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A'Licia Durden
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Teacher and Student Perceptions of African American Male Middle School Students Dropping Out of School and Potential Intervention Strategies

A'Licia Durden

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Ross College of Education and Human Services of Lynn University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 26, 2004
TEACHER AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL AND POTENTIAL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

A'Licia Durden, Ph.D.
Lynn University, 2004

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I give thanks to God who made it possible because without him I am nothing. I want to also acknowledge my supportive, patient, understanding, and loving family who stood by my side and constantly reminded me to “never give up,” which consists of my dad, Clifford; mom, Barbara; step-mom, Brenda; and my two sisters Fe’Licia and Patrice. I must also acknowledge my two dear friends and colleagues from Lynn University, Dr. Eugene Savage and Dr. Aurora Francois. When I was just about to give up, they encouraged me to stay in school, finish what I started, and forget about the past. Thanks for the valued assistance of my editor, Dr. Evelyn Torrey. I also cannot forget the assistance of my colleagues in the school district: principal, Floyd Henry and assistant principal, Charlene Ford, for allowing me to use their school site for my research study. I extend a special thanks to my secretary, Luisa Leon, and my special colleague, Jean Burns, for providing their phenomenal technological skills to assist me with my research study. Last, but certainly not least, a special thanks to my awesome dissertation committee of professors, Dr. Carole Warshaw (chairperson), Dr. Adam Kosnitzky, and Dr. Leah Kinniburgh, who stood by me and guided me to a successful endeavor. I would also like to give special thanks to Dr. Cindy Skarruppa, who was initially my dissertation chair prior to leaving the university.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons why African American middle school males are dropping out of middle school and the potential intervention strategies that can be used to keep them in school. African American males, in particular, have not been provided an effective public school education according to. Overcrowding and too few resources are problems in the schools, which have caused these students to feel alienated rather than being able to participate or feel a part of the real school world. Some express this through negative means. These African American male students feel that they are wrongly accused, told to be quiet in an unfair manner, and punished unjustly because of who they are.

Four middle school teachers and six eighth grade current/former students were selected to participate in this study. Participation was based on selected criteria within the Palm Beach County, Florida school district.

The methodological approach was a qualitative analysis consisting of classroom observation and participant interview to identify any inconsistencies with Hale’s “Best Practices” strategies and their implementation. The interviews were used to further investigate and determine the sources of the inconsistencies. A classroom observation indicator was developed reflecting Hale’s “Best Practices” strategies for African American males in a classroom structure. Each strategy from the indicator showed the teacher’s classroom style and structure and whether or not any of Hale’s “Best Practices” strategies to assist African American male students were utilized in the classroom. Interviews were also conducted to obtain responses to the experiences of the teachers and
students with regard to issues of African American middle school males dropping out of school.

The analysis revealed two groups of students who understood that education is important. The analysis also showed where the teachers of these students did not consistently use Hale's "Best Practices" strategies in their classrooms to assist African American male students. Often teachers make assumptions that they are doing all they know how to do in assisting students, and they really are not instilling confidence or hope in these students.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Many African American males are left behind in the educational realm. Several factors contribute to this issue. In particular, African American middle school males are dropping out of school. As Hale (1982) states, American educators have failed to realize the significance of African American culture. It must be addressed in the educational process. Once educators understand the African American community and realize how their cognitive patterns and behaviors may prove incompatible with the school environment, the problem can then be pursued accordingly (Hale, 1982). Hale (1982) said that the following teaching strategies should be used in the classroom to assist African American students and better understand their culture in order for them to be successful. The strategies are considered the “Best Practices.”

- **Body Language:** Black children are accustomed to nonverbal communication. Therefore, teachers should be careful when using gestures, eye contact, and other nonverbal cues so as not to create a negative learning environment for the student.

- **Standard English:** Standard English should be used and children’s speech should be dealt with accordingly, to help avoid incorrect speech being spoken before reaching adolescence. Children should also be encouraged to speak clearly.

- **Equal talking time:** Teacher “talk” should be equal to child talk. Teachers should encourage more conversation, repeating of words, and use of creativeness.

- **Group learning:** Small group learning should be utilized, and there should be more hands on contact by the teacher.
A variety of learning activities: Children should be taught with a wide-range of learning activities: audio, games, dance, and poetry.

The researcher is an assistant principal in an inner city school where 73% of the 1,230 students are Black; 2% are White, and 24% other. Coming from some of the least affluent communities of Palm Beach County, 93% have qualified for free or reduced lunch. Many of these students are also from single parent homes and some are in foster homes or alternative residential settings. Approximately 7% of the students are classified as over-aged for middle school, most of who are African American males. Many of these male students are children who were retained during their school years. Typically, they will drop out before they reach high school, but there appears to be no monitoring or follow-up when they no longer attend school.

In this urban middle school where three out of every four students are Black, this researcher recommends interventions or prevention programs for dropouts based on theorists such as Rumberger (1983) and Nobles (1983), who documented the need for effective dropout prevention efforts to serve adolescents in the school system. Research solutions are only effective when they are actually put into practice.

Current federal education policies insist that no child should be left behind. As an African American school administrator, this researcher sees many African American middle school males falling through the cracks; the dropout rate is not even being reported in some states, including Florida. The largest dropout rate reported by school districts was Cleveland School District at 20.4%. The lowest school district reported was Davis School District at 0.4%. Assuming Florida’s rate is no better than that reported for the 100 largest school districts, school year 1999-2000, U. S. Department of Education,

Since Florida started giving letter grades to schools in the year 2000, the researcher’s school has been categorized as a “C” school, based largely on the test results from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Test performance is not likely to improve for over-aged students with little motivation to help raise the school’s overall score; why should they do their best on the standardized tests when they have little hope of passing grades or academic advancement? When they perform poorly on the FCAT, the school loses. When they drop out, everyone loses. The importance of the research questions impacts students, schools, and society as a whole: (1) What are the contributing factors that may cause African American males to drop out of middle school? (2) What strategies might prevent African American males from dropping out of middle school?

According to Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1986) and Frase (1989), some theorists attribute dropping out to students’ own attributes as individuals with “pull-out” factors such as family economics. Children may be expected to generate income by working or caring for siblings so that their parents can go to work. The importance of staying in school may not rank as high as financial survival for the child’s household. When a community’s employment opportunities are plentiful, students may be able to get jobs to help provide for their families, either while continuing to attend school, or dropping out altogether (McNeal, 1997; Mihalic & Elliott, 1997).
Another dropout theory describes the "push-out" factors impacting students who seem to simply choose not to continue their education. According to Fine (1986; 1991), the problem may be two-fold, combining the students' individual attributes with those factors in the school structure, which discourage them from continuing. Jordon, Lara, and McPartland (1996) defined this "push-out" effect as the negativity that prevails within the school. Some of the push-out factors include suspensions, expulsions, or excessive absences, which are most frequently higher for male students and students of color. Additional push-out factors include the increasingly higher standards for passing state tests and high school exit exams, resulting in grade repetition and failure to graduate (Jordon, Lara, & McPartlland, 1996).

Interventions

Beyond understanding the contributing factors to students dropping out of school, the researcher wanted to investigate interventions and alternative options that have proven to be effective in preventing African American males from dropping out of middle school. The researcher hoped to develop findings of benefit to students, teachers, families, and communities who want to reduce the rates at which African American males are dropping out of school.

Statement of the Problem

National, state, and local experts are concerned about the many students who are dropping out of school (Hale, 1982; Stanard, 2003). To address this issue, the researcher must examine the reasons why African American middle school males are dropping out of school and the potential intervention strategies that can be used to keep them in school. The problem has become very complex and is influenced by the individual, family,
school, and the community (Hale, 1982; Stanard, 2003). However, dropping out of school should not be looked upon merely as a stage that many adolescents experience; officials are duty-bound to implement strategies to help students become successful in society. These interventions should be implemented from the earliest pre-school and kindergarten years all the way through elementary and secondary levels, whenever the student is identified as at-risk for dropping out of school (Hale, 1982; Stanard, 2003).

America’s Crisis

Black males in contemporary society face many challenges related to physical, psychological, and social development. There are social and economic factors that place many young Black males in serious jeopardy. According to the National Urban League report on the status of the African American male, Black males have a shorter life span than any other population group in America, due to a disproportionate vulnerability to disease and homicide (Johnson & Watson, 1990). Also, the Urban League found a discrepancy in the structural changes in the labor market and discriminatory practices between the earnings of Black and White men, creating a disproportionate number of Black men living in poverty (Holister, 1989). The unemployment figures show African American males are unemployed at a rate 2.3 times higher than that of White males. In 1988, only one-third of African American males between the ages of 16 and 19 were employed (Holister; 1989; United States Bureau of Census, 1990). In light of this grim picture, the researcher considered the relationships between poverty and unemployment and the likelihood that African American middle school males either consider dropping out of school or in fact simply stop attending their middle schools.
In Florida’s public schools, the minority student population has been growing tremendously. Much of the growth has taken place in the urban areas of the state. According to demographics from the years 1976-2001, the minority student population grew in Florida from 461,113 to 1,215,458, reflecting an increase of 163.6%, whereas the overall population showed an increase of 62.3% (from 1,540,408 to 2,500,161) and the White student population increased by 19.0% (from 1,079,295 to 1,284,703). The minority student population in Florida nearly equals that of White students; in many counties White students now constitute a statistical minority group (Bureau of Education Information and Accountability Service, 2002).

Palm Beach County School District Data

Few people realize that the number of students who finish school is declining according to Palm Beach County School District data (2003). Not surprisingly, the data indicate that dropout rates among urban students are the highest; African American students are predominantly urban students as well. As in many other large cities and densely-populated areas, the dropout problem in Palm Beach County is indeed an urban problem.

Research Purpose

Previous academic research shows that the dropout rates among African American males are significantly higher than those of any other ethnic group (Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Palm Beach County School District Data Report, 2003; Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000). Variables that contribute to high dropout rates are: economic factors, family responsibilities, suspensions, expulsions, and excessive absences (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000; National Educational
Longitudinal Study, 1988; and Rumberger, 1983). Rarely, if ever, has the research considered the perspectives of the students who are at risk of dropping out and their teachers. This researcher used a qualitative approach to compile a succinct description of the issues related to dropping out from the perspectives of the students who are susceptible to dropping out of middle school, those students who have actually dropped out of school, and the teachers who have taught them. This descriptive account supports the findings of previous research and provides new insight into what may be needed to reduce African American male dropout rates in middle school.

Limitation and Assumptions

The researcher is an administrator within the school system with extensive experience and personal understanding of the issues being investigated. The position offers an insider’s perspective but potential career jeopardy if research findings expose deficiencies within the school or the district. Even as a school administrator, the researcher must rely on the information provided willingly by state and district officials, not knowing if additional data might be available but not released to the researcher. Most dropout data reports pertain to high school dropout patterns only; few systems openly report data pertaining to middle school dropout rates or middle school graduates who fail to enroll in high school.

Researcher Bias

The researcher is an assistant principal in a predominantly Black middle school in an urban school district in South Florida. Building on 12 years in middle school classrooms, the researcher now has four years of administrative experience and frequently deals with African American male students who are over-aged, have failed
academically, or have repeated more than one grade. They are in the office as repeat
offenders with histories of suspensions and expulsions. They have little motivation to
focus on school and are quite resistant to continuing their education. The researcher is
often in touch with their extended family caregivers, their probation officers, their social
workers, and other agency specialists, and is deeply concerned about the failure of the
public school system to adequately serve African American students, particularly males
in urban neighborhoods. The researcher sought solutions that did not yet exist, saw
former students “hanging out” in the neighboring streets, and did not know how to work
the magic that would bring them back to school and motivate them to go on through high
school. The researcher sought real solutions to real everyday problems.

Research Issues

This research was designed to increase understanding of the totality and
complexities of the dropout issue, to determine what factors cause or contribute to
dropping out, and to identify effective strategies and alternative options to overcome
those factors. The overall goal is to contribute solutions designed to help more students
stay in school and graduate.

Definitions of Terms

➢ Cumulative folder: data information on each student.

➢ Dropout: (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999-2000)

Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year,

a. Was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year,

b. Has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved
educational program; and
c. Does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved education program; temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness; or death.

- Middle school dropout: early school dropout or leaving school before entering ninth grade.

- Dropout prevention programs: programs that are designed to increase high school completion rates. These interventions may include techniques such as the use of incentives, counseling or monitoring as the prevention intervention of choice.

- Interim Data Warehouse (IDW): data information on each student maintained electronically for the entire school district.

- Push effect: “Factors located within the school itself that negatively impact the connection adolescents make within the school’s environment and are causing them to reject the context of schooling” (Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996).

- Pull effect: Rational cost-benefit analysis of an economic interest to remain in or leave school (McNeal, 1997; Mihalic & Elliott, 1997).

Research Questions

The focus of this study was to discover and document the totality and complexities of the dropout problem, to examine factors that cause or contribute to students dropping out, and to determine how to overcome these factors so that more
students will stay in school and graduate. These concerns may be better understood by asking the following questions:

1. What are the contributing factors that may cause African American males to drop out of middle school?
2. What strategies might prevent African American males from dropping out of middle school?

Summary

The researcher examined the body of relevant literature to better understand the factors that contribute to or deter middle school African American male students from dropping out of school. The researcher identified proven techniques to be the best practices and prevention programs that can help all students to be motivated to stay in school and graduate. In addition to working with African American male students and their teachers, the “best practices” by Hale (1982) were used as a model to find whether or not these strategies were actually used in the classroom to help African American males stay in middle school. The researcher has considered ways to encourage parents of participants to get more involved with their children academically. Parental involvement is documented in the research (Hale, 1982) and in the statistical analysis report published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2000-01). This is one of the major factors that African American males, in particular, will need in order to stay in school. On a personal level, as an African American who grew up in a low-socioeconomic neighborhood and has succeeded professionally, the researcher is committed to expanding the documented research base that can best prevent African American middle school males from dropping out of school. The capacity to reduce the
statistical dropout rate is a worthy goal, but even more important are the brighter futures of the children who are able to complete school and contribute more effectively to their communities throughout their lives.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

There appears to be a major impact on students that drop out as well as society itself. Many studies have shown how dropouts earn less money and frequently are unemployed more than their counterparts who actually graduate. Dropouts are three times more likely not to go to college and become welfare recipients (General Accounting Office (GAO), 2002) than students who graduate. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that approximately 30% of federal and approximately 40% of state prison inmates are high school dropouts, increasing the expenses to federal and state criminal justice budgets (GAO, 2002). Lowering the dropout rate has long been a major task for educators and legislators.

National Longitudinal Study of 1988

In the spring of 1988, the National Longitudinal Study: 88 (NELS:88) was conducted using a cohort of 25,000 eighth graders in the public and private schools across the nation, and again on the same cohort in 1990. Data were also collected during the base year on students, parents, teachers, and principals. An analysis was developed which combined the base-year and follow-up data on the students as they mobilized themselves in and out of the school system during their adolescent years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000).

This study examined several characteristics of eighth graders who were at-risk of school failure. Such information included low achievement test scores and dropping out of school. Several variables were tested as factors for dropping out of school: 1) basic
demographic characteristics; 2) family and personal background; 3) the amount of parental involvement; 4) the student’s academic history; 5) student behavioral factors; 6) teachers’ perceptions of the student; and 7) the characteristics of the students’ school.

Demographic Characteristics

Sex, race, and socioeconomic status were examined.

- Black, Hispanic and Native American students along with students from low socioeconomic status were prone to score lower on mathematics and reading skills.
- Eighth grade males performed at a lower standard than their female counterparts but were no more likely to drop out than their female peers.
- Over time, when analyses were controlled for students’ gender and socioeconomic status, Black and Hispanic dropout rates were no longer statistically different from the White dropout rates.
- After controlling for the students’ gender and socioeconomic status, Black and Hispanic students were found to have performed at a lower standard in math and reading skills than had the White students.

Effects of Other Characteristics after Controlling for Demographic Characteristics

Many components of the National Longitudinal Study:88 had been proven to be independent of at-risk students’ gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. After controlling for demographic characteristics, the characteristics found to be most significant in the African American male students who performed below standards between 8th and 10th grade were:
➢ Students were from single-parent homes, were average in their peer group, and were students who moved frequently from school to school.

➢ Eighth-grade students’ parents were not a part of their educational goals, didn’t participate in school affairs, had very little education themselves, and did not promote high expectations for the child’s future educational attainment.

➢ Students who had repeated grades more than once or twice in earlier grades, had a record of poor academic performance in math and English, and did very little class work.

➢ Eighth grade students rarely brought materials necessary for class work, students often skipped class, and students exhibited high absenteeism and excessive tardiness to class.

➢ Eighth-graders who teachers thought were uncooperative, frequently were behavioral challenges, not attentive, or students who teachers thought were low achievers, and

➢ Students were from inner city schools or from schools with a large minority population.

Eighth-graders from schools that performed successfully academically were less likely to have poor basic skills. At the same time, these students were not considered either less or more likely to drop out of school than were other students (NELS:88).

Definition of At-Risk Outcomes

An “at-risk” student is defined as a student who is susceptible to fail in school. A dropout is usually considered a student dropping out of school before graduation. Certain characteristics are determining factors associated with at-risk students dropping out of
school (NELS:88). However, school failure should not be based solely on dropout data. Students who have been unable to meet the minimum requirements for basic skills can also be seen as possible dropout statistics (NELS:88).

Demographic Background Factors

According to the National Longitudinal Study:88, a student’s socioeconomic status has been found to be an important factor contributing to at-risk status. In terms of measuring what elements contribute most to the at-risk status, the National Educational Longitudinal Study:88 identified parents’ occupation, educational attainment, or family income. Somewhat more complex findings have concluded that students from lower socio-economic families usually experience more difficulty achieving than those from higher socioeconomic families. Data also report that Hispanics have proven to leave school earlier than either Black or White students, who are more likely not to drop out until the last two years of high school (NELS:88).

Overall, approximately 19% of the eighth graders from the NELS: 88 performed below level in mathematics and approximately 14% were below level in reading. Additionally, about 6% of eighth graders in the class of 1988 dropped out by the time they reached 10th grade. Of all students, Black, Hispanic and Native American students and students from low socioeconomic status rated lower in basic skills. Black, Hispanic, and Native Americans had the highest dropout rates (NELS:88).

Family and Personal Background Factors

Family characteristics have been shown to affect a student’s success. Students who come from single-parent families and from large families have a higher risk of school failure.
Zimiles and Lee (1991) examined the High School and Beyond (H S& B) sophomore group (students in high school or students who moved on to an alternative school) and found that students who came from intact families performed higher on tests than those students from single-parent families and step-parent families. They were predicted two to three times more likely to drop out of school between their sophomore and senior years. Zimiles and Lee (1991) found that the genders of the student and single-parent families or step-parent families contributed to variations in dropout rates.

Other factors involved with family status could also have contributed to students’ educational success. Barro and Kolstadt (1987) felt that dropout rates can be related to the number of siblings as well as the effects of SES.

Students who were below the average of their peers, from single-parent families, had older siblings, who were unsuccessful in completing school, or from families who moved frequently were at a higher risk of school failure than those students who did not possess these characteristics. While scores of average students tripled their performance above level in mathematics, and more than tripled in reading, data equated a decrease 11 times higher in dropping out. Students from single-parent families were estimated to have performed below standards 55–65% more frequently than those students who were from two-parent families. Students who had older siblings who had dropped out of school were more likely to drop out of school themselves. According to the odds ratios, dropouts were 47% more likely to not meet the minimum requirements in basic math and 38% more likely to not reach the minimum requirement in basic reading (NELS:88).

Students from large families (eight or more people) were more prone not to be successful in reading and math than those students in small families of two to three
members. Students who came from a medium sized family (four or five people) were rated about 50% more successful in reading and math compared to those students from smaller families (NELS: 88).

Family mobility rated very high with poor outcomes for those students moving from school to school compared to those students who never changed schools. High mobility students were two and a half times more likely to drop out than those students who remained at one school.

As a result, factors surrounding the family-personal background can be associated with socioeconomic status, race-ethnicity, or both. It is likely that students from single parent homes or from large families and come from the low SES backgrounds are most frequently associated with students dropping out of school.

As a demographic variable, students who were older than their peers, from single parent families, or who had a sibling that dropped out were prone to have an unsuccessful outcome. Over-age students are estimated to perform more than twice below the basic level and are more than eight times more likely to drop out of school. Similarly, students from single-parent families were more likely to perform at lower standards. They were also more than two and a half times more likely to be unsuccessful or below level for the basic reading and math levels compared to students who were from two-parent families.

Results also show that students with an older sibling who had dropped out were 19% more likely to perform at a low level in math than students without an older sibling dropout; students who had an older sibling that dropped out of school were 75% more likely to drop out. In addition, students with more than one sibling who had dropped out were found to be more than one-third likely to perform at a lower standard on the basic
math level and more than twice as likely to drop out of school than those students without older siblings who dropped out.

Family mobility can also be associated with an unsuccessful outcome, stemming from the student’s gender, race-ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Students who never or rarely moved were likely to be more successful on performance for the basic math level than those students who changed schools two to four times. Students who moved one to three times increased their chances by 20% of performing below the basic reading level. Consequently when looking at the SES factors, race-ethnicity, and gender, students who changed schools at least once were estimated to be 80% more likely to drop out of school. Students who changed schools several times during their first eight grades of schooling were estimated to be eight times more likely to drop out of school.

Parental Involvement

According to researcher Finn (1989), poor relationships with parents have been identified as a factor contributing to at-risk students being headed for school failure. Finn (1989) stated that delinquency was prevalent among students whose parents did not know their whereabouts, whose parents were not at home, and among students who did not communicate with their parents. Finn (1989) also refers to a study by Cervantes (1989) that asserted that students who were not close to their parents were more likely to fail in school than those students who had a close relationship with their parents. Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1989) investigated information that suggested students considered at-risk were likely to talk less with their parents about their issues. Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, and Ginsberg (1986) saw that the philosophy of educational
expectations was generally considered a negative in the eyes of a single-parent family membership.

