they made that decision and what they believe could have prevented them from making that decision. Knowing and understanding some of the common experiences can be valuable for teachers and administrators. By understanding the thoughts and experiences of students who dropped out of high school, I was able to categorize students who were at risk of dropping out of school and develop methods that may help them stay in school.

Using a qualitative research tradition provided me with an opportunity to comprehend high school dropout experiences more clearly. It also provided an opportunity to gain an understanding of what students who dropped out of high school experienced when making their decisions, the consequences of their decisions, and what they believe could have made a difference when making this decision. This study helped me to become aware of what educators believe needs to be done to create improved high school dropout preventative measures.

## **Participants**

Prospective participants for this project study were chosen based on their experiences regarding the dropout phenomenon. Each potential participant (teachers, counselors, and students who dropped out of high school) was given a letter that states in detail the purpose of this study and the intended goal. The letter was designed to help the recipient decide whether to decline or accept participation in this study. Those who committed to participating were interviewed about the high school dropout issue. The individuals who participated in this doctoral study included two adult groups. Group 1 consisted of 21 educators, and Group 2 consisted of 20 former students who dropped out of high school.

### **Participant Selection Criteria**

The selection criteria for teachers and counselors included being in the educational field for over 10 years and having had experience dealing with students who contemplated dropping out of high school. A total of 18 teachers and three counselors from G high school were selected; the gender composition was 11 women and 10 men. These educators were interviewed about reasons why students drop out of high school and different intervention and prevention methods that they know about or had used. The interviews took place before or after school hours in the school's conference room. Former high school students were selected from information gained from counselors at G High School. Counselors provided me with the names of former students who had dropped out of high school between the years of 2007 and 2012 and were at least 18 years old. Students who dropped out of high school were interviewed about their experiences and the consequences that occurred from their decisions. They were also

asked to discuss their dropout process and what they believed could have kept them in school.

The two groups of participants were imperative for this study. Teachers and counselors were able to provide suggestions regarding what they believe needed to be done to help students stay in school. Teachers and counselors also expressed how they thought their school had failed or succeeded in the high school dropout dilemma. Individuals who had dropped out of high school were the most important participants in this study. These individuals were able to provide me with information that included why they dropped out of high school, assistance that could have prevented them from dropping out of high school, and the limitations that they have faced after dropping out of high school.

I provided a variety of options to gain access to participants. Time provided included after work hours and on weekends to conduct interviews with teachers. Teachers had the option of meeting with me privately in the school's office (conference room), at the local public library in a private reading cubicle, or over the phone. To meet with individuals who had dropped out of school, I allowed participants to choose a time that was convenient to them and met them at the public library or over the phone in order to conduct each interview. Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour for each participant. Interviews held over the phone were shorter, but there were no other differences noted. The interview questions (Appendices D and E) were all open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their experiences fully and provide me with the opportunity to probe for a clearer understanding. Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed into a textual document. Signed consent forms, the transcripts from interviews, and any

other form of documentation related to this study or the participants is locked in my personal file cabinet and on my personal password-protected laptop, which is kept in my home office. I provided participants with the exact procedures that took place, where information will be located, how the information will be used, and any other relevant information that they wanted to know.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The research site for this study was G High School in Mississippi. The administrator of this school granted permission to conduct research at this site prior to data collection. The administrator provided a letter of cooperation, and that letter was then forwarded to Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to receive approval to conduct research.

I received final approval to conduct research by the IRB on Tuesday, May 21, 2013 (approval # 05-21-13-0040056). After receiving approval, letters of invitation were sent out to potential participants. Former high school students who dropped out of high school received their letters by mail and educators received their letters by email. As responses came in, calls and emails were exchanged to set up times and locations for each interview to take place.

The data collection process for this study utilized a systematic approach designed by Irvin (2007). First, interviews conducted were in a conducive and private setting that participants agreed on. I audio taped interviews for this study. Each audio recording was transcribed into a textual document using the computer. All audio and text files will be stored in a locked file cabinet and password protected computer for at least 5 years.

After interviews were completed and transcribed, the data collected from those interviews were coded to categorize information. Coding techniques help organize information that is collected during research (Saldaña, 2009). Coding allows researchers an opportunity to outline data to confirm an established theory or generate a new theory (Briggs & Coleman, 2007). Finally, data analysis was conducted to comprehend reasons why students drop out of school so that an effective dropout prevention plan can be developed.

Data provided an insight about reasons students drop out, procedures that can help prevent students from dropping out, ways teachers can encourage and motivate students, and options for students who decide to drop out of high school.

### **Instruments**

Interviews were used as data collection tools for this research study. This form of data collection allows a researcher to describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a number of individuals who have experienced it. With interviews, a researcher is able to probe for deeper answers and ask for elaborations and examples (Creswell, 2007).

The interviews provided an opportunity to understand the phenomenon that each of the interviewees experienced (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Through the interviews, I had an opportunity to build a rapport with each participant as well as gain knowledge about individual experiences with the high school dropout issue.

To gain access to participants, I was available after work hours and during the weekends. I conducted all the interviews, and each one lasted approximately one hour or less. The interviews took place either at G High School, in a private reading cubicle at the

public library, or over the phone at a time that was appropriate for the interviewee. The interview questions used for this project study are questions generated by former doctoral students (Baker, 2011; Lasley, 2012). The idea of using predesigned interview guides was chosen due to the information given by my committee chair. Permission was granted to use each interview guide, and revisions were made to fit this doctoral study. Both interview guides contain open-ended questions that will allow educators and former high school students to elaborate on the high school dropout phenomenon (Appendix B and C). I recorded interviews as they took place and took notes to gather important information. After conducting interviews, I utilized coding to categorize the collected data.

### **Reliability**

It is important for researchers to produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner when conducting research (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Merriam, 2002). Reliability refers to the degree to which research results can be replicated. Reliability helps to ensure to others that the results from a study make sense according to the data that was collected and that it is consistent and dependable. One means of obtaining reliability is through member checking (King & Horrocks, 2010; Merriam, 2002). Member checking determines the accuracy of qualitative results by bringing detailed descriptions back to the participants and determining whether participants believe that the details are accurate (Creswell, 2007). It allows involved participants to comment on the researcher's interpretation of the data to make sure statements are accurate. For this project, participants were asked to conduct a member-check on specific descriptions, which was their interview transcription. This process is to ensure that the information

they provided was transcribed accurately. I provided participants a copy of the transcription from their interview in order to provide comments on my interpretation of the data. They had the ability to view the final report to make sure all their statements were accurate.

### **Validity**

Validity is essential in a qualitative study because it provides a study with trustworthiness (Feldman, 2007; Golafshani, 2003). Validity helps decide if the research results are accurate from the viewpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) stated several ways to ensure validity (e.g., member checking, peer debriefing, external auditor, or triangulation). To assure the best possible accuracy and credibility of the findings for this project, I used clarification of bias and peer debriefing to eliminate any discrepancies. Clarification of bias involves self-reflection of the researcher. This process creates an open and honest narrative for potential readers. During clarification of bias, I was able to self-reflect and denote any personal bias that I had about the dropout topic. Peer debriefing involves having a person review the qualitative study. This process is a form of peer review, which involves asking an associate to scan over the study and determine whether the results are reasonable based on the data (Merriam, 2002). During peer debriefing, I had a former colleague read over some of the data and provide me with feedback about the information they viewed.

### **Limitations**

Although qualitative research provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon experienced by several individuals, there are some limitations and challenges when using this research approach. When using

phenomenology, choosing the right participants may result in a minor challenge because it is important not to include anyone or any group of people who can damage the interpretation of the phenomenon. Participants chosen must have experienced the phenomenon and be able to relay important data to the researcher so that the researcher is able to comprehend the phenomenon and develop a better understanding about it. Linking personal experiences may be difficult for the researcher to implement if data are not transmitted well (Creswell, 2007).

For my study, I personally faced some limitations. The number of participants was limited due to the low number of individuals who wanted to participate. The availability to participants was limited to only before or after work and on weekends, which may have contributed to the low number of participants. Because students drop out for a variety of reasons, it was a challenge to make sure I fully understood each individual reason for dropping out of school because that information was imperative for the design of my high school dropout prevention plan. During the member check process, I provided participants with a copy of their transcripts so that they could provide comments and confirm the accuracy of the transcripts. Receiving that feedback in a timely manner was another obstacle that I had to face. Even with limitations and barriers, I was able to conduct my research and analyze data in order to develop my project.

### **Researcher's Role**

I am a ninth grade vocational teacher, and I have been teaching for 11 years, as well as serving as sponsor over several extracurricular school activities. While conducting this study, it was my role to handle and balance my professional and educational duties successfully. As a researcher, I developed working relationships with

all participants in order to conduct a successful study. It was also my responsibility to remain professional and ethical at all times to ensure a positive outcome for this project. My role was to collect data, analyze data collected, design a high school dropout prevention plan, and develop an implementation process for that high school dropout prevention plan. During this process, I had to have an open mind and put aside personal attachment and biases so that focus was only on the data gathered.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Qualitative data analysis is the process of bringing organization and meaning to the cluster of data collected. This form of data analysis provides a way of interpreting significant patterns within the data (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Grbich, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2010). For this doctoral study, I used interpretive analysis. Interpretive analysis is the process of understanding social situations or phenomenon by developing explanations for what is happening within them. Interpretive analysis allows a researcher to make inferences, refine understandings, or draw conclusions (Hatch, 2002; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2009; Willis, 2007).

When conducting a qualitative research study one engages in phenomenological reduction, horizontalization, and imaginative variation during the data analysis process (Merriam, 2002). Phenomenological reduction is the process of continually focusing on the phenomenon to comprehend its essence. Horizontalization is the method of setting out all the data and valuing it equally during the initial data analysis stage and later clustering data into themes and removing repetitious statements. Imaginative variation is the process of examining the data from divergent perspectives and varying frames of reference.

To conduct an interpretive analysis during a qualitative research study, certain steps must be followed to gain a full interpretation of data gathered (Hatch, 2002). I used the following steps in order to gather information about the dropout phenomenon. First, I read all the data that were collected from the interviews in order to have a sense of the whole situation or phenomenon. Next, as I reread the data, I jotted down notes about the details of experiences and perspectives that participants shared in order to begin the interpretation process.

While studying the data, I developed themes with open and axial coding. Coding took place during the reading and interpretation of data. Coding allowed me to organize data into appropriate categories. The two types of coding systems used throughout this process were open and axial coding. Open coding guides interpretation and helps to sort data into major categories (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). The second type of coding used was axial. During the axial coding process, I developed the overall themes by using the connections from the data. During the coding procedures, WEFT QDA helped me to categorize data from interview transcripts in an effective manner. WEFT QDA is free data analysis software used for qualitative studies. This program is a qualitative data analysis tool designed for textual data such as interview transcripts and documents. WEFT QDA allowed me to code the data and create categories.

During the coding process, all related information from each interview and any discrepancies found were evaluated, discussed, and included in the final project. Some of the classifications that I used to divide information shared during interviews include the following: reasons for dropping out of high school, prevention methods that currently are being used, and suggestions for new or improved prevention and intervention strategies.

Through this qualitative research approach, the use of interviews as a data collection method, and with careful data analysis, this study had the possibility of providing a clear understanding of what experiences cause students to drop out at G High School. I analyzed data with the expectations of developing a plan that will encourage students to stay in school by providing educational staff a step-by-step program that will be easy to use and yet effective. Analyzed data from the study provided information needed for this entire process.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted over the phone, at the public library in a private reading room cubicle or in the school's office (conference room) after work hours. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, were audio recorded, and I used a journal during interviews to take notes of important information. Using a journal provides a way to monitor personal reactions during face-to-face interviews (Hatch, 2002). After conducting and transcribing interviews, I mailed or emailed all transcriptions to the correct interviewee for member checking. Member checking provided participants an opportunity to review transcriptions, provide comments on the research and verify accuracy. All participants agreed that their interview transcripts were accurate.

### **Data Analysis**

Before effective data analysis could take place, I had to make sure that I had a clear mindset so that no biased view interfered with the process. To do so I used phenomenological reduction to make sure I continually focused on the phenomenon at hand. I put aside all prejudgments and focused on the data in its pure form. Prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions can contaminate research and data analysis; therefore, I made

sure to look at data with an open mind in order to ensure no feelings or personal experiences interfered with the data analysis process. By setting aside personal views, I began to understand the dropout experience from the participant's point of view as I reviewed and studied each transcript. Through phenomenological reduction, the phenomenon and the participants' experiences remained the focus.

Horizontalization also assisted me in the process of interpreting the data collected. During this process, I read over each individual transcript three times in order to make sure I had a clear understanding of what was being stated so that I could develop accurate interpretations. The first reading was to refresh me on what each individual participant had stated. The second reading was to make notations and write down every significant statement from the transcripts that were relevant to the reasons why students dropped out of high school. After writing down all significant statements, I clustered all the statements that were repetitive or similar in nature. The third reading allowed me to go back and review my notations and each of the transcripts to make sure I did not miss any relevant information.

The horizontalization process allowed me to begin to see commonalities within the reasons why students were dropping out of high school. It allowed me to see that several participants were dropping out due to common themes, such as pregnancy, family issues, academics, and behavior problems. As I began to notice these similarities within the data, I prepared myself to begin coding this information using imaginative variations.

Imaginative variations allowed me to compare and contrast the data in order to denote similarities and differences from statements given by participants. In order to do this effectively, I used open coding in this process. Open coding allows a researcher to

code, categorized and organize similarities, or to confirm an established theory (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Saldaña, 2009). To do this, after all the member checks were conducted and verified, I saved the transcripts as text documents and downloaded into the WEFT QDA data analysis software.

