DROPOUT PREVENTION: A STUDY OF PREVENTION PROGRAMS USED BY

HIGH SCHOOLS TO INCREASE GRADUATION RATE

by

Christopher L. Simmons

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of

The College of Education

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Florida Atlantic University
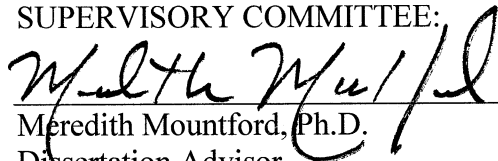
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DROPOUT PREVENTION: A STUDY OF PREVENTION PROGRAMS USED BY

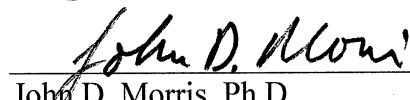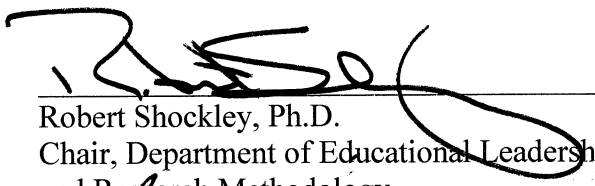HIGH SCHOOLS TO INCREASE GRADUATION RATE

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Meredith Mountford, Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
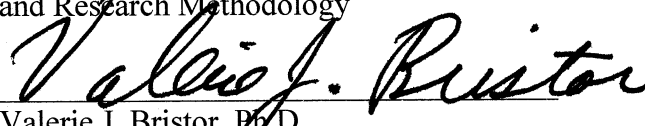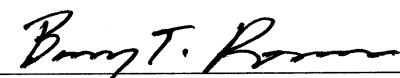
SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

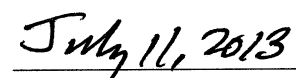Meredith Mountford, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

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       This mixed methods study focused on the relationship between dropout

prevention programs and graduation rates in one school district in Florida during the

2010-2011 school year. The dropout prevention program data analyzed included high

school principals' perceptions in regard to perceived effectiveness, fidelity of

implementation, cost efficacy, structure, and student-staff relationships within dropout

prevention programs and their relationship to graduation rate. The data analysis

investigated the relationship between the principals' perceptions of each dropout

prevention program and graduation rate. Findings from this study showed principals'

perceived that the level of fidelity for on-the-job training has a relationship to increased

graduation rate. In other words, when a principal believed the dropout prevention

program was implemented with fidelity in their school, it likely increased graduation

rate. Another important finding from this study was the varying perceptions which

existed among school leaders in this study and their varying perceptions on the

relationship between dropout prevention programs and graduation rate.

DEDICATION

To my students over the years I hope you follow your dreams and know that you always have someone who believes in you. William Arthur Ward once said, "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."

DROPOUT PREVENTION: A STUDY OF PREVENTION PROGRAMS USED BY

HIGH SCHOOLS TO INCREASE GRADUATION RATE

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I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2010, President Barak Obama released his education plan, *A Blueprint for Reform*, which was a reauthorization for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Within this report, the President outlined the federal role in education in five major areas: (a) college and career ready students, (b) great teachers and leaders in every school, (c) equity and opportunity for all students, (d) increased standards, and (e) innovation and continuous improvement for teachers within the classroom (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2010a, pp. 3-6). The goal for America's educational system is clear: every student should have meaningful opportunities to choose from upon graduating high school (USDOE, 2010a).

Public Law 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB or the Act), was signed into law in 2002; it requires a process of accountability for school districts to ensure a steady progression of achievement for all students who attend public schools (USDOE, 2004). When originally developed, NCLB aimed to empower parents to take a more personal stake in their child's education by requiring school districts to provide a choice of school options, supplemental education services, corrective actions, and restructuring of schools that did not meet the Act's requirements (Bracey, 2007). A core principle of the Act was to benchmark the success of the legislation by mandating that all students read and apply mathematical concepts at grade-level or above by 2014 (USDOE, 2004). Furthermore, as part of this requirement, all states are now expected to consider high school graduation rates as a method of academic accountability

(National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2005). According to the NASSP (2005), "faced with the high-stakes world of improving academic success for all students, and being responsible for results often influenced by factors beyond their control, principals understandably are under tremendous pressure" (p. 1). NCLB also required schools report graduation rates (USDOE, 2004), leading to "a renewed interest in high school reform as well as higher public school accountability requirements" (NASSP, 2005, p. 1). Prior to this law different perspectives existed and this seemed to create confusion among school leaders. As demonstrated by this NASSP (2005) statement:

> As more substantial research brings attention to the lackluster data on high school graduation rates, what originally was thought to be a fairly simple concept - the percentage of the senior class who actually walked across the stage - has been revealed to be a more complex issue depending on the purpose, the point of view, or the method of calculation employed. (p. 1)

This demonstrates that prior to the Act, the practice of reporting graduation rate varied by state and led to confusion among school leaders because of different perspectives and formulas. Furthermore, statewide assessments in many states are part of statewide graduation requirements. For example, in Florida one requirement for graduation is to pass the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) reading and math section in order to obtain a high school diploma.