For students whose parents spent very little time in their children’s school or did not participate in the school’s parent-teacher organization, results show low student performance and an increased risk of dropping out. Children of parents with low involvement in the school were 40% more likely to work below level in basic math and reading skills and twice as likely to drop out of school than children of parents who were moderately involved in their child’s school (NELS:88).

The precise reasons are unclear as to why children’s success in performance relies on what parents’ expectations are or how student’s performances dictate their parents’ expectations. Nonetheless, students of parents who expected their children to graduate from a four-year college or higher were found to be approximately 50% likely to attain that goal and 70% less likely to drop out of school than those whose parents expected a minimum of some college education. Consequently, eighth graders who had very little or no parental involvement were 16% more likely to drop out of school (NELS:88).

Parental involvement variables relate to SES and race-ethnicity. Parents who are in a high-socioeconomic status tend to have more time to become involved in school activities or school organizations, while minority parents are less likely to do so. In addition, highly educated parents, in many cases, expect their children to attain the same educational status (NELS:88).

The expectations attributed from parents according to their SES, race-ethnicity, and gender influenced students’ test performance and dropout status. Parents that demonstrated high to minimum expectations of their children in terms of education had
children who performed at least adequately in school. However, children of parents who had fewer or no expectations for their children to graduate from school were three and one-half times as likely to perform below the basic math level, and more than twice as likely to perform below the basic reading level than those students whose parents expected them to complete four years of college. Therefore, the students who demonstrated a lower performance were almost 14% more likely to drop out of school than those students whose parents expected their children to have some sort of college education (NELS:88).

Academic History and Characteristics

Barrington and Hendricks (1989) stated that poor school achievement results have been linked with school failure. Barrington and Hendricks (1989) found at-risk students to be unsuccessful academically as early as third grade. Retention during the early primary years is another issue that was found to lead to school failure. In secondary school, high school in particular, students who are in the vocational program versus students in the academic program tend to be at a greater risk. Students who did little or no homework were prone not to succeed in school. Studies (NELS:88) have also shown that, though at-risk students can perform at an average level when measured on cognitive ability, they tend to score lower on achievement tests than non-at-risk students.

Students who repeated a grade were about two and a half times more likely not to succeed on the basic levels of math and reading achievement tests than those students who had not repeated a grade. Students who repeated a grade as early as kindergarten through fourth grade were projected to be five times more likely to drop out of school than those students who had not repeated a grade. Students reported to have repeated a
grade later in elementary school were projected to be 11 times more likely to drop out than those students who had never repeated a grade (NELS:88).

Using the NELS:88 data for at-risk students’ previous academic performance, findings showed “A” students to be 60% and “B” students to be about 40% less likely to perform below level when compared to a “C” student. Students who had earned a “D” average since sixth grade were estimated to perform about 50% below the basic level. “D” students were also predicted to be twice as likely to perform below basic levels. Moreover, “D” students were found to be more than two and one-half times likely to drop out as “C” students (NELS:88).

In addition to performing below level as at-risk students, these students showed learning problems, emotional problems, and a history of participation in special education programs for students with learning disabilities. These factors contributed to dropping out of school between the 8th and 10th grade. For example, students who were considered special education students were said to be two and a half times more likely to drop out, students with learning deficiencies were three times as likely to drop out, and students with emotional issues were six times more likely to drop out than other students (NELS:88).

Student Behaviors

At-risk students tend to show more aggressive behavior than non-at-risk students. According to Chavez, Edwards, and Oetting (1989), many of the students who fail in school are the products of a troublesome world. There are differences between the at-risk students who are the perpetrators of crimes versus their non-at-risk counterparts who are the victims of the crimes. Researchers have also noted that at-risk students face higher
probabilities of legal action and problems with the school authorities. Problems that at-risk students tend to face are delinquency, truancy, suspension, and even expulsion depending on the severity of the offenses (Binkley and Hooper, 1989).

Attendance rates among at-risk students average 80% compared to 92% for non-at-risk students as reported by Binkley and Hooper (1989). Farrell (1988) believed that students' non-engagement in the educational process had very little to do with their disinterest in learning but was linked to their disengagement from the system in which they were unable to earn any rewards (Farrell, 1988).

Mensch and Kandel (1988) found illegal drug and alcohol use was different among male and female at-risk students, although there wasn't a significant difference found between at-risk and non-at-risk students using alcohol. They (1988) noted that more non-at-risk students only use alcohol on a trial basis, while at-risk students used the alcohol or drugs throughout the year. Mensch and Kandel (1988) also found that the earlier a student begins taking or using most substances, the more at risk a student becomes of failing school.

When comparing students who brought their materials and homework to class against students who did not bring pencil or paper or had no homework to show the teacher, the latter group were about two and a half times more likely to perform below the basic math and reading level. Students who came to class without books were estimated to be three and one-half times more likely to perform below the basic reading level than those students who always brought their books to class.

In a combined summary of variables used to determine the overall preparedness of students coming to class, the results showed that students who came to class prepared
to learn were more apt to achieve the basic skills and less likely to drop out. Students who were considered unprepared for class were four to four and one-half times more likely to perform below the basic level and nine times more likely to drop out.

In addition, those students who were constantly absent or tardy, or who skipped classes, were prone to fail in school. Students absent three or more days in the month before the NELS survey was taken were found to be one and a half times more likely to perform below level in math and reading skills. Also, they were approximately three times more likely to drop out of school than those students who were never absent in school. Students who missed five or more days were twice as likely to perform below the basic math and reading level and six times more likely to drop out of school in comparison with those students who never skipped school.

Skipping school caused students to also face poorer educational outcomes than those students who never skipped class. Students who skipped classes were a lot more likely to perform below level. Students who were tardy at least three to four times in one month before the National Center for Education Statistics survey was taken were shown to be one and a half times more likely to drop out in comparison to those students who were reported to never have been tardy to class (NELS, 1988).

Teacher Perceptions

Researchers have also found that many teachers can identify who the “at-risk” students are. Kagan (1989) found that teachers identified these students by looking at their test scores on standardized tests, the student’s neighborhood, and classroom issues such as exhibiting aggression or withdrawal. From this total observation, the teacher then identified those students as being “at risk.”
Consequently, research also shows that what teachers think of students can have overpowering influences on student outcomes. Studies also show the teacher’s perceptions of the student’s behavior and achievement from the past to present can make or break the student in reference to the particular behavior or achievement. This is determined by how the teacher responds or interacts with the student. As a result, the student’s behavior and achievement could be traced back to the teacher as being a positive re-enforcer or “self-fulfilling prophecy” linked to the techniques used by the teacher.

Students who were identified by their teachers as having been absent quite a bit and as being passive were found to be one and half times more likely than other students to perform below the basic level of math and reading skills. Students whose teachers reported them to create frequent disruptions were found to be twice as likely to perform below standards. In addition, students identified by teachers as being constantly tardy to class, working below standards, and hardly ever completing homework were three times as likely to perform below level in math and twice as likely to perform below level in reading.

Students dropping out of school could also contribute to what teachers thought about those students. Teachers seemed to have a pre-conceived image of those students. Students who were incoherent or performing at an acceptable level were more likely to drop out than were those students who worked up to their own level of performance. Also, according to teachers, students who rarely or never completed their homework were estimated to be five times more likely to drop out than those students who completed their homework. Students who were tardy on a consistent basis were approximately five
times more likely to drop out than were other students and those who exhibited excessive absences were estimated to be seven times more likely to drop out than those students who had no absences.

Revitalizing the Curriculum

Health education can be an important asset in the middle school curriculum. Courses in health should include pertinent information on eating habits and on the effects of alcohol in the body. They should also include information on teenage pregnancy since many of the teenagers are becoming teenage mothers at an early age while others are merely engaging in early pre-marital sex (Natriello, 1988).

Improving the Student Teacher Relationship

Much of the research points out that one of the reasons why students drop out is because of the negativity from teacher/student interactions. On the other hand, a successful student states that a "good teacher" is one who interacts positively with his or her students. Students often times tend to pull away from teachers as confidants, but at the same time have a need to relate with them. Students are less likely drop out of school when they find that their teachers are flexible, positive, creative, innovative, and people-oriented individuals (Bhaerman & Kopp, 1986).

Middle school teaching is an art and includes specialized training. All teachers should take special training in working with adolescents as well as specialized training in a subject area. Teachers should also be able to build confidence in their students through their middle school years. By doing so, teachers can provide a richer and more positive climate that will encourage and enhance their skills working with "at-risk" students (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989).
School Environment

According to Ekstrom (1989) and Mann (1987), students from a large city are more vulnerable and at risk in education versus those students from the rural community. Fine (1987) found that a great deal of the problem stemmed from the “at-risk” students being clustered in the same school. This clustering was considered a deterrent and an ongoing failure leading to lower funding levels in schools where students took more remedial courses or required help from counselors, teachers, and aides, and where there was often low morale among staff members. Fine (1985) found that two thirds of the staff members felt the staff and school administrator showed little or no interest at all toward the students and their work in the classroom (Fine, 1985). Fine also implied that much of the problem came from the school having an overcrowded-population (144% of its capacity), and that the ethnic make-up of the school also contributed to its limited success in graduation among students. The student body was primarily Black and Hispanic students, while the school’s administrative staff was nearly all White with a few Hispanic and Black teachers, and most of the teacher assistants were Black women who worked for low pay and showed very little respect for their work. Fine (1987) believed that very little was done by the school to change this negative perception to a positive perception in encouraging students to desire a strong belief in education to overcome the issue of poverty (Fine, 1987).

The National Education Longitudinal Study:88 concluded that eighth graders who attended urban schools were estimated to perform 24% below the basic math level and 40% below the reading level when compared with those students who went to suburban eighth grade schools. Students who attended urban schools were also projected to be 62%
more likely to drop out than were those students who attended schools in the suburban areas.

Students who were from schools with large numbers of minorities (more than 20% minority) and students who were destitute were more likely to perform below standards and to drop out as well when compared to students who attended schools where the majority were White students and where few qualified for the government free- or reduced-lunch program. When students who attend schools with a small proportion of minority students (0 – 5%) were compared to students from schools with a higher percentage (21- 40% minority population), these students were estimated about one-third more likely to perform below basic math and reading levels. Students from schools with a minority population of over 60% were more than two times likely to perform below standards and were rated approximately three and a half times more likely to drop out.

In a similar relationship, when examining student performance and the proportion of poor students in the schools that students attended (measured by the percentage of students who received free or reduced lunch), compared to students attending another school where there were no poor students, students from schools where 11 – 30% of the students who were poor were found to be 51% more likely to perform below standards. Students who attended school where approximately 75% of the student population were poor were estimated to be more than three and one-half times more likely to perform below the basic levels and seven times more likely to drop out.

Teacher engagement is a contributing factor to boosting teacher morale and teachers’ relationships to both the student body and administration. It is also a contributing factor to boosting students’ test scores. When there is little engagement
between teacher and students, approximately 20 percent of these students are more likely to perform below the basic level of math and reading standards than students from moderate teacher engagement settings. Students who attend schools where academics were highly respected were one-third less likely to perform below the basic math level as opposed to those from schools with a moderate amount of academic emphasis and were projected to be only one-half as likely to drop out.

Understanding African American Children

Curricular Goals

Beginning with early childhood education, the actual environment of the child as early as preschool should be made to feel as homelike as possible Hale (1982). Key features of the home should also be incorporated in that child’s school environment; most important of all, the school environment should represent the culture of that student’s home. The child’s learning experience should be pleasant, preparing him or her to adjust to the classroom rather than waiting years for that adjustment. In essence, a childhood educator’s focus should help with learning as well as being able to prepare him or her for the public schools. Hale (1982) speaks of several teaching strategies that teachers should implement when teaching African American children.

The Teacher

Ideally, the teacher should be someone who virtually lives in the community and/or shares the culture of the children. She or he should understand the culture and participate in it as well. The teacher of the curriculum should understand the obstacles that Black people face within their own group such as trying to escape their heritage. By
understanding this and other obstacles they face as a race, they will gain admiration as a Black person in the children’s perspective (Hale, 1982)

Discipline

Many of the discipline problems that occur with Black children stem from expectations of the White behavioral model. Teachers can actually prevent any behavioral problems if the child is engaged in learning activities.

Nutrition is another factor that could affect behavior. Most lower-income children may not necessarily be products of malnutrition, but may be less well nourished than the advantaged children. Eating junk foods and food with lots of sugar and carbohydrates can cause behavior problems. Children should be taught the importance of eating nutritious foods (Hale, 1982).

Masculinity

Black children have a different perception of masculinity from that of the European-American culture. Blacks tend to have a raunchy or macho image of such figures as Muhammad Ali and Walt Frazier. Black males have a special walk, a distinctive handshake, and slang. They also share the same common rites and share the same types of characteristic approaches toward authority figures and women (Hale, 1982).

Parental Involvement

Educators must recognize that many of the Black students have been reared in a lower-income area and by single females. Their parents are faced with many issues that require a great deal of their time and energy. For example, many of them are in school and in job-training programs. A greater problem lies with family members becoming sick
due to poor nutrition and medical care. Many of the setbacks are from living in high-
crime areas.

Parental involvement programs designed for suburban housewives will not work
for Black children’s families. Most input should come from parents to help educate and
provide activities for Black children. Some suggest that educational seminars should
relate to applying make-up or job interviewing, topics unrelated to the school and child,
but involving the interests of the parents. Within such a context, parents will give more
time to the school and the child when the parent’s needs have been met (Hale, 1982).

The parental-involvement program should possess a well-rounded view of the
Black lower-income family. The teacher should be able to understand the aspects of the
Black family and the strengths of the Black families related to school. On the other hand,
poverty must not be ostracized. At the same time, Blacks make time for their families, but
still face crime, poor health, poor housing, and limited opportunities for upward mobility
(Hale, 1982).

There should be an educational component for parents in the programs serving
Black students. Such components should include seminars on child development and
learning theories so that the parents and the teachers can all relate to the program
strategies (Hale, 1982).

The program might also include seminars on Black studies because they are not
necessarily taught in educational institutions. Blacks should be aware of their culture, be
able to share with their families, and feel the joy of discovering their heritage (Hale,
1982).
Some educators feel that because they believe in a model program, it should work for everyone else. The educational staff should make it possible to talk with parents about ideological issues and the celebration of their holidays. There should be a balance by the staff with parents with their way of thinking as well as in the decision-making process in the political realm (Hale, 1982)

Explanations for Dropping Out

According to Ekstrom et al (1986) and Frase (1989), there are three categories to dropouts exiting school: “Drop out,” “pull-out,” or “push-out.” Findings show that African American and Latino youths are more likely to drop out than our White teens of lower socioeconomic status. Researchers have not determined whether the social context of the school is significant or if outside economic or familial forces may most strongly influence students’ dropout behavior, (National Education Statistics, 2000-2001).

According to the percentage rate of dropouts in the United States reported by the Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public Elementary/Secondary Education Agency Universe Data (2000-01) and Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey (1999-2000), Dade County, Broward County, and Palm Beach County School Districts are among the largest districts in populations in the state of Florida, yet they have not reported any drop out rate for grades 7-12. The membership is taken from a membership file and reported. This file is from 1999-2000. In calculating the aggregate 7-12 dropout rate, districts that did not give any dropout information were reported unavailable. In addition, many of the larger districts had reported their dropout rates for the year 1999-2000.
Dropout Rate in Florida’s Public Schools

In the state of Florida, it was reported for grades 9-12 in the year 2001-02 that there were 11,509 White students, 8,305 Black students, 6,075 Hispanic students, 290 Asian students, 57 American Indian students, and 144 multiracial students who actually dropped out of high school in grades 9-12. The state of Florida does not report any statistics for middle school dropouts. The state of Florida shows the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out during a single school year. While the majority of dropouts reported were White students, the dropout rates were the highest among Black and Hispanic students in comparison to their population in schools. (Bureau of Education Department & Accountability Services, 2001-02).

Districts Above and Below State Average

For the 2001-02 school year, 39 out of the 67 Florida school districts had a lower dropout rate than the state’s rate of 3.2%. For Palm Beach County School District, the total dropout rate was 2.6%, whereas dropouts were 1.9% among White students, 3.4% for Black students, 3.6% for Hispanic students; 1.3% for Asian students, 4.2% for American Indian students, and 2.9% for Multiracial students (Bureau of Education Information & Accountability Services, 2001-02).

Contributing Factors

*Structural Strains Theory*

Studies on demographics have shown that boys are more likely to drop out than girls (Rumberger, 1987). In addition most children are from a family of low socioeconomic status (Socioeconomic Status; Bachman, Green, & Wirtamen, 1971, Ekstrom et al, 1986; Rumberger, 1983). Studies have shown that African American and
Hispanic students are more likely to drop out of school than European American students (Chavez, Edwards, & Oetting; 1989; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; McMillen & Kaufman, 1997). Other studies have found, on the contrary, that this is not necessarily true. According to Cairns, Cairns, and Neckerman (1989) and Rumberger (1983), low academic achievement is part of the structural factors of gender, ethnicity, and SES and dropout. However, these structural strains factors have more of an influence on students dropping out of school than on low academic achievement.

Perceptions about Being Black

According to McCadden (1998), in our society much ignorance is displayed about the African American culture and traditions, contributing to an on-going negative perception of African Americans. Educators also show an on-going negative perception of African American students, rather than mentoring them. McCadden (1998) also believes that teachers try to control Black students more than their White counterparts, believing that they are less disciplined in the home.

Freemon and Hamilton (1997) believed that the reasons for differential treatment for students of color are quite complicated and many African American students act out because of unfair treatment. For example, a White male student is likely not to suffer a consequence the first time for misbehavior, but when an African American youth does the same misbehaving act, the child is severely punished and labeled a troublemaker (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997). Many African American youths believe that if they try to excel in school, despite the obstacles, racism comes into play, and their White counterparts will win in reaping the benefits. That is when African American males become resistant and eventually drop out of school (Mahiri, 1998).
The perceptions about Black men do not lie within the young Black men, but lie in a society that portrays them as a stereotype. Some key problems experienced by Black males in society are pertinent to this project.

Life Chances of the Black Male

Nobles (1983) believed that the Black male is noted to have the lowest life expectancy of any other gender or ethnic group. According to Nobles (1983) the Black male mortality rate was 1,020 per 100,000, which was almost double that of the White male population. When compared to other groups in relation to drug-related disease, the rate for Black males under 35 years old is 12 times higher than their counterparts (Nobles, 1983).

The Black male, according to Nobles (1983), also has a one in 21 chance of being murdered in his lifetime by the time he reaches 65 years of age. Homicide is a leading cause of death among Black males 15-24; one out of three deaths (38.5%) of Black males from the ages of 20-24 was from homicide. The 54% homicide rate of Black males per 100,000 males was seven times higher than that of their White male counterparts (Nobles, 1983).

Criminality of Black Youth

The Black population represents 12% of the total population, but Black males account for 46% of the prison population. Many Black males are in prison before they reach 29 years of age. Data also show that incarceration indicates a substantial level of drug-related behavior in the Black community (Nobles, 1983).
Economic Condition of Black Males

According to Nobles (1983), opportunities for Black males to participate in mainstream economic activities are very slim, and Black males are increasingly becoming a marginal group. The unemployment ratio for Black males has doubled that of White males and currently stands at 14.9%. This information indicates that large portions of the Black male population are not participating in the economic structure of American society.

Educational Level of Black Male Youth

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2000), Black youths are scoring below average nationally across all grade levels and in all subjects. They are also unprepared to enter college because of low test scores. Additionally, data indicate that Black male students either drop out or are pushed out of the school entity at a higher rate than any other ethnic group (Noble, 1983).

Black Youth and Drugs and Gang Violence

According to Nobles (1983), many Black males face drugs, youth gangs, violence, victimization, and crime in their everyday lives. There is no doubt that drug use and abuse have played a major part in the African American community. The primary drugs used in the community have been traditionally marijuana and heroin, while cocaine is used by the rich and powerful (Nobles, 1983).

The increase in drug-related users has led to many arrests in the Black community. It was reported that there was a 19% increase in arrests for using drugs in 1984 in comparison to 1983. According to statistics found by Nobles (1983), there was an increase in arrests for heroin and cocaine sales, while marijuana took a 7% decline in
sales. These data reflected a shift change in the pattern of drug usage in the Black community.

Black Male Sexual Misconduct and Health Risk

AIDS is the largest epidemics in the Black community (US Bureau of the Census, 2003). Recently, it was reported that in the African American community AIDS continues to rise. At one time, AIDS had been considered a disease affecting White homosexual and bisexual men and some African American intravenous drug users (Nobles, 1983). African Americans (mostly males) are now said to represent 25% of the AIDS cases, but at the same time represent only 12 percent of the national population. However, recent data reported that the AIDS epidemic is now impacting all the way down to the children. It was reported according to the US Bureau of Census (2003) that 59% of these children with AIDS are African American.

Palm Beach County School District Data

Urban/Rural Education

In the Florida public schools, the minority student population has grown tremendously. Much of the growth has taken place in the urban areas of the state. According to statistics, from the years 1976-2001 in Florida, the minority student population grew from 461,113 to 1,215,458. Compared to the overall population’s increase of 62.3%, the minority student population increased 163.6%. Among the White student population, there was a 19% increase (1,079,295 to 1,284,703) over the same period (Bureau of Education Information and Accountability Services, 2002).

The number of students who fail to graduate from school could be detrimental to society. Based on Palm Beach County’s statistical research data, more urban students are
dropping out of school (Bureau of Education Information and Accountability Services, 2001-2002). This is where the influx of minority students comes from. The dropout problem is indeed an urban problem in Palm Beach County, Florida.