While I read each interview transcript, I color-coded and categorized each section based on similarity in responses in order to interpret and refine understanding. The color-coded sections provided relevant information to the main research question about the experience that caused students to drop out of high school. I highlighted all student behavioral issues in blue, peer and work-related influences and activities in green, family issues in yellow, school or motivational issues in purple and academic issues were color coded in red. I used the color-coded information to create a category tree by coding specific words or phrases in the WEFT QDA program, which began the axial coding process. With a category tree, a specific theme is the tree, and the branches provide the sub-categories. The subcategories included all similar remarks or statements from the color-coded transcripts. A category tree allowed me to view one particular theme and see all the similar responses that relate to that theme. The themes that developed from my analysis were student behavior issues, peer and work-related influences, family structure, school environment, and academics. I used these particular themes to serve as a description of the type of data that would be included in those particular sections. Once I coded and organized interview transcripts, I used the triangulation strategy. The strategy allows a researcher the opportunity to compare and contrast information from other

sources. I compared data from teachers and former students in order to denote similarities about the reasons why students drop out of high school.

As an outcome, I applied interpretive analysis of the qualitative data to refine understanding within the interview transcripts. I was able to interpret and understand the reasons why participants dropped out at G High School and the experiences that they faced leading up to their decision.

Educators who were interviewed provided information about reasons why students at G High School dropped out and I included that information in the category tree described above. I was able to note relationships and similarities from former students and educators' perspectives. Educators also provided responses about strategies for a high school dropout prevention plan. I developed separate themes involving strategies. Those themes included remediation, increase involvement, mentorship, counseling, and changes in the education system. The next two sections will provide details about the themes and findings from this process.

### **Interviews with Former Students Who Dropped Out**

I interviewed 20 former students of G High School who had dropped out in order to gather data and arrive at an understanding of why they chose to drop out of high school. Below is a description of the themes that relate to the reasons these former students dropped out of high school.

**Student behavior issues.** This theme relates to delinquency, drug use, negative attitude, and sexual activity. Participants who gave responses related to the this theme stated that they dropped out due to behavioral issues that were causing them to get suspended frequently, bad attitudes towards teachers and others in authority, as well as

pregnancy. Out of the 20 former students who dropped out of school, five gave responses that related to this theme.

Most felt like dropping out was something that was inevitable for them. DO15 stated, "I probably needed to leave school. All I did was get in trouble." Consistent disruptive behavior caused these students to get suspended or expelled. Most of these students' behavioral issues at school dealt with fights, being disrespectful to teachers or administrators, cutting classes, or being caught with items that are prohibited on school grounds. These students were getting into fights with their peers for talking about each other or feeling disrespected. Former students were cutting class because they were bored with school. They did not want to be at school and felt like it was a waste of time for them. Some cut classes or school because they handled their illegal activities during school hours. All of these actions resulted in suspensions. Once these students missed a substantial number of days from school due to suspensions, they began to get behind on their schoolwork. As a result, this caused students to begin failing and eventually decide to drop out. DO3 stated, "I had been suspended several times, sent to alternative school, and I even been to juvenile detention, so it was more like when is it going to happen versus think about it." DO15 stated, "I just kept getting in trouble, hanging around the wrong crowds, and grades started falling. I began asking myself, 'What is the point of being at school?', so I decided to quit."

Sexual activities that could lead to a pregnancy were also a common issue in this theme for teenage girls. Female participants who dropped out due to pregnancy did not know how to balance motherhood and school. In addition, when a student has to miss

school due to pregnancy or staying home to take care of her child, the absences can cause her to fall behind academically.

I had my first child when I was 12 and my second child when I was 16. By the time I was in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I was not only getting myself ready for school, but my first-born as well and getting the other baby ready for daycare. It all became a little too much, and something had to give, so it was the school for me. (DO6)

Further, DO16 stated:

The doctor put me on bed rest due to my pregnancy, and I just could not keep up with my schoolwork. Teachers sent me assignments to work on at home, but it was impossible for me to stay on task and know what I was doing without being at school to learn.

Participant DO1 added that:

Well honestly, when I dropped out of high school it was something that I knew I had to do. I was in the eleventh grade and found out I was pregnant with my second child. I knew my grandmother could not afford to take care of all of us, so I dropped out because I had to start working.

Teachers and counselors also stated that student behavioral issues are reasons why students drop out of school. This theme is one that teachers and counselors are very familiar with because often they are the ones to witness the bad behavior or have to write the disciplinary reports. They felt students' lack of respect or responsibility could cause them to make unproductive choices, which sometimes results in a student dropping out of school. When teachers and counselors were asked about some of the reasons why students dropped out of high school, responses that related to this theme included anger

issues, behavioral problems, irresponsibility, suspensions, and major disciplinary issues. Teachers believed it had more to do with behavioral issues and counselors felt that home issues were the root of the problem. E5 stated, “Students who have too many disciplinary issues seem to drop out. It is like they are angry about something all the time.” E9 stated, “I think students who drop out are just not motivated to learn and they are always getting into trouble.” C3 stated, “Some students who drop out have problems at home and take their frustrations out on their teachers and peers. Once a student becomes a distraction to the learning environment, they are removed from the educational setting”. E12, stated, “Some students who are at risk of dropping are irresponsible, have victimization attitudes, and the inability to deal with the consequences that result from their behavior.”

As I compared the responses from former students, most students did not see themselves as having an anger issue or being irresponsible, as teachers and counselors had described. DO1 stated, “I really did not want to drop out. I was not an irresponsible kid; I just made one bad decision.” Some students believed their actions were appropriate at that time, but others did regret behaving in the manner that they did. DO3 stated that he regretted the fact that he got into so much trouble and wished that he had graduated instead of dropping out.

**Peer and work-related influences.** Peer and work-related influences involve peer pressure, gang-related activity, or other influences such as work or money. Those who gave responses that related to this theme stated that they dropped out of high school due to gang related activity, peer pressure, and being involved in illegal matters, which allowed them to make fast money and began to attract their attention more than school, and work. Three participants responded to this theme. At the time they dropped out, these

students felt that making money was more important than going to school. All three stated that they were good students who made decent grades in school, but had a stronger motivation to work and make money. That motivation eventually made them miss more and more days from school, which led to their decision about dropping out. DO19 went from working part time to full time. He saw that working more hours increased his paycheck, and to him that was more interesting than going to school. His main priority was to put in more work hours because he wanted to make as much money as possible. Others had the same idea, work to make money. Because there is no way to make money being at school; going to school became irrelevant. One participant was involved in a gang and conducted illegal business. This type of lifestyle took over his entire day and going to school was no longer important to him. Participant DO19 stated, “To be truthful with you, I was always about making money. I wanted to work and make money, and I felt like school was in my way.”

Um, well, I will be honest and try to put this as lightly as possible. I dropped out of school because I had to handle my business and watch my corner. I could not do that in school, even though that school crowd was easy to sell to, but it was too easy to get caught up. (DO8)

From teachers and counselors’ perspective, students who dropped out due to the peer and work-related purposes, dropped out because of work or trying to work a full time job while going to school, peer pressures, or gang-related activity. E5 stated, “Some students drop out because they want to work and make money.” E6 stated, “Too many students are trying to work full time jobs, but do not know how to balance that workload with school.” C16 stated, “Students that dropout tend miss a lot of days from school, get

into trouble, and fall to peer pressure.” Teachers and counselors believed these students allowed factors, such as money or friends, to influence them to drop out of high school.

**Family structure.** Family structure includes family stress, family background, and parental involvement. Former students stated that they dropped out of school for reasons such as having to work to help take care of the family, family illnesses, no parental support at home, or the negative home environment. Four former students provided responses that related to this theme. These four participants seemed to feel that dropping out was a necessity because they had to take care of their family. These former students had to work to help pay bills, so there was no motivation to stay in school. Their motivation was to survive. DO7 stated that he had to get a job to help his dad with the bills. He felt it was part of his responsibility to support his family. These individuals were facing dilemmas at home and had to make decisions based on their living situations. Some were living in single parent homes, had parents who were ill or deceased, or had to deal with parents who had bad addictions. Some of these former students were stressed and did what they felt was necessary at the time.

I had to get a job to help my dad with the bills. When my mom passed away, the funeral expenses took a toll on him and the bills just began to pile up. I just wanted to help my dad support the family. You know, take care of my younger brother and sister. (DO7)

Participant DO9 stated:

My dad had a real bad drinking problem, and my mom struggled to make ends meet, so I felt it was my obligation to help her. I just knew it was something that I had to do.

Participant DO14 added:

My mother was addicted to drugs and she really was never in the right state of mind. It drove me crazy living with her. I just wanted to get away and stay away.

My home life made me lose focus on everything else. I just wanted to get away from everything and everybody, and that meant leaving school and my house.

Teachers and counselors believed students dropped out due to the family structure theme because they had a lack of family support, had a troubled home life, no support at home, low parental involvement, lived in single-parent homes, or had generational dropouts within the family. E1 stated, "In my experience, I have seen that most students drop out due to academic issues and lack of family support." E3 stated, "I get the feeling that the main characteristic of a dropout is a troubled home life. That is what I have encountered in the past." E5 stated, "Many times there is some problem at home or a lack of parental concern or support." C11 stated, "Low parental support or generational dropouts within the family can also be a characteristic of a student who is at risk of dropping out." When I compared the perspectives of former students, teachers, and counselors, there was a discrepancy on where to place the blame. Teachers and counselors put most of the blame on the parents, but from former students' perspective, parental involvement is not always absent. E21 stated, "Most students drop out of school because of the lack of a support system at home. The majority of students who drop out come from families that are dropouts or have had some type of negative experience with school." Educators believed that students are dropping out because parents are not involved in their children's lives. In contrast, former students who dropped out stated that their parents were involved in their life. DO15 stated, "My parents were always involved

in my life. They really wanted me to get my diploma and I was going to do that or at least try.” DO19 stated, “I did not want to disappoint my mom. I wanted her to be proud of me, but I knew school was just not for me.” DO7 stated, “I had to get a job to help my dad with the bills.” Some of these families were just struggling and trying to survive, so these families did what they felt was necessary, even if it meant making their child work and not go to school.

**School environment.** School environment refers to issues that are school-related issues such as boredom, the school atmosphere, or the learning environment within each class. Some of the former high school students insisted that school was just too boring for them and became a place to take naps. DO 17 stated, “I just got tired of going to school. It was not interesting to me.” Others stated that they were so unmotivated to attend school or genuinely did not like school so much that they just stopped going, and the absences began to pile up. DO11, stated, “I just woke up one morning and I was over it, I was over going to school.” DO2 stated, “I did not want to be at school because it was so boring.” Five former students responded in this theme, stating that classes were boring, lessons seemed to be irrelevant to them, there were no interesting clubs or activities to be involved in, and there was no concern to be a high school graduate. These former students felt that the school should have been more interesting and that classes should have been more entertaining. With school being boring to them, students did not feel the need to attend, which resulted in them missing several days of school.

I just did not like school. I never liked school. I hated getting up in the morning, and I hated being there all day long, I just did not like it at all. That is honestly the

only thing that made me decide to drop out because I never wanted to be there.

(DO2)

Participant DO11 stated:

I was always the not so smart kid. I mean I did enough to get by, but I was always off in a daydream. School just was not a motivation for me. I was just so over all of the rules and all the people. It was like everyone was supposed to act the same and want the same thing, but not me I was an independent thinker.

Participant DO17 added:

I missed too many days from school. I know this is probably bad to say, but school just started to become annoying to me, so once I started missing days staying at home and not going to school just became more of my habit.

From the teachers and counselors' perspective, students who dropped out due to the school environment, dropped out because of high absenteeism, poor attitude towards school, no respect for school, and apathy towards school activities. E7 stated, "I think the main problem is excessive absences and failing grades." E8 stated, "Students' apathy towards any type of school activity and their excessive absences cause them to drop out." There is a discrepancy within this theme between former students and teachers and counselors. Students seem to place the blame on educators for not making school interesting, and educators seem to think students were not coming to school motivated to learn. E14 stated, "Students come to school with little or no motivation to finish." In contrast, DO17 stated, "Teachers need to make school more interesting to attend." Both sides have valid points. Students' motivation to learn is just as important as keeping school interesting for them. It is important to find that balance between the two. This

project study will include a staff development strategy that is designed to help educators learn how to teach and motivate at-risk students.

**Academics.** The academic theme relates to students who have academic dilemmas. Some of the former students stated they had issues with failing grades and developed those problems due to behavior or suspensions, absences or not doing the work in class.

Behavior and grades helped me to make my decisions about dropping out. I did not get in a lot of trouble, but because I was trying to be the class clown instead of doing my work, my grades begin dropping. (DO20)

Others stated that they have always had issues with academics and learning, which caused them to fall behind in their earlier academic years. DO18 stated, "I had failed twice. I was 18 and older than everyone in my classes." Overall, former students in this category dropped out because of age (being older than their peers), grade retention, failing grades, and not being able to pass the state test. Three former students responded within this category. These students' academic performance was their deciding factor on dropping out of school. Being in a class with students who are younger, being retained, seeing peers graduate, or failing several classes are different things that affected these students' mindset. Some of these former students did not like being the older person in the class. Others struggled to pass the state test, which is a graduation requirement. These different factors caused students to have issues in school. Students began to lose their focus, and ultimately decided to drop out. DO4 stated, "Most of my friends were getting ready to graduate and leave high school, and I was stuck, so I decided to leave too."