Since the implementation of NCLB, a national education policy has turned into a business model which holds schools accountable for student achievement through the use of high-stakes testing, while failing to consider or measure the impact of student

diversity on achievement or to utilize alternative assessment methods to gauge student success (NASSP, 2005). According to Duffy, Giordano, Farrell, Paneque, and Crump (2008), "high-stakes assessments include mandated testing of students at various points in their careers; testing and evaluation of teachers; and assessment of teaching methods, programs of study, curricula, and schools as a whole" (p. 54). In Florida, to earn a high school diploma, part of the requirement is a passing score on the FCAT taken in 10th grade (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2012). High schools when reporting their graduation rate to the state determine their percentage of graduating students using the four-year or extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (Other Academic Indicators, 2011). Furthermore, the graduation rate is a factor which determines the grade a school receives from the state. However, when determining the school grade Florida uses the National Governor's Association graduate definition which is "the four-year cohort rate using the federal reporting requirement" (FLDOE, 2013, p. 19). Thus, the current practice of calculating graduation rates leads to confusion.

Although official estimates varied, in Florida approximately 30% of high school students fail to graduate (FLDOE, 2012; Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008). Furthermore in 2011, only 53% of African American male students and 65% of Hispanic male students graduated (FLDOE, 2012). Several researchers suggested the implications of graduation rates such as this will result in a prospect of higher unemployment, increased incarceration rates, and lower lifetime earnings for these students (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009; Milliken, 2007; Monrad, 2007; Sun, Khatiwada, Mclaughlin, & Palma, 2009). Furthermore, 50% of all dropouts and 66% of minority student dropouts were concentrated in 12% of America's high schools (Balfanz & Bridgeland, 2007).

Today, attention is drawn to dropout rates by state and federal policy makers in relationship to the high cost of dropout prevention programs. These programs appear to have made only a minor impact on decreasing dropout rate. In 2003, the U.S. Department of Labor reported that high school dropouts were 72% more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates (Lehr, Johnson, Bremeer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004). Another frustrating component for educators has been the inability to gain a clear picture on the number of dropouts across America to better calculate future costs of assistance to citizens.

Some studies indicated dropouts traditionally earned less than graduates. The average earnings difference was estimated to be $9,000 per year and approximately $260,000 over the course of a lifetime (Rouse, 2007; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The negative results of failing to graduate on the economy range from drawing larger government subsidies in the form of food stamps, housing assistance, and welfare payments (Waldfogel, Garfinkel, & Kelly, 2007) to dramatically increased chances of landing in prison, more frequent health issues, and diminishing life spans (Moretti, 2007; Muenning, 2007). Therefore, part of NCLB policy required states to report graduation rates to the USDOE. According to former U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings (2008):

> Over their lifetimes, dropouts from the class of 2007 alone will cost our nation more than 300 billion dollars in lost wages, lost tax revenue, and lost productivity. Increasing graduation rates by just 5 percent ... for male students alone ... would save us nearly 8 billion dollars each year in crime-related costs. (p. 1)

In addition to the inability to gain a clear picture of the number of dropouts, several states appear to be overestimating graduation rates far beyond reliable estimates provided by independent agents (Adam, 2005). This overestimation magnifies the confusion school leaders' face. With an overestimation of the graduation rate a portion of dropouts have gone unnoticed. The negative impact on the economy reinforced the need for these students to be tracked in a consistent manner. The economic burden of a student dropout on the U.S. economy is a motivating factor for the government to establish a system of accountability and, consequentially, programs that will reign in the associated costs of academic failure.

Public high schools nationwide reported a 74.9% graduation rate during the 2007-2008 academic year, as classified by first-time 9th-grade students by state or jurisdiction (USDOE, 2010b). Using the same criteria to measure graduation rates during the same academic year, Florida reported a graduation rate of 66.9%, trailing the national average by 8% (USDOE, 2010b). Even more troubling is the disparity of graduation rates among student race categories in Florida. In the 2010-2011 school year the graduation for the state was 70.6% (FLDOE, 2012). However, during the 2010-2011 school year, graduation rate for White students in Florida was 76.2%, while graduation rates for Hispanic and Black students were 69.4% and 58.6%, respectively (FLDOE, 2012). A problem of this magnitude warrants an investigation. Unlike previous studies which investigated an adult advocate on school (Larson & Rumberger, 1995; Quint, Bloom, Black, & Stephens, 2005; Shirm, Stuart, & McKie, 2006; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005) or focused on classroom behavior and student social skills (Dynarski, Gleason,

Rangarajan, & Wood, 1998; Sinclair et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 2005; Snipes, Holton, Doolittle, & Sztejnberg, 2006) this study focused on the dropout prevention programs and principals' perception in order to increase the graduation rate.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate principals' perceptions of dropout prevention programs in relationship to increased graduation rate in one school district in Florida. More specifically, this study investigated principals' perceptions of five dropout prevention programs through perceived effectiveness, fidelity of implementation, cost efficacy, importance of structure, and student-staff relationships in order to increase the graduation rate.