Incorporating School Context

School context influences the process of dropping out. Urban schools have the highest dropout rate (Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000). The precise reasons are not known, but the rates vary according to the degree of urbanicity of the school. Some researchers point to academic and disciplinary issues. Rural and suburban schools have a lower dropout rate and the lowest dropout for academic reasons. Push factors for leaving school still rate very high in urban schools possibly because of stricter disciplinary rules and procedures in these particular schools (Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000).

Integrated and low minority schools have lower student dropout rates than schools with the higher percentages of minority students. According to Gordon, Della Piana, and Keleher (2000) and Poe-Yamagata & Jones (2000), a vast number of minority students leave school because of attendance, disciplinary, and mobility reasons than do students at other schools. A high percentage of minority schools have the lowest rates of students leaving school in reference to academic and employment reasons. Data indicate 13% of students are dropping out of schools with a low percentage of minority students, and only 7.5% of students are dropping out in integrated schools (Gordon, Della Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000).
Neighborhood/ Community Factors

Crane (1991) and Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Kato, and Sealand (1992) felt that students with two parents might be a stronger influence in steering children from bad neighborhoods than those from single parent homes. Also, according to Crane (1991) and Brooks-Gunn et al. (1992), race and ethnicity could contribute to neighborhood effects. Crane (1991) also suggested that more research needed to be done regarding the contributing factors related to dropping out of school. Crane (1991) did an investigation on the relationship between dropout characteristics and the probability of dropping out of school. The data used in this investigation were from the 1970 Census matched with information on the microdata files from the 1980 census. This information allowed for the examination of the effects of an individual as well as the neighborhood composition on whether or not teenage boys are susceptible to dropping out of school.

According to Crane (1991), neighborhood quality plays an important role in keeping drop out rates low, and parents have a greater influence on males than their neighborhoods. He also discovered that it really didn’t matter if the boys were from a disadvantaged or middle class neighborhood; both affected the likelihood that a boy would drop out of school.

Ford (1993), in a study of 148 African-American students who were 9-14 years old, found that though parental achievement (two parents) orientation was related to motivating the student, family demographic variables contributed very little to the achievement orientation. Brady, Tucker, Harris, and Tribble (1992) found that family was more important for White students than for their African American counterparts. Such
information contradicts Crane's (1991) belief that family (two parent homes) plays a significant factor in whether a student will drop out of school.

Some researchers state that children with two parents in the household have an increased likelihood of academic success. According to Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Kato, and Furstenberg (1993), in a twenty-year study of African American children born to teenage mothers in Baltimore, Maryland during 1966-1968, a father's presence was found to be very important in terms of the student graduating. Also, Voelkl (1993) identified home environmental characteristics such as growing up in a low socioeconomic neighborhood. These characteristics were associated with low-achieving African American eighth graders who were not as successful academically compared to those with high expectations. National data cited by Voelkl (1993) also indicated low achievers who had high expectations were more successful with parents who were involved in their studies, had high expectations, had higher income, and who were also educated. Ford (1993) has found that parental achievement orientation was a significant factor contributing to students' achievement motivation, but dual-parent families contributed little to this variable.

Five Theoretical Models of Dropout

No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act that was passed by Congress in 2001 is one of the most astonishing school reform efforts. This law will give every child in America a "highly qualified teacher" by 2006, and will ensure that all students achieve "proficiency" in core subjects by 2014.
To accelerate change, No Child Left Behind requires states to test third- to eighth-grade children in math and reading yearly and once in high school. They must then issue report cards for every school assessing the performance of all students and of subgroups such as low-income, minority, and special-education students.

Deviant Affiliation Theory

Peers influence their friends' behavior and their developmental stage (Coleman, 1961; Cusick, 1973; Gilmore, Hawkins, Day, & Catalano, 1992). According to Hallinan and Williams (1990), peers also influence academic achievement of their friends. Research also indicates that having deviant friends contributes to one dropping out of school (Cairns, 1989; Elliott & Voss, 1974; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Rumberger, 1983).

According to Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, & McDougal (1996), very little research has been devoted to investigating the role of peers on academic failure. Instead, Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, & McDougal (1996) have reviewed several areas where peers could influence one to leave school early. One of these areas includes the negative influence of peers and the trouble peers may face (rejection). These are some of the issues that a teenager may face affecting academic achievement and the decision to drop out of school. Therefore, affiliation with antisocial peers should be considered a factor when understanding the process of dropping out of school.

Poor Family Socialization Theory

According to Rumberger (1983), the influence of strong family ties can begin early in a student's life to determine whether or not he will stay in school. There are many family socialization influences for dropouts. Some include parent divorce (Weng, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1988), family stress (Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997), and parental
behavioral control and acceptance (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Other researchers (Ellickson, Bui, Bell, & McGuigan, 1998; Janosz & LeBlanc, 1996; Kaplan & Liu, 1994) have concluded that a major influence on a student dropping out or academic success is the child’s parents’ educational level. In most cases, the parent’s educational background generally defines the expectations for their children’s academic success at the same level.

Parents’ involvement is generally affiliated with their income and educational level. Parental involvement might include attending general school meetings, parent teacher organizations, or school events, or participating as a volunteer parent in after school activities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). In general, parents whose children attended a school that was selected by them showed satisfaction with the school, its teachers, its academic standards, and its method of discipline more so than parents of those students who went to schools that were assigned to them (NCES, 2000).

Ford (1993) found that parental achievement orientation in two parent homes relates to motivating the students, while family demographic variables contributed little to their achievement success. He found families who live in the same neighborhood tend to have a great deal in common. Therefore, dropout rates may persist in a neighborhood because of the families who live there, and not because of the neighborhood characteristics. There are many reasons why families do not keep their children in school. Some parents need their young man to work rather than attend school. If the parents are uneducated, they may have trouble supporting their children in the school system (Petrovich & Parsons, 1989). If the parents have been unable to graduate from high school themselves, they may be unable to assume a supportive role as parents prepared to
provide for their children's education (Arnold, 1985). Finally, boys who live in a single parent home (mother) may be more likely to drop out because their mothers have a hard time monitoring their sons' behavior (Astone and McLanahan, 1991).

**General Deviant Theory**

Krohn, Thornberry, Collins-Hall, and Lizotte (1995) believed that drug use and subsequent delinquency increased the probability of dropping out of school, but were not significant factors in contributing to dropping out of school. Also, Elliott and Voss (1974) believed that delinquent students in particular who dropped out of school tended to commit fewer delinquency acts after they dropped out of school. Janosz et al. (1997) felt that delinquency and drugs were factors for students dropping out of school. Other research (Ellickson, Bui, Bell, & McGuigan, 1998; Mensch & Kandel, 1988; Weng, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1988) supported the assertion that cigarette use and other types of drug involvement had an influence on students dropping out of school.

**Academic Mediation Theory**

Poor academic achievement is said to be one of the strongest predictors of dropout because it is typically affiliated with standardized achievement tests or grade point average (Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Krohn, Thornberry, Collins-Hall, & Lizotte, 1995; Rumberger, 1983). Few studies have been done to determine more emphatically whether or not poor academic achievement influences other variables in predicting early school dropout (Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997; Janosz et al., 1997; Tinto, 1975). Deviant affiliation, personal deviance, family socialization, and structural strains could also possibly be associated with the effects on poor academic achievement.
School influence can also be a predictor of dropping out (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Elliott & Voss, 1974; Fagon & Pabon, 1990). Students who have felt a need to go to school are normally academically successful and less likely to drop out of school. Low academic achievement on the other hand can be associated with ultimately dropping out of school (Harachi, Abbott, Catalano, & Haggerty, 1996; Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Maguin & Loeber, 1996).

Other factors that are said to contribute to dropping out are located outside of the school's environment—within the family, community, and/or among peer groups (Rumberger, 1983). Sometimes factors can be beyond the school's control. When this is the case, schools can do very little without assistance from outside agencies.

According to Wehlage and Rutter (1986), the real causes of dropping out are innately within the school context itself. They believed that the schools generally do not serve all students well. These conditions could be structural and contextual factors, which may include administrative support for teachers, teacher effectiveness, morale and expectancies, student morale, and academic investment, class size, parental involvement, fiscal inequities, and physical appearance of facilities. Because of internal conditions, some students become disinterested in school. With these adolescents, school is not a priority, and teachers and their peers reinforce failure. When this happens, continuous failure and negative feelings about the school persist, and many of the students quit.

School Negativity

Both internal (pull) and external (push) factors contribute to dropping out (Wheelock and Dorman, 1988). They also found that some adolescents, in particular
African American and Hispanic males, drop out because their school lacks the ability to handle their behavior misconduct. When the school reinforces stiffer punishment such as suspension or expulsion, this sends a strong message within the school (Wheelock and Dorman, 1988). When adolescents self-concept is shattered, this can sometimes internalize sanctions. In such cases, students who are disciplined too often cannot separate the behavior from who they are. These adolescents then start to believe that who they are cannot compete with how things are in the school. As this happens, they do not feel a part of the school and they drop out. NELS:88 reported that 16% of these students dropped out because of so many suspensions, and 13% were expelled.

According to Mann (1987), African American adolescents are suspended at least three times more than their white counterparts. Garibaldi (1992) stated that African American males are misrepresented among students said to have poor academic performance, or are retained, suspended, or expelled from school. Both African Americans males and females are likely to have more suspensions and expulsions than their White counterparts, leading to one of the reasons for dropping out (NELS:88).

Fine (1986, 1991) described the “push-out effect” as individual attributes of the students themselves that cause them to drop out. According to Jordan, Lara, and McPartland (1996), the push effects could be located within the school structure and the two together could negatively influence the adolescent to drop out of school. For some students, the school can be considered an unwelcoming place. For example, depending on the school, the size of the school could limit student participation in school and increase the likelihood that the student has excessive absences. Certain schools have harsher guidelines for suspensions and expulsions for students who exhibit extensive absences in
school, and this, in turn, “pushes” them out of school. Other schools may “push” students because of their repetitive discipline offenses and policies that restrict these students, which are disproportionately applied to male students of color, and high standard achievement test guidelines likely to result in retentions.

National Dropout Data Information

National Center for Education Statistics

The National Center for Education Statistics (2000-2001) gathers nationwide data related to education. Its objective is to collect, collate, analyze, and get concise information on the condition of education in the United States. It also assists other foreign countries reviewing and reporting on education activities. NCES targets high prior education data needs and provides complete and accurate information on education statistics and trends.

Intervention Models and Strategies

National Programs for Dropout Prevention

Colorado School Dropout Prevention

Colorado’s dropout program and strategies target the community, school, family, peers, or individuals to reduce the dropout rate. This is done by using strategies and activities that are effective and programs that are considered to be “best practices.”

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (2000) reports on preventing school dropouts. In 2000, there were approximately 149,000 adolescents enrolled in middle or junior high schools, and approximately 222,000 adolescents enrolled in high school (public, private, and alternative schools). From 1990 to 2000, the population of Colorado’s youth increased tremendously.
- Middle school age (12-14 years) increased 41%
- High school age (15-17 years) increased 43%

Colorado is ranked 48th out of the 50 states in the percentage of teens considered high school dropouts (14% in 1999 in comparison to 10% to the United States as a whole) (Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000; Data Set: Census 2000 Supplementary Survey Summary Tables, Geographic Area: Colorado).

The phenomenon of school dropouts is a problem among teenage youths today. Most of these students have disabilities and serious emotional problems. Now, educators are starting to reach out and provide programs that are innovative and creative for these students as well as reaching out to the families and at the same time encouraging these teenage youths to stay in school and graduate (Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, 2000).

Key components of Colorado’s dropout prevention program include:

Outreach and Support for Families: Families play a significant part in support for school programs. These programs include many innovative practices that entail family involvement. These enable families to be partners with the teachers of their children, value and consider the diversity of families, and form family and support groups that will assist parents with whatever their needs are.

Increased Staff Collaboration and Ongoing Professional Development: School staff requires administrative support and encouragement to continue to assist at-risk teenage youths, particularly since, sometimes, there is no tangible reward for working with these youth. Alternative strategies to increase collaboration and professional development include:
• provide strong administrative leadership and support with consistency for the vision of program goals,
• encourage a multidisciplinary approach and learning tactics for instruction,
• coordinate school district-wide rules and expectations for student behavior, and
• provide ongoing staff development and school support followed by an evaluation and the results of the program periodically.

There are many reasons for dropping out of school and the solutions are multidimensional. Strategies often time overlap, but have been successful in all school levels from K-12 and in rural, suburban, and urban centers (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2003).

Strategies for Alternative Schooling suggested by the report stress the following.

1. Alternative schools provide an opportunity for students to obtain a high school diploma or GED to students with different learning interests or disabilities, teenage parents, potential dropouts, violent individuals, or court-adjudicated youths and those in juvenile detention systems. Alternative Schooling might include:

   a. a maximum teacher/student ratio of 1:10;
   b. small student base not exceeding 250 students;
   c. specific mission and discipline code;
   d. learning program that is geared toward student’s expectations and learning styles; and
   e. a school schedule that will accommodate all needs with community involvement and support.
Mentoring is also a part of the report consisting of a one-to-one relationship with someone else. The mentor is the designated supportive person, while the mentee is the person to trust the mentor for support. The mentor normally provides guidance and support to the fullest extent possible with the mentee. Mentors could be found in a one-to-one and also a one-to-group relationship.

Service learning can be a teaching and a learning experience for students in corroboration with meaningful community service experiences with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility. This service learning experience provides the developmental opportunities that would encourage personal, social, and intellectual growth, as well as a civic responsibility and career exposure.

*Boston Middle School Dropout Program*

Boston middle school dropout data showed little improvement in 2000-01 compared to previous years. It was evident that little was being done to solve the dropout problem. African American students were disproportionately represented among middle school dropouts. The majority of Boston’s middle school dropouts left school with less than a 6th grade education, and students dropping out in the middle grades 2000-01 came disproportionately from three middle schools. Middle school students have increased in the number dropping out of school in the state of Massachusetts.

In a review of Massachusetts Department of Education dropout data for the school years 1996-2001, the following facts were noted:

- In 2000-01, the number of students that dropped out of middle school declined by four students from 156 students in 1999-2000 to 152 students by 2000-01, still
reflecting a significant rate four times the number of dropouts in 1995-96 and three times the number who dropped out in 1996-97.

- African American students in the number of students dropping out of Boston’s middle school are overrepresented. In 2000-01, African American students represented 48.3% in overall enrollment, but 57.2% in the dropout rate. African American and Hispanic students represent together 75.4% of all students in the Boston school district, but 86.8% of all middle school dropouts.

- The majority of Boston’s 2000-01 middle grade students left school in sixth grade, particularly noteworthy considering the fact that a child must be 16 to leave school. The majority of Boston’s middle school dropouts leave school with less than a 6th grade education. Out of the 152 Boston middle school dropouts in the year 2000-01, 94 dropped out of 6th grade, 30 dropped out of 7th grade; and 28 dropped out of 8th grade. In the Boston School District for grades 6 and 7 together, 124 students dropped out by 2000-01, representing 82% of all of the middle grades dropouts.

- The number of students who actually dropped out in the Boston School District for middle grades was significantly higher than any other middle school grades in Massachusetts. Students who drop out of Boston’s middle grades make up an increasing proportion of dropouts in middle grades in Massachusetts. In 1995-96, 20.2% of the Massachusetts dropout rate existing in middle school came from Boston. In the year 2000-01, 58.2% of the state’s middle school dropout rate came from Boston. While the number of dropouts for middle grades has increased statewide, Boston’s increase is higher than that of the state.
• Because these students are not reported in the dropout rates, the official statistics are inaccurate on the district’s dropouts.

The numbers of dropouts for Boston, in particular middle grades, do show a scant improvement from 1999-2000 to 2000-01. “There should be no student in middle grades at the age of 16. Dropout numbers from the Boston middle grades should be taken care of immediately in providing services through the education pipeline” (Boston Middle School Dropout Rate Report, 2000-01). The lack of change from 2000 to 2001 indicates that Boston needs to change its strategies to reduce the number of students who turn 16 in the middle grades (Boston Middle School Dropout Rates, 2000-01).

A dropout prevention strategy for the middle grades should consist of having policies in place for students dropping out of middle school and providing the necessary services for overage students so that they can learn in an appropriate setting (Boston Middle School Dropout Rate Report, 2000-01). To stop middle grades dropouts in the future, educational leaders should take a stand in instructing schools to eliminate school-based practices that contribute to low motivation, excessive tardiness, low attendance, and grade retention. The district should also abandon the grade retention policy that has contributed to an increasing number of middle school students who are overage. They should adopt a policy that guarantees that all students will receive extra credit help in their age-appropriate grade.

Leaders in this district should also assess the school climate, practices, and the services that are available for schools with the highest dropout rate and provide intensive technical assistance to these schools in support of the students to prevent them from dropping out (Boston Middle School Dropout Rate Report, 2000-01). Leaders should also
visit those schools, which exhibit a high dropout rate and work with these schools in developing strategies to identify those students who are considered at-risk; services must be provided for them and their families to get their focus back on track.

Boston should also identify the number of students that are overage in the middle grades and develop a rapport with alternative schools; they should be encouraged to increase their services for all students who are in dire need because they are two years overage for their grade (Boston Middle School Dropout Rates, 2000-01).

When compared to Colorado’s program, Boston’s on the other hand emphasizes that overage students should take a top priority in dropout prevention programs, suggesting mentoring, service learning, and alternative schooling as well as assistance in finding the necessary services in accommodating them before they leave middle school. However, Colorado and Boston dropout prevention services agree that practices and services should be made available for potential middle school dropouts.

*Florida State Preventions for Dropout*

*Project Wise-Up*

According to statistics from Parks and Recreation (1999), the high-school dropout rate for 16-to-19-year olds in the state of Florida is nine percent. Many of the youths today are incapable of making changes and following through with the right decisions. Unless certain destructive behaviors, as shown by our youth, are corrected, this behavior has the potential to affect children (Parks and Recreation, 1999). The 1994 high-school dropout rate in Florida for 16-to-19 year olds was 13 percent. In Alachua County from 1993 to 1994 there were 698 cases of detention, 62% were African American. Many of these youth were transferred to adult court. Project WISE-UP (Working in School to
Educate Yourself for Prevention) was formed as a result of this trend. It was formed from a principal investigator, Bertha Cato (1999), who had an idea to develop a prevention intervention. Funds were needed to develop this plan and she began asking for assistance from several entities such as the local police department, the Alachua County School Board, and the local juvenile justice department, to enter into the partnership. Ms. Cato, along with others, then went to the Florida House of Representatives and shared their ideas on the state level and with juvenile stakeholders. The program was discussed in detail and involved many components. It became a phenomenon for the purpose of recreation decision-making, and drug and crime education as factors in the prevention technique. Funding was then extended from two years to three years.

Cato, Chen, and Rainford (1999) developed the program and designed it to be an innovative, collaborative, and client-centered approach to substance abuse and delinquency prevention. Much focus centered upon the pre-stage intervention of “high at risk; middle school, African American youth.” The program exhibited comprehensive, innovative, interactive, client-centered, and family oriented design, which evolved around the student’s environment, community, school, peer group, and family. This component was achieved through an after-school program, field trips, playing the game of chess, and involving parents.

Project Wise-Up’s (1999) sole purpose was to reduce the risk that youths will face dysfunctional behaviors such as drugs and crime. The main emphasis was placed in reducing referrals and improving the academic standing of participants, while lowering absences and out-of-school suspensions. At the same time that this intervention technique
was to take place, the improvement of family interaction through a family-enrichment program would also take its existence.

During the three-year period (1994-1996), 100 middle school students from a housing project in Gainesville, FL participated in the project. These participants were selected with the following as major factors: economic distress, alcohol and drug abuse, chronic failure in school, high school suspension rates, and learning disabilities. A single female parent headed most of these households. The neighborhood was regularly patrolled by a police officer (Parks and Recreation, 1999).

The program was responsible for decreasing the rate of academic deterioration in the first year. There was also a decline in students being administratively placed in upper grades. After a two-year period of Project WISE-UP, grade point averages exceeded (from 1.7 to 2.1), while absence rates were cut by 54% and school suspension rates dropped by 76 percent. The number of referrals decreased by 54%.

As a result of this program, each youth could recognize the significance of the Project. Participants began to take ownership. Success could only take place if each participant bought into the goals and objectives and acquired a sense of ownership.

The Wise-Up Program is very similar to Colorado’s dropout prevention program, i.e., to promote services around their family, community, and environment. These programs would help to develop social skills, responsibility, and personal growth in these young individuals. As a result of the programs, these youths will recognize the importance of the projects to assist them in staying in school.

Palm Beach County District Alternative Placement Programs
The Palm Beach County School district provides intervention techniques and programs for students who are identified as at-risk students or are close to dropping out of school (Palm Beach County District Data Report, 2003). All students who exemplify the following characteristics qualify for the program: overage for their grade placement, having failing grades, low achievement test scores, high absenteeism, or demonstration of other at-risk factors. Students who are labeled Limited English proficient (LEP) and or Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students also qualify for these programs.

Palm Beach County School District prevention programs for at-risk students are very similar to those in the Colorado and Boston School Districts. They all try to provide alternative services for students who are considered at-risk or overage. The main objective is to promote services outside of the public school that will prevent these youth from dropping out of school and allow them to become successful students.

A student identified as at-risk can also qualify for the accelerated program if the student is enrolled in the following:

1. A dropout prevention performance-based (competency-based) program that would grant credit for at least 70% in performance time to students with-limited instructional time; or

2. An approved drop-out prevention is modified for time variation (shortened or lengthened for class instruction) as an alternative for student performance, or integration of course performance standards of the differential units of study. When these courses have been completed, students may be awarded double credit for completing the mastery of performance standards.
The minority student population has grown tremendously in Florida's public schools. The growth is stimulated by the shift in demographics of the most populated counties in South Florida and continues to grow in the urban areas of the state. From 1976-2001, minority students in the Florida public school system grew from 44,113 to 1,215,458, an increase of 163.6%. This is compared to an increase of 62% (from 1,450,408 to 2,500,161), of the overall student population.