DO18 stated, “I dropped out of school in the ninth grade. I was 18, had failed more than once, and I had no interest in school anymore.”

I dropped out because of those tests that we have to take for the state. I was a good student, but I am just a bad test taker, and I kept failing those tests. Those state tests are not fair, how can my entire high school life depend on four state tests and not my class grades, foolishness. (DO5)

Teachers and counselors believed state test, low-grade point average, failing more than one class, no motivation to learn, retained two or more years, and low reading level affected students’ decisions to drop out of high school. E4 stated, “From my experiences, some common characteristics of a student that is at risk of dropping out includes students who have failed one or more classes, failed one or more SATP, and those with low grades or low GPA.” When comparing teachers and counselors’ responses to former students’ responses, there is cohesion between both. It is clear that poor academics can play a role in whether a student drops out.

### **Student Suggested Strategies**

Some of these former students were able to suggest some strategies that might have influenced them to stay in school. Some of their suggestions included counseling, job programs, shorter school day, anti-bullying programs, study groups and daycares.

DO20 stated that schools need programs that will help students stay out of trouble. DO18 stated that tutors would help for students who are struggling with the work. Other participants could not think of anything that could have kept them in school; some even stated that they probably would have dropped out of school regardless of any type of

assistance. DO11 stated, “Nothing would have stopped me from dropping out. Once my mind is made up, it is a done deal.”

Some students stated that individuals did try to motivate them to stay in school. Some had parents, grandparents, and even teachers who tried to push them to stay in school. Despite the efforts of these motivators, these former high school students decided to drop out of school to meet their own personal needs (working, taking care of family, etc.). Dropping out of high school caused some participants to face limitations in life such as poverty and limited job opportunities. DO14 stated that his life is not stable because his can only find odd jobs here and there. Some former students who dropped out stated that they have not been able to reach certain goals as they wish. DO4 and DO18 explained how they cannot get the jobs that they dreamed of because they do not have the education. On the other hand, some have flourished. Participant DO19 stated that he was working offshore, has a decent life, and is making good money.

Overall, these interviews were able to provide insight and better understanding about why some students choose to drop out of school at G High. This information was very valuable because to develop an effective high school dropout prevention plan, it is important to understand the explanations about why students drop out of high school.

### **Interviews with Educators**

I interviewed 18 teachers and three counselors from G High School to gain insight on both research questions. They provided information about why educators felt students dropped out of high school and feedback on what they considered good strategies to include in an effective high school dropout prevention plan. Educators (teachers and counselors) gave responses such as failures, low parental involvement, students' bad

behavior, students' inability to pass the state test, graduation requirements, excessive absences, and work requirements not being met. When I asked teachers and counselors what type of strategies should be included in a dropout prevention plan, they provided 11 different ideas. Using the WEFT QDA software, I was able to color-code and group all the suggested ideas. The ideas given were based on educators' personal experience with at-risk students. The common themes include the following: remediation, increase involvement, mentorship, counseling, and changes in the educational system. Appendix D indicates all of the individual ideas that were suggested as well as how frequent the ideas were suggested.

The teachers and counselors whom I interviewed provided suggestions that they felt were most important in keeping students in school. Below is a description of each theme and suggestions from teachers, counselors, and former students.

**Remediation.** This theme refers to providing some form of tutorial or remedial services to students who have academic concerns. Ten teachers and counselors provided suggestions for the use of remediation. Three of them suggested a peer tutorial program, and the other seven suggested a school remediation program. They believed that some students need more help than others, and that extra help is needed outside the normal classroom setting. E4 stated, "Providing students with one-on-one assistance will help to improve students' grades. This will also show them that someone cares." It was their belief that remediation will allow a student to progress in the classroom setting once they receive additional one-on-one assistance. Some teachers and counselors believed a peer tutorial program would be a great tool to utilize in schools. They felt that students sometimes learn better, when one of their peers is assisting them.

A good mentorship program would be first on my list. Next, I would say some kind of intense remedial services to help those who are struggling with their grades. Also, I think we need some type of training for guardians and teachers, to help those individuals deal with at-risk students better. (E15)

Participant C16 added:

Students who are at risk academically need a tutorial element. Students who are at risk behavioral wise need some type of behavior invention or counseling element.

We need some form of technical training or GED program as well.

DO18 agreed that tutoring would probably have been a great resource that could have kept him in school. Other students who dropped out due to academic issues stated they could not think of anything that could have kept them in school.

**Increase involvement.** This theme refers to an increased level of involvement from parents and the community in school related activities. Eighteen teachers and three counselors stated that the school needs a higher level of parental involvement, and two suggested a higher level of community involvement. Educators believed that involvement, especially parental involvement, plays a major role in whether a student performs well in school or not. Educators believed when parents are involved in their children's lives and education, those children will do better in school and make good decisions. E9 stated, "A parental involvement element, a tutorial element, and some form of counseling for the troubled youth are good prevention strategies." E4 stated, "I think we should get rid of standardized testing and get more parents involved in their kid's lives." C3 stated, "There has to be a partnership between parents and teachers to ensure

the students are motivated to succeed in life. The students have to take ownership of their education and always be accountable.”

Data collected from teachers and counselors reveal that educators believe that parental involvement is important and can be a determining factor in whether a student graduates, but in contrast, none of the former students whom I interviewed stated that they would have graduated if their parents had been more involved in their lives. Some did state that they did not want to disappoint their parent(s), but none of the former students referred to low parental involvement. DO15 stated, “My parents really wanted me to get my diploma and I was going to do that or at least try.” DO19 stated, “I did not want to disappoint my mom.” This suggests that parents were involved.

**Mentorship.** This theme refers to providing a form of mentoring services or programs to students who meet specific criteria. Five teachers and one counselor believed that a mentorship program is an important element in a dropout prevention program. These teachers and counselor felt that mentorship programs were important because they help to provide students with more structure in their life. Educators believe students who have behavior or family issues are able to participate in mentorship programs and get help with their personal issues. Teachers and counselors believed that this was a way for students to get more involved with activities and open up to students’ issues. In return, that involvement can help them develop a stronger focus on education as personal issues are addressed. E6 stated, “Right now, I think a good mentoring program is essential, as well as some type of parental involvement strategy.”

I never really thought about this before, but I guess that maybe each student that is at risk should be assigned two mentors (one that is a college student and one that

is a teacher). The college student can give fresh real world advice, and the teacher can provide wisdom from experience. (E1)

Some former students agree that mentorship programs should be included in the school system. DO3 stated that any type of strong support system, like a Big Brothers, might have motivated him to make better decisions and behave in school. Students believe that having someone there to motivate and encourage them on a daily basis is important. DO20 stated that it would have helped if someone had pulled him to the side and talked to him.

**Counseling.** This theme refers to providing some form of counseling to students who are observed as having personal or social issues. Four teachers and three counselors suggested that a counseling system would provide a positive influence for at-risk students. These teachers and counselors shared similar views, and they believed that some students need a person they can trust and go to when they are having problems with personal, behavior, or academic issues. Through counseling, students have the opportunity to express themselves and deal with issues that they are facing at home or school. Counselors have the opportunity to assist these students in making positive decisions regarding their situations. E1 stated, “Students need a cheerleader in their corner cheering them on, and counselors can be that cheerleader.” Counselors believed that it was their job to help students graduate. C11 stated, “As a counselor it is meant for me to encourage students to stay in school by helping them to see the benefits of graduating. Counseling is also meant to help students handle conflict and resolution and develop skills.” E7 stated, “Counseling sessions, parental involvement, and some type of tutorial or remedial sessions should be included in a dropout prevention program.” E12

stated, “Counseling is an important key. Peer groups would be good. Match an at risk student with a study buddy that would encourage them to attend school.”

Some former students also felt that counseling is important in helping students to stay in school. DO18 stated that he might have stayed out of trouble if there had been someone to talk to more often. DO14 stated that she probably needed counseling to help resolve some issues. Participants agreed that counseling could provide some type of assistance when working with at-risk students.

**Changes in educational system.** This theme refers to the school’s administration team making changes within the school’s educational system in a way to increase graduation rates and promote students to stay in school. Twelve teachers and three counselors provided suggestions for this theme. Four suggested that an in-district GED program, two suggested teacher-training programs, two mentioned the use of vocational school and training, five stated new graduation requirements need to be introduced, and two suggested an early monitoring system. Many teachers are tired of state tests being graduation requirements. They felt that if students meet the necessary requirements in the classroom, then they should not be required to take a state test that may cause them to not graduate. Many teachers believed that an in-district GED program would benefit school districts. They believed that if students want to drop out and get their GED, they should be able to get it within the district. Teachers and counselors agreed that changes must be made to help the educational system grow and to keep students in school and on the road to graduation.

I think we need different graduation options. For example a co-op program (or something along this line) where students attend school part of the day and work

part of the day. Have work apply to graduation requirements. Educational leaders need to re-think testing requirements. We need to have different requirements or credits for students who want to go to a junior college and those who want to go to a four-year college. Parent education is needed. (E5)

Participant E10 stated:

We need to identify at-risk students no later than 8<sup>th</sup> grade as they transition to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. We then need to monitor and meet with these students on a regular basis and use some type of tracking system throughout each school year.

Former students also shared some of the same views as the teachers and counselors. DO19 stated that a technical school that provides training for jobs should be added to educational systems. DO1 believed that a teen pregnancy program that helps teenage mothers deal with school and raising a baby should be added to the school system. DO10 felt that every school system should have an anti-bullying program established. There are different ideas, but teachers, counselors, and former students agreed that changes are needed in the educational system, in order to increase a student's chance of graduating.

Overall, teachers and counselors felt strongly about the need to include parental involvement techniques, counseling, remediation, and mentorship programs. They believed that the inclusion of these particular strategies were necessary when assisting students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

## Conclusion

Collecting and analyzing the data allowed me to understand the dropout phenomenon better. The research questions were addressed by allowing participants (students who dropped out of school, teachers, and counselors) to provide responses that provided details about their personal experiences with the dropout phenomena. The first research question for this study involved finding out why students were dropping out of high school. Through the findings, I was able to interpret that former students of G High School dropped out due to issues such as poor academics, family matters, lack of interest in school, pregnancy, and behavior problems. Students were facing personal issues that caused them to lose focus on school or they had issues with the school that caused them to want to drop out.

I compared the responses from former students who dropped out to the responses of teachers and counselors, and responses were very similar. The reasons teachers and counselors listed for students dropping out are some of the same reasons former students gave. There was one discrepancy within the responses. Teachers and counselors believed that low parental involvement was a major factor for dropping out, but none of the students included that as a reason for dropping out.

I also noticed that the reasons students dropped out could be interpreted in different ways, but represent a common theme. For example, students said they dropped out because school was boring or they did not like school, but teachers and counselors stated students are not involved in class and lazy. These statements are two different perspectives that share a connection, the school environment. I concluded that students dropped out of high school for numerous reasons, not just due to poor academics. This

particular information was important because I needed to understand these reasons in order to develop an effective dropout prevention plan.

When focusing on the second research question that dealt with finding strategies that should be included in an effective dropout prevention plan, I was able to interpret from the findings that many students who dropped out of high school did not know what strategy could have been used to keep them in school. Most had never even thought about that factor. They could explain why they dropped out, but they could not think of anything that could have prevented them from making the decision to drop out. Some students who had very specific reasons for dropping out were able to think of strategies. Not all of the strategies offered by the students were realistic for a high school setting. For example, a daycare center for children of students would be too expensive to include in a high school, especially with school districts not being fully funded. Other ideas, such as providing technical training at the vocational centers were more feasible. Teachers and counselors were able to come up with multiple strategies that they wanted to see used in G High School. Teachers and counselors felt that their ideas could not only help decrease dropout rates, but also improve the school's educational system.

At the conclusion of the analysis process, I was able to compare my findings to the conceptual framework and the five categories developed by Battin-Pearson et al. (2000). All the reasons that former students gave for dropping out of school were similar to one of the five categories described by Battin-Pearson et al. I found these five categories to be comparable to my findings. For example, former students who dropped out due to family issues could be classified within the family socialization category because they share similar family problems, such as low parental involvement or family

financial strain. Students who dropped out due to behavioral issues could be classified within the general deviancy category because students were dropping out for the same reason in both categories, behavioral problems. When comparing my findings to the literature in section one, I noticed that the reasons participants in this study gave for dropping out of school related to those discussed in the literature review. Studies showed that students dropped out due to academics, behavior problems, school environment, and family issues (Adam, 2007; Lund, 2010; & Perry et al., 2010). Those specific reasons are similar to the causes for dropping out given by participants in the current study. One main discrepancy that I noted dealt with the limitations and negative effects faced by students who dropped out of school. Most researchers who have studied the dropout phenomena focused on the negative effects, such as crime, poverty, or unemployment (Graves, 2009, Levin, 2009, & Treadwell et al., 2008). These studies suggested that a high number of dropouts would be involved in criminal activity and have low income. In comparison, some of the former students in this study did face limitations such as limited finances and criminal issues, but others did not resort to criminal activity and were able to obtain well-paying jobs.

In conclusion, I was able to understand why students were dropping out of high school by gaining the perspectives of former students who dropped out, teachers, and counselors. I was also able to comprehend what strategies these individuals felt needed to be added to an effective dropout prevention plan. After I collected and analyzed the data, I was able to develop the project described in this study based on the findings.