Background of the Study

In current practice, the goal of increasing the graduation rate has not been factored consistently into the use or selection of dropout prevention programs (Martin, Tobin, & Sugai, 2002; McPartland & Jordan, 2002). Some suggest dropout prevention studies have a catch them before they fall philosophy (Martin et al., 2002; McPartland & Jordan, 2002), which in turn precludes an analysis of program effectiveness. According to several theorists (Kronick & Hargis, 1998; Morton, 1998; Skromme, Van Allen, & Bensen, 1998) the critical first step for reducing dropout rate is an evaluation of dropout prevention programs. While The Dropout Prevention Act, a component of NCLB (2002), identified a mixture of variables for the purpose of influencing student achievement it does not recommend for using particular dropout prevention programs. However, these variables do not address preventive methods used within a high school that impact student dropout rates (USDOE, 2004). For example, various studies have focused on assigning an adult advocate to a student at risk of dropping out (Larson &

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Rumberger, 1995; Quint et al., 2005; Shirm et al., 2006; Sinclair et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 2005). However, the effectiveness has proven minimal (Larson & Rumberger, 1995; Sinclair et al., 1998) with no discernible effect on the child staying in school (Quint et al., 2005). Moreover, several studies of dropout prevention programs focused on the effort to equip students' with classroom behavior and social skills (Dynarski et al., 1998; Larson & Rumberer, 1995; Shirm et al., 2006; Sinclair et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 2005; Snipes et al., 2006) but have found improvement of classroom behavior and social skills to be a less critical component in preventing students from dropping out (Dynarski et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 2005) and even discovered no discernible effects on a child's progression in school (Shirm et al., 2006; Snipes et al., 2006).

For the purpose of this study, the dropout prevention programs derived from the websites of the USDOE, the FLDOE, and the school district. Specifically, the Institute of Education Sciences (2009) of the USDOE released a report titled, *WWC Evidence Review Protocol for Dropout Prevention Interventions, Version 2.0*, which outlines "interventions whose primary purpose is to affect behaviors that are correlated with staying in school or completing school" (p. 2). From this report, the researcher then searched the FLDOE website and school district's website. Based upon those steps the following five dropout prevention strategies were selected: (a) alternative education, (b) mentoring programs, (c) graduation coach, (d) online district supported programs, and (e) on-the-job training. Alternative education focused on developing a sense of belonging for student academic success (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2008), which would include programs such as a culinary academy and various

other magnet programs. Mentoring programs are most often considered a "proactive role models in an evolving interpersonal transaction, directly attempt to assist their mentees in benefiting from the great variety of educational possibilities available" (Galbraith & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2000, p. 138). Graduation coach was a person who is responsible for providing various types of guidance and developing a sense of community within the school (Dropout Prevention Act, 2012). On-the-job training included programs which focus on having students responsible for their own decisions (Knowles, 1975; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005), which included training program for students to learn a trade and earn certification, along with a high school diploma. Finally, district online program included both credit recover and online education programs with a virtual school or online initiative, full-time online school, or both (Watson, Gemin, & Ryan, 2009). Students who drop out of school have been a focus of many studies in the past; however, use of dropout programs has not been evaluated sufficiently.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate principals' perceptions of dropout prevention programs in relationship to increased graduation rate in one school district in Florida. More specifically, this study investigated principals' perceptions of five dropout prevention programs through perceived effectiveness, fidelity of implementation, cost efficacy, importance of structure, and student-staff relationships in order to increase the graduation rate. Despite varying estimates of the actual number of dropouts in the United States along with an increase in school leaders' and policy makers' awareness of the problem, the graduation rate remains stagnant with more than

one half million young adults dropping out of high school on a yearly basis (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). The reason these dropout rates have not declined despite the use of a myriad of dropout prevention strategies remains unclear.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

This purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate principals' perceptions of what relationship exists between dropout prevention programs and increased graduation rates. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the relationship between the principals' perceived effectiveness for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

2. What is the relationship between the principals' perceived degree of fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

3. What is the relationship between the principals' perception of cost efficacy for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

4. What is the relationship between the principals' perception of the importance of structure for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

5. What is the relationship between the principals' perception of the importance of student-staff relationships for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

Figure 1 describes the dependent variable of graduation rate and the relationship of it with the five dropout prevention programs and the research question variables. For reference the coding for the five dropout prevention programs are alternative

education (AE), mentoring program (MP), graduation coach (GC), on-the-job training (OJT), and district online programs (DOP).