In 2001-02, 26,380 students dropped out of grades 9-12; 11,509 were White, 8,305 were Black, 6,075 were Hispanic, 290 were Asian, 57 were American Indian, and 144 were multiracial. Even though there was a high rate of students who dropped out, the rates were higher among Black and Hispanic students (Bureau of Education Information and Accountability Services, 2003) from grades 9-12 who dropped out within a year’s time. Of Florida’s 67 school districts, 39 of them, in 2001-02, had dropout rates lower than the state’s rate of 3.2%. The drop out ranged from 7.2 percent (Glades County) to a low of 0.5% (Liberty and Martin Counties). The drop out rate in all of Palm Beach County totaled 2.6%.

Program Interventions

On Campus Intervention Programs (OCIP) are being used by several schools in Florida. They are used as an alternative to out-of-school suspensions stressing academic guidance and counseling support. The programs’ objectives are to reduce suspensions, truancy related juvenile crimes, and dropout rates. OCIP in the process modifies disruptive behavior and maintains educational opportunities that would have caused students, under other circumstances, to be suspended. The ultimate goal of OCIP is to generate less behavioral issues. In the long term the goal is to improve a more positive
learning environment in classrooms and at the same time reduce disruption. Clearwater High School in Pinellas County, Florida was the first to adopt such a program. It was also assisted with support from the Clearwater High School Advisory Council, and Pinellas County School Board and Family Resources (Promising Programs, 1999).

Clearwater High School results have been very positive since the school instituted this program. There were 930 students who had been suspended during the school year of 1994-95. By the year 1998-99, 313 students were suspended. Officials in this county attribute decreased suspensions partly to the OCIP. Other positive results of the OCIP were a 3.5% decrease in suspension 1997-98, improvement in test scores, 75% lower percentage rate in physical altercations, and a lower rate of 50% in classroom disruptions. The program also indicates that 82% of the students were not repeated offenders, and many expressed their thanks for the program (Promising Programs, 1999).

The Clearwater program consists of four components: academics, individual counseling, group counseling, and aftercare. These students are assigned to the program at the discretion of the principal. Students who qualify for this program are those who have bad conduct in profanity, disobedience, class disruption, missing detentions, or skipping class. This program does not accept those students who have participated in serious offenses including fights or possession of weapons or drugs. The program is done strictly on a voluntary basis, i.e., parents of students who have been suspended are given a choice for their children to attend OCIP or they must serve their out-of-school suspensions. Most OCIP students must remain in the classroom for five days. They are kept inclusively in the OCIP classroom. In addition, the program also provides counseling and permits students to talk with each other.
As a positive result of the OCIP at Clearwater High School, the program has been adopted in six additional high schools and four middle schools. Currently, Palm Beach County is in the process of instituting this program in its School District. It is scheduled to begin in the next five years.

The School of Choice program is another intervention currently enrolling students in the Palm Beach County School District. This program works as an individualized education program and allows students who possess different learning styles to focus on high academic expectations in an environment of caring and support. Students are placed through the Child Study Team (CST) or Individual Education Plan (IEP) Team.

At-risk students must display one of the following characteristics to be admitted in the program and simultaneously not exhibit serious or chronic infractions at their home and school (Palm Beach County School District Manual, 2003). Support personnel such as guidance counselors, teachers, administrators, or parents can consider the following elements in determining whether the student will benefit from the program:

- Poor grades or underachievement for ability;
- Over-age for grade due to retention in middle school;
- Credit deficiency in high school;
- Poor attendance or truancy;
- Poor or inconsistent peer relationships and/or poor social skills;
- Lack of motivation;
- Limited support systems;
End-of-Year Promotion

School of Choice principals have the option, by the end of the year, to determine whether or not a student who has had multiple retentions can be promoted to the next grade level if the following conditions have taken place.

- The student is recommended for retention for the current academic year;
- The student has at least three retentions (K-8) including the current year’s retention;
- The principal and teachers have determined that academic progress can only happen in a promotion to an alternative program;
- A program of instruction will be given to the student that is different from what was initially for him;
- The student does not have a serious illness or repetitive discipline infractions;
- For exceptional students, the process must include an IEP Team.

The school staff identifies candidates for the Choice Program through the first part of the year as soon as possible, but students may enroll no later than the third quarter. The CST or IEP Team does placement. A packet must be prepared and completed and referred to the Alternative Education Department.

Several items must take place to guarantee a positive learning experience for students, including instructional models, classroom activities, and program components. Within a certain amount of time, students will have the opportunity to:

- Improve attendance;
- Move to the next grade level in middle school;
Accumulate enough credits that will eventually lead to a high school completion and in turn receiving a high school diploma;

Improvement in social skills;

School of Choice is strictly voluntary. Students must attend at least one semester but preferably students should attend a full year. School administrators must develop a program designed at their site.

Other options are available for high school students to participate in and use as an alternative to an educational program. They may enter the accelerated credit program and the GED Exit Option Model if the student qualifies for these programs. Principals are asked to incorporate the following design elements and may choose to add others where they apply.

Program Design Elements

- Pre-and post academic assessments (required);
- Individualized performance plan for students;
- Content based on Sunshine State Standards;
- Developing of intensive reading, writing, and mathematics instruction;
- Skills in test taking;
- Career exploration;
- Caring and supportive staff members;
- Sensitivity to learning styles;
- Character education;
- Study skills;
- High expectations for student academic performance and self-management;
Accelerated credit program and GED Exit Option Model (high school only);
Periodic review of student progress; and
Regularly scheduled conferences sharing information, strategies, and progress.

Exit Options and Procedures

Students may volunteer to enroll in the “School of Choice.” Parents, students, the child study team (CST) or the IEP Team may request that the student return to his/her home school. The CST or IEP team reviews the student progress report and documents to support it. Recommendations are then made for the student to exit the program. A student may exit at the end of the semester.

Summary

Early signs of dropping out of school for an adolescent should be detected, and interventions should be implemented to see what works and what does not with our youth in society (Stanard, 2003). Keller (1986) stated there is a need for establishing drop out prevention programs for the education of children. There is also a need for parental achievement orientation, which contributes to students’ achievement motivation (Ford, 1993).

African American males, in particular (NCES, 2000) perform the lowest academically, have poor attendance, and experience high retention rates. Some of these males also have to work to help provide for the family or stay at home with their siblings while their mothers work two and three jobs. These factors are considered “pull” and “push” out of school.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The researcher conducted qualitative phenomenological research in this study. Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that phenomenonologists explore the structures of consciousness in human experiences. This study investigated the factors that can influence African American middle school males who have dropped out, or have signs that they are at-risk for dropping out, of middle school. These concerns may be better understood by asking the following research questions: (1) What are the contributing factors that may cause African American males to drop out of middle school? (2) What strategies might prevent African American males from dropping out of middle school? Additionally, intervention strategies and dropout prevention programs were investigated to determine their usefulness in assisting at-risk students from dropping out of middle school. This research was an on-going investigation for a period of one academic year.

Research Approach

The researcher chose qualitative research in order to paint a rich narrative description of the problem (Patton, 1990). The researcher also arrived at the methodology to use based on Miles and Huberman’s (1994) analysis that a researcher should have “...some familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under study” and “strong conceptual interests” (p. 38). The researcher wanted to use a “naturalistic inquiry” to unfold real-world situations (Patton, 1990). Included in the methodology are elements described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “naturalistic inquiry” which includes (a) discovery of the underlying nature of the general topic, (b) use of categorization as a
procedure for making sense of data collected, (c) maintaining relative consistency to improve the probability that findings are credible, (d) testing the credibility of sources, and (e) acknowledgement of threats to internal validity.

Reliability was addressed by explaining the purpose and the process of the study to the participants, using consistent interviewing techniques, triangulating the data, and providing specific details of data collection, methods, and the analysis techniques along with member checking and document investigation (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

School Site

Similar to the researcher's school, J. Middle School is located in a low socioeconomic area in Palm Beach County. There are 1,230 students. The ratio is 73% African American, 2% White, and 24% other. Many of these students are overage for middle school. The majority of the middle school students' ages range from 12-14 years. The percentage of repeating students is approximately 45%. Most of the repeating students are African American males. Discipline files, cumulative folders, and the Identification Data Warehouse (IDW) information show that many of the African American males have high suspensions and low attendance on their record that may have contributed to grade retention and later indicating traits for possibly dropping out of school. A lot of these students also come from single-parent homes where the mother is the only parent in the home (Palm Beach County School District Data Report, 2003).

Participants

Because of the investigator's position in the school district where the study took place, the researcher had authorization to view and explore the cumulative folders and the discipline files of the students. In addition, written documents in the form of policies and
procedures, training information, and additional student school information through the IDW, augmented these discipline files and cumulative folders as well as the teacher interviews and observations.

The researcher established criteria for selecting participants for the study. The criteria for selecting the teachers were: (a) teachers who have taught 3 years or more, (b) teachers who had taught one or more of the students on the potential student participant list, (c) teachers who had knowledge of any intervention techniques or prevention programs. The participating teachers included one African American male, one Jamaican American female, and two White males. The researcher sought these teachers to participate because they are all eighth grade academic teachers and have taught at least one or more African American middle school male potential participants chosen for the research. Each of these teachers is an experienced teacher who has taught students more than three years at the school chosen for the research. In selecting teachers for the interviews, the researcher reviewed each teacher's educational experience, teaching experience with the potential students for the research, and their knowledge on any dropout prevention techniques or dropout prevention programs that they have actually implemented in their classes. The researcher asked all four of the teachers in an informal manner by simply explaining to each of them individually the specifics of the research and then asking them if they would like to participate. If they agreed to participate, then the informed consent form was provided for their signature prior to their approval.

The researcher did a purposeful sampling by selecting three African American males who remained in school and three who had dropped out of middle school. The purposeful sample was selected with these participants to obtain a more reflective set of
data. "Unlike survey research in which the number of and representatives of the sample are major considerations, in this type of research, the crucial factor is not the number of respondents but the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p.83).

The criteria for selecting student participants included at-risk students for dropping out or who had dropped out based on the following factors: (a) low attendance, (b) high grade level retention, (c) discipline record, (d) eighth grade student/former eighth grade student (not enrolled in an adult educational program), (e) age 15-18, and (f) African American male. It was the intent of the researcher to have six participants. Students chosen were three African American males who remained in school and three African American males who were former middle school students but who had dropped out before reaching high school. The researcher checked the subjects’ cumulative folders to ensure that they met the criteria for participating in the study. If the student agreed to participate then an assent form was provided for his signature and then an informed consent form was given to his parents.

Instrumentation

The interview is one of the most powerful methods in qualitative research. This method provides the opportunity to step into the minds of other persons to see and experience what they are feeling (McCracken, 1988).

Written Documents

This researcher has access to the discipline files, cumulative folders, and the IDW to support the findings on each student. In addition, written documents in the form of policies and procedures and training information augment the interviews of the teachers,
discipline files, cumulative folders, and the IDW. All data information collected has been retained by the researcher and placed in a locked file cabinet in her home.

Interview Method

Interview questions were developed to answer the research questions. Schools that are effective for the urban poor (Edmonds, 1979) were the major focus in the literature section. This focus, attributed to middle school dropout, and played a large part in determining the interview questions.

The questions for the interview were based on Hale’s (1982) “Best Practices” and are found in Appendixes A and B. These questions were designed to describe experiences/behaviors, obtain opinions/values, and describe feelings and knowledge (Patton, 1990). Information supplied by the respondents was analyzed which was the initial step in this qualitative analysis (Maxwell, 1996). Several themes were coded among the 10 respondents. These themes for students included: socioeconomic status, neighborhood factors, family, peer pressure, low attendance, high grade level retention, and discipline record. The themes for teachers included: intervention programs, education (teaching methodology), resources, and training.

Classroom Observations

The last data collection technique for this study was the classroom observation. The researcher’s main purpose was to compare and contrast each teacher’s technique to Hale’s (1982) “Best Practices” strategies that should be used in the classroom. The researcher observed each teacher for sixty minutes on announced occasions and utilized the teaching strategies to evaluate the process against Hale’s (1982) “Best Practices” strategies. Hale’s (1982) “Best Practices” strategies includes: body language, standard
English, equal talking time, group learning, and a variety of learning activities. By observing participants as they were teaching and interacting with their students in their general education subject area classes, the researcher was able to reconcile some themes from the strategies, verbal, and non-verbal expressions used in the classroom.

**Procedures**

After receiving approval from the dissertation Committee, the researcher submitted the appropriate documents to the IRB for approval. When the IRB gave approval, an application was submitted to the Palm Beach County School District Research and Evaluation Division, requesting permission to conduct this research. Palm Beach County School Board approved the research after the Lynn University IRB Research Committee approved it (See Appendix H).

The letter of introduction to the interviewee (See Appendix C) was reviewed and the appropriate signatures were obtained for the record according to the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines.

An introductory letter from the researcher (See Appendix C) was sent to the participants’ parents for permission to conduct the research. Letters were sent to the parents of the participants who were under the age of 18. A deadline was set for forms to be returned two weeks after the parents had received the consent form for their children to participate in the research.

The informed assent (See Appendixes C and E) was given to the student participants with the permission of their parents and the informed consent was given to the teacher participants. However, the students or teachers could have withdrawn from
the study at any time without any penalty. Once signatures were obtained, the individual was considered a participant in the study.

Once the proposal was approved by the Lynn University IRB and Palm Beach County School District, the first phase of the research was to select the participants according to the established criteria. The second phase included in-depth interviews with the African American middle school males who were potential dropouts but remained in school, African American middle school males who had dropped out of school, and teachers who met the established criteria.

Objectives and conditions were explained to the participants at the start of the interview. Meanwhile, confidentiality was assured to all by reading them the ethics protocol (See Appendixes C and E). Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

The interviewing process involved six at-risk African American male students who remained in or had dropped out of school. A demographic questionnaire was utilized to collect information regarding retentions, highest-grade level completed, and other pertinent details (See Appendix F). Similarly, the selected participants were/had been in the eighth grade and ranged from 15-18 years of age. When chosen for the study, they were all classified as at-risk students in an inner-city school. Also, each of these subjects lived in a low-socioeconomic neighborhood and received reduced lunch. They also lived in single-parent homes. In the final interviewing process, the researcher sent four letters to each group to obtain four participants who were willing to submit to questioning. It was hoped that they would participate. A demographic questionnaire was done for those teachers selected who exemplified an experienced certified teacher in the district and one
who has taught the 6 African American at-risk current and former eighth grade students
See Appendix G).

Interviews

For a phenomenological study, the process of collecting information involves
primarily in-depth interviews with as many as 10 individuals. The important point is to
describe the meaning of a small number of individuals who have experienced the
phenomenon. With an in-depth interview lasting as long as 2 hours (Polkinghorne, 1989),
10 subjects in a study represent a reasonable size. Added to 10 in-depth interviews might
be the self-reflection of the researcher as a preparatory step to interviewing or as the
initial step in the analysis (Polkinghorne, 1989). Besides interviewing and self-reflection,
Polkinghorne (1989) adds gathering information from depictions of the experience
outside the context of the research project such as descriptions from novelists, poets,
painters, and choreographers.

The interview questions were developed to obtain responses to the experiences of
the teachers and the students with regard to issues of African American middle school
males dropping out of middle school. The format for the interview protocol contained
open-ended questions that addressed the dropout issues of African American middle
school males. The questions in the interviewing process entailed strategies that teachers
use in the classroom to prevent dropout. Questions also alluded to extracurricular activity
involvement of these African American males students who are at-risk. The researcher
also consented to stop the interview if the interviewee were to get upset. A guidance
counselor was available for follow-up to make sure the interviewee had not suffered
reaction to any questions which might have been of a sensitive nature. Finally, after each
teacher participant signed the consent form and the student participant signed the assent form to participate in the interview process, all data and information collected were retained by the researcher and used for the purpose of the research without revealing any identities.

An interview protocol was used for the three role groups. Teachers and students were interviewed. The teachers were interviewed on what their experiences were with at-risk African American middle school males, and their demographics. The interviews were significant in showing whether or not teachers play a role in the African American middle school male’s life by comparing their teaching strategies to the “Best Practices” for dropout prevention (Hale, 1982):

- **Body Language**: Black children are accustomed to nonverbal communication. Therefore, teachers should be careful when using gestures, eye contact, and other nonverbal cues so as not to create a negative learning environment for the student.

- **Standard English**: Standard English should be used indefinitely and children’s speech should be dealt with accordingly, to help avoid incorrect speech being spoken before reaching adolescence. Children should also be encouraged to speak clearly.

- **Equal talking time**: Teacher “talk” should be equal to child talk. Teachers should encourage more and more conversation, repeating of words, and use of creativeness.

- **Group learning**: Small group learning should be utilized and there should be more hands on contact provided by the teacher.
A variety of learning activities: Children should be taught with a wide-range of learning activities: audio, games, dance, and poetry.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected at J. Middle School as well as in the community in Palm Beach County. The researcher acted as a synthesizing and interpretive agent, transcribing the information from the respondents into a description of real-world situations using Microsoft Word and the researcher reviewed the interviews for accuracy and filled in additional notes and comments using a separate annotation, asterisk, or boldface for notes. In analyzing the data, a descriptive method was used based on Hale’s (1982) “Best Practices.”

Validity

Validity is the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of specific inferences made from the research studies (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1996). Descriptive validity refers to the factual accuracy of the actual account as reported by the researcher. This form of validity is important because description is a major objective in nearly all qualitative research. In this aspect, the researcher recorded and described the research participants’ behavior and the context in which they were located. Interpretive validity refers to accurately portraying the meaning attached by participants to what is being studied by the researcher and will be displayed in the research report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checking was used for validation. Member checking is the process of having those individuals who were students review the statements made in the researcher’s report to check for accuracy and completeness (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1996).
They are used to review the statements in the report which may reveal factual errors and may help individuals recall new facts or to have new perceptions of the situation. Once the researcher had interviewed each participant, she set up appointments for each participant to review the transcription of the interview. If there were any errors or discrepancies at that time, the researcher corrected them immediately. Some participants wanted to discuss some new information. The researcher then recorded the new information and put it on file.

Although sample size in this qualitative research study is small, Patton (1990) says, “it depends...on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources” (p. 184). Patton (1990) supports the latter in the following: “The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with information-richness of the cases selected and the observation/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with the sample size” (p. 185).

Internal validity was addressed in several ways: conducting interviews in a natural setting (Goetz and Lecompte, 1984), presenting how these groups actually viewed themselves and their experiences (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984), and using triangulation (Merriam, 1988).

Triangulation is a process from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of research methods. The researcher interviewed six participants and four teachers who had taught these students. The student participants were interviewed after school hours in their homes. The teachers were interviewed after school hours at J. Middle School and observed in their classroom. Written documents on each participant such as
the discipline file, cumulative folders, and the IDW were also used in the process of triangulation.

The general principle known as triangulation is the “collecting of information from a diverse range of individuals and settings using a variety of methods” (Denzin, 1970). As stated by Maxwell (1996), “This reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only systemic biases or limitations of a specific method, and it allows you to gain a better assessment of the validity and generality of the explanations that you develop.”

In this study, the researcher interviewed six student participants and four teachers who taught these students. Written documents on each student participant such as the discipline files, cumulative folders and the IDW were also searched to glean information that might be pertinent to answers given to the open-minded questions asked of each of the student subjects. Finally, observations were done at the school to elicit the behaviors of the teachers in their classrooms, and observations of the students’ homes were conducted at the time that the interviews were taking place.

The researcher included participant feedback, direct quotations of respondents, and member checking as ways of matching the meaning of the participants to what was being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The within-case study of students out-of-school called 1, 2, 3; and students in school called 4, 5, and 6 examined each student’s feelings about school and reasons why they did or did not drop out of school. The across-case study for teachers compared the strategies that were used in their classrooms as seen in the observations and the ones discussed in their interviews, with the “Best Practices” of Hale (1982). The across-case study for the students consisted of the thoughts that the
dropout students had before leaving school, and those thoughts that the in-school students have at this time.

Data analysis

The questions asked were open-ended questions that required “the person making a decision about what an experience is and whether or not an experience has occurred” (Patton, 1990, p. 304). Information given to the researcher was verified through data records, discipline files, and cumulative records. The researcher included participant feedback, direct quotations of respondents, and interpretive validity, portraying the meaning of the participant to what is being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The within-case study included: teachers A-D, students out of school 1-3, and in school, but at-risk 4-6. The across-case study for teachers compared their strategies to “Best Practices” (Hale, 1982) and the two groups of students for similarities and/or difference in their responses.

Summary

After each teacher participant signed a consent form and the student participants signed the assent form to participate in the interviewing process, all data and information collected were retained by the researcher and used for the purpose of the research without revealing any identities. The researcher used the interviewing process to answer the research questions and to get a feel for what the participants have experienced related to African American middle school males dropping out. To get a balance of the interview responses, the researcher coded the interview questions for each group in the research to study the within-case and across-case phenomena. Member checking is one of the tools that the researcher used, which was the process of having the studied individual review the statements made in the researcher’s report to check for accuracy and completeness.
(Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1996). Personal interviews took place after school hours to accommodate each participant in the research. A guidance counselor was available for any participant who felt he might have a problem answering questions and to make sure the interviewee had not suffered reactions to any questions, which might be of a sensitive nature. The observations took place in each teacher's classroom. Finally, after each participant had signed a consent/assent form to participate in the interviewing process, all data and information collected were retained by the researcher and used for the purpose of the research without revealing any identities.
In this chapter, the researcher presents the many themes that emerged throughout the cross-analysis of the interviews with teachers, African American male students who dropped out of school, and African American male students who stayed in school. Each participant was unique in the investigation and had to construct an academic identity in relation to the school environment. Although each individual teacher’s educational experiences and personal attitudes toward teaching African American middle school males in his/her class were very unique, the richness of the responses often intertwined; they were woven into a unified tapestry of inspiring thoughts, ideas, and nuances. As with the African American male participants, many of their expressions, ideas, and thoughts were very similar, yet each young man tried to construct a Black identity while still formulating an academic identity.