## Outcome

In Section 2, I presented the findings produced by the analysis of data derived from interviews conducted during this project study. From those interviews, I determined that student behavioral issues, peer and work-related influences, family structure, school environment, and academics describe some of the reasons why students drop out at G High School. Former students, teachers, and counselors all provided information that related to one of those five themes. It is clear that teachers wanted to see more strategies included in a high school dropout prevention plan in order to decrease dropout rates (Appendix D).

After conducting and analyzing these interviews, I realized some important factors must be included in dropout prevention programs. Counseling is important because many of these students are facing issues that they need help addressing. A rigorous remediation program is necessary because as soon as students begin to fail, time is of the essence to get them back on the right track before they fall back too far. Teen mothers need some form of assistance as well. Most teen mothers whom I interviewed did not know how to balance going to school, being a young mother, and working. Within any dropout prevention program, it is important to have components within a plan that addresses each individual issue that at-risk students face.

I developed the Road to Success dropout prevention plan to include elements that address each individual known reason why students drop out at G High School in order to assist students and their needs. The overall projected outcome is to be able to meet the needs of students who are at risk, not only academically, but in other areas as well. The goal is to have fewer students dropping out of high school or having alternative options

for students who still decide to drop out of high school so that they are able to learn some type of skill in order to be able to succeed in life.

Section 3 will provide a description of the project based upon components that were found to be most effective for a high school dropout prevention plan.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

Section 3 provides an overview of the project, a high school dropout prevention plan for G High School that focuses on programs that will address the reasons why students drop out of high school according to the data collected. This project focused on developing and implementing programs that provided students with the assistance they need in order to decrease the number of students dropping out of high school. The implementation of mentorship and tutorial programs, parental involvement assistance, counseling, GED options, professional development, and alternative schooling elements were researched for this study to determine effective dropout prevention strategies. The overall goal of this project was to provide students with the assistance and encouragement that they need in order to graduate high school.

### **Description and Goals**

The Road to Success Dropout Prevention Plan (RTS) includes components such as remediation and tutoring, teacher staff development, mentorship program, counseling, community and parental involvement, teenage mother programs, and alternative options. Remediation and tutoring will be used for students who have academic issues and need remedial services. Teacher staff development will be used in order to help teachers learn new strategies to identify and work with at-risk students. Mentorship programs will be provided for students who have excessive behavioral issues. Counseling services will be provided for students who have personal or social issues that need to be addressed. Some students may be involved in both mentorship and counseling services. Community and parental involvement allow school leaders to create different projects that the community

and parents can get involved with at the school in order to increase parental involvement and community awareness. A teenage mother program will be used to assist teenage mothers in balancing school and motherhood. Alternative options will provide at-risk students with alternatives for success.

### **Rationale**

I chose the dropout issue as my project due to the number of students who are dropping out at G High School. I witnessed several of my former students dropping out after their ninth grade year in high school, and I became concerned about the dropout issues that G High School was facing. I wanted to help address the problem and assist in creating a potential solution for the issue. Currently, the prevention plan at G High School assists students who mainly have academic issues. According to the results, students are dropping out for other reasons besides academic issues. Some are dropping out due to discipline, family matters, pregnancy, low interest in school, and minimum parental involvement. The development of the Road to Success dropout prevention plan provides components that address the different obstacles that have been causing students to drop out at G High School.

I used the findings of this study to design the RTS plan that will assist students in improving their grades, provide counseling, mentorship, and other components that will address and assist students with personal issues, as well as provide alternative educational settings for students who remain focused on dropping out.

## **Review of Literature**

For this review of literature, I focused on finding information related to dropout prevention programs, especially strategies used in dropout prevention programs. The themes I used to define my research for this literature review included remediation, parental involvement, high school mentorship programs, counseling, and alternative school options. Using these themes as my guide, I researched information regarding the use or effectiveness of the different categories. To find information on these five themes, I used Walden University's library to gain access to the ERIC database. Within the ERIC database, I used key terms such as remediation, parental involvement, high school mentorship programs, counseling, alternative school options, and dropout prevention plans to search for information. With this database, I was able to search many peer-reviewed sources that pertained to my study. These sources provided me with information on each theme.

In the United States, around 500,000 students who were supposed to graduate high school in 2010 were reported as dropping out (Stillwell & Sable, 2013). Students drop out of school for multiple reasons and because of that, there must be solutions that can help deal with each of those individual reasons (Bowers et al., 2012; Dynarski, 2001). High school dropout prevention and intervention plans are targeted to help at-risk students. These plans should assist students in all the areas that they are struggling with such as academics, physical, social or emotional issues. For a high school dropout prevention plan to be effective, it must contain certain components that will be effective in assisting the needs of all at-risk students.

Within the findings, I noted that teachers placed the most emphasis on the need for academic remediation, counseling, and parental involvement. These three main elements are very important and have the potential to help students graduate, but those three elements do not address all the needs of at-risk students. An effective dropout prevention plan must include elements that address all the needs that at-risk students have. I conducted a literature review to gather more information about what components or strategies are effective in a dropout prevention plan. During the review of literature, information was gathered about dropout prevention strategies. Research was also conducted on studies that analyzed dropout prevention plans. When conducting this literature review, I was careful to note strategies that would be effective for students at G High School. For this review, I used the Walden library databases to find relevant information dealing with high school dropout prevention plans. I found that several research studies have been conducted in the past in order to determine what components contribute to a good high school dropout prevention plan. I discuss some of the plans in the following sections.

### **Prevention Plans**

According to Smink and Reimer (2005), an effective high school dropout prevention plan consists of four main categories. These categories include school and community involvement, early interventions, basic core strategies, and quality instructional time. School and community involvement provides opportunities for community collaborations, career education and workforce readiness programs, conflict resolutions, and violence prevention programs for students. These types of programs (during and after school) can provide students with the extra enhancement that they need

in order to maintain a desire to stay in school by allowing them the opportunity to work with members of the community to understand the importance of education as it relates to real world situations (Dansby & Dansby-Giles, 2011). Early interventions can include family involvement, childhood enhancement programs, and reading and writing programs, which can be effective if utilized while a child is very young. Early intervention helps identify at-risk students at an early age (Finnan & Kombe, 2011; Norton, 2011). Early intervention is extremely important because if a child's weakness is observed at a younger age, there is an opportunity to assist that student with their weaknesses. Basic core strategies that schools should incorporate include mentoring programs, alternative schooling, and out of school improvement programs. Quality instructional time provides openness to diverse learning styles and individualized learning opportunities for students (Smink & Reimer, 2005).

Other studies suggest that a good high school dropout prevention plan focuses on personal initiative, focuses on academics, has family outreach programs, school structure, and work related programs (Carter & Healey, 2012; Featherston, 2010; Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004). The personal initiative focuses on having retreats that will build a student's self-esteem, provide classroom-based discussion and provide individual counseling. The academic strand contains provisions of special academic courses for students, as well as provides individualized methods of instruction and tutoring. The family outreach programs increase parental involvement and include strategies that increase feedback to parents and home visits. School structure can involve several school setting procedures, including creating a safe learning environment, providing smaller class sizes, and the inclusion of an alternative school setting. Work

related programs provide students with the opportunity to receive vocational training or participate in volunteer and service programs. A natural support system, work related programs, and rehabilitation systems provides students with the structure and empowerment that they need in order to get back on the right track towards graduation (Malloy, Sudar, Hagnar, Pierias, & Viet, 2010)

The National Dropout Prevention Center (n.d.) recognized several preventive tactics that have had an influence on high school graduation rates. Some of the strategies include mentoring and tutoring programs, service learning programs, alternative schooling, and career and technical education for students and professional development for teachers (Schargel et al., 2007; Tavakolian & Howell, 2012). Mentoring and tutoring provides a supportive rapport between a mentor and a mentee that is grounded on trust. Tutoring also provides that one-on-one relationship, but it also helps to focus on academic remediation. Service learning provides students with meaningful community service experiences that are connected to academic learning. Through service learning, students can build their personal and social skills, enhance their career development, and learn about their civic responsibility. Alternative schooling provides at-risk students with different educational options that can potentially lead a student to graduation.

Professional development opportunities should be provided to teachers who work with youths who are at a high risk of academic failure. These professional development programs should provide teachers with the skills and techniques that they need in order to assist these students more effectively. This element is important because it can help teachers stay abreast on ways to assist at-risk students. Through professional development, teachers can learn to target at-risk students at an early stage, and that is

very important because a teacher is able to assist and engage them sooner, while keeping them on the educational pathway (Orthner et al., 2011). Professional development opportunities also have the chance to provide teachers with new information on how to raise student achievement, increase students' interest, and make learning enjoyable (Balfanz, 2011; Petrie & McGee, 2012).

Career and technical education will provide a student the opportunity to learn a skill or trade. School-to-work programs recognize the importance of preparing youth with specific skills that are necessary for the workplace, but it is important that students understand the pros and cons of going from school to work versus school to college (Hutchins, Meece, Byun, & Farmer, 2012).

There are varieties of options that can be included in a high school dropout prevention plan, such as remediation programs, staff development opportunities, mentorship programs, counseling, community and parental involvement, and alternative options. Remediation will provide students with a form of tutoring, which is a significant way to build positive relationships with academic performance because students will begin performing better (Rheinheimer, Grace-Odeleye, Francois, & Kusorgbor, 2010).

Mentorship programs are positive components that are included in some dropout prevention plans. Mentorship programs, such as the Boys & Girls Club or Big Brother Big Sister, might be able to provide structure in the lives of troubled youth. Mentoring is a one-on-one system that provides a supportive relationship between a mentor and a pupil that is based on trust. That trust provides a bond that can be important to a student. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center (n.d.), mentoring has proven to be extremely effective. Mentors have the power to change the destructive cycles of their

mentees' lives, providing the guidance that mentees need in order to stay on the right track educationally and socially (Komosa-Hawkins, 2012). Programs such as these provide students with an opportunity to build character, leadership skills and empower them to make better decisions in their lives (Malloy et al., 2010). This component will have the potential of helping students stay out of trouble and on the right path in their personal lives and at school.

Counseling was another common element that was included in many dropout prevention plans. Counselors have many important roles. They assist in developing programs that promote academic success for all students and make sure specific programs meet the needs of potential dropouts (Dockery, 2012). Counselors can assist in creating intervention strategies to strengthen students' desire to remain in school (Blount, 2012). Banerji & Majesky-Pullman (2007) suggested that providing effective counseling is a way to provide assistance for a student early. Continuing counseling provides students with a person they can contact to get assistance with minimizing personal and social distractions and allows counselors to develop early intervention methods that can assist those children (White & Donald, 2010). Sometimes these strategies include providing counseling sessions to students in order to assist them with personal issues that are causing a distraction with their learning.

Parental and community involvement is definitely an element that all dropout prevention plans should have. The presence of parents has a high influence on graduation; therefore, it is very important to create ways for parents to be involved in the educational setting in order to increase graduation rates (Jordan et al., 2012). Research suggests that parents who are engaged directly with their children's lives and education

have a higher influence on their children and those children have a greater chance of succeeding (Noel, Stark, Redford, & Zukerberg, 2013). Members of the community, leaders, and stakeholders also must be involved in their community's educational framework. The community can assist in making decisions, come up with suggestions, provide needed resources, volunteer and provide time to help with projects, and do many other things (Olgetree & Hancock, 2010). This type of support system is needed in order to show students that the people around them do care and want the best for them. It is important for school systems to generate programs and activities that will promote the involvement of the community (King, 2012).

Finally, alternative options must also be included in a high school dropout prevention plan. This option is needed because there will still be students who decide to drop out, and educational leaders need to provide alternative options that those students can consider. Alternative options need to include different educational settings, training, employment, and other services that will assist that student in being successful (Bloom, 2010). Providing students with information about options such as Job Corps, the military, GED programs, and online education will give students options that they can consider before dropping out (Lee & Choi, 2011). These types of options can assist students in starting a rewarding career or assist them in entering college (Nix & Michalak, 2012).

It is important for educational leaders to develop and choose high school dropout prevention plans that include components that will be beneficial for their specific environment and students. An effective dropout prevention plan has the potential to keep more students on track to graduation, which also can result in the development of more productive citizens within their communities.

## **The Project**

I developed the Road to Success Dropout Prevention Plan to assist students who are at risk of dropping out of high school due to various reasons (Appendix A). RTS differs from the current plan used at G High School because it places emphasis on and provides assistance for various issues that cause students to drop out. The components of the current plan include a subject area-testing program, Parent and Teacher Association (PTA), senior mentoring, service learning, and afterschool remediation programs to address the high school dropout rates (G Public School, 2009). The majority of those components address students who have academic issues. Components in the RTS dropout prevention plan will include remediation and tutoring, teacher staff development, mentorship program, counseling sessions, community and parental involvement initiative, and a program for teenage mothers. The prevention plan will also have an alternative component for students who choose to drop out. That alternative component will provide them with options for technical training, GED readiness program, Job Corps, and military informational assistance.

**Remediation and tutoring.** During academic remediation, students will be able to receive the remediation and tutoring that they need for the subjects that they are failing or for additional assistance in helping to pass the state test. Remediation will provide students with a more one-on-one learning environment so they can get the extra attention or help that they need in a smaller learning setting. Remediation will take place with a designated subject area teacher before or after school hours throughout the week. The length of time that students will be required to attend remediation sessions will depend on their success rate. By including remediation programs in the dropout prevention plan, I

am providing students with the opportunity to receive one-on-one assistance from a teacher in order to get a better understanding of core subject areas that they are not passing. This specific component should be included in a dropout prevention plan in order to assist students who are struggling academically.