Dependent Variable: Graduation Rate

Graduation Rate

Variables

Five Dropout Prevention Programs:
AE
MP
GC
OJT
DOP

Research Question Variables

Perceived Effectiveness
Fidelity of Implementation
Cost Efficacy
Structure of Program
Student-Staff Relationships
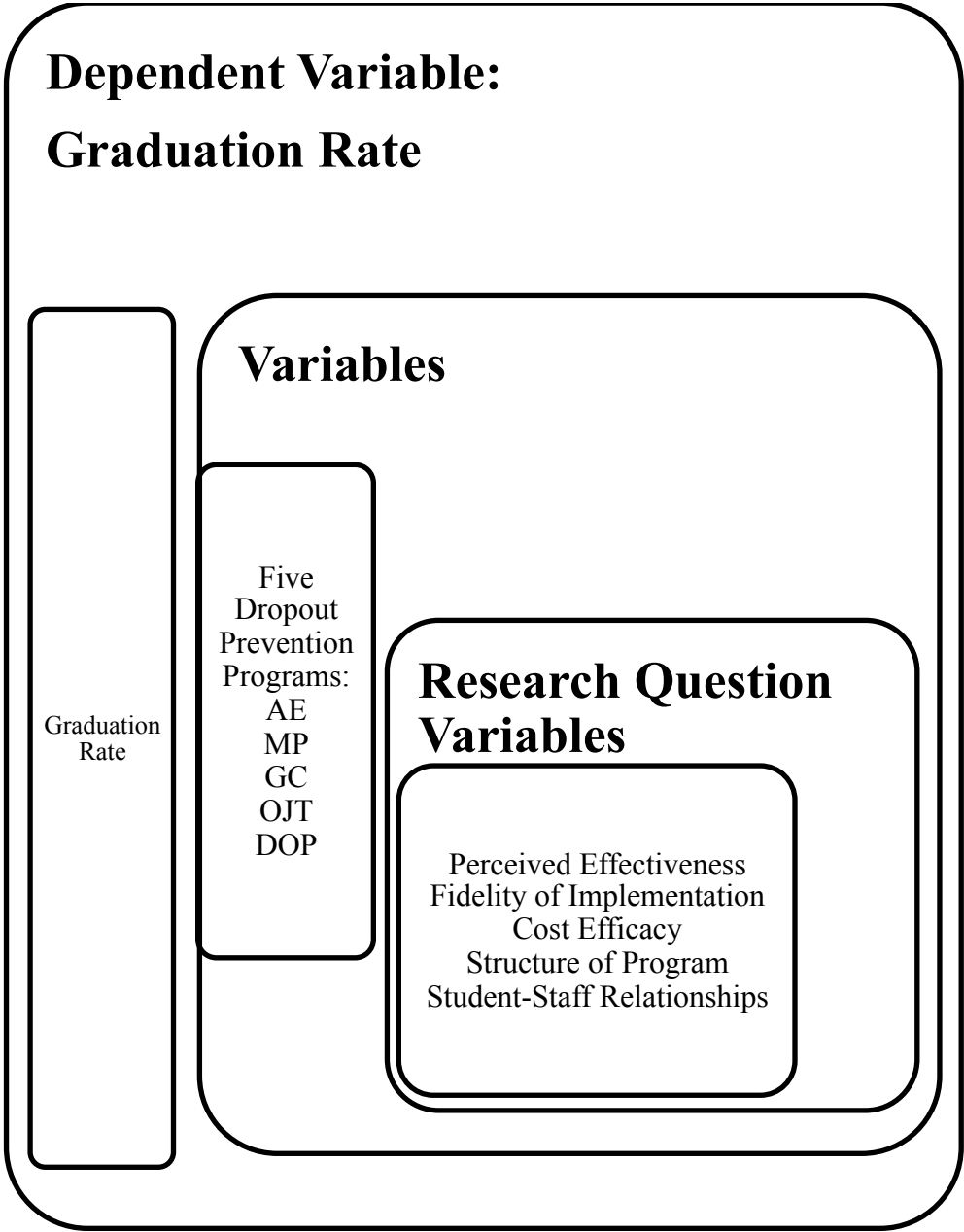
Figure 1. Variables used in this study.

Significance of the Study

Unlike previous studies which investigated an adult advocate in school (Larson & Rumberger, 1995; Quint et al., 2005; Shirm et al., 2006; Sinclair et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 2005) or studies that focused on classroom behavior and student social skills (Dynarski et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 2005; Snipes et al., 2006), this study was unique and significant because it investigated dropout prevention programs to discern a correlation between principals' perceptions of the dropout prevention programs used and increased graduation rate.

This investigation, with its specific focus on dropout prevention program participation was necessary to tease out which programs might assist to increase graduation rate. An investigation focusing on dropout prevention program selection was necessary to discover effective strategies that may prevent high school students from leaving school before they obtain diplomas. Findings offer insight into commonly used dropout prevention programs in Florida and their relative efficacy in raising graduation rates. Identifying these patterns and insights will assist school leaders and policy makers in developing strategies to increase graduation rate. This study was conducted in one of the most diverse and largest urban school districts in the United States.

Definitions

Alternative Education Program – an autonomous school within a district focused on developing a sense of belonging for student academic success (NCES, 2008). For the purpose of this study, an alternative education program included

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culinary arts, performing arts, magnet programs, or any program within a traditional high school, designed for students who have interest in a specific educational program.

Cost Efficacy – is a variable used to compare dropout prevention programs via cost "to one another within the funding year" (Merino, Aust, & Caffey, 2011, p. 370).

District Supported Online Program – operating a full-time online high school with a virtual school or online initiative, full-time online school, or both (Watson et al., 2009). For the purpose of this study, a district supported online program included grade or credit recovery program(s) and/or online education program(s).