Many of the teacher participants prior to the interview explained that their way of teaching stemmed from how they were taught in school, and this, they felt, led to their becoming successful in the area of education. The African American male participants too, represented a variety of ways that many African Americans negotiate through the power structure of American life. Each of the students had his own way of coping and resisting in the educational system. To introduce each participant beginning with the teacher participants, the researcher assigned them the letters A-D. The student participants who dropped out of middle school were assigned the numerals 1-3, and the student participants who remained in school were assigned numerals 4-6. This was done to assure confidentiality. Participants’ respective demographics are shown in Table 1.
Table 1

Demographic Profile of Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Highest Grade Completed</th>
<th>Number of Retentions</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Teacher Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Grade Level Taught</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6, 7, 8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These cases represent the teachers' viewpoints regarding their values, discipline, students' low attendance, and students' attitude toward school and students, both dropout and completer's perception of the teachers, discipline, low attendance, and their viewpoints on dropping out of school. They were analyzed in relation to the research questions.

The focus of this study was to understand and evaluate the complexities of the dropout problem, to examine what factors caused or may have contributed to students dropping out, and to decide how to overcome these factors so that more students will stay in school and graduate. These concerns were better understood by asking the following questions:
1. What are the contributing factors that may cause African American males to drop out of middle school?

2. What strategies might prevent African American males from dropping out of middle school?

The first case studies consist of teachers who taught the student participants while they presently attend or previously attended J. Middle School. The researcher has thought through every aspect of these cases over the last year. She has studied the interviews searching for answers.

Teachers:

Teacher A:

Teacher A is a White male currently teaching seventh and eighth grade at J. Middle School. He has been teaching history for 8 years. This teacher is known to support the school in extracurricular activities. Teacher A also drives the bus to transport teachers if the regular bus driver is absent. He is even considered an expert with software products. Most importantly he is receptive to all improvement plans.

I met Teacher A in his school’s conference room to conduct his interview. He was very relaxed, poised, and articulate as he was asked why he thought students dropped out of school. He said, “If they are coming from a family not appreciating the value of education, this would indicate the major reasons why students drop out of school.”

I asked. “What do you see as the characteristics of students likely to drop out of school?”

He answered, “It is usually the poor readers, lack of study habits, and lack of study skills.”
I continued with, "Identify several kinds of strategies that you presently have implemented to assist students."

"Intensive reading, remediation, instructional and study skills, and perhaps homework assistance," he replied.

I was trying to understand his classroom strategies so I continued to question Teacher A. "Are there specific strategies that you presently have implemented to assist students?"

Teacher A replied, "I usually reduce assignments, varying difficulty in assignments, and give them more time to finish."

I then asked Teacher A, "What do you recommend that the school district do to keep students in school?"

Teacher A said, "I think the district should follow through with smaller class sizes."

I proceeded to ask him, "How do you deal with these students who have discipline issues?"

He said, "Contacting the parents has always been my way of dealing with low attendance and it has helped a lot."

Finally, I asked Teacher A, "How do you deal with students who are failing your class?"

Teacher A replied, "Try and figure why they are failing and remedy that problem."

There was one last question that I had to ask to close the interview, "What do you envision has to occur to help youngsters stay in school?"
“Ideally, it would be someone who could replace parents and put these students in a different environment,” he replied.

Teacher B:

Teacher B is a Black female currently teaching seventh grade at J. Middle School. She has been teaching for 17 years. According to her colleagues, she is a no-nonsense teacher. Teacher B is Jamaican-born and currently teaches math. This particular teacher is also a graduate of Virginia State University. The administrative staff can always count on her to have positive and consistent assessment scores.

The interview was held in her school’s conference room and I began the interview by asking her, “What do you see as the characteristics of students likely to drop out of school?” She was sitting in a very dignified position with sincerity in her eyes.

She replied, “Arrogance. They feel like you do not tell me what to do. I do what I want. When they see what others are doing such as drugs and how much money they make off of (sic) selling drugs, they do not think it is necessary to go on.”

I continued my interview with Teacher B by asking her about the several kinds of strategies that she uses to assist these students in her class.

“Let them know how important reading is and help them to build their dreams. Build up their self-esteem and let them know if they try they might reach a lot higher than they think they can go.”

Teacher B also stated, “It is important to go to college. They do not have to go to a four-year college. They should also be independent and prepared. They need to prepare themselves for certain things or they will fall through the cracks.”
I wondered and asked Teacher B, “What specific strategies are you using to prepare them?”

She answered, “Give them a lot of reading, help them to build their dreams, and build their self-esteem.”

The next question I asked Teacher B was, “What do you recommend that the school district might have to offer these students regarding dropout prevention?”

She said, “One of the things I think is make the parents more responsible, make the kids more responsible too. A lot of the motivations have to start at home, like parenting classes.”

I continued, “How do you deal with these students who have discipline issues?”

Teacher B answered, “Talk to them real hard, call their parents, and if necessary refer them to administration. Sometimes, I take them to the side and talk to them because maybe they are having a bad day.”

“How do you deal with students who have low attendance?” was my next inquiry.

Teacher B said, “Talk with the counselor or call the parents.”

The next question I asked Teacher B was, “How do you deal with students who are failing your class?”

She responded, “Sometimes, I give them extra work. I notice that a child can work only so much. Even though students may not have a passing grade but is trying, I will not fail the child. Once the child is disruptive, you call the parents and express that they are not motivated. You might call the parents and they do not do anything or they just simply do not care. These students then receiving a failing grade” (sic).
At the end of the interview I asked Teacher B, “What do you envision has to occur to help youngsters in school?”

She answered very thoughtfully, “Start very early by instilling in these kids that it is important to stay in school. Again, it has to start at home. Get the parents parenting classes. They can get a free education because it is so important. They should get their education and deal with their child the best way they can.”

I felt that Teachers A and B were on the same wave length with what has to occur to help students in school. It begins at home as Teacher A stated. Parents may need to be replaced. If not as Teacher B expressed, it begins at home, parents should take parenting classes. Parents have to take responsibility or be replaced.

The messages from these teachers were, “You can.” This reinforces assertions by Kunjufu (1985) and Hopkins (1997) that African American males can establish strong academic identity in a nurturing environment.

Teacher C:

Teacher C is a White male teacher at J. Middle School and currently teaches eighth grade. He has been teaching for four years. He teaches critical thinking/reading. Teacher C is said to have a good relationship with his students. He is considered insightful and compassionate with his students. In his classroom, according to his administrators, you may find Teacher C working with his students in cooperative learning (students working together in a group) effectively and generating real-world applications. You may also find this particular teacher assisting in technology workshops as well.

I met with Teacher C in his school’s conference room, which had been decided as the common place for each interviewee. He was more unique in his thinking than his
counterparts. He verbalized his feelings very emphatically as I interviewed him. His
demeanor was quite pleasant, jovial and lively. It was really intriguing to interview him.

I began the interview by asking him his feelings on why he believed students
dropped out of school.

He responded, “It is varied in the student. There are many reasons such as gangs,
crime, and teenagers who cannot distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate.”

I then took a deep breath and said, “What do you see as the characteristics of
students likely to drop out of school?”

His face saddened, and his tone with sincerity, stated, “Apathy and substance
abuse.”

I continued to ask him about the specific strategies that he has implemented to
assist students.

He said, “Rational emotive therapy and questioning their reason for doing things.”

I was very interested in his answer because I was skeptical at whether or not this
type of therapy really worked with these students as he proclaimed. I then proceeded to
ask him the next question, “What do you recommend that the school district do to keep
students in school?”

He quickly responded, “Reward them with money. Take a proactive stance and it
could help somewhere down the road.”

I asked, “How do you deal with students who have discipline issues?”

He explained, “I give them behavior modification schedules, written assignments
explaining why they engaged in their behavior, and sometimes I questioned what they are
getting out of it, acting out.”
My curiosity was getting the best of me. I was very interested in what his next response would be when I asked him how he dealt with students with low attendance.

He slowly answered, “When they come back, I say welcome back. I think it is the least damaging for the student.”

Teacher C’s answer was certainly not an answer that I expected, because most teachers from the researcher’s experience in observing teachers over the years did not use this technique. Instead, many teachers question the student when they return from the abundance of their absences. When I thought about Teacher C’s response, it made a lot of sense.

I continued with the next question, “How do you deal with students who are failing your class?”

He replied, “Rational emotive. Try to emote certain behavior. Have them, for example, do a pros and cons list. Try to educate them on the decisions that they are making now.”

This was a very interesting answer but it puzzled me, “What did he really mean?”

I was so inquisitive about the whole idea so I asked him to explain.

He replied by saying, “Students need to be motivated so you must stimulate the power of the brain in fulfilling this need.”

I finally closed this interview with “What do you envision has to occur to help students stay in school?”

He sighed, “I think the programs have to be as diversified as the students. A program specialist would be necessary to educate the teacher about the student. I also think it should start at the elementary age.”
Teacher D:

Teacher D is a Black male who is currently teaching sixth through eighth grade. He has been teaching students for 14 years as a band instructor. He is very ambitious and one day wants to become an administrator. He often fills in as an administrator on his school campus when administrators are out. According to parents and colleagues, he is also very active in the community where he gives music lessons to the disadvantaged students. In the eyes of many, he is the pillar in the community.

Teacher D was also interviewed in the school’s conference room and was asked, “Why do you think students drop out of school?” His smile was breathtaking, and he exhibited a little bit of charm as he attempted to answer the first interview question. His attitude was stern and right to the point in his responses.

He answered, “I think they drop out because they do not value education. It was not emphasized at home. If we could find a way because they are really not interested in school.”

Next, I asked Teacher D, “What do you see as the characteristics of students likely to drop out of school?”

He responded, “Values that they come with. My household education was also considered important economics, also. Most people leave it in the past. They kinda (sic) disregard education.”

The answer he gave me to the next question entailed identifying several strategies to assist students.
He stated, “I do not have a specific answer in finding a way to value education. Maybe we can begin by finding someone, whether it be medicine or athletics. Perhaps we need more role models who value education than just becoming a doctor or an athlete.”

This information is important because the research on teaching and learning is very clear. When teachers provide authentic assignments that are connected to students’ lives, student achievement improves (Haberman 1991; Wiggins, 1998).

This answer introduced the next question to be asked, “Are there specific strategies that you presently have used to assist students in your class?”

He explained, “We have tried to get them to see that there are no avenues. My job is to educate them. You can survive in society somehow. I have tried to present different people to them to allow them to talk to them. For example, I have had former students who came back to their alma mater to speak to my current students who went on to become the valedictorian and salutatorian of their graduating class.”

I asked, “What do you recommend that the school district do to keep students in school?”

He answered as a matter of fact, “You gotta (sic) figure out a way to educate these students to value education. FCAT is not important to them. Schooling is not important to everyone. Some are not self-motivated. You have to try to find a way to motivate them. You have to find in the district what is best for them.”

I then asked, “How do you deal with students who have discipline issues?”

His response, “In my classroom I try to take everything I can and deal with the discipline without sending them out of the classroom. I know a lot of the parents so I contact the parents, too. I try not to send them out of class because the more they are out
of class, the more they will miss in the class. As a teacher, I try to take on as much as I can so if I send them to the Assistant Principal, I expect to see action. If it is done that way, I think it will work.”

I continued, “How do you deal with students who have low attendance?”

He said, “I try to conference with them and let them know where they are. I let the parents know. We do the progress reports.”

I asked, “How do you deal with students who are failing your class?”

Teacher D replied, “Unfortunately the ones who are failing, I do not get the progress reports back. The effort is what I am grading them on.”

In closing out this last teacher interview I asked, “What do you envision has to occur to help students in school?”

He answered with a sigh, “The focus at the top has to change. It has to be on an overall education. Until we are able to deal with students who are able to function socially, there will be a problem. That is an important part of education. We do not teach social skills. All we focus on is academics. We do not have Home Economics and Business Education anymore. We need social skills because if we get them to function socially, then we can teach them academically. The focus has to be taken off of (sic) just academics. Academics should only be a part of education.”

I was really intrigued by his last response to the interview question. The way Teacher D responded was very convincing to me that maybe the focus should include social skills. In his own unique way, he expressed that the programs should be diversified like the students. The difference in his belief is that someone should come in and educate the teachers about the students.
Within-Case Study of Students:

In this microcosm, the six African American male students about to be introduced represent African Americans at large. Schools represent society. The diversity of the American culture is represented in the urban school (Chilton, 2001) Dropout Student 1 is angry and disappointed with himself. Dropout Student 2 is knowledgeable but frustrated; Dropout Student 3 is seemingly compliant, but willing to point out the injustices of authority; In-school Student 4 is smiling and willing to do whatever it takes to stay in school; In-school Student 5 is determined and headed for his goal, and finally In-school Student 6 is cheerful and proud of a rich history of survival. All six of these African American male participants represent many African Americans, past and present.

The Voice of Participants

The participants of this study are six African American students from different backgrounds with varied interests. The common threads tying them together were the same middle school that they attended and the fact that three of them dropped out of school around the same time and three of them were motivated to stay in school at the same time. While they all knew or heard of the other participants, they were not necessarily all friends. Three of the students dropped out of middle school and came back to attend middle school, but were placed in an alternative school instead. They later dropped out of school again. The other three participants are in eighth grade.

Dropout Student 1

Dropout Student 1 is an African American male who had two retentions in middle school. He is currently 18 years of age. Dropout Student 1 is fair-skinned, thin and attractive. He used slang and Ebonics more than standard English in this interview. As a
matter of fact, Dropout Student 1 still lived at home, which is where I interviewed him. The specific place of the interview was in the living room where he and his mom sat as I began. He wore baggy jeans, a white tee-shirt, and high top sneakers.

According to him, while attending school he was in trouble a lot and was sent to the office with multiple referrals for arguing with teachers and not being compliant. When interviewed in his home, Mom said that his attitude was the primary reason for him getting in trouble a lot. Mom also declared that his academic performance was fair throughout his school experiences when he was not in trouble.

I asked Dropout Student 1 to tell me about his family. He said, “I have a sister and two brothers.”

I asked, “Do you live with them?”

He answered, “I live with my mom, daddy, and girlfriend.”

He also indicated very openly that he had a baby girl and she also was living with them in the household.

I continued with the interview questions. The opening question, “Why did you drop out of school?”

He replied, “I got tired of coming to school early every day.”

“In what ways did your school rules in general, make you want to drop out of school?” I asked.

He said, “Not bending the rules every now and then and granting special favors for other students.”

“In what ways have teachers made you want to drop out of school?”
He stated, "Teachers lied on you (sic). Make up stuff and the principal would believe them."

I then asked, "In what ways did the curriculum have an influence in your decision to drop out of school?"

Dropout Student 1 indicated, "Sometimes the work was too hard and the teacher would not explain the work to you. They just passed out the work and expected you to do it."

I then proceeded to ask, "Tell me about the discipline in school and what you felt about it?"

"I was very upset when it came to discipline and they did not give you enough chances," he commented.

I followed by asking, "Tell me about your attendance."

"I missed a lot of school," he replied.

"When you were in school, were you aware of any programs offered by the school district that might have helped you to stay in school?"

He answered, "Yes, I was informed about ROTC. That's all I can remember."

"What are some of the things that might happen to get you back in school?" I questioned.

He responded, "I want to go back to school, but they make it difficult for you to want to stay in school with all their rules."

Finally I asked, "What advice would you give to another student who is contemplating dropping out of school?"

He replied, "Stay in school because it is too hard to make it on your own."
Dropout Student 2:

Dropout Student 2 is an African American male who had two retentions in middle school. He is currently 18 years of age. Dropout Student 2 was muscular with a well-developed athletic body. He smiled a lot as the researcher began to interview him. He was wearing a blue tee-shirt, jeans, and a pair of “Michael Jordan” high-top sneakers. As I began to interview, which took place underneath a tree where he and his buddies were hanging out, I noticed that he was easy and laid back. Dropout Student 2 was also charismatic, when he chose to be, throughout the interview.

We later went to his mom’s house and completed the interview. Mom wanted to take part in the interview and expressed that he was troubled while in school. She said that he had the ability to do his work, when he chose to do the work. He also admits that he was encouraged or pressured by friends to do the wrong things. As he puts it, “I did what I had to do.”

When I asked Dropout Student 2 to tell me a little bit about his family, he stated, “I live with my mom and stepfather.” He also indicated that he had a little girl who often lived with them too.

I asked him, “Why did you drop out of school?”

He explained, “I was feeling o.k. about school until violence came into the school with different gangs fighting over territory. I got involved and lost interest in school.”

“In what ways did your school rules, in general, make you want to drop out of school?”

He replied, “All the administrators was (sic) taking sides for the group they liked and would not listen to our side.”
My next question was, "In what ways had teachers made you want to drop out of school?"

He stated, "Teachers did not make you drop out of school. It was the class work, waking up every morning."

"In what ways did the curriculum influence your decision to drop out of school?" I asked.

He sighed, "The work was very hard and I found myself very frustrated with doing the work."

I continued to ask the next question, "Tell me about the discipline in school and what you felt about it?"

Dropout Student 2 said, "Suspend you for nothing. Discipline was very strict. The students in one group was (sic) treated more fairly than the students in the other group."

I then asked him to explain more of what he meant.

He said, "If you lived in a certain town or neighborhood away from the school you were treated differently than those who were in the area of the school. Students who lived near the school did not get in trouble for starting fights."

I then continued and asked, "Tell me about your attendance."

He replied, "Yes, I missed a lot of school."

"When you were in school, were you aware of any programs offered by the school district that might have helped you to stay in school?" I asked.

He answered with a slight pause, "I did not know of any programs that could have help (sic) me to not drop out of school."
I continued to question him, “What advice would you give to a student that is contemplating dropping out of school?”

He said, “I would tell them, do not do it. Down the line you will need it. It is not worth it.”

Dropout Student 3:

Dropout Student 3 is an African American male who has also had two retentions in middle school. He is currently 18 years of age. I interviewed at his mom’s home. His dress was typical of the adolescent craze, name brand tennis shoes, name brand baggy jeans and no belt. Mom said he was popular with classmates, especially girls. His skin was dark, the typical afrocentric view.

Mom says he was suspended as early as seventh grade for causing trouble among other students. Mom also stated when the interview began with her son in her home, that he was not living with her at the time. She states that he is a very angry child. He pouts and exhibits moody behavior. She also said that he would get upset with her when he did not get his way in her home. At the same time he was said to be “sharp” beyond many of his peers.

I asked Dropout Student 3 to tell me a little bit about his family. He replied, “I live with my mom and two brothers.” I later found that the mother had asked him to leave home after much controversy had taken place with him and his mom.

I began the interview by asking, “Why did you drop out of school?”

He explained, “I did not have a choice. I did not feel comfortable with the Alternative School that I was placed in.”
I continued, "In what ways did your school rules, in general, make you want to drop out of school?"

He laughed, "Well, it did not really make me want to drop out of school. I miss it and regret it."

"In what ways have teachers made you want to drop out of school?" I asked.

He responded, "Some teachers' ways made you want to drop out of school. When I said I did not understand something, some teachers did not teach me, to help me understand. I think some teachers did not like me because I was popular."

"In what ways did the curriculum have an influence in your decision to drop out of school?" I asked.

He stated, "Some of the hours in classes was (sic) too long and boring. The classes that I liked seem too short."

I continued, "Tell me about the discipline in school and what you felt about it?"

"I did not break the rules, but I bent them. I did just enough to not get in trouble. So they could not touch me."

"Tell me about the attendance," I said.

He explained, "As long as I stayed home and was living for free, I had to go to school. When I got put out of the house, I missed a lot of school."

"When you were in school, were you aware of any programs offered by the school district that might have helped you stay in school?"

He expressed very candidly, "I knew about the G.E.D. given as an alternative to a district/state diploma program at night. (Researcher's note: General Education Diploma) That is all I knew about. They were not teaching me anything."
Finally, I concluded by asking him, "What advice would you give to a student that is contemplating dropping out of school?"

He stated very clearly, "Stay fully focus (sic). If you got a goal, chase your goal. Dreams are for dreamers. You cannot do anything when you are sleeping."

In the closing of the interview, they were each asked what advice would they give a student that is contemplating dropping out of school. Again, all of their responses were very similar. They all understood in order to achieve success, they needed an education. This adheres to many researchers' philosophy on education. They all alluded to wanting to become prosperous as adults and they all knew and, in so many words, stated in their responses, that, in order to be successful you must stay in school and get an education (Begley, 2000, Cordeiro & Carspecken, 1993). They all also understood that, a good education would include attending college, as well.

In-school Student 4:

In-school Student 4 is an African American male who has two retentions in middle school. He is currently in the eighth grade and 15 years of age. In-school Student 4 was dressed very neatly with a pair of slacks and a plaid-colored shirt and with sneakers. He was very polite as he sat across from me in the room provided at the school for the interview. He spoke with clarity and strength when the interview began. It was evident that his mom had taken care to cultivate his sense of worth, as it reflected his identity.

Before the researcher actually began the interview, you could feel this student exhibited a sense of pride just in his mannerism. He alluded just informally, that his mom
had given him a sense of pride and a sense of direction where he needed to be. There was definitely a feeling of closeness with him and his mom.

When I began to interview In-school Student 4, I asked him to also tell me something about his family. He said, “I have a twin sister and I live with my mom.”

I continued, “What makes you think about dropping out of school?”

