

Students' Initial Disconnect from School and Dropping Out of High School

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and to determine whether that disconnect from school led to their decision to drop out of high school. An additional purpose of this study was to determine the extent high school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school. A quantitative research design was used in this study.

Three research questions guided the current study: (1) To what extent do high school dropouts experience an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years? (2) To what extent does the initial disconnect experienced by high school dropouts during their K-8 years lead to the decision to drop out of high school? and (3) To what extent do high school dropouts believe there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school? The population of interest for this study included students enrolled in the Missouri Options Program during the 2013-2014 school year in Raytown, Missouri. Research hypothesis one, High school dropouts experience an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and research hypothesis three, High school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school, were tested using a one-sample t test. Research hypothesis two, High school dropouts' initial disconnect during their K-8 years leads to their decisions to drop out of high school, was tested using a chi-square test of equal percentages. The results indicated there was not statistically significant difference for

research question one or research question two. There was a statistically significant difference for research question three.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my loving family who encouraged me as I completed this program. For my husband, Darrell, your love, patience, and support mean more to me than you will ever know. For my sons, Korbin and Kade, I dedicate everything good I do in life to you both. You two are my most important job. Let this dissertation be proof that you can accomplish anything in life. For my parents, Doug and Debbie, your love, encouragement, and support have been unfailing in every aspect of my life. Words—spoken or written—will never be able to convey the love I have for both of you.

God has abundantly blessed my life, and the five of you are the personification of His goodness in my journey. I love you.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures.....	x
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Background.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Study	5
Significance of the Study	5
Delimitations.....	6
Assumptions.....	6
Research Questions.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
Overview of the Methodology	8
Organization of the Study	9
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	10
History of the High School Dropout Issue.....	10
Causes for Dropping Out of High School.....	13
Individual Risk Factors	14
Family Risk Factors	19

School Risk Factors	21
Disconnected Students	23
Effects of Dropping Out of High School	25
Dropout Prevention Programs.....	28
Check & Connect.....	29
Career Academies	30
High School Reform Models	31
Summary	32
Chapter Three: Methods	33
Research Design.....	33
Population and Sample	34
Sampling Procedures	34
Instrumentation	34
Measurement.....	35
Validity and Reliability.....	36
Data Collection Procedures.....	37
Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing	38
Limitations	39
Summary.....	39
Chapter Four: Results	40
Descriptive Statistics.....	40
Hypothesis Testing.....	44
Summary.....	46

Chapter Five: Interpretation and Recommendations	47
Study Summary.....	47
Overview of the Problem	47
Purpose Statement and Research Questions	48
Review of the Methodology.....	48
Major Findings.....	49
Findings Related to the Literature.....	50
Disconnection From School and Disconnection Leading to	
Dropping Out	50
Prevention	50
Conclusions.....	51
Implications for Action.....	52
Recommendations for Future Research	53
Concluding Remarks.....	54
References.....	55
Appendices.....	66
Appendix A. Missouri Options Student Survey	67
Appendix B. Baker University IRB Application	73
Appendix C. Baker University IRB Approval Letter.	78
Appendix D. Permission from Raytown C-2 School District.....	80

List of Tables

Table 1. Frequencies of Birth Year..... 41

Table 2. Frequencies of Ethnicity 41

Table 3. Frequencies of Number of Schools Attended during K-8 42

Table 4. Frequencies of Number of High Schools Attended 43

Table 5. Frequencies of a Time that Students did not Enjoy Going to School..... 44

Table 6. Observed and Expected Frequencies for H2..... 45

List of Figures

Figure 1. Status Dropout Rates for 16- through 24-year-olds, by Income Level: 1990 through 2012	19
Figure 2. Median Annual Earnings by Age and Educational Attainment (Full-Time, Year- Round workers	27

Chapter One

Introduction

Students dropping out of high school has been a significant issue in the United States public school system for over 50 years (Jimmerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). Every year an increasing number of students, mostly poor and minority, leave high school before they graduate (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). According to Entwisle, Alexander, and Steffel (2004), 2,756 students drop out of high school every day in the United States; this is equivalent to one student dropping out of high school every nine seconds each school day. “The individual and social costs of this catastrophic waste of human potential are staggering” (Johnson, 2010, p. 1).

It is challenging to precisely predict who will drop out of high school and who will graduate. Lan and Lanthier (2003) conclude that the high school dropout rate is not a simple problem, rather a complex issue that is related to factors including characteristics of the individual student, school, family, and community. Most studies report that the choice to drop out is an ongoing process of disengagement from school and is related to numerous factors (Bridgeland, DiTullio, & Morison, 2006). No individual risk factor, or even combination of risk factors, can predict with accuracy who will eventually drop out, although dropout predictions are stronger with multiple risk factors.

Many negative consequences can be attributed to dropping out of high school; however, no issue is more prevalent than students feeling disconnected from their education (Lan & Lather, 2003; Rumberger, 2011). “In hindsight, young people who dropped out of school almost universally expressed great remorse for having left high

school and expressed strong interest in reentering school with students their age” (Johnson, 2010, p. 1). Despite all of the research on this topic, “little has changed, except that the consequences of dropping out have become much more dire” (Johnson, 2010, p. 1).

Background

More than half a century of research has focused on identifying and responding to reasons why students drop out, but the issue continues to plague schools (Jimmerson et al., 2002; Rumberger, 1983; Rush & Vitale, 1994; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). A high school dropout, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2015), is an individual “between the ages of 16-24 who [is] not enrolled in school and has not earned a high school credential” (p. 1). However, some authors conclude that defining a high school dropout is much more multifarious (Rumberger, 2011). According to Rumberger (2011), defining a high school dropout is dependent on the manner in which someone chooses to view a high school dropout. Rumberger (2011) defines a dropout in three specific ways: (A) a status, (B) an event, and (C) a process. Due to the varying views of dropouts, data about dropouts is inconsistent. The lack of data makes it much more difficult to identify and respond to students who drop out of high school (Rumberger, 2011).

In 2014, the national dropout rate was 14%, whereas the State of Missouri’s dropout rate was 2.3% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). From 2004 to 2014, dropout rates in the Raytown C-2 school district increased from 3.5% to 5.1% (DESE, 2015). The dropout rate for the Raytown C-2 school district was 5.1% in 2014, higher than the state’s average (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2015a). The Raytown C-2 school district is a suburb of Kansas

City, Missouri. There are approximately 8,845 students enrolled in the district. The student population is made up of 50% African Americans, 34% Caucasians, 11% Hispanics, and 5% Indian, Asian, or Pacific Islanders (DESE, 2015a). Additionally, 68% of students in the Raytown C-2 school district receive free/reduced lunch (DESE, 2015a).

The Missouri Options Program was initiated in 2002, and has grown to include more than 230 urban, suburban, and rural school districts across Missouri. The program was designed to target high school students who have the ability to graduate, but for a variety of reasons lack the credits needed to graduate and have dropped out of their traditional high school. Students enrolled in this program receive intensive guidance and counseling support (Missouri Options Program, 2014).

Students in the Missouri Options Program must complete a minimum of 15 hours of academic instruction per week compared to 35 hours per week a traditional high school student must complete. Additionally, students must be enrolled in additional supervised instructional activities, including but not limited to, career education courses, elective classes, and work experiences. To graduate from the Missouri Options Program with a high school diploma, students are required to take End of Course (EOC) exams in all content areas. Additionally, students must take and pass a course in Government, Functions of the Government, Personal Finance, and Health. To finish, students are required to participate in counseling and life-skills training designed to assist students as they enter the work force, manage their own finances, and live independently (Missouri Option Program, 2014). School districts have the option of mandating additional requirements.

Students who successfully complete the requirements of the program are able to graduate with a diploma and participate in the commencement ceremonies of their home high school. Conversely, if students have not completed all aspects of the program, even if they have passed the required assessments with passing scores, they will not receive a diploma. Students not completing all aspects of the program can opt to take the General Educational Development (GED) assessment to be eligible to earn a GED certificate (Missouri Option Program, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Across the United States, approximately 1.3 million high school students drop out of school every year (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Daye, 2015). Nearly one-half of all African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic students attending high school never graduate (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Over time, research has found that students who fail to graduate, compared to those who did graduate from high school, experience higher unemployment rates, lower overall lifetime earnings, higher levels of incarceration, and a lower life expectancy (Jemal, Ward, Anderson, Murray, & Thun, 2008; Moretti, 2007; Muenning, 2007; Rouse, 2007; Swanson, 2009; Waldfogel, Garfindel, & Kelly, 2007).