Dropout – according to the Florida Senate (2000-2013):

- The student has voluntarily removed himself or herself from the school system before graduation for reasons that include, but are not limited to, marriage, or the student has withdrawn from school because he or she has failed the statewide student assessment test and therefore does not receive any of the certificates of completion;

- The student has not met the relevant attendance requirements of the school district pursuant to State Board of Education rules, or the student was expected to attend a school but did not enter as expected for unknown reasons, or the student's whereabouts are unknown;

- The student has withdrawn from school, but has not transferred to another public or private school or enrolled in any career, adult, home education, or alternative educational program;

- The student has withdrawn from school due to hardship, unless such

  withdrawal has been granted under the provisions of s. 322.091, court action,

  expulsion, medical reasons, or pregnancy; or

- The student is not eligible to attend school because of reaching the

  maximum age for an exceptional student program in accordance with the

  district's policy.

Dropout Prevention Programs – for the purpose of this study, included

programs used within a Florida high school to increase graduation rate. Specifically,

within this study the five dropout prevention programs used were alternative education,

mentoring programs, district online programs, on-the-job training, and graduation

coach.

Effectiveness – is a variable which for the purpose of this study focused on the

ability to "make an individual or group of people more productive, efficient, or useful to

an organization" (Bedingham, 1997, p. 89). For the purpose of this study, this term

specifically gauged a principal's perceived ability of a dropout prevention program to

increase or improve graduation rate.

Fidelity of Implementation – is a variable used to ensure "consistency and

quality of targeted organizational members' use of specific innovation" (Klein & Sorra,

1996, p. 1055). For the purpose of this study, fidelity of implementation included the

level of execution of a dropout program to increase graduation rate.

Graduation Coach – person who is responsible for proving academic guidance,

motivating students, and helping them plan for the work force, along with connecting

families with school and community service (Dropout Prevention Act, 2012). For the

purpose of this study the graduation coach included a person who specifically works with at-risk students in danger of not graduating with their cohort.

Graduation Rate – the four-year or extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (Other Academic Indicators, 2011).

High Stakes Assessments – the assessments that have direct and significant consequences for the person or institution being tested or assessed (Duffy et al., 2008).

Mentoring Program – "proactive role models in an evolving interpersonal transaction, directly attempt to assist their mentees in benefiting from the great variety of educational possibilities available" (Galbraith & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2000, p. 138).

On-the-job Training – included programs which focus on having students responsible for their own decisions, through readiness to learn concepts and trades relative to real life situations (Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 2005). For the purpose of this study on-the-job training included training program for students to learn a trade and earn certification, along with a high school diploma.

Relationships –- is a variable which for the purpose of this study focused on the developing and sustaining trust through effective communication (Kelly, 2001).

Selection – is a variable that, for the purpose of this study, focused on the importance of structure of a dropout prevention program influencing attributes and measure of the degree of impact for each attribute (Rahman, 2012).

Structure – is a variable for the purpose of this study focused on "ties between individuals or grouping of individuals" (Entiwisle, Faust, Rindfuss, & Kaneda, 2007, p. 1495). For the purpose of this study, this term included the tie between components,

such as dropout prevention programs (e.g., amount of students, time with students) and increased graduation rate.

Years in Administration Pool – for the purpose of this study, years in administration pool will be defined as length of time after passing the Florida Educational Leadership Examination and fulfilling other state administration requirements and prior to obtaining an assistant principal position

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of a study are external factors to the study beyond the control of the researcher (Creswell, 2003; McMillan & Schumaker, 2005). For this study, the limitations were: (a) the accuracy of information provided by the school district website, (b) the accuracy of graduation rate data as provided by the Florida's Department of Education website, (c) response rate of survey instrument lead to a small sample size used in the analysis of the study, and (d) the data were derived from self-reporting of principals in the school district. As Schwarz (1999) discussed, "respondents may want to edit their private judgment before they report it to the researcher, due to reasons of social desirability and self-presentation" (p. 97).

Delimitations are conditions the researcher has placed on the study (Creswell, 2003; McMillan & Schumaker, 2005). For this study, the delimitations were: (a) only public high schools were considered and not any private schools, charter schools, or alternative schools, (b) only the 2010-2011 school year data were analyzed, (c) besides the five selected dropout prevention programs, other variables such as socioeconomic status of students or size of high school were not factored, (d) the study was based upon

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high school principals' perceptions only and did not solicit data from any other administrator sources, and (e) sample size.

The delimitations of the study were selected by the researcher and therefore were not countered. Rather, these restrictions gave clear guidance during all phases of the research process. On the other hand, the limitations were out of the researcher's control and needed to be addressed during the research process. Through cross checking of data, such as, graduation rates from both the district and state website helped ensure accuracy of information. As there are various definitions of graduation rate, the researcher clearly defined graduation rate within this study. The other restraint centered around sample size and honestly of participants used in this study. To address this limitation, the researcher designed a study which used both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 included an introduction to the dropout problem in the United States, along with a description of the problem school leaders and policy makers must address in order to meet federal laws such as NCLB. The significance of this study was to uncover relationships between successful dropout prevention program selection and increased graduation rate.

Chapter 2 will review dropout prevention literature and research currently being used in the United States and further describe the five dropout prevention programs being used in Florida high schools that were the focus of this study. Chapter 3 will present the methodology design and methods for this study, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Chapter 4 will provide data analysis and findings. Finally,

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Chapter 5 will include a discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research on this topic.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a discussion of the dropout prevention problem in the United States. A review of the literature presents a chronology of changes in U.S. dropout rates from the 1930s to present day. The next section discusses current educational policy related to the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB or the Act) and the 2009 Race to the Top (RTTT). Furthermore, an overview of the five dropout prevention programs, used in this study and principals' perceptions was evaluated.