He replied, “I really do not have anything to live for. I have to stay in school. I want to go to the NFL one day. That is what my dream is. I never really thought about it. I am trying to make good grades.”

“In what way may teachers have caused you to think about dropping out of school?”

He said, “Sometimes teachers push too hard on students in trying to help them get their grades.”

I continued asking, “In what ways have teachers made you think about staying in school?”

He responded, “Get a good education. They have also encouraged me to follow my dreams where I do not have to work where I do not want to work.”

I then asked, “Tell me about any discipline issues you have had in school?”

“Fighting in the sixth grade. My sister was getting ready to be jumped. I told her do not worry about it. I then punched the boy because he was talking too much,” he said.

The next interview question I asked, “Tell me about any attendance problems in school.”
He carefully replied, "No attendance problems. I may have missed 5-10 days a year. When I missed that many days, it was because my grandmother died and I had a hard time dealing with it."

I followed by asking, "Give an example of the kinds of programs that the school district might offer to help you to stay in school."

"Have more activities such as field trips for making good grades or good conduct," he replied.

I asked In-school Student 4, "How would you encourage another student to stay in school?"

He responded, with a pause, "Living on the street is not good. Kids are catching AIDS everyday, that is contributing to a person's death."

Finally, I asked, "What makes you stay in school?"

He responded, "My mom. My mom leave me right now (sic), I do not know what I will do. I might lose my mind."

In-school Student 5:

In-school Student 5 is an African American male who has two retentions in middle school. He is currently in the eighth grade and 15 years of age and has a little girl. When the researcher met with this student he seemed very jovial. He was wearing a pair of designer jeans, a collared shirt, and sneakers. It was clear that he took a sense of pride in his appearance as we began the interview.

He was attractive with a rich brown-skinned complexion. He verbalized his answers with no hesitation. Every answer to an informal question before the interview began was concise and sharp. You could feel that he came from a family who valued
education because he communicated with me very intelligently and with dignity. It was though he exhibited a sense of “being just a little better.”

I then asked him to tell me about his family. He said he has two sisters and lives with his mom; he, too, has a baby daughter.

I began my interview, “What makes you think about dropping out of school?”

“I do not think about dropping out of school because I have too many things ahead and I am planning for the future,” he replied.

“In what ways may teachers have caused you to think about dropping out of school?”

He stated in a monotone voice, “Teachers make me angry but not enough to make me want to drop out of school.”

“In what ways have teachers made you think about staying in school?” I asked.

He sighed, “They have said to be all I can be and that I would make a good role model for other kids.”

I then questioned, “Tell me about any discipline issues you have had in school.”

He though a few seconds, “Skipped a few times and been to the office for bad behavior in the classroom,”

I asked, “Tell me about any attendance problems in school.”

He responded, “I come to school everyday.”

I asked him, “Give an example of the kinds of programs that the school might offer to stay in school.”

He said, “I think that we should have extra days that we are out of school so that we can get out earlier. We should have a football team for middle school.”
The researcher asked him what he meant and he explained.

He stated that students should not miss any school excluding holidays. By this, the year can end earlier and at the same time the middle schools can have a football team.

"How would you encourage another student to stay in school? I asked.

He slowly said, "I would tell them they do not know what they are missing and they need everything that they are learning to improve on the things they need to do in the future."

I finally asked, "What makes you stay in school?"

In-school Student 5 responded by saying, "My mom. I need to take care of my mom. I got my baby girl to take care of too."

In-school Student 6:

In-school Student 6 is an African American male student in the eighth grade and has two retentions in middle school. He is also 15 years of age. He had a large built and did seem not so attractive. He sat in the room to be interviewed, dressed in a pair of baggy blue jeans, striped shirt, and a pair of regular sneakers. In-school student 6 was very cheerful and seemed excited about the interview.

He appeared to be typically a student with a cautious demeanor. He had a pleasant smile. He was very mature looking and seemed to be the type of student to take charge. This student never seemed hesitant when he spoke. He was on target with all his answers. It was pleasing to the researcher to see how delightful this student was in the interview. You could pick up a sense of strong family ties with this student.

I asked him to tell me about his family. He said he has three brothers and one sister and that he lived with his mom.
I proceeded with the interview asking him, “What makes you think about dropping out of school?”

He said, “I never thought about dropping out of school. I got too many things on my mind.”

I continued, “What ways do teachers have that may have caused you to think about dropping out of school?”

He thought with a pause, “I had one teacher to push me to the point of dropping out of school. I thought it was no need to stay in school. My mind at the time was not focused.”

This was confusing to me because I thought, on one hand, there was a specific teacher who caused him to think about dropping out, yet he originally said he never thought about dropping out. I needed more clarification so I asked him to please explain exactly what he meant.

He responded, “Yeah, I thought about it, but only for a second. I had to stay focused on what I needed to do.”

“In what ways have teachers made you think about staying in school?” I continued.

He paused, “I had a teacher who helped me. She said I had many talents. I could sing, play football, and was also a good writer. She said I should use the knowledge to the good of America”(sic).

“Tell me about any discipline issues you have in school.”

He laughed, “I got put out of class for sleeping in class. We did a lot of reading in that class and reading does not excite me.”
I proceeded in asking him, “Tell me about any attendance problems in school.” He thought for a minute and said, “I was in three different schools. So I missed a lot of school. All of this happened in one year. After all the moving around, I would get suspended for talking back to the teacher.”

I then asked him, “Give me an example of the kinds of programs that the school district might offer to help you stay in school.”

He stated, “Basically, I never thought about dropping out of school. Speed reading courses may help push me along with more math courses and better teachers. Teachers do not teach and the kids rule the teachers.’

I continued, “How would you encourage another student to stay in school?”

“I go to football practice everyday. I do not get a chance to go out on the streets. I also encourage my other buddies everyday after school to meet me at the pole out in the front of the school so that we can go to football practice together. By doing this, it helps them to stay off the streets too”, he replied.

In closing out the final interview with In-school Student 6 I asked him, ”What makes you stay in school?”

With much emotion he answered, “My mom makes me stay in school. I am not going to let her hard work go in vain.”

Description of Data Analysis Interpretation

Across-Case Study

Teacher A’s perception was contrary to why students drop out of school.

Her response was, “They do not have a set goal; they are not motivated. Little things that seem attractive to them they cling to it. They have to be taught from early on to persevere. Too many give up too early.”

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Teacher B, unlike Teacher A, gave a strong message about what strategies should be used in the classroom.

This response from Teacher B was quite similar to Teacher A’s response on attendance. They both appear to think that the parent should be a part of why the student is not in school and have some sort of explanation why the student is not attending school. In general, it is believed from teachers that parents play a key role in a child’s life (NELS: 88).

I felt that Teacher A and B were on the same wavelength with what has to occur to help students stay in school. It begins at home as Teacher A stated. Parents may need to be replaced. If not, as Teacher B expressed, parents should be taking parenting class. Parents should have to take the responsibility or be replaced.

As I thought about Teacher A’s response on the question about the characteristics of students likely to drop out of school, it was similar to Teacher B’s response where she also expressed that it could be drugs where they see their peers using them and making money for it.

I asked Teacher B to identify several kinds of strategies that she uses to assist students in her class.

Her response surprisingly was very much like that of Teacher A’s, “Take them from where they are at. You can not try to sell them on anything. You have to be rational emotive.”

Teacher C was asked the question regarding students with low attendance and he explained how he would welcome them back. His answer was totally different from
Teacher A and Teacher B’s response where they both responded similarly, which was to contact the parents as one of their solutions to the problem.

Teacher C was asked what did he envision had to occur for students to stay in school. He felt that the teacher should motivate the student and encourage them to stay in school.

This was very similar to Teacher B’s response where she also stated that you should start very early instilling in students to stay in school.

Teacher D was asked what he recommended that the school district do to keep students in school. His insight was significant. He understood the teacher’s oppression. You could feel that he had been the brunt of it many times. His idea was very similar to Teacher B’s response. She stated that the motivation should take place, but it should begin at home.

It was interesting to find that the responses from Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C on how they deal with discipline issues in their class were similar to Teacher D. They all felt there needed to be a relationship established with the teacher and the student. Parents should be contacted and the administrator should be the last result after all else has failed in working with the student.

Teacher D was asked the question regarding how he dealt with students who have low attendance. He felt that you should conference with them first and let them know where they are. At the same time, he would let the parents know as well. Again, Teacher A and Teacher B similarly stated that the parents should be contacted to see what the problem is regarding the student’s low attendance. On the contrary, Teacher C felt that
just greeting them when they come back from their absenteeism and proceeding with
where they left off would be his way of dealing with students who have low attendance.

*Hale (1982)* “Best Practices” Strategies

As I concluded all of my interviews, I thought about what Kunjufu (1985) and
others alluded to in regard to the thoughts about African American males. They say that
they are no longer “cute” little boys; teachers consciously or unconsciously see them as
menacing (Chideya, 1985; Gordon, 1997). It goes back to the media as well and how they
interpret the stereotypes that begin to affect the teacher’s verbal and nonverbal
communication.

Hale (1982) said there are strategies called “Best Practices,” which should be used
in the classroom to assist African American students to better understand their culture in
order for them to be successful. Here are Hale’s strategies and what the students thought.

(1) Body language would be considered one of the nonverbal communication
strategies. The out-of-school and in-school students when interviewed showed
differences with this strategy. Out-of-school students did not indicate in their interview
where teachers used body language to display communication with them. Instead, their
teachers displayed, according to Dropout Student 1 and Dropout Student 2 verbal
communication by expressing what their thoughts were regarding the students’ behavior
in class.

In-school students indicated that their teachers displayed verbal and nonverbal
communication. As In-school Student 4 stated, “They push too hard on students in trying
to help them get their grades.” This would be considered verbal communication.
In-school Student 4 and In-school Student 5 described their teachers making them angry and In-school Student 6 stated in particular, "I had one teacher to push me to the point of dropping out of school." By their descriptions, these teachers exemplified nonverbal communication. As Hale (1982) says, "Nonverbal communication cues could be damaging creating a negative learning environment." Facial expressions, ignoring students when asking questions about the assignment, or displaying a negative gesture when students entered the classroom were shown by teachers of these students.

(2) Standard English, equal talking time, and group learning as Hale (1982) stated were "Best Practices Strategies" did not seem to take place in the classroom according to the out-of-school students. In-school students expressed that some of their teachers talked with them in the classroom and had encouraged them to stay in school. As In-school Student 4 stated, "Get a good education. They have also encouraged me to follow my dreams where I do not have to work somewhere where I do not want to work." In-school Student 5 stated, "They have said to be all I can be and that I would be a good role model for kids." It was not conveyed to the researcher that standard English or group learning was also taking place with the in-school students.

(3) Equal talking time was definitely taking place in the classroom as one of Hale's (1982) "Best Practices" strategy in the classroom with the in-school students. If this strategy were practiced with the out-of-school students, the researcher sensed from the teachers that it would have been effective and maybe contributing to a lower dropout rate. Though it may have been possible, in-school students did not indicate whether or not these particular strategies had also taken place in the classroom.
A variety of learning activities were not expressed by any of the in-school students. The researcher believed that if a variety of activities were going on in the classroom, this would enhance students' knowledge from a wide range of learning. By using this method, teachers could keep the students' attention and less discipline issues would take place in the classroom setting.

In searching for themes in the data analysis, one became quite clear. It was the acknowledgement and rewards for the student's efforts. This was never really verbally communicated from the teachers, except for Teacher C who would reward them with money, but indirectly stated from each out-of-school and in-school student in this study. Some adults can see this as being materialistic in our society, the same as a student being rewarded for positive behavior with rewards of certificates and of candy. However, if this is what it takes to get positive results, students should be rewarded for their efforts.

None of the students that the researcher interviewed were in abject poverty. They could buy things teachers would buy them as a positive reward. They needed more than a small gift. They needed recognition for their efforts. It was the whole idea that the teachers recognized the child's behavior and something was done about it. This was considered validation for students who do not feel validated for good behavior (Begley, 2000; Chance, 1992; Tell, 1999/2000).

Reflecting back on Hale's (1982) "Best Practices" in the classroom with African American students, the researcher considered the interviews with the teachers, and their responses working with the out-of-school and in-school students in their classrooms formed many questions. What was really going on in the classroom? Could there have been deficiencies in the teacher's teaching that they overlooked? Did they understand that
their teaching style was hurting some of their students? Did In-school Student 5 define what the other students were thinking? “Teachers make me feel like dropping out of school. Teachers make me angry but not enough to make me drop out of school.”

Classroom Observations

Throughout the classroom observations, many patterns were noted. Each teacher had a personal classroom style, but yet they were all uniform in some way as part of their classroom structure. As the researcher made note of this, it was evident there was some consistency shown with each teacher. Using the classroom protocol to compare and contrast the formed patterns, Teacher D was the least favorable. It was noted earlier that parents and his colleagues think a lot of him as a teacher. It is reasonable to state that as a veteran teacher, he displayed a less favorable attitude using Hale’s (1982) “Best Practices” strategies in his classroom. Teacher C was unavailable for observation. Teacher A and Teacher B had almost an even distribution throughout the four analyzed strategies. While no teachers received the same checkmarks consistently in each strategy, the gathered information provided some understanding about the strategies that the three middle school teachers displayed as they taught their students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Observation Indicator</th>
<th>Teacher A</th>
<th>Teacher B</th>
<th>Teacher D</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEACHER NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. The teacher’s voice tonality stays the same at all times.</td>
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<td>2. The teacher appears to treat all students in a dignified way.</td>
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<td>3. The teacher appears to be appreciative of all students’ presence and effort.</td>
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<td>4. The teacher seems to relate with all students.</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The teacher projects positive body language when responding to students’ questions or comments.</td>
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<td><strong>STANDARD ENGLISH</strong></td>
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<td>6. The teacher speaks in complete sentences.</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. The teacher encourages students to speak in complete sentences.</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. The teacher informally corrects students who use incorrect English.</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EQUAL TALKING TIME</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Teacher allows students to interact with them the classroom.</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The teacher allows students to talk conversationally, in recitation, creatively.</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GROUP LEARNING</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. The teacher allows hands-on contact with the teacher.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. The teacher allows students to learn with peers.</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The teacher allows cooperative learning (group of 2 or more students).</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A VARIETY OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Teacher allows students a variety of activities in the classroom</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-Verbal Communication

All of the teachers seem to have been consistent with using non-verbal communication with their students. However, the researcher observed an exception in two of the attitudes exhibited by Teacher D that was not positive. His voice tended to change quite often with some of his students while giving instructions in his classroom setting. He seemed to have lost the momentum at times. It appeared also that he did not relate well with all students based on certain students’ behavior issues while class was taking place. Some of his students were not listening to him. Instead, they talked while he was giving instructions for their assignment.

Standard English

This was so delightful as I observed Standard English taking place in the classroom. The researcher can remember vividly Teacher B restating a question that the student was asking about a quiz that they were to take in the classroom setting. The student was not clear on his question and she rephrased the question and in turn asked him to repeat what she said. This was a perfect example of the teacher informally correcting the student to use correct English. All of the teachers were exceptional in speaking in complete sentences and encouraging their students to do the same as they asked questions or answered questions throughout the class time.

Equal Talking Time

Teacher A was very creative in his classroom. He began with going over the definitions of vocabulary words. He then stated to students that they would have a quiz in 15 minutes. He allowed students in the meantime to learn, with their peers, the definition of the vocabulary words. Following the quiz, he then allowed them to read in the groups
together the next chapter in their social studies book. The students were so attentive in the
groups. Teacher B did not allow students to talk conversationally during most of the
period because they were taking a test most of the period. Students could interact with her
when they finished their test. According to the researcher’s observation, students
appeared to have a great rapport with Teacher B. Teacher D did not allow any
conversation with him in his classroom. He began going over instructions in the class. He
then asked questions about the lesson. He did not want any talking going on with any
other students at this time either. Some students failed to listen as these instructions were
given by him.

*Group Learning and a Variety of Learning Activities*

The researcher found that Teacher D did not utilized all of Hale’s (1982) “Best
Practices” strategies in the classroom as much as the other two teachers. However,
Teacher D stated that education should not be strictly academics, but it should also be
social. This would validate what the researcher observed in his classroom. It also
validates Wiggins (1998) philosophy on authentic assignments relevant to the students’
lives. Wiggins (1998) explained that a lesson’s authenticity deals with real life
experiences. This leads to student achievement. Teacher D had two different activities
taking place in the classroom, which allowed students to interact with each other studying
in a group for a quiz that he would give the next day. Teacher D stated that he would
sometimes invite former students to speak to his current students and would have some
former students work with them in groups on their musical instruments for that specific
class, who may have the same interest or goal. He says that a role model exhibits a
positive learning environment for students. As mentioned earlier, it was intriguing to see
Teacher A exhibiting group activities as well. Each student was studying with his or her peers for a quiz and later working in a group on a reading assignment. Teacher B gave a test, which took almost the entire period allowing no room for group learning time.

**Across-Case for Students**

The researcher reflected back on all of dropout students’ responses. It was disturbing to find that each of these former students wanted to go back to school but had their own reasons why it did not work out that way.

It was also interesting to note that none took responsibility for dropping out. Each one had his excuse. Dropout Student 1 stated that it was too early to get up and go to school everyday. Maybe if the time had been a little later in regular school, he may have been more encouraged to go to school. Dropout Student 2 stated that he did not like the Alternative School that he was placed in. It seems possible that if something could have been done, where he could have been given another chance to return to regular school, based on a contract signed by him and the parent, it would have been a possible solution to his problems. He may not have dropped out of school again. Dropout Student 3 indicated that he was involved in gang fighting and the administrators seem to have taken the other group’s side. This obviously discouraged him and caused him to evidently lose interest and later drop out of school.

It can also be noted that each of these former students turned the blame on their teachers. It was these teachers that caused them to drop out of school.

Dropout Student 1 felt that the teachers lied to him and that the administration believed the teachers regardless of what he explained to them. Dropout Student 2 believed it was the class work assigned by the teachers and not the teachers. He also
added that it was a pain waking up every morning. Dropout Student 3 felt that the teachers did not teach him anything to help him understand.

Two of the former students are very atypical as mentioned by their teachers and administrators, where they were more resistant to the controls in the school culture. The other former student was not resistant at all. He wanted to go to school. He just did not want to attend an Alternative School. It was clear that he wanted to be re-enrolled in a regular school but was told he could not return to the regular school setting.

It seems that African American males, in an urban setting, seem to be a challenge for teachers because of surrounding factors such as low-socioeconomic status and peer pressure, and they are determined to be at-risk students. The evidence can be found in high suspension and expulsion rates in comparison to other students in the school population (Chideya, 1995; Gibbs, 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992).

When asked about the curriculum, Dropout Student 1 and Dropout Student 2 were very similar in their responses. They felt that the work was very hard and the teachers did not explain the work to them. On the contrary, Dropout Student 3 felt the classes were too long, emphasizing the classes that he did not like.

Another aspect of the causes of their dropping out that seems quite important has to do with their attendance. Each of their responses was similar. That is, they all agreed they missed a lot of school, although Dropout Student 3 admitted he started missing a lot of school when he was no longer at home.

Finally, none of the dropout students seem to have known or been aware about what the district offered when they were in school. Dropout Student 1 could only remember the R.O.T.C. Dropout Student 2 was not aware of any programs in school, and
Dropout Student 3 could only remember the G.E.D. program, which he states did not help him at all. In so many words he felt it was a waste of time.

Many of the responses of the in-school students were quite similar. I asked them in the interview, “What makes you stay in school?” They all replied, “Their mom.” Even more interesting was that nothing was ever said throughout the interview, positive or negative, about their fathers having an impact on their lives. I recall In-school Student 4 saying, “My mom leave me (sic) right now, I do not know what I will do. I might lose my mind.” In-school Student 6 responded similarly when he said, “My mom makes me stay in school. I am not going to let her hard work go in vain.”

When I asked the in-school students about what ways teachers made them think about staying in school, their answers again were very amazingly similar. In-school Student 4 said, “Get a good education. They have also encouraged me to follow my dreams where I do not have to work somewhere where I do not want to work.”

In-school Student 5 said his teacher told him, “Be all I can be and that I would be a great role model for kids.”

In-school Student 6 said, “I had a teacher who helped me. She said I had many talents. I could sing, play football, and also a good writer. She said I should use the knowledge to the good of America.”

Another theme was the out-of-school and in-school students’ responses on attendance. The attendance response with the in-school students was quite contrary to the out-of-school students. In-school Student 6 issue was the only in-school student that declared he missed a lot of school. He explained this was because his family moved
around a lot. He also stated that his family did eventually settle down and he was then able to go to one school on a continuous basis.

Out-of-school students all responded similarly. They all acknowledged the fact that they were suspended a lot or just did not go to school. It was also evident that all of them were in many fights resulting in a high suspension rate, unlike, or contrary to, in-school students who were not suspended a lot or missed a lot of school. In-school students did not indicate in their responses on attendance that they were engaged in a lot of fights or disruptive behavior in school.

The answers to the question about what the district might have offered to help students stay in school showed agreement. It was apparent that the out-of-school students and the in-school students did not feel that the school district was doing enough to encourage students to stay in school, but the students, themselves, were not cognizant of what the school district actually could offer them. Was this their fault, their teacher’s fault, or the district’s fault? As a prime example, Dropout Student 1 was only aware of the R.O.T.C., Dropout Student 2 was not aware of any programs offered by the school district that provided help for students to stay in school, and Dropout Student 3 was aware of the G.E.D. program that was provided from the school district.

Among the in-school students, In-school Student 4 felt that the district should provide more activities such as field trips for making good grades or good conduct. In-school Student 5 said, “I think that we should have extra days that we are out of school so we can get out earlier. We should also have a football team for middle school.” In-school Student 6 replied to the question saying, “Basically, I never thought about dropping out
of school. Speed reading courses, this may help to push me along with more math courses and better teachers. Teachers do not teach and the kids rule the teachers.”