Behaviors that are common in high school dropouts can be identified as early as first grade, yet little has been done to determine what connections can be made to the ultimate decision to drop out (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997). Researchers have evaluated why students drop out of school. Much of the research lists disconnecting from school as an antecedent to dropping out. However, little research exists about the relationship between students' initial disconnect from school and students' eventual decision to drop out of school. It is imperative that educators understand what high

school dropouts believe to be the cause for their disconnect from school, as well as what events took place to cause them to make the decision to drop out of school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and to determine whether that disconnect from school led to their decision to drop out of high school. An additional purpose of this study was to determine the extent high school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study have the potential to provide valuable insight to school districts and policymakers about the relationship between what causes students to disconnect from school and ultimately drop out. This study could also provide important insight for educators about events that start students on the path to dropping out of school. Early identification of factors that lead to disconnection from school could be monitored and interventions could be designed. Additionally, identifying and addressing causes for disconnecting from school, and ultimately dropping out of high school, has the potential to increase the number of students who graduate from high school, thus reducing the burden dropouts place on society. This knowledge could help educators develop a support system for those students who exhibit early disconnection from school, to keep students connected to school, and prevent them from leaving school prior to graduation.

Delimitations

“Delimitations are self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study” (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 134). The delimitations for this study were:

1. Data were collected from participants enrolled in the Missouri Options Program located in Raytown, Missouri.
2. The data were collected through a single survey developed by the researcher.
3. Participants were between 18 and 21 years old.

Assumptions

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) describe assumptions as “postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operations for purposes of the research” (p. 135). This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. Participants were able to read and understand the items on the survey.
2. Participants provided accurate and honest responses to the best of their ability.
3. Participants had left the high school setting without graduating and were participating in the Missouri Options Program.

Research Questions

Research questions give the study direction and contain the essence of the study for those who review them (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The following questions were addressed in the study.

RQ1. To what extent do high school dropouts experience an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years?

RQ2. To what extent does the initial disconnect experienced by high school dropouts during their K-8 years lead to the students' decisions to drop out of high school?

RQ3. To what extent do high school dropouts believe there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school?

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined for the investigation:

Alternative education. An alternative education program addresses diverse needs of students who are not successful in a traditional school setting. Such programs are generally remedial in nature and focus on both academic and socio-emotional issues (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

At-risk. Any student considered at-risk is in danger of failing or dropping out whose appearance, socioeconomic status (SES), attitudes, behaviors, home structures, ethnicity, or values do not match those of the dominate culture (Wehlage, 1987).

Dropout. A dropout is an individual who has not received a high school diploma or achieved a GED by age 22 (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olsen, 2004) and any student in grades 7 through 12 who left school before graduation (Castellana & Powell, 2000).

Dropout rate. A dropout rate is the percentage of the number of students who leave high school without a diploma as compared to the number of students who enter high school four years earlier (DESE, 2015).

General Educational Development (GED). The General Educational Development test is used to assess knowledge in five content areas: writing, reading,

mathematics, science, and social studies. The GED “is designed for people who did not graduate from high school but want a certificate equivalent to the traditional high school diploma” (DESE, 2015, p. 1).

Retention. Retention is the situation where a student’s lack of academic success results in not advancing to the next grade level with student’s same-age peers; this may be the result of lack of credits or poor performance (Rumberger, 1995).

Student engagement. “Student engagement is the degree to which students are motivated and committed to learning, demonstrate positive behaviors and attitudes, and have relationships with adults, peers, and parents that support learning” (Daggett, 2005, p. 38).

Traditional high school. A traditional high school is the academic setting that most teenage students attend during grades 9-12. Students in a traditional high school are grouped according to grade, follow a prescriptive schedule, attend classes organized by departments or subject area, and earn credits toward graduation by attending those classes (Hoffman, 2003).

Overview of the Methodology

The data used for this study were collected from a student survey administered in January 2014. The sample for this study included 31 students enrolled in the Missouri Options Program in Raytown, Missouri. Participants were between 18 and 21 years of age. The survey was administered to collect student responses on a variety of questions regarding their school experiences while attending traditional K-12 public school.

Survey data were analyzed in relationship to the three research questions guiding this

study. Results were analyzed using one-sample t tests and a chi-square test of equal percentages.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Introduced in chapter one was the focus for this research. The information included the statement of the problem, purpose statement, significance of the study, delimitations, assumptions, research questions, definitions of terms, and overview of the methodology. Chapter two contains an overview of issues associated with high school dropouts and reasons students become disconnected from school. In chapter three, the methodology used in this study is reviewed and includes a description of the research design, population and sample, sampling procedures, instrumentation, measurement, validity and reliability, data collection procedures, data analysis and hypothesis testing, and the limitations of the study. In chapter four, the results of the study are revealed, including descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing results. In conclusion, chapter five includes a study summary of the findings of the study in relation to the body of the literature. The chapter ends with implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to determine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and to determine whether that disconnect from school led to their decision to drop out of high school. An additional purpose of this study was to determine the extent high school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff members could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

This chapter includes a background of the research regarding the history and causes of students dropping out of high school. Chapter two also reviews research that has been conducted to determine risk factors associated with dropouts which includes disconnection from school, the impact of dropping out of high school, and the success of programs that have been implemented to address the issue of students dropping out.

History of the High School Dropout Issue

The nation's high school dropout problem is not new. Entering the 20th century, it was estimated that the dropout rate in the United States was 90% (Rumberger, 2011). During the early 1900s, school was not mandatory and most children, when given the choice, chose labor factories rather than school. In 1918 progressive reformers changed child labor laws and school become nationally mandatory until the age of 16 (University of Southern Florida (USF), 2014). Once most students reached age 16, they left school to enter the work force, resulting in a 90% dropout rate. John Dewey, a leader in the progressive movement, stressed the importance of educating the whole child, and initiated reforms to focus education on students' interests. Dewey's theories and ideas

shaped education in the United States and the way students learned for many years (USF, 2014). Starting in the late 1920's, the Great Depression caused alarm for many parents, and brought attention to the fact that the fundamentals of education were not being taught, resulting in a shift back to schools becoming a place of strict learning and discipline, focusing on reading, writing, and arithmetic (USF, 2014). As the United States evolved into a more industrialized country, the need for education became more important, and a more insufferable gap between high school dropouts and high school graduates emerged (USF, 2014).

Rumberger (2011) noted “Until 1945, school dropouts could be absorbed by our economy or our military. As the American economy moved from a brawn-based to a brain-based economy, the absence of a high school diploma became a major deterrent to employability” (p. 4). Because of the economic impact dropouts had on the country, researchers began to focus on the issue of students dropping out of high school in earnest. Unfortunately, the issue of dropping out has continued to plague schools, resulting in ongoing detrimental effects on students and society. Nearly 1.3 million students drop out of school high school year (Bridgeland et al., 2006). “The vast majority of kids in the developed world finish high school—but not in the United States. More than a million kids drop out every year, around 7,000 a day, and the numbers are rising” (Rumberger, 2011, p. 1). In 2010, the United States ranked 22 out of 27 industrialized nations in high school dropout rates (Rumberger, 2011).

Since 2002, when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law, it had been a national goal that every student would graduate within four years of starting high school (NCLB, 2002). This law also required all schools, districts, and states report

to the public their academic progress, including dropout and graduation rates. Prior to NCLB, schools had been allowed to self-report and each state had been allowed to use different graduation measures (Swanson, 2004). Before this law, there was no nationally established graduation goal or incentives for meeting state goals. Preceding 2002, many schools districts did not report students who stopped showing up to school as a dropout; therefore, the high school dropout rate was actually much higher than reported (Thornburg, 2006). In 2006, Thornburg investigated the dropout rate in the United States, focusing on rural high schools. He noted that the districts investigated reported graduation rates as high as 98%. Districts did this by counting students who dropped out, then later passed the GED assessment, as graduates. Additionally, it was not a requirement to report graduation rates for subgroups of students including minorities, SES, and special education students (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Curran & Reyna, 2009; NCLB, 2002). NCLB put more focus on specific aspects of education, including dropout rates.

In 2008, Margaret Spellings, U. S. Department of Education Secretary, ordered states to use a new system to report dropout rates in a standardized and reliable way by 2011. Spellings announced, “For too long we’ve allowed this crisis to be hidden and obscured . . . Where graduation rates are low, we must take aggressive action” (cited in Kingsbury, 2008, p. 1). The new system required disaggregated data by race, gender, and SES to be reported by each high school and school district, and thus allowed schools and districts to be compared to each other with consistent graduation rates.

The Department of Education records indicate that the dropout rate in the United States in 2014 was 14%. “Although the rate is falling, this is deplorably high for an

industrialized nation like the United States. No society can afford to waste 14% of its human resources in this way” (Schargel & Smink, 2014, p.4). Educators need to identify causes for dropping out and put supports in place to increase the number of students who graduate.