**Teacher staff development.** Teachers will need to be able to participate in staff development that will keep them abreast on working with at-risk students and how to be more effective in assisting them. Teachers are a powerful influence on whether students like school or not (Hallinan, 2008). Teachers must be willing to work well with each other and parents in order enhance the learning experience of at-risk students (Kreie, Headrick, & Steiner, 2007).

Through teacher staff development, the district will provide teachers with training and learning opportunities that will teach them how to identify and assist students who are at risk of dropping out. This form of staff development training needs to happen throughout the school year so that teachers can continually work with each other in this area.

**Mentorship programs.** The school system will need to collaborate with a mentoring institute, such as the Boys & Girls Club, and work together on providing mentors for students, specifically troubled youth with behavior issues. Positive mentors can provide influence on students in ways others cannot, so to work with mentoring programs in order to provide students with effective mentors can prove beneficial in assisting a student to change their negative ways.

Once a student is flagged as having a behavioral issue, the counselor can work with the student (if parent agrees) to get that student enrolled in a mentoring institute. The

counselor will remain in contact with that institute in order to gain feedback on how well the student is doing or to see if anything else needs to be done in order to assist that student with his or her behavioral issues.

**Counseling.** Counselors need to be involved in the dropout process because they are able to pull students out of class and provide one-on-one “talk sessions” with students in order to figure out what problems are affecting each student. During counseling sessions, students will be able to address specific issues related to their personal and academic growth. If a student is an at risk student, a counselor may also be able to develop specific intervention techniques for that student in order to assist teachers in working with that child.

Students who are struggling, behaviorally or academically, may be included in other programs, but they will also have counseling sessions. The counseling sessions will last at least 30 minutes in each session, but the frequency of how many times they will occur will be based on what the counselor deems necessary. The counseling role is very important because counselors have an opportunity to build a trusting relationship with a student. With that type of relationship, a student may feel comfortable enough to open completely up about all their personal issues (Blount, 2012).

**Community and parental involvement.** Effective parental involvement programs are also very important (Noel et al., 2013). Through teacher preparation programs or in-service staff development, administrators and teachers can develop effective ways to reach out to parents and the community (Carter & Healey, 2012; DeHass, 2005). Research shows that students with involved parents are more likely to stay in school and graduate (Epstein, 2005). As a school, programs or forms of gatherings

will have to be created to get parents and community members to the school and involved with the school system and students' education.

The school district will have to provide programs (preferably monthly programs) where the community can come in and get involved. These programs should allow the community to give their input, assist with in-school programs and provide opportunities for making suggestions for the school. This opportunity will provide time for the school district to inform the community of what the school district needs help with, what the school district wants the parents to be involved in, and informing the community on how the school district wants to be able to work together.

**Teenage mother programs.** In order to help teenage mothers learn how to balance school and motherhood, a program needs to be created to assist teen mothers who are struggling to maintain a balance. The programs do not have to be directly within the school, but school counselors need to know effective programs that they can recommend to students. There are not many around, but teenage mother programs help teen mothers learn how to take care of their child, go to school, work and keep everything balanced. The RTS dropout prevention program will identify programs that will be recommended to students.

Teen mothers who began to struggle in school will be the ones directed to this component. With the assistance of a counselor and permission from a parent, the teen mother will be directed in a teenage mother program that will help her balance the responsibilities in her life, lower stress, and hopefully prevent her from struggling emotionally and academically.

**Alternative options.** This option is for students who ultimately decide to drop out of high school. For those students, educational leaders need to have alternative options set in place in order to help them still be successful in life. For students who decide to drop out, the counselor will provide these students with information about the GED, Job Corps, and military options because many do not know about them and the requirements for each. In addition, in the future, the vocational centers and high schools need to work together to ensure different forms of technical training options for students, so that students can get certifications in specific skills and begin working.

Implementing this dropout prevention program may be complex, and schools may have to hire an extra person in order to do these particular objectives, but students will benefit greatly. It is important that students receive the assistance that is needed to help them succeed.

## **Implementation**

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

I developed this project study in order to understand the reasons why students drop out of high school so that a high school dropout prevention plan can be developed in order to meet the needs of those at-risk students. With the development of a high school dropout prevention plan, resources will be needed in order to make sure it is productive and effective. The current dropout prevention plan at G High School uses funding, community assistance, and volunteers. RTS dropout prevention plan will require resources that include funds to support financially all the elements that will be needed to implement the program successfully. There also may be a need for a dropout prevention coordinator or specialist to be added to the school district to run the program. If the RTS

were approved, funding would be needed in order to improve current vocational centers so that students could get technical training and receive certifications in specific trades. Organizations such as Big Brother Big Sisters, Boys & Girls Club, and teen centers will also be utilized as a resource for particular components in my plan.

Support is needed from all levels in order to make this plan successful. Teachers and counselors will have to be willing to provide extra assistance for at-risk students. They will need to be willing to participate in staff development programs so that they can be able to identify and assist at-risk students in an effective manner. Teachers play an important role in assisting students because they are the ones who see the students the most and they will be useful in helping to address and make notice of any issues.

Educational leaders will have to provide support for those teachers and encourage communities and parents to be a part of the process. They need to make sure all the programs are being used effectively and efficiently. Guardians and the communities are going to have to invest time as well if they want to see improvements and success rates with their children. Their involvement is imperative, and they will have to be willing to provide assistance where needed. Parental and community involvement provides students with support and encouragement to succeed.

### **Potential Barriers**

There are potential barriers that may cause problems in successfully creating and implementing a new high school dropout prevention plan. For example, the financial resources to implement such a rigorous program may not be available. Budget cuts in the educational system have been rising each year, and it may be difficult to fund an intense dropout prevention plan. The support and assistance that is needed in order to make this

plan work may be limited. Some people do not like change and others do not like having to put in extra work or time. Therefore, the support system may not be as strong as it needs to be, which will cause a major barrier. In order to address this issue, motivational factors or incentives may have to be created.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The current dropout prevention plan at G High School contains components that mainly focus on academic issues. That plan will be eliminated once the RTS dropout prevention plan is approved for implementation. The use of RTS will place focus on academics as well as personal and social issues that cause students at G High School to drop out.

It will take time to implement the RTS. First, one must make sure all the elements or components included in the plan are acceptable and doable. Next, the plan must be submitted to the school district (superintendent and school board) to be approved to use in the district. Within this step, changes may be required in order to meet the criteria of the district. Once approval is given, resources will be gathered for each element of the plan. Funding may also be needed for the implementation of certain components within the plan. Next, a plan will be generated to implement the plan into the schools. Once implementation has taken place, the process of evaluation will take place over several years in order to determine its success rate, unsuccessfulness, or to note needed adjustments.

The school district superintendent and school board must approve each component of the plan, but each component will have different implementation

procedures. If the district decides to hire a specialist to oversee the program, then it will be that person's responsibility to implement each component and monitor the progress.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others**

My role was to develop the dropout prevention plan. I had to develop components or strategies that would assist at-risk students at G-High School. My responsibility was to collect and examine data accurately in order to determine what obstacles were causing students to drop out. My responsibility was to present this plan and to make sure it is implemented effectively. It is essential that everyone involved in the dropout prevention plan be responsible for his or her individual role. Educational leaders have to make sure they provide the support needed in order to make this process a successful one. Teachers need to be available to provide the time and remediation that is needed for certain students. Counselors will have to provide the opportunity for students to receive more intense counseling or be able to collaborate with outside programs in order to recommend students to them. Parents and community leaders have to be willing to play an active role in students' lives so that students can have support at home and at school. The students' role is very important as well. They need to be open and willing to accept the assistance that is being provided to them, but not only do they need to accept the assistance, they need to make a conscious effort to utilize the resources being offered.

### **Project Evaluation**

Outcome-based evaluation will be used in order to determine whether the dropout prevention plan is being successful. Outcome-based evaluation provides an opportunity for the school district to evaluate the impact, benefits, or changes that have occurred in a specific amount of time (McNeil, 2011). Outcome-based evaluation will be used ideally

to determine whether at-risk students are successfully benefiting from the use of the implemented dropout prevention program. It will also help determine whether each element or component of the program is successful, needs adjusting or needs to be replaced.

The program logic model will be used to complete an outcome-based evaluation for this project. This type of model allows a researcher to denote inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of programs (Miron & Evergreen, 2008). This evaluation tool was selected because it is a clear way to state and understand the project's goals and projected objectives or outcomes. As stated, project logic model lists the inputs and outcomes of a project. The inputs are what go into the project, which includes the activities that will be conducted during the program. The outcomes are the goals that the project wants to achieve using the listed inputs. For this project, the inputs are the components of the dropout prevention program (remediation and tutoring, teacher staff development, mentorship program, counseling, community and parental involvement, teenage mother program, and alternative solutions). The goals or the outcomes for this project are divided into short, medium and long-term goals. The short-term goals are to increase school attendance, improve grades and decrease behavioral issues and referrals. The mid-term goals include an increase in community and parental involvement and improvement in retention and promotion rates. The long-term goals of this project include a decrease in high school dropout rates, increase in high school graduation rates and an increase in post-secondary enrollment.

To evaluate the outcomes, formative and summative assessment will be conducted using the project logic model as a guide. Formative assessment is a method of

judging the substance of a program while the program's components are in progress (Hendrickson, 2012). During this assessment, the short-term goals of the program's logic model will be observed. Students who are participating in the school's dropout prevention program will be monitored using the school's STI tracking system software. This software is used at schools in order to track student attendance, grades, and discipline records. Students' records (attendance, grades, and discipline) will be examined each nine weeks to see if there is any progress with students meeting the short-term goals. In addition, any notable adjustments that need to be made with the high school dropout prevention plan will also be addressed as the school year progresses.

Mid-term and long-term goals will be addressed at the end of each year for the next 5 years to determine whether progress is being made in those outcome areas. To track the mid-term goals, the counselor or dropout prevention specialist will keep a record of how many community members or parents are participating in monthly meetings as well as school projects. Community members and guardians will also take a survey to rate their satisfaction with meetings and school projects. They will also use STI to track the number of retentions and promotions from one school year to the next. The counselor or the specialist will also track long-term goals. STI will assist in keeping a record of the dropout and graduation rates from one school year to the next. As students purchase transcripts, counselors will also keep a record of how many have enrolled in post-secondary institutions. With this process, all the records and data gathered will be examined to see if there is any progress being made towards meeting the outcomes of the project.

The evaluation of this project will be ongoing for the 5 years. Changes or adjustments may be required throughout this process if unforeseen elements prevent a component from being used properly.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

If an effective dropout prevention plan is created and efficiently decreases the dropout rates and increases high school graduation rates, many positive effects can occur in the communities surrounding G High School. If more students are graduating, there is a potential increase in college intake in the surrounding universities or community colleges. There is also a chance for an increase in the number of productive citizens within the communities of G High School. With more working individuals, the economy may have a chance to flourish. Crime may also decrease when the number of productive citizens increases. Less crime in the neighborhoods means a chance at better environments for the next generation to grow up in, but this will only occur if there is success in the creation and implementation of a more intense high school dropout prevention plan, with the support needed to make it work.

#### **Far-Reaching**

This dropout prevention plan has the potential of being used in other schools if it is found to be effective. This will allow other schools an opportunity to improve graduation rates and increase the number of students who go to college or join the workforce.

## **Conclusion**

The project's overall goal is to decrease high school dropout rates by providing risk students with the resources needed to stay in school and graduate. Section 4 will describe the project's strengths and limitations as well as an analysis of the researcher's development throughout this process.

## Section 4: Reflections

### **Introduction**

High school dropout concerns have been an issue that has gradually plagued the educational system over time. This issue will not go away overnight; it will take determined leaders continually working on this issue year after year until a huge impact is made.

Section 4 includes a reflection on the project's strengths, limitations, and recommendations for future research. This section will also describe what I have learned about scholarship, project development, and leadership and change. Lastly, I will reflect on my personal growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer.

### **Project Strengths**

This project's solution to the dropout issue was thoroughly researched to develop and provide the best resolution. Different types of components for a high school dropout prevention plan were examined, and only the most practical components were included in the development of this plan. This high school dropout prevention plan includes components that can help at-risk students in different areas of their lives. It provides academic assistance, counseling for those who are failing due to personal issues, and alternative solutions for students who ultimately are focused on dropping out of school regardless of any assistance.

Not only does this project study assist at-risk students, but it also helps teachers and the community. With this project study, teachers can receive professional development that can assist them in identifying and supporting students who are at risk. Professional development can keep teachers abreast on this issue as well as provide them

with tools on how to manage at-risk students. The community also benefits from this project study. With more students staying in school and graduating, there is a potential investment for the community. These students can come back and help build and economically support their community.

### **Project Limitations**

This project study does have some limitations in addressing the stated problem. Funding may cause a limitation when implementing this program. Funds will be needed in order to support this high school dropout prevention plan or to hire a dropout prevention coordinator or specialist that can make sure the plan is continually being used effectively within the school. If funding is not available, alternative solutions may have to be used in order to continue with the implementation process. Components that were chosen to be included in this dropout prevention plan were based on the needs of the local setting. Once implementation and evaluation of the plan occurs, adjustments or more research may be needed in order to implement the plan for a wider spectrum.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

During the process of this doctoral study, I only used interviews as a data collection tool, which may have restricted the amount of data collected. Had I not limited the ways data were collected, I may have been able to collect more data in different ways in order to gain more information about why students drop out of high school and get more people involved in the process. For those that may address this problem in the future, I would recommend not limiting resources or data collection tools. Use a variety of ways to gain data. For example, researchers may want to incorporate a round table discussion with teachers, counselors, administrators, and former students to discuss the

high school dropout issue and all the components of it. As participants give feedback, ask and answer questions to one another, the researcher may be able to gain more in-depth information.