Historical Perspective on Dropouts

Individuals who drop out of high school face an uphill battle for the remainder of their lives. Dropouts are more likely to become unemployed, to depend on social services, to experience health issues, and to become incarcerated (Cataldi et al., 2009; Milliken, 2007; Monrad, 2007; Sun et al., 2009). At the same time, the definition of "dropout" is hampered by a lack of consensus regarding the best method for reporting dropouts (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Rumberger, 1987; Samuels, 2007). This section focused on the historical perspective of the dropout epidemic ranging from the 1930s through present day.

Child labor laws in the 1930s and 1940s revolutionized societal thought as schools became the appropriate and expected place where adolescents spent their teenage years (Dorn, 1996). In the 1940s, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover claimed, "a youth crime wave was sweeping the nation" (Dorn, 1996, p. 70). In the 1950s,

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Congressional hearings "focused on a supposed link between mass media and crime committed by youth" (Dorn, 1996, p. 70). Conant (1959) asserted in his writing, "public high school is expected to provide education for all the youth living in a town, city, or district" (p. 7). During the 1950s, preventing youth from leaving school became a priority for educators. According to Dorn (1996), "by the end of World War II, educators had expanded the mission of high schools to include the vague goal that schools should help students adjust to adult life" (p. 33).

From 1940 to 1975, the percentage of 25 to 29 year old adults who completed 12 years of education rose steadily from 37.8 to 83.2% (Roderick, 1993). Not until the 1960s, however, did educators consider dropouts a problem.

In the 1960s, the term dropout emerged to describe students who left high school prior to earning a diploma (Dorn, 1996). The term dropout originally was referred to as "elimination from school" or "early school leavers" as they were used interchangeably (Dorn, 1996, p. 2). For the first time, students dropping out of school were thought to be a failure of the education system since the primary goal was to educate each and every child (Dorn, 1996).

In the 1970s, the NCES started to track dropout rates. In addition, the 1979 American Association of School Administrators *Critical Issue Report* declared retaining students a major problem on a national level for school administrators (Lam-Yip & Lewis-Zavala, 1998). Despite this report and the statistical tracking of dropouts, the focus on the desegregation of schools overshadowed the dropout issue (Dorn, 1996). Forced desegregation leads to African American students being suspended and pushed out of schools at higher rates than their White counterparts (Dorn, 1996).

Dropout prevention was not a critical policy concern in the first wave of education reports that ushered in the reform movement of the 1980s. However, by the end of the decade, "virtually every major school system in the country had instituted programs and policies to reduce school dropout" (Roderick, 1993, p. 1). On April 26, 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education submitted a report to U.S. Secretary of Education T. H. Bell titled, *A Nation At Risk,* which outlined and brought attention to America's failing school system. Interestingly, *A Nation At Risk* did not mention "elimination from school" (Dorn, 1996, p. 2) as an indicator of risk in American education (Roderick, 1993; Zhao, 2009).

During the 1990s multiple studies examined the dropout epidemic in the United States. Hyde (1991) studied perceptions of school leaders on the causes of student dropout and asserted if school leaders understood their role in reducing dropout rates, more students would want to stay in school. Smith (1992) juxtaposed theorists' viewpoints of restructuring public schools with those of practitioners, and concluded practitioners believed change is best initiated at the school level, while theorists are concerned with the community understanding the change. In regards to dropout prevention, Smith (1992) believed that excessive change leads to students dropping out. Henderson and Friedland (1996) evaluated a theory based upon the relationship between school suspensions and student dropout rate. Not surprisingly, that study found that students who were suspended more frequently dropout of school at a higher rate than compared to students with fewer suspensions. More importantly, the Henderson and Friedland (1996) study found that principals must understand the

school's challenges and policy to make certain equality is applied to all students, thereby reducing dropout rates.

In the twenty-first century, multiple studies (Irons & Harris, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Johnson, Thomas, & Tintera, 2000; New York City Board of Education [NYCBOE], 2002; Rausch & Skiba, 2004) delineated educational reforms such as NCLB and RTTT. Johnson et al. (2000) studied the perception of district personnel and school administrators regarding the reporting of dropout rates and discovered the importance of school leaders understanding dropout rates in order to address the problem within their schools. In 2002, two major events occurred in education in regard to dropout rates: (a) NYCBOE (2002) reported the national dropout rate was 20.4% and (b) NCLB was signed into law; specifically, Part H of NCLB that outlines School Dropout Prevention (USDOE, 2004). Reaction from policy makers to these reports generated many reform initiatives, resulting in assessment, standards, and accountability (Irons & Harris, 2006). Rausch and Skiba (2004) investigated the impact of suspension and expulsion on the dropout rate and concluded that the experiences of the principals and the relationships of school leaders with students decreased dropout rates. In 2006, the average income of a person between 18 and 65 years of age was approximately $21,000 as compared to $31,400 for the same age range for people who had either a general education degree (GED) or a high school diploma (Cataldi et al., 2009). Johnson (2007) conducted a study on alternative education programs and discovered that the school leaders' collaborations between school and community were vital to lowered dropout rates.