Causes for Dropping Out of High School

A significant body of research has identified many causes for dropping out of high school. One of the earliest studies regarding dropouts was authored by Ayres in 1902. His research focused on students dropping out of high school and non-promotion in elementary schools. Ayres found that for schools to be efficient, educators had to recognize and address that a substantial number of children were not attending school regularly, and those who were, were not putting forth their best efforts and acting in a manner that would promote learning (Ayres, 1909). Additionally, Ayres (1909) found that for society to continue to move forward, students needed to move forward with their education (1909). He asserted that the most important standard by which to assess the success of a school system and a student is if students graduate.

Whelage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989), claim that this early research accurately summarized the problems associated with dropping out and the need for school reform. However, the Ayres study, as well as other early studies, yielded insufficient data to determine the reasons students chose to drop out, resulting in researchers relying on descriptive data to determine the causalities of withdrawing from school (Castellana & Powell, 2000).

In the 1960s, researchers studied a sample of dropouts and analyzed them according to the personal and social attributes they shared (Wehlage et al., 1989). For the

first time, students' family circumstances became a focus and were considered the possible source of the problem. The interest in the relationship between family circumstances and school achievement continued to grow in the mid-1960s, which enabled researchers to start to develop a profile of a stereotypical dropout (Roderick, 1993). Dropouts became characterized by their perceived psychological defects, including risk factors, which were viewed as the "primary distinction between dropouts or graduates" (Dorn, 1996, pp. 67).

Risk factors for dropouts can be separated into three main domains: individual, family, and school. "No single risk factor or even combinations of risk factors can accurately predict who will eventually drop out, although dropout prediction is strong with multiple risk factors" (Shealy, 2011, p. 45).

Individual risk factors. Individual risk factors of high school dropouts include poor academic performance, poor attendance, and personal attributes, all of which lead to disengagement from school. Poor academic performance has been identified as the earliest potential indicator of students dropping out of high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Lan & Lather, 2003, Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009).

Based on research conducted by Janosz, Le Blanc, Boulerice, & Trembly (2000), Belfanz, Herzog, & McIver (2007) created a typology of dropouts. Dropouts were categorized into four groups:

Quiet dropouts were students who as early adolescents had no misbehavior and moderate or high levels of commitment to school but whose achievement grades were lower than eventual graduates.

Disengaged dropouts were students who had average or below-average levels of school misbehavior, low commitment to school, and average grades.

Low achiever dropouts had a weak commitment to schooling, average or lower levels of misbehavior, and failing grades.

Maladjusted dropouts had very high levels of misbehavior, weak commitment to school and poor grades. (Belfanz et al., 2007, p. 225)

Research conducted by Janosz et al. (2000) found that the ‘quiet dropout’ and the ‘maladjusted dropout’ made up 77% to 85% of all dropouts. Findings from this longitudinal research concluded that while characteristics of dropouts may differ, students began to disconnect from their learning for two different reasons: “academic struggles” or “behavioral reactions to the school environment” (Janosz et al., 2000, p. 225).

Researchers have found that intermediate grades, third grade through fifth grade, are a pivotal time in a student’s education. Paulson (2001) stated, “After third grade, classroom materials tend to be more complex, and students who do not have effective reading skills are more likely to fall behind” (p.1). Christenson and Thurlow (2004) conducted a study that investigated the reading levels of third graders and the impact it may have had on future dropout rates. They found that the reading levels of third graders were strong predictors for dropping out of high school. Additionally, the researchers found that the learning pattern had been established by third grade, which determined the path of a student’s entire educational career (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Further research conducted by McCaslin, Burross, and Good (2005) focused on student learning and achievement in intermediate grades and found that fourth grade is an exceptionally

vulnerable time for students to academically fall behind, especially for students living in poverty because the risk factors become too overwhelming to overcome.

School disconnection often starts at an early age and continues through high school. Lan and Lather (2003) found that the feelings of disconnection and alienation from school increased progressively from eighth to tenth grade and from tenth to twelfth grade, increasing the likelihood students would drop out. When potential dropouts start to disengage from school, they also start to disengage from extracurricular activities, including sports, clubs, and other organizations, and begin to have feelings of resentment towards school. Additionally, low academic performance leading to retention can lead to low self-esteem and low academic self-efficacy (Lan & Lather, 2003). Failure to succeed academically can lead to a student feeling disconnected from school, and a feeling of not belonging.

When students fall behind, the decision to retain is often discussed by teachers, administrators, and parents. The concept of retention is to hold a student back a year so that grade-level academic content can be mastered. However, being retained has been found to be an antecedent of dropping out of high school for all subgroups (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Christle, Jolivetter, & Nelson, 2007). The retention problem is one of the most serious challenges in education, especially because it is so much more prevalent in schools that enroll disadvantaged students (Alexander, et al., 2001). After conducting a meta-analysis of existing research, Viadero (2006) found that the most predictive factor in the choice to drop out was repeating a grade in elementary school or middle school. Alexander et al. (2001) reported that 64%

of students who had been retained in elementary school and 63% of students who had been retained in middle school did not graduate.

Finn (1993) and Rumberger and Larson (1998) found that minority students and students from low-income homes were more likely to become disconnected from school and drop out. In a study conducted by Chapman, Laird, Ifill, and KewalRamani (2011), national trends on high school dropout rates from 1972 to 2009 were analyzed holistically and disaggregated by individual factors, including gender, race/ethnicity, and family income. Chapman et al. (2011) found that males are slightly more likely to dropout than females; 3.5% compared to 3.4%. The study went on to find that 2.4% of white students dropout, compared to 4.8% of black students, and 5.8% of Hispanic students (Chapman et al., 2011). The most significant finding was the difference in dropouts based on family income, as 7.4% of students from low-income homes dropped out, 3.4% from middle-income homes dropped out, and 1.4% of students from high-income homes dropped out (Chapman et al., 2011).

Many students who dropped out of high school believe school success has little to do with things they control, but rather, external factors which they cannot control (Greer, 1991). By accepting this belief, they relinquish control of their own success. In a study conducted by Bridgeland et al. (2006), students who left high school early listed their top five reasons for dropping out. The reasons included (1) being bored in school, (2) missing too many days and not feeling like they could catch up, (3) spending time with people who were disconnected from school, (4) not having structure and rules enforced in their lives, and (5) failing academically (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Many students reported that their teachers did not demand much from them, but that they would have been

willing to work harder for their teachers, counselors, principals, or other school staff, if it would have been expected (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The same study that identified reasons why students left high school early also examined the students' perspectives about what actions could be taken by schools to increase the chance of those students completing school. The actions are as follows:

1. Make school more engaging through real-world experimental learning.
2. Improve instruction and support for struggling learners, smaller classes, more individualized instruction, better teachers, and more tutoring.
3. Improve school climate with greater supervision and classroom discipline.
4. Ensure that students have a relationship with at least one adult in the school.
5. Improve communication between parents and schools. (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 8)

A study conducted by Gleason and Dynarski (2002) reported that some students claimed they dropped out because they felt like teachers, principals, counselors, or other staff wanted them to drop out, while others said they dropped out for reasons out of their own control. Several studies have found that students believe it is easy to drop out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2006, Gleason & Dynarski, 2002; Swanson, 2004). Many said they simply just stopped showing up to school. The educational system offered little resistance, enabling students to make a quick decision they would likely regret. Swanson (2004) studied ways to close the graduation gap in the United States and claimed that NCLB should provide incentives to school districts to increase the dropout age to 18 and develop a more accurate system to keep track of the age of all dropouts.

Family risk factors. Families play a large role in students' individual risk factors. According to Swanson (2004), school districts that have more students receiving free or reduced priced lunches, which is based on family income, have a lower graduation rate. Allensworth and Easton, (2005) also found that students in low-SES families are more likely to drop out of school.

In 2013 the U.S. Department of Commerce released longitudinal data about dropouts from 1990 through 2012 by income level. Figure 1 contains an overview of that data.