I would also recommend future researchers to conduct research at more than one school in their local setting if possible. By increasing data collection, a researcher can see if there are trends or similarities between schools and dropout phenomenon. Overall, I would advise future researchers not to limit their data collection instruments and be open to using a variety of options because one tool may work, but using several tools may provide more usable data.

### **Scholarship**

As a high school teacher for the past 11 years, I have always wanted to do more than just teach. I wanted to affect the lives of students whom people assume would not make it in society. I always had the desire to focus on the lives of students who are considered “troubled.” Throughout my educational years, I have always worked with students who had severe behavioral issues. These students would listen to me before they listened to anybody else. If I remained a constant figure in their lives, they would begin to trust me and start behaving because they did not want to disappoint me with their actions. As I began to notice this happening, my desire to work with troubled youth became even stronger, and I knew that I could make a difference in their lives if I stayed focused on their needs.

Entering into this doctoral program at Walden University, gave me the first step that I needed in order to begin to make that difference. Part of Walden University’s mission is to develop scholars and practitioners who will create positive social change,

and that is my overall mission in life. I want to grow continually in my personal life, while helping others, mainly youth, grow into productive individuals. I want to work towards helping troubled youth make positive changes in their lives, so that they can be examples for others and in return help someone else.

This study provided me with the opportunity to improve my skills as a scholar. Scholarship starts with an inquiry and then moves from an inquiry to creating a research plan that allows a person to gain knowledge about an inquiry. Research is a powerful learning tool. Research is a very time-consuming process, but through research, knowledge about any subject matter can be gained. There are so many different ways to research a subject matter, and that is what makes research unique. Throughout this process, I was able to develop into a skilled researcher. Reviewing journals, collecting data, and analyzing that data allowed me to understand why research is so important. Through research, a person can come to an understanding or comprehend an intriguing phenomenon. I was unsure of myself in the very beginning because I did not think I would be able to meet all the requirements that it took to be a scholarly researcher, but through hard work and determination, I feel I have become successful. I now find it much easier to research and understand the data gathered because I look at everything in a different manner now, and that shows that I have personally grown as a scholar.

Scholarship also involves social change. Through scholarship, one has the desire to create or develop positive changes that will affect communities in a dynamic way. It is my hope as a research scholar that I am able to promote progress through my studies, as well as my actions. This study has provided me with the opportunity to help young individuals and if I am able to do so successfully, those young individuals will be

impacted in a positive manner and then they will be able to influence the lives of others around them.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

Throughout this doctoral study, my main goal was to understand why students dropped out of high school, in order to design a high school dropout prevention plan that addressed more than academics concerns. My overall intentions have always been to help students who struggle academically, are involved in gangs, are teenage mothers, or have other personal issues that prevent them from doing their best in school. This project provides me with the opportunity to help students discover the importance of education and connect them to a better pathway.

My desire to begin developing this project began once I noticed how many students were dropping out of high school on a local and national level. This issue began to bother me even more when I began to see my former students dropping out. I knew something had to be done and I wanted to be a part of that process, and that is where the idea of creating a high school dropout prevention plan evolved. I began researching dropout prevention plans in order to see what schools were doing in order to keep students in school and I noticed the majority of the dropout plans that I came across dealt with academics only and I knew students dropped out for more reasons than that. Therefore, I decided to let my study focus on why students drop out of high school so that I could eventually create a plan that could address most of those issues.

Project development is a very tedious job because a person wants their project completed properly, meeting all the necessary criteria. During the development of this project, I began to understand that it is important to plan every detail and remain focused

on those details. When a researcher has outlined and organized a plan, the design process goes a little smoother. When designing this project I learned to be willing to make adjustments. Sometimes the process will not work out exactly as planned, so that adjustments may be necessary. It is also important for project developers to understand receiving assistance from others can be an added bonus. Whether providing encouraging words, giving feedback or participating in the development of a project, other people can sometimes make the process less stressful. In the end, the benefits make all the hard work of a project developer worth it.

### **Leadership and Change**

In order to be a great leader, a person has to have the ability to lead and guide others effectively. In a school setting, it is imperative to have good leaders so that a school can be successful. Leaders set the tone for how effective a business or school will be. Poor leadership will cause a business or school to fail, whereas great leadership can cause an organization to thrive. Leaders have to possess certain characteristics, such as communication skills, confidence, commitment, passion, and respect. A leader has the ability to know when change is needed and is able to accept the change. School systems are always changing from the way standardized tests are given to the requirements of the techniques used to teach students. As a leader, it is imperative to understand the importance of change, know why specific changes are needed and embrace the benefits that change can bring. Not all changes will seem beneficial at first, but all changes deserve a chance.

I hope to be in a leadership position in an educational setting one day, and I want to be the type of leader who understands the importance of change. In order for me to be

an effective leader, I have to be open to ideas and different strategies that may not seem rational to me but have the potential of being beneficial to students. One person does not know everything, which means I have to be willing to listen to the ideas of others. As a leader, it will be important for me to keep the interest of my students as a priority in order to make decisions that will affect their lives in a positive manner.

Also as a leader, I must always take the time to self-reflect. Self-reflection allows people to examine themselves and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Self-reflection allows a leader to see ways to improve personally, in order to become a better leader. Self-reflection provides an opportunity for a person to step back and examine the surroundings in order to see what is working and what needs to be changed. I try to make sure I reflect on myself regularly because I want to know what I can improve about myself in order to become a better person and teacher. Self-reflection is very important for everyone to do, especially leaders, because it provides an opportunity for an individual to view the past, focus on what happened in the past, and then create a plan of action for the future.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

Throughout this doctoral process, I developed into a more defined scholar. I was able to recognize and define a problem, develop a research plan, collect data, analyze the data, and develop a plan of improvement that has the ability to bring about social change.

This educational journey allowed me to gain knowledge about different research methodologies that I was not aware of as well as how to conduct a qualitative study. The qualitative study is definitely my favorite. I enjoy this type of study because it helps in researching real world situations or phenomenon in an easy manner. I developed

professionally because of this study. It is important that I stay abreast of educational issues so that I can do my part in helping the educational system grow stronger. As a scholar, it is my job to continue learning and taking the knowledge that I possess to help those around me. I plan to continue learning more about students who drop out of high school and the reasons why they drop out so that I can continue to improve the high school dropout prevention plan. A scholar never stops learning, and it is my intention to continue to grow in this area year by year so that I can help more students excel academically.

Throughout this program at Walden, I was also able to improve several personal skills. My writing and leadership skills improved drastically due to this journey. I am a much better writer now. I understand the importance of presenting reliable and valid information in a clear and concise manner so that the audience I am presenting it to can understand it. My leadership skills have grown throughout this process. I am now more willing and open to take on leadership roles versus just being a follower or team player. I am more vocal and I take on duties that I know I can handle. Having strong leadership skills is going to assist me as I work more in trying to help improve the educational system and increase graduation rates.

Scholars should also be devoted to making positive social changes around their community in order to improve society. I plan to continue to work with the youth for the rest of my life. My goal for my dropout prevention plan is to start locally and eventually extend to other school districts. I want to make sure that I am able to reach out and help as many students as I can. In return, I am hoping to improve the lives of students and

their communities by helping to develop hard working individuals who will contribute to society in a positive manner.

Overall, a scholar needs to be willing to learn continually throughout his or her lifetime. Being a life-long learner develops a person into a profound scholar. I am willing to take on that responsibility in order to make sure that I am continually promoting positive social change in my community, especially in the lives of the youth.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

While attending Walden and conducting this study, I have come to understand and realize many different things about myself during this project. I realized that my role as a high school teacher was so much more than teaching within the four walls of my classroom. It is more than just helping students whom I personally know or teach. It is my role to influence the lives of as many students as possible, in as many different ways as possible. My goal as an educator is not only to increase the knowledge of my students, but also to make sure they are okay in all aspects of their lives. Developing into a better practitioner meant that I had to be acceptable to change. I began looking at different ways that I could improve my skills as a teacher and the learning process of my students. I began engaging more with colleagues to see their viewpoints on different things. As an educational practitioner, I had to understand that things are always changing around me, and I have to stay abreast of all those things in order to be the best educator that I can be.

As an educational researcher, I was able to gain more knowledge about the different ways to collect data. With that added knowledge, I was able to develop into a more effective researcher. Being an effective researcher is very important because as a scholar or practitioner, I want to make sure I am gathering, processing, analyzing, and

using the most valid and reliable form of data or information available. Being an effective practitioner also means that an individual is developing into a lifetime learner. As a lifetime learner, I need to continue to grow and understand the different methods of conducting research, so as I am researching educational issues I can make sure I am using effective research methods that are most beneficial to me.

Throughout this journey at Walden, I have learned new things from the time I entered this program, and those things have helped to increase my knowledge and improve me personally. I plan never to stop learning so that I am able to focus continually on helping the youth in the most beneficial methods obtainable.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

After all the reading and literature reviews, conducting research, and collecting and analyzing data, I was finally able to see my project start developing. During the development of my project, I did have several setbacks as I went through the process. Some obstacles were my own personal fault, but others just required me to accept necessary changes. Despite these circumstances, I maintained my determination to finish this journey as well as to continue working on it in the future. This process allowed me to understand how important it is to be patient and stay focused.

As a project developer, I had to make sure I was using the best practices that students would benefit from the most. Developing this project allowed me to feel a sense of accomplishment. Knowing I had an idea, and I created a project based on that idea to help someone else makes this journey worthwhile. I always knew I wanted to help more students stay in school, but starting this program at Walden allowed me to figure out exactly how I could do that, and I have been working to make sure it happens.

As a first-time project developer, I think I did a decent job. There are definitely areas that I can improve on, and with more practice with the development of more projects, I will get better. In the future, I want to create a center for troubled youth, and this process has given me the foundation that I can build on. My passion has always been to work with youth, so my center will revolve around troubled youth and assisting them in becoming better students. I plan for the development of that project to be just as successful as this one.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

The purpose of this project was to understand why high school students were dropping out of school. With that understanding, the project of developing a high school dropout prevention plan was developed. With this plan, I wanted to create a positive impact in communities by providing an opportunity for positive social change through the process of helping at-risk students remain in school. This project is very important because far too many youth are dropping out of high school and not living positive, productive lives. I designed this study to help prevent students from dropping out of school by providing them with the academic assistance that they need as well as counseling and other elements to help them with the personal issues that many of them face from day to day.

Overall, the development of this project has the potential to benefit many people. Students who may consider dropping out, now will have a dropout prevention plan that will assist in reaching out to them and helping them in areas that focus on their academic and personal issues. Teachers will have the opportunity to identify and assist at-risk students in more improved ways. Parents will understand their importance in the

educational system and have opportunities to assist in educational activities. The community will have more students graduating and developing into hardworking, productive citizens.

One positive social change can create great opportunities for more positive social changes and continual growth. I hope that through this project study and the development of the high school dropout prevention plan, many students will have the benefits of being impacted in a positive manner and begin to be an influence to those around them. The overall goal of this project study is to decrease the high school dropout rate, but it is also to help influence the lives of high school students and help them understand the importance of their life and their education.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

This study is very important to educators at G High School who are committed to increasing high school graduation rates and decreasing the dropout rates. Throughout this study, literature reported that the consequences of dropping out of high school, such as crime or poverty, not only affects the former students, but also the community in which they reside. An effective high school dropout prevention plan will assist at-risk students in staying in school, and potentially benefit communities by having more students graduating and becoming productive citizens in their society.

This project has the potential to assist school leaders at G High School in reaching out to students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. By keeping students in school, there is a possibility of increasing graduation rates. Implementing a high school dropout prevention plan that has the potential to assist students with academic problems, family dilemmas, behavioral issues, teen pregnancy, or alternative options has the

opportunity to reach out to more types of at-risk students and provide them with the academic remediation or counseling that they need. Normally, academic issues draw the most attention, but it is important to identify the other reasons that are causing students to struggle with school. With this particular project, the focus was on the reasons that were causing students to be at risk of dropping out at G High School.

During implementation, outside organizations will have to be utilized, community and parental projects will have to be created, teachers will have to be allotted time to assist in areas where needed, and students participating in the program will have to be aided in understanding the components. To do this effectively, school leaders have to be willing to implement fully each step and follow through in each area. Teachers and counselors have to be willing to apply the time that is needed for each individual student. If this project is applied half-heartedly, then nothing will be accomplished, and students will not receive the suggested benefits that this project potentially has. If this project is implemented correctly, at-risk students are identified, and services for these students are rendered appropriately, then there is a possibility for academic success and personal growth for students involved.

In the future, implementing and evaluating this project in other schools across the state will help in increasing high school graduation rates. Through continual research and making needed adjustments to this project, the dropout prevention plan has the potential of becoming beneficial to more students and incorporates more involvement that is parental. Future research should also include ways to incorporate the components of the high school dropout prevention plan on a level where elementary and middle school administrators can use them. Students with behavioral and academic issues sometimes

start having problems at an early age, so finding ways to use these components with younger students may be beneficial to them as they become older. In the future, I plan to research ways that identify at risk elementary and middle school students, in order to assist those students at an early age. If educators provide the needed support to students at a younger age, hopefully, they will have fewer issues as they begin their high school years.