In-School Student 4 made one point very clear when he said, “I really do not have anything to live for. I have to stay in school. I want to go to the NFL one day. That is what my dream is. I never really thought about it. I am trying to make my grades.”

In-School Student 5 responded by saying, “I do not think about dropping out of school because I have too many things ahead and I am planning for the future.”

In-School Student 6 replied, “I never thought about dropping out of school. I got too (sic) many things on my mind.”

From in-school students’ responses it was apparent that it was determination or strong will in their decision making process that allowed them to stay in school. It is also apparent that someone instilled this determination in them at a very early age. They all emphasized that mom was an important person in their lives. Their moms made a tremendous impact on their lives and helped them to make the right decisions.
Table 4

*Students’ Attitudes Toward Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct:</th>
<th>+ Positive</th>
<th>= Neutral</th>
<th>- Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Home Life</td>
<td>School District</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of School</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>= R.O.T.C.</td>
<td>“Teachers lied on you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mom and Dad, girlfriend, baby girl</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>- “I did not know of any programs that could have help (SIC) me to not drop out of school.”</td>
<td>“Teachers did not make you drop out of school. It was the class work, waking up every morning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mom and Stepfather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>= G.E.D. Program</td>
<td>“Something teachers did not teach me to help me to understand. I think some teachers did not like me because I was popular.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mom and two brothers</td>
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<tr>
<td>In School</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>= “Have more activities such as field trips for making good grades or good conduct.”</td>
<td>“Sometimes teachers push too hard on students in trying to help them get their grades.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mom and twin sister, “My mom leaves me right now (sic), I do not know what I will do. I will lose my mind.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>“I think that we should have extra days that we are out of school so that we can get out earlier. We should have a football team for middle school.”</td>
<td>“Teachers make me angry but not enough to make me want to drop out of school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mom and two sisters, “I need to take care of my mom. I got a baby girl to take care of too.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>- “Basically I never thought about dropping out of school. Speed reading courses may help push me along with more math courses and better teachers. Teachers do not teach and the kids rule the teachers.”</td>
<td>“I had one teacher to push me to the point of dropping out of school. I thought it was no need to stay in school. My mind at the time was not focused.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mom, three brothers and one sister, “My mom makes me stay in school. I am not going to let her hard work go in vain.”</td>
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</table>
Finally, all the in-school students understood, based on the responses in the interviews, that in order to achieve success they needed an education. They each wanted to become successful as adults. It was clearly identified that the road to success was having an education (Begley, 2000; Cordeiro & Carspecken, 1993). They each understood that the same road to a good education would mean attending college as well. Yet, most identified success with material wealth. To many young people, material wealth means success (Begley, 2000; Cordeiro & Carspecken, 1993; Majors and Billson, 1992).
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My research focused on the voices of three out-of-school and three in-school African American males who once attended or currently attend J. Middle School. I included the voices of four of their teachers. Together these voices presented a perspective of one urban school culture. My questions were:

1. What are the contributing factors that may cause African American males to drop out of middle school?

2. What strategies might prevent African American males from dropping out of middle school?

Each student had a different background, yet there were similarities that ran through each scenario. The researcher began the data analysis with the literature review. The researcher looked at each out-of-school and in-school student using the information gathered from the research on African American males. The researcher also reviewed the statistical data related to African American male middle school dropouts and Hale’s (1982) “Best Practices” strategies that should be used in the classroom structure that is supposed to alleviate the dropout issue. The research enlightened the researcher to the fact that that African American students must overcome identified factors that prevent them from being successful academically.

Family characteristics have been shown to affect a student’s success. Students who come from single-parent families and from large families have a higher risk of school failure (Zimiles & Lee, 1991). However, other factors involving family status could also contribute to educational success, as well. Barro and Kolstadt (1987) felt that
dropout rates can be related to the number of siblings. The conservative view, according to researcher Finn (1989), shows that poor relationships with parents have been identified as a factor contributing to students becoming at-risk and headed for school failure. The other view comes from the National Education Longitudinal Study:88 (NELS:88) reporting that children of parents with low involvement in the school were 40% more likely to work below level in basic math and reading skills, and twice as likely to drop out of school as children of parents who were moderately involved in their children’s school.

Another view comes from Barrington and Hendricks (1989), stating that poor school achievement has been linked with school failure. Other theorists such as Kagan (1988) found that teachers identify early “at-risk” students by looking at their test scores on standardized tests, the student’s neighborhood, and classroom behavior. From this observation, it can be determined that the student is considered “at-risk.” Kagan showed that what teachers think of students can have overpowering influences on student outcomes. As a result, the techniques of the teacher can be a positive re-enforcer or cause a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. The researcher believes that her research supports these theories.

Through the teacher interviews, it was shown that the teacher had a great impact on the students. The teachers that taught out-of-school and in-school students demonstrated a different reaction with out-of-school versus the in-school students. The in-school students felt that their teachers created a positive feeling with the strategies that they used in the classroom. On the contrary, out-of-school students did not express the same feelings when they were in middle school. If that is an issue, perhaps if good
strategies had been used with the out-of-school students, these teachers would have been able to encourage them to stay in school.

Each student had multiple risk factors that may have contributed to either dropping out or showing characteristics of dropping out of school: (a) five of the six students were from a broken home, (b) all of them were African American males, (c) all of them were at-risk students, (d) all of them had retentions, and (e) all lived in the section of the community with the highest crime and poverty rate. Yet, each former and current student, according to their administrators and teachers, had not committed any serious offenses in school. According to the administrators and the teachers of these students, many of them repeated the same offenses such as tardiness, participating in fights, and low attendance. The researcher can only conjecture that perhaps if these students had not repeated their offenses, if there would have been no retentions at all taking place, or no low attendance, they may not have dropped out of school. Did the students indicate, to their teachers or administrators, or someone that they could trust, such as their parents, that they were thinking of dropping out or becoming a potential drop out from school? It also appeared in the dropout students’ interviews, that none actually took the blame for what they did to contribute to dropping out or becoming a potential dropout from school.

The responsibility lies in the hands of the students. None of the teachers seemed discouraged teaching their students, but felt that the school district was not doing enough. Is it possible that somehow the school district failed to help all students stay in school? If this is the truth, is it too late to correct? The researcher, reflecting back on the interviews with the teachers, felt that none of them saw that they were a part of the problem in the
relationship with their students. The young Black male band teacher showed a great deal of animosity with the district. It seems that he did not feel that the district was doing enough to help supply the needs for at-risk students. He stated that you have to find a way to educate these students to value education. He also commented that the FCAT is not important to them. He felt that schooling was not important to everyone. His philosophy is that you have to figure out a way to motivate the students. He thinks that the district should find other ways that will best fit the needs of these students.

The researcher wanted to know what strategies was Teacher D using in his classroom to help soothe the problem with students faced with dropping out of school. He stated that he did not have a specific answer in finding a way to value education. It was his belief that there should be more role models, other than just doctors and athletes. There should be role models from all walks of life. He said that everyone is not “cut out” to go to college; therefore, you should meet non-college-bound students’ needs. He expressed that if he had any classroom disruptions he would handle it in the classroom. He made it very plain that contacting the administrator would be the last resort. He also emphasized that he knew a lot of parents and that he would contact them if he had to, as another solution, before giving up on the student. The researcher had the opportunity to observe his classroom. Some students were disruptive while he was trying to give class instructions at the beginning of class. He finally got all of their attention after ten minutes into the class. The researcher also acknowledged the fact that Teacher D kept his composure as he finally got all of the students to participate in the class assignment. It appeared that most of these students did respect him. I think the most important piece to this puzzle lies in the way he handled his classroom management issues, and that he
could identify with all of his students. He did not appear to have issues with his students regardless of what neighborhood they came from, their background or ethnicity. This was the key to his success. However, the researcher believes, as does Hale (1982), that if there was some group learning or equal talking time in his classroom, the class could have been more manageable in a shorter period of time.

Teacher A was one of the White male teachers who appeared to enjoy his job teaching these students, but felt that the district should also be doing more for students. His main concern was smaller class sizes. He did not feel that large class sizes were conducive to meet the needs of all children. The researcher was starting to feel that, though Teacher A appeared to love his job in teaching students, he seemed overwhelmed with the school district as a whole. Finally, like Teacher B, he felt that a lot of the responsibility or problems lie with the parents (Rosenholtz, 1991). He also said, “Some responsibility would also lie with the student.” His belief is that it must begin at home and he stated that if there is no reinforcement in the home then simply replace the parent and put these students in a different environment.

At the other end of the spectrum at J. Middle School were Teacher B and Teacher C. Teacher B was a Jamaican-born female teacher who spent 17 years teaching math. Many of her colleagues described her as being very rigid and strict. Teacher C was a White male critical thinking teacher of four years. His colleagues and administration staff considered him very energetic and open-minded. Both of these teachers understood the community where they taught, though they were from “different worlds”. Teacher B understood the children because she also witnessed similarities in her country, when she was a child, and survived it. She saw poverty, drugs, and crime in the streets of her
neighborhood. When the researcher asked her about what strategies she used in her classroom to assist her students in the learning process, she stated that she must let them know how important reading is, and help them build their dreams. She also stated that they must first know how to read in order to move to the next level in the learning process. If they can read, then they have accomplished a large portion of the learning process in order for them to achieve academic success.

Teacher C had empathy for his students and their lives but did not allow this to interfere with his teaching process. The researcher was amazed at his statement in the interview when asked what he recommends the school district do to keep students in school. He replied, “Reward them with money. Take a proactive stance and it could help somewhere down the road”. He felt that if students were paid for their good behavior or good deeds this could be a part of the solution in preventing students from dropping out of school.

The researcher thought about Haberman’s (1995) research on the characteristics and behaviors of star, urban teachers when analyzing all of these teachers and their interviews. What is a good teacher or how did the students perceive what was a good teacher? None of the students clearly stated that any of these teachers were exceptional, although it comes to mind in an interview with in-school student 6 when he was asked the question, “What ways have teachers made you think about staying in school?” He answered that he had a teacher who helped him. He said that the teacher told him that he had many talents and that he should exercise them, “to the good of America.” These very words, he said, encouraged him and gave the researcher the impression this is what he thought a good teacher is all about. Each student had a different experience in middle
school. Their perspectives on the negativity of a teacher were quite similar. Out-of-school and in-school students verbalized that many of their teachers pushed too hard using what is called the “push effect” (Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996) and did not listen to them. This, then, caused students to retaliate and act out, causing them to drop out of school, which is called the “pull effect” (Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996).

Having the opportunity and the ability to witness classes was a great advantage to the researcher after interviewing each of these participants (Creswell, 1998; Lecompte & Preissle, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Much of the research points out that many students drop out of school because of the negativity from teacher/student interactions. On the other hand, successful students feel that a “good teacher” is one who interacts positively with his or her students. Students then pull away from their teachers who have been their confidants, though they have a need to relate to them. These students are less likely to drop out of school if they find that their teachers are flexible, positive, creative, innovative, and people-oriented individuals (Bhaerman & Kopp, 1986). In many aspects Teacher A, B, C, and D all exhibit some of the traits of an effective teacher as discussed by Hale (1982). However, there is more that could be done to assist in making them more effective. None of them mentioned in their interviews nor was it seen in the classroom observations that they tried interacting with students individually or giving them their undivided attention. Also, good middle school teachers take special training as an on-going process (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). None of them mentioned in their interview that they were using the teaching strategy of assisting students in the learning process. By going to extensive specialized training, teachers can provide a richer and more positive
climate that will encourage and enhance their skills in working with at-risk students (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989).

It was troublesome to the researcher that, after going back over the interviews with the teachers, none of them mentioned the academic achievement of students. There was no mention of a reward system nor was a reward system evident in the classroom observations for any student who did well academically or did not create havoc in the classroom, preventing other students from learning. The researcher believes that the teachers may have had negative feelings toward certain students, creating a negative environment. This could be the reason why Dropout Student 1 and Dropout Student 2 felt the way they did. They felt that teachers would just give you the work and expect you to do it without explaining the assignment. Students then felt that teachers did not care. Dropout Student 1 also felt that teachers gave certain students special treatment if they came from a certain part of the town. None of the teachers mentioned anything about the neighborhoods of students and how that could be a factor with some of the chaos that would take place at J. Middle School. According to Crane (1991), neighborhood plays an important role in a male’s life, but parents play more of an important role because they have a greater influence on males. As mentioned earlier, most of the students were from single parent homes. Crane (1991) also felt that it did not matter if they were from a disadvantaged or middle class neighborhood; both affected the likelihood that the male would drop out of school if there were no strong influences in the home from the parent.

Teachers cannot be successful in an urban school with students of color unless they are open to learning about their identity and their background. It can be noted that teachers who cannot relate to all of their students and communicate with them effectively
will have serious problems in the classroom setting (Gordon, 1997). It can also be noted that when teachers show or give positive feedback to their students, positive results will take place in the classroom setting. Students will do better academically and are less likely to drop out of school (Fullan, 1991; Giroux, 1988; Haberman, 1995; Hall, 1981; Hebert, 1998; Kozol, 1991; Kunjufu, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The most interesting and intriguing teacher that stood out in the researcher’s mind was Teacher D. He exhibited most of these characteristics in his teaching techniques.

The perceptions of the students at J. Middle School were indeed a problem. Most of the African American male students felt that their teachers were too hard on them. One of the students, In-School Student 4, stated that teachers push too hard. This then creates negativity with the student and the teacher. Again, students are less likely to drop out of school when their teachers are more flexible, positive, creative, innovative and people-oriented individuals (Bhaerman & Kopp, 1986).

*The Academic Identity Construction of Six African American Middle School Males*

The researcher was quite amazed at the sincerity of each student in the interview. It was as though they were all reaching out in some way but did not know which way to turn. Dropout Student 3 had a bad experience with his mom and somehow was found to be unmanageable in the home. This led to where he could no longer stay at home with his mom. The researcher could feel his pain. The researcher can remember when she first interviewed him; he was seen under a tree with his friends. He later showed the researcher where he lived and the interview began there with the mom present. He showed signs of sorrow and guilt. He mentioned to the researcher that he was sorry for what he had done in the home to make it unpleasant for the mom and her husband.
However, the mom felt that he needed to do more with his life, although at the same time, he was considered “sharp” by his peers. Even more interesting was the fact that all of these students never said anything negative about their own fathers, but acknowledged the fact that the nurturing was coming from their moms. There was only one student who lived with both parents permanently and that was Dropout Student 1. The researcher can also remember in the interview with the in-school students that they all felt that they could not drop out of school because they were afraid to let their moms down. One of the statements that was made by In-school Student 6 who said that his mom is the one who makes him stay in school and he cannot let her hard work “go in vain”. Maybe if more African American males had the same positive view of their moms, it might be a reason for them to stay in school.

*Contributing Factors for Dropout*

There were seven major themes identifying the possible constructs of students at-risk for dropping out of school: (a) had single moms; (b) lack of teacher’s motivation; (c) lack of acknowledgement for positive behavior in the classroom; (d) general attitude toward school; (e) high retention; (f) single teenage fathers; and (g) negative perception about the school district.

Most of the students identified their mom as someone who stressed the value of education. Each student’s mother encouraged her children’s desire to learn. Even the parents, who may not have had as much education or did well in the school, wanted this to happen for their son. The researcher got the impression that getting an education and doing well in school is what these parents wanted. Single parents are faced with a lot of issues that require much of their time. Many of the setbacks as a single parent are from
living in high crime areas (Hale, 1982). The mother of Dropout Student 2 wanted her son to do well. She said he had the ability to do his work, when he chose to do his work.

Dropout Student 2 admitted that part of the problem was that he was pressured by his friends to do the wrong things. The main influence in the African American male’s life for academic identity points to supportive parent(s). Most of the students articulated in some form how the parent(s) was important to them in helping to construct an academic identity. There was a more nurturing desire from the in-school students than the out-of-school students. The in-school students wanted their parents’ approval when they made decisions. The out-of-school students wanted this approval too, but were not as direct in stating it. However, with the foundation of nurturing parents, supporting friends, and mentors, students would be encouraged and enabled to focus on the academic aspects of schooling (Maslow, 1968).

The second important influence was making the connection in school with their teachers. According to Hale’s (1982) “Best Practices,” teachers should use the following strategies when working with African American students to better understand their culture and for them to be academically successful: (a) body language, (b) standard English, (c) equal talking time, (d) group learning and (e) a variety of learning activities.

None of the teachers consistently used all of the strategies in their classroom according to the researcher’s observation of their classroom practices. It was not noted in their interviews that they verbally suggested or mentioned that any of these strategies were specifically used with their students. If this were done with all of their students, could the teachers have saved Dropout Student 1, Dropout Student 2 and Dropout Student 3? Maybe if all of the students were exposed to these strategies, it would have encouraged
all the students to stay in school. Often teachers make assumptions that they are doing all that they know how in assisting the students, and they really are not instilling confidence or hope in these students, especially African American males, who may be hiding behind a mask of bravado (Akbar, 1996; Kunjufu, 1984; Majors & Billson, 1992). Teacher D made it very clear that the school curriculum should be diversified like the students and that someone should come in and educate the teachers about the students. Teacher C similarly felt the same way. He stated in his interview that the programs should be diversified and a program specialist should come to the schools and educate the teachers about the students. In addition, he felt that it should start in the elementary grades. The teacher should be someone who may live in the community and/or may share the same culture with the children. The teacher should also understand the obstacles the African American males face within their own group. As teachers understand the obstacles that these students face, then they hopefully will gain respect from these students. Some teachers already have a pre-conceived image of at-risk students. These students generally "pick up" on teachers’ attitudes toward them and become discouraged, later dropping out of school (NELS:88).

The third important influence was lack of acknowledgement for positive behavior. The researcher believes that understanding of this study’s students’ efforts is much needed in a school system with African American males. The study’s students believed that they should be recognized for their positive and academic behavior. Teachers of these African American males utilizing a positive reward system in their classes did not verbally communicate this. They needed more than just a small gift. They needed recognition for their efforts. Once the teacher recognizes good behavior, it is then
exercised with a reward of certificates or something of materialistic value. Many other researchers agree with this researcher’s findings and consider validation for students who do not feel validated for good behavior (Begley, 2000; Chance, 1992; Tell, 1999/2000). Farrell (1988) believed that students non-engagement in school had very little to do with their interest in school, but was linked to the disengagement from the system in which they were not able to receive any rewards.

The fourth important influence is the student’s general attitude toward school. This researcher found in this study that the “at-risk” students had a pervasive dislike for school. These students, all from the same school, face many of the dilemmas found by Fine (1987). He found that “at-risk” students that are clustered in the same school could create a problem. The clustering process was considered one of the problems specifically where there was lower funding in the schools, low morale among staff members, and students having to take remedial courses. Eventually, they drop out (Fine, 1985). The researcher found very little was done to encourage the students in this study to value education.

The fifth important influence is the high retention rate among African American males. Barrington and Hendricks (1989) stated that poor school achievement is linked with school failure. These researchers have found that at-risk students are unsuccessful academically as early as third grade. Retention during the early primary years is an issue that was found to lead to school failure. Students who repeated a grade were about two and a half times more likely to not succeed on the basic levels of achievement tests than non at-risk students (NELS:88). The researcher found this to be true. All students were
retained twice. Again, the researcher feels because of the connection to the parent, the in-
school students have remained in school.

The sixth important influence is becoming a single teenage father. Data indicate
African American males drop out of school or are “pushed out of the school” at a higher
rate than any other ethnic group because of fatherhood (Noble, 1983). Four African
American males in this research study stated in the interview that they were fathers and
they expressed the need to somehow be able take care of their children. For one of those
students, fatherhood was the contributing factor for him dropping out of school. These
African American males have no means of financial support and must work to provide
for their families.

The final important influence is the negative perception about the school district.
Most of the students in the study were not aware of any programs that the district had to
offer. “Schools of Choice” is the only program that the researcher is aware of that will
service “at-risk” students. Also, some of their teachers expressed in the interview that the
district was not doing enough to assist these students or they were not aware of what the
district actually offered to assist “at-risk students.” Keller (1986) stated that there is a
need for establishing dropout prevention programs for the education of children. Early
signs of dropping out of an adolescent should be detected early and an intervention
program should be immediately implemented that will best fit the need of the student
(Stanard, 2003).
Hale’s “Best Practices” Strategies

Hale (1982) recommended five “Best Practices” strategies to prevent students from dropping out of school. Many of the teachers did not use these strategies consistently. For example: Teacher D used non-verbal communication as one of the strategies but did not seem to relate well in the beginning to keep his class under control (See Table 3). It took some time for him to eventually attain momentum. His voice did not stay the same all the time. In the beginning he was very annoyed with the students’ behavior, and his tone of voice displayed it. He later projected more of a pleasant voice and remained that way throughout the period. Maybe if he had started out in a pleasant voice from the beginning, he would have received their undivided attention, when going over the instructions in class, and making the class instructions more receptive to students (Hale, 1982).

The second “Best Practices” strategy by Hale (1982) is for all teachers to use Standard English. Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher D all used Standard English in their class. They were all consistent with this strategy when observed by the researcher (See Table 3).

The third “Best Practices” strategy that Hale (1982) suggested is appropriate for keeping students in school is for teachers to encourage equal talking time (See Table 3). Teacher B and Teacher D did not allow their students to talk conversationally. All of their students had to remain quiet after the instructions were given. Though Teacher B had given her children a math test, they were not allowed any conversation time after that. Teacher D gave instructions and all students sat in their seats the entire period doing class
work. If both of these teachers had allowed some conversation time during the period, perhaps students would have been more excited about the learning process.