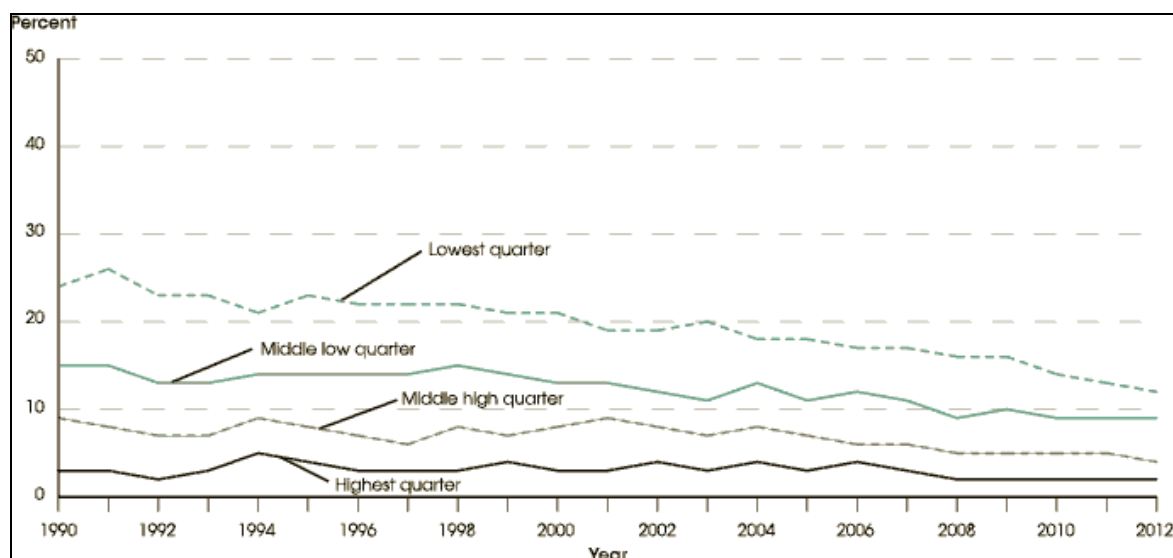


Figure 1. Status dropout rates of 16- through 24-year-olds, by income level: 1990 through 2012

Adapted from United States Department of Commerce, Census Bureau. (2013). *Current Population Survey (CPS), October 1990-2012*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpa.asp

As shown in Figure 1, the dropout rate declined in low- and middle-income family groups between 1990 and 2012. Dropout rates declined from 24 to 12% for those students in families with the lowest incomes (the bottom 25% of all family incomes), from 15 to 9% for those in middle-low income families (families with incomes between the 25th percentile and the median), and from 9 to 4% for

those in middle-high income families (families with incomes between the median and the 75th percentile). For those in the highest income families (the top 25% of all family incomes), there was not a significant decline in the dropout rate over time. From 1990 to 2012, the dropout rate for those in the highest income families was consistently lower than the rates for those in the lowest income families. While differences remained, the gap in the dropout rate between those in the highest and lowest income families narrowed from 21 percentage points in 1990 to 10 percentage points in 2012 (NCES, 2012, p.144).

This decline could be attributed to a variety of factors, including more supports that have been put in place to help students graduate, differentiated learning opportunities, vocational opportunities, and dropout prevention programs.

Parent involvement at school is typically lower for students who ultimately drop out of school. In research conducted by Bridgeland et al. (2006), of the students who dropped out of high school, 68% stated their parents did not become involved in their education until they had already dropped out, if at all. If parents struggled in school or had a bad experience, their attitude toward education was vastly different than those who had a positive experience (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Students with siblings or parents who dropped out of high school are much more likely to drop out themselves (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007). Hill and Torres (2010) found that many parents, especially minority parents, feel easily intimidated by school administrators, teachers, and other staff, and often leave school meetings or events feeling incompetent, misunderstood, and embarrassed. It is likely that if parents understood what was needed to help their children be successful in school, they would be better equipped to provide the necessary support.

Oftentimes, the parents of students who eventually drop out feel disconnected from school, and as a result, choose not to be involved. Parents are frequently confused by the school structures, underlying school politics, and the expectations schools have for families (Hill & Torres, 2010). Parental attitude toward schools was found to impact the attitude of their children.

Transiency also has an impact on connectedness to schools for parents and students. According to Swanson and Schneider (1999), students who moved from one school to another school between eighth grade and tenth grade were drastically more likely to drop out, than students who did not relocate. Frequently relocating has a negative effect on all students at all grade levels (NCSET, 2014).

School risk factors. School risk factors include the type of school a student attended, teacher and administrator support, and quality of the curriculum, which are all factors that can contribute to students dropping out (Bridgeland et al., 2006). As more students dropped out and the problem continued to have a more detrimental effect on society, “studies started emphasizing the interaction between the individual and the school in relation to dropping out” (Shannon, 2003, p. 21).

A critical time for academic success exists before a student enters kindergarten. Having early childhood educational opportunities, such as pre-school, provides students with background knowledge and structure that sets students up for a successful start to school. Rumberger (2011) supports focusing on the most susceptible students as far back as their early elementary years to ensure they are getting needed supports to promote success, thereby reducing the likelihood of dropping out of high school. “The importance of early childhood education has been touted as one of the most logical and cost-effective

ways to address problems in the education pipeline” (Kids Count in Missouri, 2013, p. 53). Students who participated in early childhood education, compared to those that did not, were

more likely to have better grades, less likely to need special education classes, more likely to graduate high school and enroll in college, less likely to engage in criminal behavior throughout life, more likely to be employed, less likely to depend on public assistance and less likely to become teenage parents. (Kids Count in Missouri, 2013, p. 53)

Contrarily, Balfanz and Legters (2005) contend that the first step in addressing the dropout problem and “reclaiming [student’s] squandered potential” (p. 10) is to target the high schools and the overall school systems that are guilty of high dropout rates.

Between 1993 and 2002, the total number of high schools across the United States increased by 8%, however, the number of high schools that had students who did not graduate, increased by 75% (Balfanz & Legters, 2005).

“Dropout factory” is a term used to describe the lowest performing high schools in the nation (Balfanz & Legters, 2005). A school earns that status when “on average over three years, the number of seniors is 60% or less than the number of freshmen at the school three years earlier and is said to have weak promoting power” (Balfanz & Legters, 2005, p. 43). Using that definition, approximately 2,000 dropout factories exist in the United States. These schools educate approximately 2.6 million students, and are responsible for 50% of all dropouts nationwide (Balfanz & Legters, 2005; Wise, 2012). Balfanz and Legters (2005) contend that 15 states account for 80% of the nation’s

dropouts. It would be more beneficial to close 15% of the most challenged high schools and start all over (Balfanz & Legters, 2005).

Disconnected Students

Becoming disconnected from school has been closely linked to students dropping out of school. A disconnected student refers to a student who has disengaged from school, is not participating in classroom instruction, and who has not become empowered by prior learning experiences, thereby becoming a “casualty of the curriculum” and the school system (Kronick & Hargis, 1998, p.11). Disconnection from school can be defined

as a higher order factor composed of correlated sub-factors measuring different aspects of the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion. (Balfanz et al., 2007, p. 224)

Many students contend they are at the mercy of life’s circumstances and become disconnected due to circumstances in their life or previous educational experiences.

Rumberger and Lim (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of 25 years’ worth of data focusing on why students drop out of high school. They found that one of the most predictive factors for dropping out was student engagement, or how connected or disconnected students were to school (Rumberger & Lim, 2006). One study Rumberger and Lim referenced in their meta-analysis was an extensive review of research literature by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004). Fredricks et al. (2004) found that there are three ways students can become disconnected from school; behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively. Behavior disconnection refers to the student’s engagement in academic

and social aspect of school, such as completing homework and being involved in extracurricular activities. Emotional disconnection denotes students' reactions to experiences in school, and how they respond to a myriad of emotions (Fredricks et al., 2004). Students who are emotionally disconnected from school do not respond to situations in positive manner, and display a negative attitude toward school. Lastly, cognitive disconnection impacts students' mental behaviors that are necessary for students to learn and put forth their best effort on difficult tasks (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Not attending school on a regular basis, getting into trouble at school, or not putting forth best effort are all indicators that a student is disconnecting from school, which may likely lead to a student choosing to drop out (Fredricks et al., 2004). Belfanz et al. (2007) found that most students who eventually drop out of school begin to disconnect long before they decide to drop out.

The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) (2010) found that students dropped out because they disliked school, struggled to get along with teachers and peers, felt they were frequently in trouble, moved from school to school throughout their educational experience, or felt disconnected from school. According to LaCompte and Dworkin (1992), disconnection from school was a result of previous negative classroom experiences. LaCompte and Dworkin's research went on to conclude many students who became disconnected in high school enjoyed success in elementary and early middle school, but started to develop feelings of rejection toward the end of middle school, leading into high school. If teachers, principals, counselors, or other staff members fail to identify and intervene with students who have disconnected from school, their likelihood to drop out increases greatly (Tanner, Kahan, & Hartnagel, 1995).

Attendance is another factor in school connection. Absenteeism was found to be a significant predictor of a student's feeling of connection to school, and can be the most critical factor when a student decides to drop out (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Rumberger and Lim (2008) found, "out of 19 high schools researched, 13 showed a strong relationship between absenteeism and dropping out" (p. 25). Poor attendance is not something that starts suddenly, rather a pattern that typically starts at the elementary level. During middle school and high school, students gradually start arriving late to school; this frequently leads to skipping classes, then ultimately missing entire days (Hale & Canter, 1998).