### **Conclusion**

Education is extremely important in society. Without an education, a person will have some limitations on his or her life and lifestyles. It is imperative to get students to understand the importance of education and the benefits that an education provides for them. If educators, parents, and the community continue to work together in order to make sure students are successful, there is a potential that high school graduation rates may increase along with the number of productive, young citizens. Educational leaders must continue to develop strategies that will assist at-risk students with completing high school graduation requirements. Developing new high school dropout prevention plans and incorporating new teaching strategies must be an ongoing process to ensure students stay on a successful pathway.

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**Appendix A: The Project**

Road to Success  
High School Dropout Prevention Plan: Implementation Manual

Section 1 – Project Background

Section 2 – District Approval Process

Section 3 – Implementation Procedures

Section 4 – The Evaluation Process

## Section 1: Project Background

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project is to assist teachers, counselors, administrators, school district leaders, parents, and the community with helping students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. This manual will introduce the components of this dropout prevention plan and describe the roles of each of the individuals listed above. This project was designed to utilize strategies that will address different factors that students face. My role will be to conduct and meet the necessary requirements to implement this dropout prevention plan into G High School.

G High School is facing issues dealing with high dropout rates. It is currently utilizing a high school dropout prevention plan that consists of a senior mentor program, service learning, and an afterschool mentoring curriculum (G Public School, 2009). The components of this program are used only to assist students who are at risk of dropping out of school due to academic issues. Students are dropping out for various reasons such as behavioral issues, pregnancy, family problems, peer pressure, school environment, along with the academic issues. In order to assist more at-risk students, a high school dropout prevention plan must be able to address the reasons why students are dropping out.

High school dropout rates were an issue that concerned me, and I wanted to help do something about it. My project was to develop a high school dropout prevention plan (Road to Success Dropout Prevention Plan) that will include strategies that have the possibility of assisting students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. In order to achieve that goal, strategies included in this plan are components that will assist students

who drop out due to academic and other social or emotional reasons. The objective of this dropout prevention plan is to increase the high school graduation rate of G High School by decreasing the number of students who are dropping out.

This plan will benefit at-risk students by allowing them the opportunity to participate in programs that may have the potential of assisting them to stay in school and remain on track with graduation. The components of this dropout prevention plan were chosen based on the data collected during this study. The data collected provided information about why students were dropping out of high school, and these components were designed to assist students in their specific at risk area. The following information lists the components of the projected high school dropout prevention plan along with a brief description of each component's purpose.

**Remediation and tutoring.** The purpose of the remediation and tutoring component is to provide remediation and tutoring to students who need additional assistance in subjects that they are failing or for assistance in helping to pass the state test. Remediation will provide students with a more one-on-one learning environment so they can get the extra attention or help that they need in a smaller learning setting.

**Teacher staff development.** Teachers will need to be able to participate in staff development that will keep them abreast on working with at-risk students and how to be more effective in assisting them. Through teacher staff development, the district will provide teachers with training and learning opportunities that will teach them how to identify and assist students who are at risk.

**Mentorship programs.** The purpose of the mentorship program is to provide a mentor for students who have behavioral issues. The mentorship component is designed

to help provide structure and stability in the lives of troubled youth with behavioral concerns by working with mentorship organizations (such as Big Brother Big Sister) to help monitor and guide students on a regular basis.

**Counseling.** The purpose of the counseling sessions is to provide students who are at risk due to social or emotional issues, a trusted person with whom they can discuss their personal issues or concerns. The main goal of these sessions is to provide one-on-one “talk sessions” with students in order to figure out what problems are affecting each student. During counseling sessions, students will be able to address specific issues related to their personal and academic growth. If a student is an at risk student, a counselor may also be able to develop specific intervention techniques for that student in order to assist teachers in working with that child.

**Community and parental involvement.** The purpose of the community and parental involvement component is to provide the school district an opportunity to create ways to get the community and parents involved in the education system as well as to increase participation in school functions.

**Teenage mother program.** The purpose of a teenage mother program is to assist teenage mothers in learning how to balance motherhood with school and work. With the increased number of teen pregnancy, this program will be helpful in assisting teenage mothers to stay on track with graduation.

**Alternative options.** This option is for students who ultimately decide to drop out of high school. This component is designed to provide those students with information that they can use for alternative options. Information will be provided on things such as the GED options, Job Corps, and military options.

## Section 2: District Approval Process

Before implementation can take place, the appropriate approval from school administration, superintendent, and school board must be received. In order to receive those approvals, I will present my study and findings to the school principal, district superintendent, and the school board, respectively. School leaders, I will explain the reason for my study, the findings, and the development of my high school dropout prevention plan based on the data collected.

During my presentation I will elaborate on the high school dropout prevention plan that I created, describing each component, its purpose, how students will benefit from it, how it will be implemented into the school system, and the evaluation process. After presenting this information to each person, respectively, I will address any concerns that they have, making notations of adjustments or changes that they want to make. I will then go back and adjust my plan according to their specific suggestions or requirements, and then present the information again until all parties are satisfied. School officials will also have to determine which outside organizations they want to use in the mentorship program, whether or not they want to include a dropout prevention specialist, and how much funds they will allowed for this program. Once approvals have been granted, I will then contact the organizations that we were approved to work with and develop a process for enrolling students into their programs. Implementation of the actual dropout prevention plan will begin the following school year.

### Section 3: The Implementation Procedure

The implementation of each district-approved component will take place the school year after approval. The following information describes how each component will be implemented in the school system in correlation with the high school dropout plan. For this project, no specific number of individuals will be denoted. All individuals that meet the specific criteria of each component in the dropout prevention plan will be able to participate (with parental consent in certain areas). The more individuals to participate, the more data that can be collected for the evaluation process. The following components of the dropout prevention plan are listed below, along with the criteria or characteristics that must be met in order for a student to participate in that specific component as well as the implementation procedure for each component.

### **Dropout Prevention Plan: Implementation Process**

**Component:** Remediation and Tutoring

**Participants:** Students who are at risk academically (such as those students who are currently failing 2 or more classes, behind 2 or more grade levels, or have not passed state test) will be chosen to participate in this component. This component will allow them to receive extra assistance on their work or in their studies. Emphasis will be placed on core subject classes such as English, science, mathematics, and history because those classes are stated tested areas and are needed in order for students to graduate.

**Implementation Process:**

1. To implement this component, counselors will identify students who are struggling academically using STI (Software Technology Incorporated). STI is a tracking software that is used to record and track students' grades, absentee, discipline, and other academic components. A list of student names will be compiled detailing which subject area(s) a student needs remediation. That compiled list will also determine how many teachers will be needed in order effectively remediate students with a small teacher to student ratio.
2. Once students are identified, their parents or guardians will receive notification about their child's academic issues along with a detailed summary of the remediation sessions that are being provided. Parents will be informed what areas students are struggling in, the graduation requirements related to that subject area, and the goals of the remediation sessions. Parents must grant permission for their child to participate because remediation sessions will be held before or after school and students may need transportation to and from sessions.

3. Remediation will take place before or after school, depending on the time set by the administration. Teachers responsible for remediation will be subject area teachers also selected by the administration. During remediation, students will cover objectives that they have not mastered or skills that they need to know for state test purposes. If a student needs tutoring for multiple subject areas, they will alternate weekly between those different remediation sessions.

**Timeframe:** Students will receive remediation for one hour, three times a week. It will end once their grades have improved or state test is passed.

**Faculty Involved:** The counselor will be used to make personal contact with students and parents. Subject area teachers will be used to perform remediation. If a prevention specialist is hired, that person will be of assistance as well.

**Monitoring System:** STI will be used to monitor students' progress and grades.

**Component:** Teacher Staff Development

**Participants:** Teachers and administrators will be the individuals participating in this component.

**Implementation Process:**

1. Teachers have professional development throughout each month of the school year. In order to help prepare teachers to teach at-risk students, the administration will provide in-service staff development for teachers to participate in so they can learn new teaching strategies that are designed to help at-risk students.
2. The district will develop and provide their personal staff development program for teachers and occasionally hire an expert to come in and work with teachers on how to assist and teach at-risk students. These staff development sessions will provide teachers with strategies that they can use in their classroom in order to assist students who may be considered at risk students.
3. Staff development will also take place when teachers (not necessarily all teachers) are sent to participate in staff development programs held by other schools or institutions. Teachers who participate in those programs will come back and share information with fellow colleagues by presenting the information in a staff development setting.
4. Teachers will have the responsibility of implementing the strategies discussed in the staff development into their classroom.

**Timeframe:** At least one staff development each month needs to contain a session about servicing at-risk students.

**Faculty Involved:** Administration will be responsible for helping to conduct staff development meetings that provide teachers with information they need to know about assisting at-risk students, along with the assistant of the dropout prevention specialist (if the district decides to hire one).

**Monitoring System:** Teacher feedback and administrative evaluation will help determine which strategies are most helpful in the classroom. Administrative evaluation will allow principals to observe whether teachers are implementing learning and teaching strategies within their lessons and to see which ones are working more effectively in the learning process. Teacher feedback will allow teachers to come together to discuss what is working, what is not working, and ideas they may have to make a strategy more effective.

**Component:** Mentorship Programs

**Participants:** Students with reoccurring behavioral issues will be involved in this component of the high school dropout prevention plan.

**Implementation Process:**

1. First, school leaders will collaborate with institutions such as Big Brother Big Sister or the Boys & Girls Club in order to develop a working relationship with them. Administration and the school board will determine which institute they want to collaborate with for mentorship services. With the assistance from these organizations, the school will work to enroll students who need stability in their life.
2. The school and the specific organization will work together to set up a system where students with behavioral issues can enroll in the program through the school system.
3. Administration will choose students who have behavioral or other stability issues to participate in this program. They will make their decision by using STI to search for all students with an extensive behavioral record. The most focus will be placed on students who constantly receive detentions or referrals each month.
4. Parents will receive notification about the mentorship program. They will be given information about the purpose of the mentorship program, the goals surrounding this component, and an explanation about why their child was chosen to participate. The parents or guardians must grant permission for the student to participate before they can be enrolled in the program.

5. Once permission is granted, the student will talk with the counselor or prevention specialist to discuss information about the mentorship program, student expectations, and requirements.
6. Next, the enrollment process will take place. The counselor or prevention specialist will enroll the student into the organization that the district chose (for example Boys & Girls Club).
7. The student will then participate in the organization's program in order to gain structure and stability. The student will be required to participate in all the activities mandated by that organization and meet all required goals.

**Timeframe:** Students will remain in that program until they reach the maximum age limit or until the parent decides to remove them.

**Faculty Involved:** The counselor (or the prevention specialist if hired) will be used to make personal contact with students, parents, and mentorship organization. The school board and administrators will be used to decide which organization's mentorship program to use for this specific component.

**Monitoring System:** Administration or counselors will provide specific behavioral goals or expectations for students based on their behavior record. Those goals must be met weekly by the student. The organization will provide weekly progress reports to the school about each student's progress and describe whether the students met their goal. To do this, the organization will use a behavioral observation log (located on p. 121). These reports will give general information about the student's improvements, strengths, and weaknesses, and will describe any specific concerns that may have been observed.

**BEHAVIOR OBSERVATION LOG**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Next to each specific, measurable goal or expectation, please write in detail whether or not the student met that goal (providing evidence of specific instances or information that caused the student to meet or not meet that goal).

<b><u>Behavior Goal/Expectation</u></b>	<b><u>Monday</u></b>	<b><u>Tuesday</u></b>	<b><u>Wednesday</u></b>	<b><u>Thursday</u></b>	<b><u>Friday</u></b>

Additional Comments/Kudos/Concerns:

**Component:** Counseling

**Participants:** Students with behavior, family, or emotional issues will be involved in the counseling sessions.

**Implementation Process:**

1. The counselors will identify students who will be chosen to participate in this component in one of the following manners: Students with reoccurring behavior issues, students who personally make counselors aware of their issue, and students who have issues that are identified through the personal assessment known as BASC-2 (behavioral and emotional screening system), which is an assessment that is given to every student throughout the year during homeroom to identify students who may have personal or emotional issues. The students identified will be chosen to receive counseling sessions throughout the week.
2. Parents will receive notification about the counseling sessions. They will be informed of procedures used in selecting their child, of the purpose of the counseling sessions and will be provided a list of goals set for the student. Parents or guardians must give written permission for the student to receive counseling.
3. Counseling sessions will take place at the school during school hours in the counselor's office or the conference room. Counselors must create rotation schedules to denote when and whom they will see each day. Because counselors do have other job duties, if the district does hire a specialist, the specialist will also assist in this area when needed.

**Timeframe:** Counseling sessions will be at least 30 minutes long and completed twice a week. Each student will continue their sessions until their specific goal, which will be set by the counselor, is met.

**Faculty Involved:** The counselor will be used to make personal contact with students and parents.

**Monitoring System:** Counselors will monitor students' progress and note what improvements the students are making as they work towards reaching the students' specific counseling goal. The counselor will also use STI (the school's data tracking system) to keep track of student's progress with grades and behavioral reports.

Counselors will use the counseling session log (located on page 124 to denote specific information gathered during the sessions.

**COUNSELOR SESSIONS LOG**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Setting</b>	<b>Date/Time</b>	<b>Session Notes</b>

**Component:** Community and Parental Involvement

**Participants:** All community members and parents or guardians will be encouraged to participate in this component of the high school dropout prevention plan.