On February 24, 2009, President Obama reiterated his commitment to preventing students from dropping out of school by speaking these words to a joint session of Congress, "dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country and this country needs and values the talents of every American" (p. 9). President Obama, along with Education Secretary Arne Duncan, continue to stress to school leaders and policy makers the importance of preventing students from dropping out of school. Secretary Duncan, during a televised interview with journalist Christiane Amanpour on August 29, 2010, repeated the importance for the administration to prevent students from dropping out, "In this country, we have a 25% dropout rate, that's 1.2 million students leaving our schools for the streets every single year. That is economically unsustainable and that is morally unacceptable" (Amanpour, p. 6).

From the 1930s until the 1960s, students dropping out of school were not a priority for educators. In the 1960s, the term dropout emerged and a student not completing their education was considered a failure of the education system (Dorn, 1996). Since the 1970s, statistics of students dropping out of school have been tracked (Lam-Yip & Lewis-Zavala, 1998) and multiple studies have focused on some form of dropout prevention (Henderson & Friedland, 1996; Hyde, 1991; Irons & Harris, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Johnson et al., 2000; NYCBOE, 2002; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Smith, 1992). Since the 2000s, policies such as NCLB and RTTT have made graduation rate an accountability piece for school leaders.

Current Education Policy

Being faced with increased demand for student achievement, professional

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growth, and professional development is a reality for school leaders (Gilson, 2008).

Influenced by the public's changing expectations to adopt new and expanded education

policy, school leaders are being pressured on a daily basis (Normore, 2004).

Accountability is maintained with a rigorous implementation of high stake testing

provisions such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), NCLB, and

RTTT, with a combination of results that are both valuable and challenging for public

school children, teachers, and school leaders (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009). These

education policy mandates have made the importance of understanding dropout

prevention programs vital for an effective school leader.

No Child Left Behind

As the latest reauthorization of ESEA, NCLB seeks to improve the achievement

of low performing students (Hamilton, 2004). Signed into law by President George H.

W. Bush, the purpose of NCLB is to "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and

significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum,

proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic

assessments" (USDOE, 2004, p.15). New reporting requirements added by NCLB

allow parents to gain detailed insights into their children's achievements, professional

qualifications of their teachers, and the graded outcome of schools in the community.

Specifically, assessments of results and state progression objectives are broken down by

socioeconomic level, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to make

certain that no group will be left behind (Natriello, 2000; USDOE, 2004). Apple (2007)

suggested NCLB defined success and failure through the shaming practice of student

achievement via subgroups, and advised that this reprehensible practice of identification

by subgroup has caused a rebellion in various states and school districts, resulting in little consideration concerning the impact of legislation. NCLB targets dropout prevention in Part H of the Act, titled School Dropout Prevention. This section concentrates on dropout prevention along with raised academic achievement in two facets: (a) challenge all children to attain their highest academic potential and (b) ensure all students have substantial and ongoing opportunities to attain their highest academic potential through school wide programs proven effective in school dropout prevention and re-entry (USDOE, 2004).

Race to the Top

Much like NCLB, RTTT is an example of the expectations school leaders face through data-based and data-driven results that are often out of their control. On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 (USDOE, 2009). The ARRA provides $4.35 billion for RTTT, which is designed to encourage and reward states for creating conditions for education innovation and reform along with achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including improved graduation rates (USDOE, 2009, p. 2). Moreover, RTTT advocates for core educational reform in the following areas: (a) adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace to better compete in the global economy; (b) building data systems that measure student growth and success and that inform teachers and principals how they can improve instruction; (c) recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and (d) turning around the lowest-achieving schools (USDOE, 2009, p. 2).

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In combination, NCLB and RTTT provide insight into a data-driven accountability system for educators. School leaders face a variety of new frustrations and pressures over conflicting views on exactly what constitutes student achievement and success for students (Ingram, Louis, & Schroeder, 2004; Valli & Buese, 2007; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). Both NCLB and RTTT identify graduation rate as an indicator of student success; they also lead to greater awareness of dropout prevention methods.

Five Dropout Prevention Strategies

NCLB created tremendous pressure for school leaders and policy makers to deal with the wide range of academic and social needs of students (Powell, 2003). In order to meet expectations from such policies, school leaders are turning to alternative routes instead of the traditional school setting to prepare students to meet the demands of NCLB and to help students become successful when entering the workforce. Historical events and developments in technology have led to many of the dropout prevention programs in this review. For the purpose of this study, the dropout prevention programs were derived from the websites of the USDOE, the FLDOE, and the school district. Specifically, the Institute of Education Sciences (2009) of the USDOE released a report titled, *WWC Evidence Review Protocol for Dropout Prevention Interventions, Version 2.0*, which outlines "interventions whose primary purpose is to affect behaviors that are correlated with staying in school or completing school" (p. 2). From this report, the researcher then searched the FLDOE and school district's websites to confirm usage of dropout prevention programs. Based upon those steps the following five dropout

prevention strategies were selected: (a) alternative education, (b) mentoring programs,

(c) graduation coach, (d) online district supported programs, and (e) on-the-job training.