Effects of Dropping Out of High School

Dropouts burden society in many ways. Lochner and Moretti (2004) researched the connection between the education level of criminals and crimes committed and the impact those crimes had on society. They found that on average, each additional year of high school would reduce the national assault and murder rates by nearly 30%, auto theft by 20%, arson by 13%, and burglary and larceny by around 6%. The same research found that if graduation rates for males increased by 1%, \$1.4 billion taxpayer dollars could be saved per year (Lochner & Moretti, 2004). High school dropouts are over 3.5 times more likely to be arrested and 8 times more likely to be in jail or prison than high school graduates (Bridgeland et al., 2006; NDPC/N, 2010). According to Stayton (2011), "three-quarters of state prison inmates and 59% of federal inmates are dropouts" (p. 14). Stayton went on to say "dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school completers to be imprisoned at some point during their lifetime" (Stayton, 2011, p. 14).

In 2010, a study was released that analyzed jobs over a 25 year span. The number of jobs in the United States' that required postsecondary education, or additional training past a high school education, increased from 28% in 1973 to 59% in 2008 (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; Kingsbury, 2008). By 2020, this percentage is expected to reach 63% (Carnevale et al., 2010; Kingsbury, 2008). Dropouts are less likely to have the skills and abilities needed to compete in the current job market, and jobs that are suitable for dropouts are likely to be low-paying with few or no advancement opportunities (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). In the 50 largest cities in the United States, the median income for high school dropouts was \$14,000 (Swanson, 2009). A high school graduate's median income was \$24,000, and college graduates earn an average of \$48,000 yearly (Swanson, 2009).

The earning power of high school dropouts is substantially less than students who graduate. Barton (2006) found that 25 to 34 year-old male dropouts who worked full-time, earned an average yearly income of \$22,903 in 2002, a decrease from \$35,087 in 1971. In comparison, female dropouts 25-34 year-olds in 2002 earned, on average, \$17,114, a decrease from \$19,888 in 1971. This full-time income, for families with children, is just slightly above the poverty line (Barton, 2006).

In a report released by the U. S. Census Bureau (2011), the median annual earnings for full-time workers by age and educational attainment were compared. The results are shown in Figure 2.

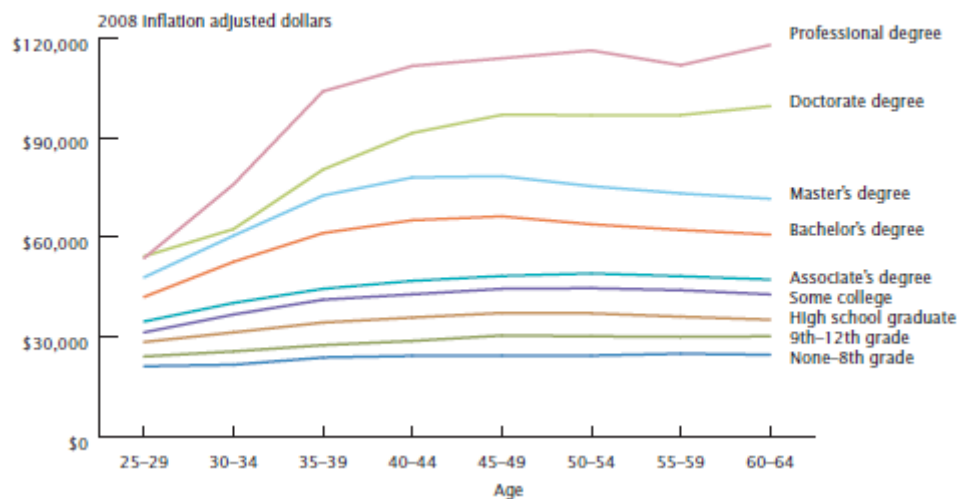


Figure 2. Median Annual Earnings by Age and Educational Attainment (full-time, year-round workers)
Adapted from United States Department of Commerce. Census Bureau. (2009). *American Community Survey, 2006-2008*. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/american_community_survey_acs/cb09-cn28.html

The amount earned for those who did not complete high school was substantially less than those who completed high school, or earned a further degree.

In addition to having lower incomes, high school dropouts are a drain to taxpayers as well. In 2001, four out of 10 adults ages 16 to 24 without a high school diploma received some form of government assistance in the United States (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Research conducted by Waldfogel et al. (2007) found nearly half of single mothers receiving government assistance were high school dropouts. The same research also stated “if all welfare recipients who were high school dropouts were high school graduates, welfare costs would fall some \$1.8 billion” (Waldfogel et al., 2007, p. 87). Dynarski et al. (2008) found dropouts are more dependent on government subsidies including food stamps, housing assistance, and welfare payments. Dropouts also have a radically increased chance of ending up in prison, have poorer overall health, and lower life expectancies compared to high school graduates (Dynarski et al., 2008). Rumberger

(2011) asserts that life expectancy for dropouts is shorter by up to seven years compared to high school graduates. Around \$24 billion taxpayer dollars are spent on welfare benefits and crime-related expenses created by dropouts (Stayton, 2011, p. 14).

Rumberger (2011) found that dropouts are less likely to look for or find work at all, and more likely to commit crimes, live in poverty, and suffer health problems. Stayton (2011) found “raising the high school completion rate 1% for all men ages 20-60 would save the US \$1.4 billion annually in crime-related costs” (p. 14).

Since 1990, the Anne E. Casey Foundation has published an annual report that assesses the well-being of children across the United States. The report focuses on economics, education, health, family, and community. In 2014, this report showed that high school dropouts are three times more likely to live in poverty than those who graduated high school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). The report concluded that lacking a high school diploma virtually guarantees low-level, minimally paying employment, and found that most young adults who are unemployed had also dropped out of high school (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014).

Dropout Prevention Programs

The majority of research associated with dropping out focuses on characteristics of dropouts, risk factors, predictors, and consequences of dropping out, rather than evaluating a way to make schools more engaging for students to prevent the desire to drop out (Somers & Pilliawski, 2004). The need for effective programs that could potentially save more than one million students who leave school each year is ever present. To determine what programming is necessary, it is essential to analyze who is leaving school. Researchers have identified a multitude of characteristics of students

who dropout; however, much less is known about the factors that prevent dropping out (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) researched many dropout prevention programs, but found only three to have a positive effect on reducing the amount of students who choose to dropout.

Check & Connect. The Check & Connect program model was initiated in 1990 by the Office of Special Education Programs from the U.S. Department of Education. Check & Connect “was initially developed for urban middle school students with learning and behavioral challenges and was designed to promote students’ engagement with school and learning, and to reduce and prevent dropping out” (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 90). This program was designed to connect students, families, schools, and communities to work together to help students stay in school.

A distinctive feature of this program is the adult monitor that is assigned to each student. Partnering students with a consistent adult who is invested in their education and future will increase the likelihood that they graduate (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). The role of the monitor is to “continually assess the student’s school performance, including attendance, behavior, and academics. Monitors are trained to follow up quickly at the first sign that a student is struggling in any of these areas” (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 90). Students and families receive resources from the school and community to increase engagement, promote attendance and positive behavior, and monitors give individualized attention to participants. Students and families who sign up to be a part of Check & Connect agree to a 2-year commitment, “including the promise and ability for a monitor to follow highly mobile youth from school to school so that students do not lose services when they move from their original program site” (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 90).

The cost of this program is around \$1,400 per student, but has generated positive results (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). An assessment of the program in 2006 found that only 9% of Check & Connect students dropped out of school in comparison to a control group of students with similar attributes who had a 39% drop out rate. The model has been field-tested and reproduced for students in suburban settings without disabilities and yielded the same positive results (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

Career academies. The school-within-a-school model originated in the 1970s as vocational education for students who were not viewed as good students in the traditional high school setting. This program has evolved to reach elementary through high school students in need of a more individualized education. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) focused on 1,700 high-risk high school students who applied for one of nine selected career academies utilizing the school-within-a-school model. The three distinguishing elements of these academies are:

First, it is organized as a school-within-a-school; students in a smaller and more personal learning atmosphere stay with the same teachers over three or four years of high school. Second, it includes both academic and vocational coursework, with the two integrated in the curriculum and in pedagogy. And, third, it uses partnerships between the academy and local employers to build links between school and work and to provide students with career and work-based learning opportunities. (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 91)

This school-within-a-school model reduced the dropout rate for at-risk participants by 32%. Additionally, by the end of the program, 40% of the high-risk academy students had earned enough credits to graduate compared to only 26% of the

high-risk students who did not participate in the school-within-a-school model (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

High school reform models. Preventing students from dropping out is rarely the reason high schools restructure. However, data that is evaluated at the district and state levels force high schools to acknowledge the need for reform. A need to increase student achievement is usually the driving force, but improving the graduation rate is an additional positive side effect of reform (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). While many reform models have been tried in a variety of schools across the nation, only one model has provided evidence of success: Talent Development High Schools (TDHS) (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). This model has attributes of both Check & Connect and school-within-a-school. TDHS was developed at Johns Hopkins University. TDHS requires high schools to create smaller learning communities within each school, and connects students with mentors who follow them through their high school years. In addition, there are systems put in place to partner parents and communities with the schools. The results have been validated and TDHS is now practiced in 43 districts in 15 states (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

Many dropout prevention programs have been attempted across the nation, while very few have produced positive results. A common factor for successful programs is partnering students with adults in the school who can provide support to the student. Additionally, involving parents and the community in a student's education yields higher graduation rates for students. Finally, focusing the learning to meet the needs and interests of students will likely increase student engagement and encourage students to remain in school and graduate.