The fourth strategy Hale (1982) recommended to be a successful strategy to keep students in school is to allow group learning. None of the teachers allowed any hands-on contact with the teacher; which meant that the teacher did not engage in any learning strategy with the student that required hands-on. Teacher B and Teacher D did not allow any contact with peers throughout the period (See Table 3). If Teacher B and Teacher D would have allowed an extensive amount of group learning, there may have been more willingness from students to learn. Teacher D would have saved time and energy in trying to calm the class down had he encouraged students to feel a part of the class from the beginning.

The fifth and last strategy that Hale (1982) stated that is effective in keeping students from dropping out of school is implementing a variety of learning activities. Teacher A and Teacher D did give students more than one assignment for students to do. Teacher B only gave a math test and students had to remain quiet for the rest of the period. This could have created some animosity with students not willing to cooperate with the teacher, although this did not occur. This atmosphere certainly did not warrant students to feel any enthusiasm about taking a test and having to keep their mouths closed for the rest of the period, even if they finished the test early.

Young African American males are aware of their true identity in this world. They are also aware of the statistics where they are not fairly represented (Kunjufu, 1984, 1985). Educators need to understand that the African American males’ culture and heritage are very important. Educators also show an on-going negative perception of
African American students, rather than helping or mentoring them. Hamilton (1997) believed that the reasons for differential treatment for students of color are complicated and that African American students tend to act out.

The strongest common force among the dropout students is that they all understood that education is important. Dropout students all admitted in the interviews that if they had to do it all over again they would not have dropped out. Dropout Student 2 said he would tell any student, “Do not do it.” “Down the line you will need it. It is not worth it.” Dropout Student 3 said, “Stay fully focus (sic). If you got a goal, chase your goal. Dreams are for dreamers. You cannot do anything when you are sleeping.” The researcher believes that Dropout Student 1 said it best. He stated, “Stay in school because it is too hard to make it on your own.”

Conclusion

Some of the research about teaching students of color is not new, and some of the information pertains to all students, but the purpose of this research was to understand how we could better assist African American males to stay in school and be successful academically. The study used information from other middle schools in the county, state, and other states; it included perceptions of the middle school environment and the strategies and interventions that should be utilized to keep students in school.

Educators must recognize that a large portion of African American children live in a home with a single female parent. Many of these parents are in school, job training programs, or working more than one job, which places a burden on their time and energy. Educators must be sensitive to the students of these parents. Educators should examine their own feelings before they reach out to help someone else. This is critical because
students are aware of negative behaviors shown by teachers. This can be seen through nonverbal and verbal language. Students tend to act out when negativity is displayed toward them.

It has been found (Haberman, 1995) that students can identify effective teaching among urban teachers. Through the interview process, the researcher found that students need an adult who really cares. Teachers could go above and beyond to help students through home visitation, enrolling students in tutoring classes for academic support, and/or be someone who can provide emotional and social support. None of the teachers mentioned in their interviews that any of these things were taking place. The researcher felt that there was yet more to be done by all teachers to keep students interested and not wanting to drop out of school.

**Limitations**

The first limitation revolves around the sampling issues. The participating teachers were purposefully selected by the following criteria: (a) teachers who have taught three years or more, (b) teachers who have taught one or more of the students, (c) teachers who have knowledge of any intervention techniques or prevention programs. There was one African American male, one Jamaican American female, and two White males. The participating students were purposefully selected from the following criteria: (a) low attendance, (b) high grade level retention, (c) discipline record, (d) eighth grade student/former eighth grade student (not enrolled in an adult educational program), (e) age 15-18, and (f) African American male. There were three eighth grade African American males and three former eighth grade African American males in the study.
The second limitation is that the researcher of the qualitative inquiry is an administrator within the school system with extensive experience and personal understanding of the issues being investigated. Based on the viewpoints of the researcher, biases take place during the periods of data collection and analysis. Cautionary measures were taken to minimize any subjectivity on the part of the researcher by choosing a middle school with which in some way had a connection with the researcher. The researcher also used triangulation and more specifically member checking to ensure validity and reliability of the study.

The final limitation was the data collection timeframe. Information was gathered three weeks prior to the closing of the school year. There was a possibility that the teachers felt stressed, frustrated, or overwhelmed with the closeout deadlines that they had to meet before closing out for the summer. Some teachers were not interacting at great length, because some students were leaving early for the summer to vacation with their parents. As a result, some teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication impacted the flow of the interview.

While the limitations may have affected the generalizibility of the study's findings, this presented an avenue for a future study. It is evident that these six current/former students and four teachers do not represent all middle school students or middle school teachers. According to Merriam (1988):

Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities—that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. Research is exploratory, inductive, and emphasizes process rather than end. (p.17)
The author states that a qualitative inquiry is a process. These limitations offer other researchers an opportunity to expand on the current study.

**Recommendations**

According to Ekstrom and Mann (1989, 1987) students from a large city are more vulnerable as a risk in education compared to those students from a rural community. Fine (1987) believed that a great deal of the problem stemmed from the “at-risk” students being put in the same school. This can create a low morale among staff members and administrators. There is a lot of research available to educators to work with children in low socioeconomic neighborhoods and children of color. The school district will need to incorporate information based on this research and other studies that can help meet the needs specifically for African American males. Many of the students and teachers in the interviews were not aware of any programs available to meet the needs of students. If there are more alternative programs available for “at-risk” students, the district can prevent a lot of African American male students from dropping out of school.

A quantitative research study on African American male dropout is recommended by the researcher to implement in the school district. Once this important document is implemented, the district can monitor how many students have dropped out beginning in middle school. If problems are detected early, perhaps fewer students will drop out of school.

According to Wehlage and Rutter (1986), the real causes of dropping out are within the school context itself. These factors can be structural and contextual factors, which may include administrative support for teachers, teacher effectiveness, morale and
expectancies, student morale, and academic investment, class size, parental involvement, fiscal inequities, and physical environment. When students see that school is not a priority, they may feel it is not necessary and choose to drop out. Somehow, the whole administrative staff of the district needs to come together and display more of an interest in the school settings and visit the schools more. They can visit the schools and speak with faculty, staff, and even the student body requesting what it is that they can do to make everyone feel more comfortable in the school environment. By doing this, it shows an interest that they are ready to serve and meet the schools' needs. It is also strongly recommended that all minority children should not be placed in urban schools. Somehow, the district needs to work harder in changing the boundaries of the lower socioeconomic neighborhoods, so that all schools will be more balanced in the urban and suburban areas, and provide a better education for students of color. If these students remain clustered in the same schools, the district will continue to see an increase in the student dropout rate.

Another problem is the student teacher relationship. A successful student believes that a “good teacher” is someone who interacts positively with his/her students. Students are less likely to drop out of school if this type of behavior is displayed with all students (Bhaerman & Kopp, 1986). It is recommended that the district provide some type of training to specifically meet the needs of students of color. The program might include seminars on African American males reinforcing what is supposed to be taught in the educational institutions. African American males should be aware of their culture, be able to share with their families, and feel the joy of discovering their heritage. If all teachers exercise this in the school district, fewer students will drop out of school.
Hale (1982) suggests five strategies that teachers should use with the African American students on a daily basis in the classroom. These strategies that she recommends are called “Best Practices.” It is believed that if these strategies are used to assist African American students in the classroom, fewer students will drop out of school. It also allows the teacher the opportunity to better understand the students’ cultures in order for these students to be successful academically. Perhaps the school district can collaborate with other school districts to plan a workshop and present Hale’s (1982) “Best Practices” strategies on a professional development day.

Another recommendation is that there needs to be a stronger parental involvement program in the schools. All schools currently reflect parental involvement in some way, but there is more to be done in this area. It is entirely too much paperwork and documentation and nothing is really being done to meet the total needs for students of color. Educators must realize that many of our African American males have been reared in a lower-income area and by single females. The parents are faced with many issues that require a great deal of their time and energy. Many of us are not sensitive to their needs.

Parental involvement programs designed for all suburban moms will not necessarily work for families of African American males. Educational seminars are recommended that relate specifically to African American parents. Topics unrelated to the school and the child, but geared toward the interests of the parents are another avenue of assistance that the district can give to the African American parent as well as other parent. Important components of these seminars might include applying for jobs,
interviewing, child development, and learning theories. Within this context, you will not lose parents' interest, and they will be willing to give more time to the school.

Next, parents who are from the lower socioeconomic neighborhoods need to be exposed to seminars in assisting their children in how to read and to do well academically in school. The parent should have a background in supporting her child's learning. Perhaps, if the district could come together with local agencies and the media and provide information through school newsletters, this will help parents become more aware, and they may support their children's learning.

Revitalizing the curriculum such as health education is an important asset in particular for middle school children. Courses in health education should include information on the eating habits and on the effects of substance abuse and alcohol on the body. The curriculum should also include information on teenage pregnancy, since many of the students are becoming teenage mothers and fathers at such an early age.

Recommendations for Further Study

The anticipation of interviewing students and the teachers was most exciting. The researcher learned so much more from hearing both the positive and the negative sides of situations. She feels that having a dialogue or interacting with the persons is important. One gets to hear and see how they feel. This helps to understand and look for solutions to solve some of the problems that students and teachers face. Many of our students and teachers are the victims of the set rules and guidelines mandated by the federal, state, or local entities. Based on the interviews, they feel they really have no voice or any "say so" in the matter. These people that are affected should have the opportunity to be heard. The students and teachers were excited about the interviews. Students in the interview felt a
need to be candid in their responses by telling the researcher they would be willing to start the education process all over again, i.e., being more receptive to their teachers in the process. The main point that each student expressed in his own way is that they wanted a teacher who showed that they care. Teachers were also sincere in their responses. The teachers expressed the need for more support from the district. Therefore, it is suggested that further studies be done in incorporating students and teachers to search for more solutions in the school district.

Most of the students and teachers were not aware of programs offered by the school district to assist "at-risk" students. Evaluations of school district officials and programs for "at-risk" students should be done annually with changes in the implementation of these programs as needed. A follow-up process should take place every two years after the initial evaluation.

No doubt, teachers and district officials need to sit at a roundtable and generate solutions to help save all children. It ultimately comes to caring about all children and meeting their needs. The participants in this study raise voices that could be heard in other research studies. The participants allowed the researcher to search her soul and to not lose sight of what is important in the school system, which is meeting the needs of all children.
REFERENCES


Binkley and Hopper (1989). *Statistical Profile*.


Palm Beach County School District Data Report (2003).


APPENDIX A

Student Interviews: Dropped out of school:

1. How did you feel about going to school?
2. Why did you drop out of school?
3. School-based Influences on dropping out of school:
   a. In what ways did school, in general, make you want to drop out of school?
   b. In what ways have teachers made you want to drop out of school?
   c. In what ways did the curriculum have an influence on your decision to drop out of school?
4. Were other pressures on you to drop out?
5. Tell me about the discipline in school and what you felt about it?
6. Tell me about your attendance. Were there any problems?
7. When you were in school, did you participate in any activities or clubs? Would you have liked to belong to any clubs or activities?
8. When you were in school, were you aware of any programs offered by the school district that might have helped you stay in school?
9. If yes, did you participate in any programs offered by the school district? If no, in what ways would you have liked the school district to have helped you?
10. How did you do in school? (Tell me about your grades.)
11. What did your parents say about leaving school?
12. Who else do you think might have helped you to stay in school?
13. What are some of the things that might happen to get you back to school?
14. What are you doing now?
15. What advice would you give to a student who is contemplating dropping out of school?
Student Interviews: At-risk students who have stayed in school:

1. What makes you think about dropping out of school?
2. In what ways have teachers caused you to think about dropping out of school?
3. In what ways have teachers made you think about staying in school?
4. Tell me about any discipline issues you have had in school?
5. Tell me about any attendance problems in school.
6. What activities or programs do you go to in your school?
7. What activities or programs would you like to join in school? Why do you want to belong?
8. Give an example of the kinds of programs that the school district might offer to help you to stay in school.
9. How would you encourage another student to stay in school?
10. How are you doing in school? (Tell me about your grades.)
11. What makes you stay in school?
12. What do your parents feel about your experiences in school?
13. Do you still feel like dropping out?
14. If you dropped out, what do you think you would be doing?
APPENDIX B

Teacher Interviews

1. Why do you think students drop out of school?

2. What do you see as the characteristics of students likely to drop out of school?

3. a. Identify several kinds of strategies to assist these students.

   b. Are there specific strategies that you presently have implemented to assist students?

4. What does the district do to keep these students in school?

5. Tell me about any programs that the school district might have to offer these students regarding dropout prevention.

6. What do you recommend that the school district do to keep students in school?

7. What do you think about after school tutoring? Or other after school possibilities?

8. What would make students aware of these services after school?

9. How do you think any activity or club after school might help these students?

10. How do you deal with students who have discipline issues?

11. How do you deal with students who have low attendance?

12. How do you deal with students who are failing your class?

13. What do you envision has to occur to help youngsters in school?
APPENDIX C

INFORMED ASSENT

(Student Form)

You have been invited to participate in a research study conducted by A'Licia S. Durden, a doctoral student in the College of Education program at Lynn University, Boca Raton, Florida. The research involves African American middle school males dropping out of middle school. Your parent(s)/guardian will also be asked to give permission for you to participate in the study. The information can then be used to help Palm Beach County and other school districts to understand the experience and help all students to remain in school.

The study involves an interview and possibly a follow-up interview. The one-on-one interview will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences in middle school and what may have happened to cause you to drop out or think of dropping out of middle school. The interview will be tape-recorded. The total time that this will take is about two to three hours.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential, and a number will be used instead of your name to protect your identity. The results of the research will be published in a doctoral dissertation.

The researcher is available by telephone [redacted] for contact at any time for any reason. If you feel you want to stop at any time during the interview, you may. If you do stop, all of your information will be destroyed and you will be dropped from the study.

If you have any questions about this study or your part in it, feel free to ask at any time. If you have concerns about this project and you do not want to talk to the researcher A'Licia S. Durden, you may call Dr. Carole Warshaw, Dissertation Committee Chairperson, Lynn University, at [redacted].

Two copies of this informed assent form have been provided. Please sign both indicating you have read, understood, and agreed to participate in this research. Please return one copy to the researcher and keep the other.

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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>A'Licia S. Durden</td>
<td>Date</td>
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Witness Statement: In my judgment, the subject understands the information in this assent form and agrees to be in the study.

Witness signature: ________________________ Date ________
Informed Consent Audio-Record

I, ____________________________, give permission to have this interview recorded by means of an audio recording device. I understand the interview will be taped for data collection purposes specific to this research project only. The recording will be transcribed and coded. It will be kept in a confidential place for five years in a box. All information will be kept completely confidential.

I, parent of ____________________________, give permission to have this interview recorded by means of an audio recording device. I understand the interview will be taped for data collection purposes specific to this research only. The recording will be transcribed and coded. It will be kept in a confidential place for five years in a box. All information will be kept confidential.

Name of participant (please print) ________________________________________________________________________ Date

Signature of parent ________________________________________________________________________ Date

Signature of participant ________________________________________________________________________ Date

A'Licia Durden ________________________________________________________________________ Date
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

You have been invited to participate in this research study conducted by A’Licia Durden, a doctoral student in the College of Education program at Lynn University, Boca Raton, Florida. The research involves African American males who are at risk of dropping out of middle school. You will be asked to give permission to participate in the study. The information can then be used to help Palm Beach County and other school districts better understand the experience and aid in the planning and the preparation process for students to remain in school. You have been selected because of the following criteria for at-risk students: (1) low attendance; (2) high retention; (3) discipline record; (4) age 15-18 (not enrolled in an adult educational program); (5) African American male; and (6) eighth grade student/former eighth grade student.

The study involves a one-on-one interview and possible follow-up interview. The one-on-one interview will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences in middle school and what may have caused you to drop out of middle school. The interview will be tape-recorded for a later analysis. Once the analysis has been completed, you will be contacted again for a follow-up interview to review the analysis for accuracy. The total time involved in your participation will be approximately two to three hours.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. The report of this study will not include any identifiable data. If you do participate, the data will be coded to protect your identity and kept in a locked security box for a period of five years. After five years, the data will be destroyed.

It is hoped that this research will benefit Palm Beach County School District as well as other school districts to better understand the experience of African American males dropping out of middle school and the strategies needed to properly plan and prepare for them. The researcher is available by telephone for contact at any time without negative consequences, for any reason you deem necessary.

Upon request, a copy of the research analysis will be provided to you at the conclusion of the research. If you have any questions about any aspect of this study or your involvement, feel free to ask at any time. If you have concerns about the project that you do not want to address with A’Licia S. Durden, you may call Dr. Carol Warshaw, Dissertation Committee Chairperson, Lynn University, at [redacted].

Two copies of this informed consent form have been provided. Please sign both indicating you have read, understood, and agreed to participate in this research. Please return one copy to the researcher and keep the other for your files.

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Informed Consent Form Audio-Record

I, ________________________________, give permission to have this interview recorded by means of an audio recording device. I understand the interview will be taped for data collection purposes specific to this research project only. The recording will be transcribed and coded. It will be kept in a confidential place for five years in a box. Audio recording will be destroyed after five years. All information will be kept completely confidential.

Name of participant (please print) ________________________________ Date

Signature of participant ________________________________ Date

A'Licia S. Durden Date
Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Carole Warshaw in the College of Education at Lynn University. I am conducting a research study to find out why African American middle school males are dropping out of middle school. I am requesting your child’s participation, which will involve a one-on-one tape-recorded interview and possible follow-up interview. Your child’s participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child to participate or to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty (it will not affect your child’s grade). The report of this study will not include any identifiable data. If your child does participate, the data will be coded to protect the identity of your child and kept in a locked security box for a period of five years. After five years, the data will be destroyed. The results of the research study may be published, but your child’s name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child’s participation is for school districts to understand the experience of African American males dropping out of middle school.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child’s participation in this study, please call me A’Licia Durden at [phone number], or Dr. Carole Warshaw at [phone number].

Sincerely,

A’Licia Durden

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child [name] to participate in the above study.

---

Signature ___________________ Printed Name ___________________ Date ___________________

If you have any questions about you or your child’s rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Board, through Dr. Farideh Farezmond, at [phone number].
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT: (Teacher Form)

You have been invited to participate in a research study conducted by A'Licia S. Durden, a doctoral student in the College of Education program at Lynn University, Boca Raton, Florida. The research involves African American middle school males dropping out of middle school. The information can then be used to help Palm Beach County and other school districts better understand the experience and aid in the planning and preparation process for students to remain in school. You have been selected because you meet the criteria: (1) teacher who has taught three years or more, (2) taught the African American middle school African males selected for the research, and (3) knowledge of dropout prevention programs or intervention techniques.

The study involves a one-on-one interview and follow-up interview. The one-on-one interview will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences with middle school students and/or what may possibly cause or has caused an African American male to drop out of middle school. The interview will be recorded for a later analysis. Once the analysis has been completed, you will be contacted again for a follow-up interview to review the analysis for accuracy. The total time involved in your participation will be approximately two to three hours.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. The transcription of the interview will be coded with a number and an alias to protect your identity. Reports of this research will not include any identifiable data. The overall results of the research will be published in a doctoral dissertation as well as other possible venues (e.g. professional journal). Lynn University’s Institutional Review Board has authorized access to all materials related to this research.

It is hoped that this research will benefit Palm Beach County School District as well as other school districts to better understand the experience of African American males dropping out of middle school and the strategies needed to properly plan and prepare for them. The risk to you is considered low on a scale of low, medium, and high. If you choose not to participate, there will be no negative consequences related to your employment in Palm Beach County School District. The researcher is available by telephone [redacted] for contact at any time without negative consequences, for any reason you deem necessary. Should you withdraw, all your documentation will be eliminated from the study and destroyed. Should you feel upset you may at any time stop during the interview. The name and telephone number of a counselor will be provided should you feel the necessity to speak to someone. If you do participate, your data will be coded to protect your identity, and kept in a locked security box for a period of five years. After five years, the data will be destroyed. There is no financial remuneration for participating in this study. Although highly unlikely, as a requirement of the Lynn University Institutional Review Board, revelation of any unethical or illegal behavior is subject to reporting to the appropriate authorities.

Upon request, a copy of the research analysis will be provided to you at the conclusion of the research. If you have any questions about any aspect of this study or your involvement, feel free to ask at any time. If you have concerns about this project that you do not want to address with A’Licia S. Durden, you may call Dr. Carole Warshaw, Dissertation Committee Chairperson, Lynn University, at [redacted].

Two copies of this informed consent have been provided. Please sign both indicating you have read, understood, and agreed to participate in this research. Please return one copy to the researcher and keep the other for your files.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of participant (please print)</th>
<th>Telephone Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature of participant</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’Licia S. Durden</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

Demographic Characteristics Questionnaire

Student

1. Ethnicity: ____________________________
2. Grade Level ______
3. Highest grade completed: ____________
4. Number of retentions: ____________
5. Gender _______________
6. School area in which you obtained an education:
   Rural____  Suburban____  Inner city____
7. Who lives at home?
APPENDIX G

Demographic Characteristics Questionnaire

Teacher

1. Ethnicity ___________________ ___________________ ___________________

2. Gender ______

3. Grade Level Taught: _________

4. How many years have you taught? ________

5. School area in which you teach school:
   Rural ______ Suburban _______ Inner City ________
April 2, 2004

A'Licia Durden

Dear Ms. Durden:

The School District of Palm Beach County (SDPBC) procedures only require an employee to submit an application to conduct research when the data-gathering activity is outside their job function. Accordingly, as an Assistant Principal, you do not need permission from the SDPBC to conduct your at John F. Kennedy and Lake Shore Middle schools once you have obtained permission from Lynn University’s Institutional Review Board.

If your research requires the use of additional schools in the future, you must first submit an application to conduct research and then wait for a response before proceeding.

Sincerely,

Marc Baron, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Research, Evaluation, and Accountability

MB:bls

c: Marisol Ferrer, North Area Superintendent
Ethel Randolph, Principal, John F. Kennedy Middle School
Floyd Henry, Principal, Lake Shore Middle School