**Implementation Process:**

1. At the beginning of the school year, the school will hold a community conference explaining the importance and benefits of having the community and guardians involved in the school system. School leaders will also explain the different ways that the community and parents can be involved within the school throughout the year. This first meeting will be an informal meeting to let the community and parents know the higher level of involvement that is needed and expected from them.
2. After that initial meeting, the school will hold at least one meeting each month for the community and guardians (this meeting can be in conjunction with the Parent Teacher Association). Within these monthly meetings, the school will outline its agenda for that month and discuss specific ways that the community and parents can assist with different functions going on at the school. Community members and parents will then be allowed to sign up for the specific task that they want to assist with during that month.
3. School leaders will have to create different projects that the community and parents can be involved in at the school. Projects can include, but is not limit to things such as assisting at sporting events or raising funds for school resources.

4. School officials will also allow community members to give feedback and suggestions during these monthly meetings, so they can express ways they would like to help or changes they would like to see.
5. Communication between the school and the community must be ongoing throughout the entire school year.

**Timeframe:** Meetings will be held once a month at the school.

**Faculty Involved:** Administration, teachers, and counselors all will assist in creating agendas for monthly meetings as well as developing or choosing at least one school function that the community and parents can assist with each month.

**Monitoring System:** A record will be kept to keep track of the number of community members and parents who come to the meetings as well as the number that participate in the school functions. The volunteer count sheet (located on page 127) will be used to keep track of attendance numbers. This information will be recorded to see if community and parental involvement increases as well as determine which functions the community members and parents participate in the most. Community members and guardians will also have the opportunity to take a survey about the effectiveness of school programs.



**Component:** Teenage Mother Program

**Participants:** This component of the dropout prevention plan will focus on teenage mothers who are struggling academically or having a hard time balancing being a mom and going to school.

**Implementation Process:**

1. Depending on the school board's decision, the teenage mother program will be held either at the school after school hours with qualified volunteer workers selected by school board according to their criteria or off school campus at a designated facility that is designed to assist teenage mothers in balancing school and motherhood (an institution such as CARES).
2. To implement this component any teenage mother or pregnant teen who is struggling academically or who can be identified as at risk due to emotional behaviors, will be acknowledged by the counselor or recognized by a teacher and brought to the counselor's attention. Teenage mothers can also voluntarily seek information to participate in this program.
3. Once students are identified, a notification will be sent home to that teen's guardians in order to receive permission to participate in the teenage mother program. The notification will inform parents that their child has been identified as being at risk of dropping out of school since becoming pregnant or after having a baby. It will inform parents that the school wants to provide their child with assistance on learning how to balance motherhood and going to school. The notification will outline the type of assistance that their child will receive, the benefits, and the goals of the program.

4. Once permission is granted, that student will be informed about the program, its expectations, and requirements.
5. The counselor will then enroll the student in the program.
6. The students will participate in the program after school and will gain assistance with balancing parenting and going to school. The student will be required to participate in all activities or functions and meet the goals set by the program.

**Timeframe:** The program is designed to help teenage mothers learn how to balance motherhood and school; therefore, the teenage mother will remain in that program until positive progress has been made based on that program's criteria.

**Faculty Involved:** The counselor will be used to make personal contact with students and parents. Administration will be involved in choosing which teenage mother organization that they want to use.

**Monitoring System:** STI will be used to monitor students' progress with grades and the program used to assist the teenage mothers will provide weekly progress updates on students' development. The behavioral observation log (located on page 121) will also be used for this component. These reports will give general information about the students' improvements, strengths and weaknesses, as well as any specific concerns that may have been observed.

**Component:** Alternative Options

**Participants:** Any student who chooses to dropout will participate in this component.

This component will be a part of the exit procedure and students will receive information about other alternative educational options.

**Implementation Process:**

1. Students who come to the counselor's office to drop out of school will be given information on the GED program, Job Corp, Camp Shelby, trade school, and military options (Information will not be limited to just these specific options. Other options will be added as they become available). These students will be provided with detailed information about each of these programs including each program's purpose, enrollment requirements, the criteria, the benefits, and expectations.
2. Students will be given a choice of choosing to want to participate in one of the alternative options or to withdraw without partaking in any of them.
3. Students who decide they want to participate in one of the programs listed above will be given contact and enrollment information by the counselor.
4. The counselor will assist that student in the enrollment process to ensure the student does everything that is required.
5. It will be that student's obligation to meet the requirements or criteria of that program.
6. The counselor will contact that student quarterly to get information on the student's progress and get updates on the student's well-being.

7. In the future, the school district will need to make sure its vocational or technical school in the district is equipped to provide students with the opportunity to receive a certificate in specific trades or skills.

**Timeframe:** The timeframe for this component will be based on the program that the student chooses.

**Faculty Involved:** The counselor (or the prevention specialist if hired) will be used to make personal contact with students and parents.

**Monitoring System:** Counselors will contact the former student quarterly to get an update on the student's progress and well-being.

#### Section 4: The Evaluation

The program logic model will be used to conduct an outcome-based evaluation on this project. This evaluation tool was selected because it is a clear way to state and understand the project's goals and projected objectives or outcomes. The inputs are what goes into the project, which includes the activities that will be conducted during the program. The outcomes are the goals that the project wants to achieve using the listed inputs. For this project, the inputs are the components of the dropout prevention program (remediation and tutoring, teacher staff development, mentorship program, counseling, community and parental involvement, a program for teenage mothers, and alternative solutions). The goals for this project are divided into short, mid-term, and long-term goals. The short-term goals are to increase school attendance, improve grades and decrease behavioral issues or referrals. The mid-term goals include the increase in community and parental involvement and improvement in retention and promotion rates. The long-term goals for this project include a decrease in high school dropout rates, increase in high school graduation rates and an increase in post-secondary enrollment.

To evaluate the outcomes, formative and summative assessment will be conducted using the project logic model as a guide. Formative assessment is a method of judging the substance of a program while the program's components are in progress (Duckor, 2014). During this assessment, the short-term goals on the program logic model will be observed. Students who are participating in the school's dropout prevention program will be monitored using the school's STI tracking system software. Students' records (attendance, grades, and discipline) will be examined each 9 weeks to see if there is any progress with them meeting the short-term goals. In addition, any notable

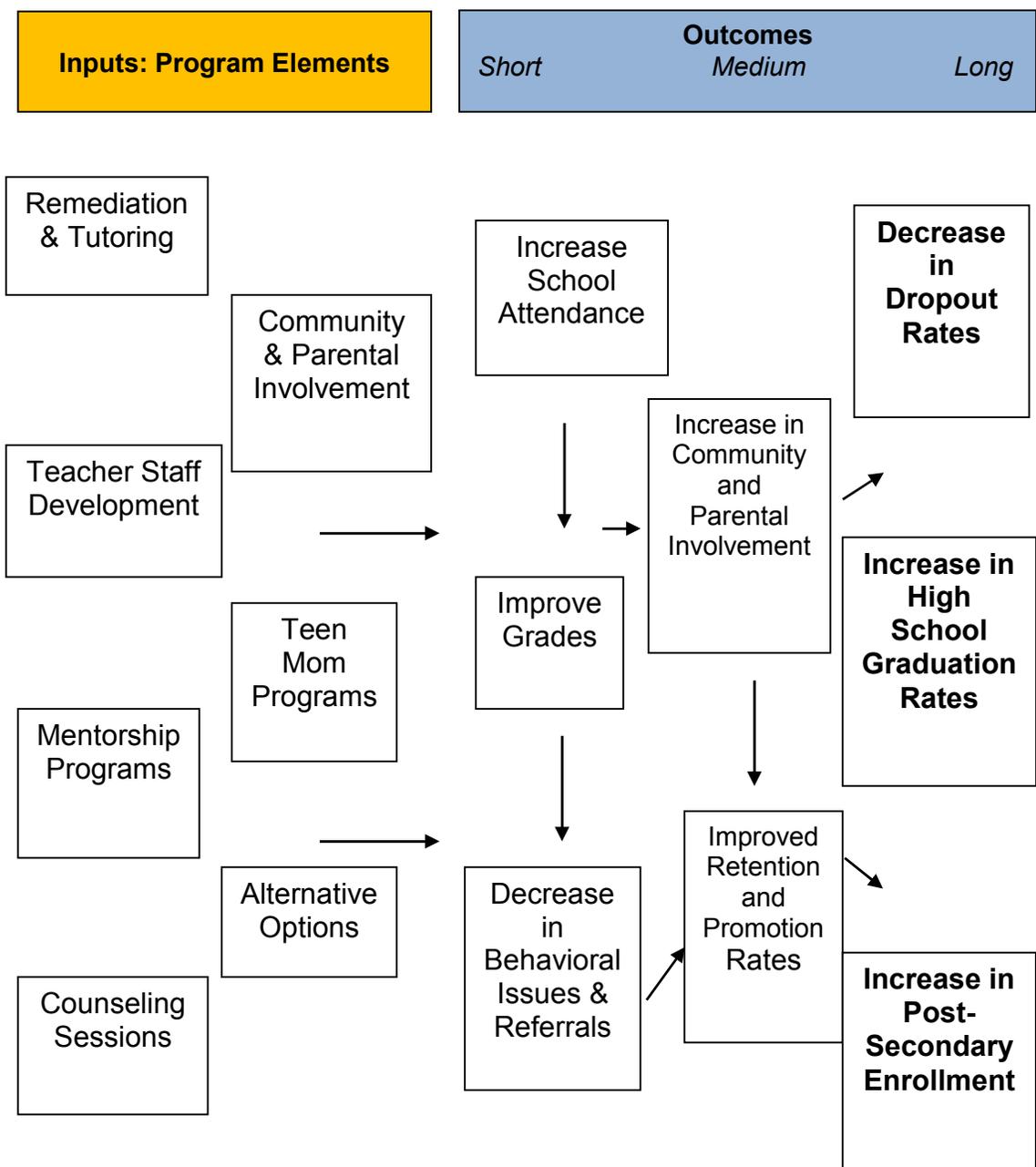
adjustments that need to be made with the high school dropout prevention plan will also be addressed as the school year progresses.

Mid-term and long-term goals will be addressed at the end of each year for the next 5 years to determine whether progress is being made in those outcome areas. To track the mid-term goals, the counselor or dropout prevention specialist will keep a record of the number of community members or parents who are participating in monthly meetings as well as school projects. They will also use STI to track the number of retentions and promotions from one school year to the next. Long-term goals will also be tracked by the counselor or the specialist. STI will be used to keep the record of the dropout and graduation rates from one school year to the next. As students purchase transcripts, counselors will also keep a record of how many have enrolled in post-secondary institutions. With this process, all the records and data gathered will be to see if there is any progress being made towards meeting the outcome or the goals of the project.

The evaluation of this project will be ongoing for the next 5 years. Changes or adjustments may be required throughout this process if unforeseen elements prevent a component from being used properly.

## High School Dropout Prevention Logic Model

Miron & Evergreen, 2008



## **Appendix B: Interview Guide for Former High School Students Who Dropped Out of School**

### *Interview Questions:*

1. What do you consider the most important factor that contributed to your decision to drop out of school?
2. What had the strongest impact on your decision to drop out; people (teachers, administrators, peers) or systems (rules, policies, laws)?  
Explain.
3. If you had been thinking about dropping out prior to your final decision, was there anyone or anything keeping you from dropping out of school?
4. Before dropping out of school, was there anyone in school who motivated you to stay and graduate? Who? How?
5. Was the process of dropping out a sudden decision or was it a decision that you had been considering for some time? If so, for how long?  
Explain the process.
6. Do you feel there was a specific situation that pushed you to dropping out of school (an argument, a disciplinary action, a prolonged absence from school, etc.)?
7. What could have any school staff member done or said to make you change your mind about dropping out?
8. What programs or support systems could have the school have in place to motivate, encourage, support you to stay in school?
9. Do you have any regrets about making that decision?

10. After dropping out of high school, in what did you get involved?
11. What limitations have you faced since dropping out of high school?
12. What are your goals in life? How has dropping out of high school affected your goals?
13. If you could change one (or several) things about school that would help you stay in school and graduate successfully what would it be?
14. Would you like to share any additional information?

*Source:* Baker, W. (2011). High school dropout: perceptions and voices of African American and Hispanic students. (Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M, 2011). *ProQuest LLC* (UMI # 3471171).

### **Appendix C: Interview Guide for Educators**

#### *Interview Questions:*

1. Tell me about your experiences in working with students who are at risk of dropping out?
2. Describe the current dropout process.
3. What are some common characteristics of students who are at risk of dropping out of high school?
4. How does counseling play a role in preventing high school students from dropping out? (counselor question only)
5. What is your opinion of establishing relationships with students as an important aspect of preventing students from dropping out?
6. How do you motivate students to complete high school?
7. In your opinion, why do you think students who have the ability to complete school still dropout?
8. What do you think needs to be done to prevent so many students from dropping out of high school?
9. In your opinion, what are the elements of a good high school dropout prevention plan?
10. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

*Source:* Lasley, C. (2012). Teacher perceptions of the efficacy of a high school dropout prevention program. (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University, 2012).*ProQuest LLC* (UMI # 3490289).

### Appendix D: Prevention Strategies

*Components Needed in a High School Dropout Prevention Plan – According to 21 G High School Educators*

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<b>Component Named</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
Mentorship Program	7
New Graduation Requirements	5
Peer Tutorial Program	3
Remediation Program	7
Parental Involvement	11
Technical/Vocational School & Training	4
Community Involvement	2
Counseling System	7
Early Monitoring System	2
Teacher Training	2
In-District GED Program	4

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