Summary

Chapter two reviewed an overview of the research associated with the school dropout issue. Causes for dropping out, risk factors associated with dropouts, and why students become disconnected from school were presented. Issues of student disconnection from school, the effects of dropping out, and dropout prevention programs were also shared. The methodology of the study used to address the research questions stated in chapter one is addressed in chapter three.

Chapter Three

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and to determine whether that disconnect from school led to their decision to drop out of high school. An additional purpose of this study was to determine the extent high school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

In this chapter, the methodology used to conduct the research is provided. Included are a description of the research design, population, and sampling procedures. The data collection process is described with a detailed explanation of the procedures followed in the study. Next, the data analysis and hypothesis testing are introduced. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study.

Research Design

The current study was a non-experimental research design that utilized purposive sampling, as the sample only included students who had dropped out of high school and were 18 to 21 years of age. Data were retrieved in January 2014. According to Creswell (2009), a quantitative research design best addresses the problem by identifying what factors or variables influence an outcome. The variables in this study were students' K-12 school experiences and their perspectives about those experiences, along with the level to which students felt disconnected from school.

Population and Sample

Lunenburg and Irby (2008) stated “The target population is the group of interest to the research or the group to which you would like the results of the study to be generalizable” (p. 167). The population for this study was high school dropouts. The sample included 31 students who responded to the survey and who were enrolled in the Missouri Options Program in Raytown, Missouri during the 2013-2014 school year.

Sampling Procedures

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) explained the goal of purposeful sampling as selecting individuals for a study who are information-rich with the topic of the researcher. Purposive sampling was used in this study because it enabled investigation of the specialized population of Missouri Options Program students in Raytown, Missouri. The students in the Missouri Options Programs were selected because they had all dropped out of a traditional high school prior to graduation. Those enrolled in the Missouri Options Program in Raytown, Missouri, who were 18 to 21 years of age, and who completed the survey in its entirety were the sample for this study.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized in this study was a survey designed by the researcher. Creswell (2009) contended that “surveys could be a preferred type of data collection procedure because of the economy of design and rapid turnaround in data collection” (p. 146). The purpose of the survey was to gather specific information to determine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years (see Appendix A). An additional purpose of the survey was to determine whether that disconnect from school during their K-8 years led to a student’s decision to drop out of

high school. The final purpose of the survey was to determine the extent high school dropouts believe there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

Some survey items were created to directly address the research questions of this study. Survey items that did not directly address the research questions were written for descriptive purposes. The survey was administered via paper and pencil. The data were collected from all respondents within the same hour on the same day. Various response anchors were provided for students to accurately identify their feelings and attitudes about school, events that impacted their perceptions, other issues that had an impact on the disconnect of school, and the decision to drop out. Each item allowed for an open-ended response, if the options provided were not inclusive.

Measurement. The survey had sixteen items. Items 1, 3, 8, 9, 14, and 15 were multiple-choice. Items 2, 5, 7, and 11 included a Likert-type scale with the response options of *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Neither Agree nor Disagree*, *Disagree*, and *Strongly Disagree*. Items 4 and 10 utilized a Likert-type scale with the response options of *No Impact*, *Minor Impact*, *Moderate Impact*, and *Major Impact*. Item 4 had nine response options and item 10 had 11 response options. The last response option for items 4 and 10 was *Other*, giving participants an opportunity to rate an event not listed. If *Other* was marked, the participants were able to provide an explanation below the question on lines provided. Items 6, 12, and 13 were constructed response items.

Survey item 5 was used to address research question one regarding the extent to which high school dropouts experienced an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years.

There was an event or experience that I can remember during K-8 that caused me to become disconnected from school (circle one).

Survey item 7 was used to gather data regarding research question 2. The question was written to determine the extent of the disconnect by high school dropouts during the K-8 years.

If you agreed or strongly agreed to #5, please respond to the following: The disconnect I experienced during K-8 led to my decision to drop out of high school (circle one).

Survey item 11 was used to address research question 3, in which participants were to indicate if any member of high school staff could have prevented them from dropping out.

There was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent me from leaving high school (circle one).

Validity and reliability. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), validity is “the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure” (p. 181). After creating the survey, 15 subject matter experts were asked to read and analyze the survey to provide feedback, motivating changes, and improvements. The experts providing feedback included literacy professors, high school special education instructors, GED instructors, Missouri Options Program administrators, and young adult high school dropouts who did not participate in this study. To further establish validity, the survey was field tested with a volunteer group of eight high school freshmen. Students provided input based on how they defined and understood the survey items along with how they

interpreted the response options; revisions were made to improve clarity and accuracy, based on recommendations received.

Reliability refers to “the degree to which an instrument consistently measures whatever it is measuring” (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 182). The internal consistency of a survey refers to the relationship of the items on the survey that measure one variable (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alpha was conducted and is reported in chapter four.

Data Collection Procedures

Before data collection began for this research, permission was requested from the Director of Support Services and the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education for the Raytown School District. A proposal for research (see Appendix B) was submitted on December 5, 2013 to the Baker University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requesting approval for research. On December 20, 2013 the IRB granted approval for the study in accordance with Baker University’s requirements and policies for conducting research (see Appendix C). Permission was received from the Director of Support Services and the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education in the Raytown School District to utilize students enrolled in the Missouri Options program as the sample for this study (see Appendix D). The Director of Support Services also provided contact information for the Missouri Options Administrator in Raytown for use. Data collection commenced January 18, 2014 and ended on January 25, 2014. The data were collected using a printed survey on paper, per the request of the site administrator. The data were organized and compiled in an Excel spreadsheet and imported into IBM® SPSS® Statistics Faculty Pack 22 for Windows for analysis.

Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Data analyses for testing the hypotheses were conducted. Each research question with its corresponding hypothesis and the analysis used to test that hypothesis is listed. The significance level for all tests was set at $\alpha = .05$.

RQ1. To what extent do high school dropouts experience an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years?

H1. High school dropouts experience an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted to test H1. The sample mean was compared to a null value of 3.

RQ2. To what extent does the initial disconnect experienced by high school dropouts during their K-8 years lead to the decision to drop out of high school?

H2. High school dropouts' initial disconnect during their K-8 years leads to their decisions to drop out of high school.

A chi-square test of equal percentages was used to test H2. The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance

RQ3. To what extent do high school dropouts believe there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school?

H3. High school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

A chi-square test of equal percentages was conducted to test H3. The observed frequencies were compared to those expected by chance.

Limitations

“Limitations of a study are not under the control of the researcher. Limitations are factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings or on the generalizability of the results” (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 133). The limitations of this study included:

1. Student participation in the survey was voluntary. Some students may have provided responses that did not fully reflect an honest response.
2. Respondents’ ability to understand and follow survey directions could be potentially limiting. If a student did not fully understand the question, the question may not have been answered accurately.
3. This study includes findings from one metropolitan area; therefore, results may not be generalized to other geographic locations.

Summary

An overview of this quantitative research was presented in chapter three. The research design was explained in detail, and the population and sample were thoroughly introduced. The instrument used to collect data was explained in detail. In addition, the research questions were listed with the hypotheses and data analyses. Chapter four includes the results of the hypothesis testing.

Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and to determine whether that disconnect from school led to their decision to drop out of high school. An additional purpose of this study was to determine the extent high school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school. The results of statistical analyses regarding each research question are included in this chapter.

Descriptive Statistics

The target population for this research was limited to students who were 18 to 21 years of age and enrolled in the Missouri Options Program as of January 2014 in the Raytown School District in Raytown, Missouri. The study included 31 students, 11 females and 20 males. The descriptive statistics of the data are presented in Tables 1 through 5.

In responding to the survey, students indicated their birth years, which are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequencies of Birth Year

Birth Year	Frequency	Percent
1994	5	16.1
1995	23	74.2
1996	3	9.7
Total	31	100.0

Students' ethnicities are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequencies of Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
African American	11	35.5
African American, Indian	1	3.2
African American, Other	1	3.2
Caucasian	10	32.3
Caucasian, African American	1	3.2
Hispanic	3	9.7
No Response	4	12.9

Total	31	100.0
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The number of schools students attended during their K-8 school years are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequencies of Number of Schools Attended during K-8

School Years

Number of Schools Attended	Frequency	Percent
1	1	3.2
2	6	19.4
3	6	19.4
4	9	29.0
5 or more	9	29.0
Total	31	100.0

The number of high schools students attended is reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequencies of Number of High Schools Attended

Number of High Schools Attended	Frequency	Percent
1	16	51.6
2	10	32.3
3	2	6.5
4	3	9.7
Total	31	100.0

In responding to the survey, 54.8% of students *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* with item two, *There was a point in my K-8 years that I did not enjoy going to school*. Only 22.6% of respondents indicated disagreement (see Table 5).

Table 5

Frequencies of a Time Students did not Enjoy Going to School

Level of Agreement	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	5	16.1
Agree	12	38.7
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7	22.6
Disagree	5	16.1
Strongly Disagree	2	6.5
Total	31	100.0

Hypothesis Testing

The research questions and hypotheses to address each are listed below. The results of the analysis are described for each research question. The research hypotheses were tested using one-sample t tests and a chi-square test of equal percentages.

RQ1. To what extent do high school dropouts experience an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years?

H1. High school dropouts experience an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years.

Results of the one-sample t test indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = .162$, $df = 30$, $p = .873$. The sample mean ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.110$) was higher than the null value (3). In responding to the survey, 45.2% of students did not remember an event or experience during their K-8 years that caused them to become disconnected from school. This does not support H1.

RQ2. To what extent does the initial disconnect experienced by high school dropouts during their K-8 years lead to the decision to drop out of high school?

H2. High school dropouts' initial disconnect during their K-8 years leads to their decisions to drop out of high school.

Results of the chi-square test of equal percentages indicated there was not a statistically significant difference between the observed and expected values, $\chi^2 = 1.267$, $df = 3$, $p = .737$. See Table 6 for the observed and expected frequencies. This does not support H2.

Table 6

Observed and Expected Frequencies for H2

Values	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree
Observed	5	4	4	2
Expected	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8

RQ3. To what extent do high school dropouts believe there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school?

H3. High school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

Results of the one-sample t test indicated there was a statistically significant difference between the two values, $t = -3.340$, $df = 29$, $p < .05$. The sample mean ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.093$) was lower than the null value (3). Only 13% of students *Agreed* or *Strongly Agreed* that there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school. The average response on this item was lower than a neutral response, indicating the majority of the sample disagreed with this item, a result that does not support H3.

Summary

This chapter included the results of the study, which consisted of the frequencies of each demographic item and the results of each hypothesis test. The results showed there were not statistically significant differences for RQ1 and RQ2. There was a statistically significant difference for RQ3. Chapter five includes a summary of the study, an overview of the problem, and a restatement of the purpose and research questions. Additionally, the methodology, major findings, literature connections, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks are included.

Chapter Five

Interpretation and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and to determine whether that disconnect from school led to their decision to drop out of high school. An additional purpose of this study was to determine the extent high school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

The preceding four chapters contain the background, problem, significance, purpose, and research questions of this study. Additionally, a review of the literature related to the history and factors of student dropouts, as well as causes, effects, and prevention programs was included.

Study Summary

The following section contains a summary for the current study. An overview of the problem, the purpose of the study and research questions, review of the methodology, the study's major findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research are provided.

Overview of the problem. Dropping out of high school is a nationwide problem. Nearly one out of four students in the United States who attend public schools drop out of high school before graduation (American's Promise Alliance, 2010). Many of these dropouts end up on government assistance, putting an additional burden on the economy. A report published by American's Promise Alliance (2015) estimates that 5.8 million 16- to 24-year-olds are neither in school nor employed. There are many factors that can

contribute to a student becoming disconnected from school and ultimately making the decision to drop out. Information about these factors is essential for educators to know, so the issue can accurately be addressed to prevent students from disconnecting from school and ultimately dropping out of high school.

Purpose statement and research questions. The purpose of this study was to determine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and to determine whether that disconnect from school led to their decision to drop out of high school. An additional purpose of this study was to determine the extent high school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school. To investigate these ideas, three research questions guided the study: (1) To what extent do high school dropouts experience an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years?; (2) To what extent does the initial disconnect experienced by high school dropouts during their K-8 years lead to the decision to drop out of high school?; and (3) To what extent do high school dropouts believe there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school?

Review of the methodology. Data used for this quantitative research study were obtained through a survey (see Appendix A) administered in January 2014 at the Missouri Options Program in Raytown, Missouri. The sample included Missouri Options Program students who were 18 years or older and had left the traditional high school setting, and who were enrolled in the Missouri Options Program. Student responses to a variety of questions regarding their experiences during their K-8 school years were

collected through a survey. One-sample t tests and a chi-square test of equal percentage were used for statistical analyses.

Major findings. Research question one assessed to what extent did high school dropouts experience an initial disconnect from school during their K-8 years. The majority of participants (45%) disagreed with the item, compared to 35.5% of participants who agreed or strongly agreed. The results suggest that there was not an event or experience they were able to remember during their K-8 school years that caused them to become disconnected from school.

Research questions two assessed to what extent did the initial disconnect experienced by high school dropouts during their K-8 years lead to the students' decisions to drop out of high school. Less than half of the students taking the survey responded to this question. Of those who responded, the majority of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed (60%) with the item versus agreed (13%). The results suggest that the initial disconnect experienced by high school dropouts during their K-8 years did not lead to the decision to drop out of high school.

Research question three assessed to what extent did high school dropouts believe there was something a teacher, principal, counselor or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school. The majority of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed (67%) with the item versus those who agreed (13%). The results suggest that there was nothing a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

Findings Related to the Literature

This section examines the findings from this study as they relate to the literature regarding students disconnecting from school and dropping out of high school.

Disconnection from school and disconnection leading to dropping out.

Rumberger and Lim (2006) found that one of the most predictive factors for dropping out of high school was how connected or disconnected students are to school. Fredricks et al. (2004) identified three ways students become disconnected from school: behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively. In responding to the survey in this study, 42.2% of students did not remember an event or experiences during their K-8 years that caused them to become disconnected from school, whereas 35.5% of students agreed or strongly agreed that there was an event or experience that caused a disconnect from school. Of the students who did remember an event or experience that caused them to become disconnected from school during their K-8 years, the majority did not believe that led to their decision to drop out.

The results of the current study support previous research regarding transiency. According to Swanson and Schneider (1999) students who attend more than one school between eighth and tenth grades are more likely to drop out, compared to peers who stay in the same school. Bridgeland et al. (2006) also found that high mobility is a factor that contributes to students dropping out. The results indicated that 96.7% of students surveyed attended two or more schools during their K-8 school years, and 48.3% of students attended more than one high school before dropping out.

Prevention. The majority of students in this study did not believe there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to

prevent them from leaving high school. McEvoy and Aelker (2000) stated that students drop out of school for a variety of reasons, including not having a connection to an adult in the school setting, or lack of feeling that a teacher or educator cares about their education. Gleason and Dynarski (2002) found that students reported they dropped out because they believed teachers, principals, counselors, or other staff wanted them to drop out. Students in this study who entered an alternative educational setting or a GED program have acknowledged that dropping out was a mistake and are working to rectify their original decision. In contrast, much of the previously conducted research included subjects who had dropped out of school and who had not earned a GED or entered a completion program.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and to determine whether that disconnect from school led to their decision to drop out of high school. An additional purpose of this study was to determine the extent high school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school. The results of the current study indicated that the majority of participants did not remember an event or experiences during their K-8 years that caused them to become disconnected from school. Of the students who did remember an event or experience that caused them to become disconnected from school during their K-8 years, the majority did not believe that led to their decision to drop out. Finally, the majority of students did not believe there was something a teacher, principal,

counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from leaving high school.

Implications for action. The majority of the findings of this study did not support previous research. The findings of this study did show, however, the majority of the students surveyed did not blame others for their choices. Because students surveyed were enrolled in a drop-out recovery program, they had acknowledged that they needed to rectify their decision to drop out of high school. Schools need to have an effective system to partner with all students who are at-risk for, or in the process of dropping out, giving students an opportunity to verbalize what factors are leading them toward that decision. This partnership will provide school personnel feedback to proactively meet the needs of students prior to them dropping out. Additionally, this will allow for teachers, principals, counselors, or other staff members to connect or reconnect with students who feel disconnected.

School districts across the nation are challenged with keeping students from becoming disconnected during their school years and with providing the support students need to graduate from high school. The results of the current study indicated that 48% of students surveyed attended two or more different high schools. This factor was a focus for some intervention programs outlined in chapter two, as it proves to be a reason for disconnection and a powerful antecedent for students who drop out. The results of research question three in this study highlights the importance for district leaders to properly allocate funds for proven dropout prevention programs, some of which partner students with adults who are committed to their educational success. Key stakeholders who are invested with students can better address the dropout problem and have a better

understanding of where to focus efforts to reduce the number of students who become disconnected from school and who drop out.

Recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to examine if high school dropouts experienced a disconnect from school during their K-8 years, and examined if that disconnect from school led to their decision to drop out of high school. Additionally, this study examined the extent high school dropouts believed there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

Recommendations for future research to improve and extend this study including the following:

1. A researcher could duplicate this study using data from other districts that utilize the Missouri Options Program, to determine if findings are similar to the findings in the Missouri Options Program in Raytown, Missouri. This will increase the sample size to see if the results changed.
2. A researcher could expand the current study to include students under the age of 18 who have left the traditional high school setting and who have enrolled in alternate program. This will provide the researcher a larger sample size, different perspectives, and potentially different antecedents for dropping out.
3. A researcher could duplicate the study using students who have dropped out of school, and who have not entered an alternative educational setting. This will allow the researcher an opportunity to get the perspectives of dropouts who have made a choice not to obtain a GED or an alternative high school diploma.

4. A researcher could duplicate this study as a qualitative study. This would allow the dropouts an opportunity to name reasons for dropping out of school. Additionally, it is possible that students could be disconnected from school and do not remember becoming disconnected from school, or are unable to identify their lack of connectedness as disconnection. In a qualitative study, a definition of disconnection or examples of disconnection could be provided so the students surveyed could have a better understanding of disconnection.
5. A researcher could duplicate this study with students who were at risk for dropping out, but ended up graduating. This would allow the researcher the opportunity to analyze what factors or supports prevented those students from dropping out.

Concluding remarks. The results of the current study indicated that the majority of participants did not remember an event or experiences during their K-8 years that caused them to become disconnected from school. Of the students who did remember an event or experience that caused them to become disconnected from school during their K-8 years, the majority did not believe that led to their decision to drop out. Finally, the majority of students did not believe there was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent them from leaving high school. The results indicated that the students surveyed have taken ownership for their decision and do not blame others for their decisions. School districts across the nation are faced with the challenge to keep students from disconnecting during their school years. Students continue to drop out of school; therefore, this issue continues to affect students, school districts, the economy, and the future of the nation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Missouri Options Student Survey

Missouri Options Student Survey

Please think about your experiences in school and answer each question as honestly as possible and to the best of your ability.

Elementary and Middle School (Kindergarten through 8th grade)

1. Approximately how many schools did you attend during your K-8 experience?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

2. There was a point in my K-8 years that I did not enjoy going to school (circle one).

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. If you agreed or strongly agreed, in which grade did you begin to not enjoy school?

- K
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

4. Please indicate the level of impact each of the following factors made on you not enjoying school.

Factor	No Impact	Minor Impact	Moderate Impact	Major Impact
a) School was hard.				
b) My teachers didn't like me.				
c) Students picked on me.				
d) School was too easy.				
e) I got in trouble a lot.				

Factor	No Impact	Minor Impact	Moderate Impact	Major Impact
f) I didn't feel safe at school.				
g) I didn't have friends.				
h) I felt like no one cared.				
i) Other (please explain below).				

5. There was an event or experience that I can remember during K-8 that caused me to become disconnected from school (circle one).

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. If you agreed or strongly agreed, please explain.

7. If you agreed or strongly agreed to #5, please respond to the following:
The disconnect I experienced during K-8 led to my decision to drop out of high school (circle one).

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

High School

8. How many high schools did you attend?

- 1
 2
 3
 4
 5 or more

9. How old were you when you left the traditional high school setting?

- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20

10. Please indicate how each of the following factors ultimately impacted your decision to leave the traditional high school setting.

Factor	No Impact	Minor Impact	Moderate Impact	Major Impact
a) School was hard.				
b) My teachers didn't like me.				
c) Students picked on me.				
d) School was too easy.				
e) I got in trouble a lot.				
f) I didn't feel safe at school.				
g) I didn't have friends.				
h) I felt like no one cared.				
i) I was homeless.				
j) I had a problem with drugs/alcohol.				
k) Other (please explain below).				

11. There was something a teacher, principal, counselor, or other staff member could have done to prevent me from leaving high school (circle one).

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. If you strongly agreed or agreed, what do you think could have been done to keep you in the traditional high school setting?

13. Is there any additional information you would like to share about your educational experiences?

Background

14. Please indicate the year you were born.

- 1993
- 1994
- 1995
- 1996
- 1997
- 1998
- Other (please specify) _____

15. Please indicate your gender.

- Male
- Female

16. Please indicate your ethnicity.

- Caucasian
- African American
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Other (please specify) _____

Appendix B: Baker University IRB Application



Date: _____

School of education

IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER _____

Graduate department

(irb USE ONLY)

**IRB Request
Proposal for Research
Submitted to the Baker University Institutional Review Board**

I. Research Investigator(s) (Students must list faculty sponsor first)**Department(s)** **School of Education Graduate Department**

Name	Signature	
1. Russ Kokoruda	_____	Major Advisor
2. Katie Hole	_____	Research Analyst
3.		University Committee Member
4.		External Committee Member
Principal Investigator:	_____	Julie Schmidli
Phone: 816-213-8861		
Email: Julie.schmidli@raytownschools.org		
Mailing address: 15504 E 40 th Street		
Independence, MO, 64055		

Faculty sponsor:

Phone:

Email:

Expected Category of Review: ___Exempt ___Expedited ___Full

II: Protocol: (Type the title of your study)

Relationship Between Initial Disconnect From School and Events that Lead to Dropping Out of High School

Summary

In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.

The purpose of this study is to determine the factors that caused students to become disconnected from school and events that led them to dropping out of school and whether there was a connection between the two. There has been a great deal of research about why students become disconnected from school as well as why students drop out. There has been little research about the relationship between the two. This research has the potential of helping educators identify antecedents early in a student's education that could lead to students dropping out of high school. This knowledge can help educators better plan for support systems to keep students in school through graduation.

Briefly describe each condition or manipulation to be included within the study.

There are no conditions or manipulations in this study.

What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.

The researcher has created a survey that has gone through validity testing (please see attached). The survey is designed to gain demographic information, identify events that caused students to become disconnected from school, and identify reasons students chose to leave the traditional high school setting.

Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.

Subjects will not encounter any psychological, social, physical or legal risks.

Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.

There will not be any stress to the subjects involved in this study.

Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.

The subjects will not be deceived or misled in any way.

Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.

The survey requires subjects to report demographic information and reflect on experiences they had while in school. This information is personal and could be perceived as sensitive; however, all surveys will be completed anonymously.

Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.

The subjects will not be presented with materials that might be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading.

Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?

Each subject will spend approximately 10 minutes completing the survey.

Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.

The subjects for this study are students enrolled in the Missouri Options program in the Raytown School District in Raytown, Missouri. Only subjects 18 years or older will participate in this research. Students will be contacted at the Raytown Missouri Options site, and asked if they want to take this voluntary survey. Dr. Steve Shelton, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources and Dr. Staci Mathes, Director of Support Services, gave approval for this study pending the IRB committee's approval.

What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?

Participants are students in the Missouri Options program, who are 18 years or older. Students will be informed that their participation is voluntary. There will not be any inducements offered to subjects for their participation in this study.

How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.

Students will be verbally informed that their participation is voluntary. Completion of the survey will be considered the student's consent to participate.

Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.

There will not be any data from this study that will become part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject.

Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher or employer? If so, explain.

Participation information will not be made part of any permanent record to a supervisor, teacher, or employer.

What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data? Where will it be stored? How long will it be stored? What will be done with it after the study is completed?

Data gathered will be reviewed by the researcher and will remain confidential. Data will be entered into an Excel document by the researcher. Responses and data in the Excel document will be kept for three years in a secured location, of which only the researcher has access. After three years, the data from this study will be destroyed.

If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?

There are no risks involved in this study. This research has the potential of helping educators identify antecedents early in a student's education that could lead to students dropping out of high school. This knowledge can help educators better plan for support systems to keep students in school through graduation.

Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.

There will not be any data from files or archival data used in this study.

Appendix C: Baker University IRB Approval Letter



Dec. 20, 2013

Julie Schmidli,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your research project application regarding your proposal and has approved it under Expedited Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

The Baker University IRB requires that your consent form must include the date of approval and expiration date (one year from today). Please be aware of the following:

1. At designated intervals (usually annually) until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the IRB.
2. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedures must be reported to the IRB Chair or representative immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform Office of Institutional Research (OIR) or myself when this project is terminated. As noted above, you must also provide OIR with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from the IRB one month prior to the annual update. Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Thomas Peard
Chair, Baker University IRB

Appendix D: Permission from Raytown C-2 School District

Schmidli, Julie

From: Staci Mathes <staci.mathes@raytownschools.org>
Sent: Tuesday, September 17, 2013 10:31 AM
To: Schmidli, Julie
Subject: Permission

Hi Julie,

Sorry it has taken so long for me to get back to you. I spoke with Dr. Shelton, and you have our permission to use the Missouri Options Program students in the Raytown School District for your research. I look forward to reading your findings. Let me know if you need anything from me. Good Luck!

Staci

Dr. Staci Mathes
Director of Support Services
Raytown School District