Alternative Education Programs

Alternative education programs originally were developed to provide students

an alternative place to learn when they were unable to succeed in traditional school

settings (Gregg, 1998; Raywid, 1994; Young, 1990). Well-designed alternative

education programs have proven beneficial for students who struggle in traditional

educational settings (Guerin & Denti, 1999; Nichols & Utesch, 1998; Raywid, 1990,

1998). During the past few decades, school leaders have realized alternative schools are

a viable option for at risk students as well, which has lead to fewer dropouts. Past

studies included Barr and Parrett (2001); Natriello, McDill, and Pallas (1990); Raywid

(1989); Wehlage and Rutter (1987); Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez

(1989); and Young (1990), which have lead school leaders to advocate alternative

education models to help traditional schools meet the needs of all students. Moving

away from the original purpose of alternative schools, today many operate as corrective

schools for undesirable students (Gregg, 1999; Koetke, 1999). However, when properly

implemented, alternative education programs can serve as intervention programs by

providing positive educational experiences to at risk students (Raywid, 1999).

During the 1950s and 1960s, the social justice movement led to a debate among

educational pundits regarding whether the current public education system was the best

system for all students (Fitzsimons-Lovett, 2001). The focus of this movement

addressed students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with disabilities,

and/or students for whom English is a second language (Lange & Sletten, 2002;

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Raywid, 1981; Young, 1990). During this period, alternative education was an approach to teaching lower performing students by removing them from traditional schools to ensure success for students from affluent backgrounds (Raywid, 1981; Young, 1990). A purpose of ESEA was to satisfy resistance from federal and state officials who were concerned about changing the current educational approach (Fitzsimons-Lovett, 2001). Through ESEA, alternative education became an "established separate education option for those students who were not benefiting from the traditional system" (Sagor, 1999, p. 74).

According to Raywid (1999), "in the late 1960's, the alternative education movement split into two distinct categories: (a) those that operated outside the public education system; and (b) those programs and schools that functioned within the public education system" (p. 49). In order to overcome stumbling blocks, alternative education settings that operated outside the traditional education system were called "freedom schools" (Raywid, 1999, p. 49). The freedom school approach was founded on the principle that student achievement should be based upon a student's ability to explore his/her natural intellect and curiosity (Raywid, 1999). Since the freedom school approach was unable to combine individualized education with the formal requirements of traditional schools (Deal, 1975; Raywid, 1981), it was only a temporary fad.

Following freedom schools, the public school system moved to an "open school approach" (Raywid, 1999, p. 49) based upon an individualized learning pace for each student. The open school approach encouraged independent learning and empowered schools to incorporate sufficient formal education to insure students met the requirements of traditional schools within a centered, non-competitive evaluation

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system (Raywid, 1999). The first example of the open school approach was the community based learning schools called "schools without walls" (Raywid, 1999, p. 49). The schools without walls approach was based upon community involvement in which community members served as teachers and educated students on the skills necessary to perform jobs and become contributing community members (Raywid, 1999). In addition to schools without walls, "schools within schools" (Raywid, 1999, p. 49) also took an alternative approach to education. "Schools within schools" were based upon small group learning within larger schools, giving participants a belief of belonging among their fellow students (Raywid, 1999).

During the 1970s, alternative education programs in the United States increased from 100 to 10,000 (Raywid, 1981). This increase led to a multitude of alternative education methods. Two examples of alternative schools that sprang up in the 1970s and continued into the following decade include democratic schools and community schools (Hadderman, 2002). Democratic schools placed a value on citizenship, while community schools emphasized moral development of the student (Hadderman, 2002).

In the 1980s, alternative education shifted from the progressive and open philosophy of the 1970s to a more conservative approach in the 1980s (Young, 1990). An increase in students achieving below average achievement levels, accompanied by a conservative climate, led to a decline in innovative types of alternative education programs (Young, 1990). According to Raywid (1999), "it was during this time that the nature of alternative education began to shift from a rehabilitative approach to a punitive approach" (p. 50). School leaders viewed alternative programs as places geared toward students who were disruptive and/or not successful while enrolled at their

home schools (Young, 1990). The belief that alternative education programs are successful destinations to house struggling students still is common among many school leaders today.

Today, magnet schools serve as an alternative education option to ensure racial integration (Raywid, 1999). Magnet schools are based upon curriculum themes exclusive to an individual school in order to attract students from a wide variety of racial and cultural backgrounds, thus allowing students to attend schools based upon their individual interests instead of where they live.

In the 1990s and 2000s, alternative education was influenced by the U.S. Congress passing two acts: (a) the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, mandating students who brought weapons to school be expelled and/or sent to an alternative education setting for no less than one year (USDOE, 2002) and (b) the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997, permitting schools to place students with disabilities in appropriate alternative education settings for up to 45 days without being in violation of their individualized education plans (IEPs) (Hadderman, 2002; USDOE, 1997). Each of these acts, although appropriate and necessary, further perpetuates the image of alternative education as a place for problem students.

For the purpose of this study, alternative education programs included an autonomous school within a district focused on developing a sense of belonging for student academic success (NCES, 2008). For example, an alternative education program included culinary arts, performing arts, magnet programs, or any program within a traditional high school, designed for students who have interest in a specific educational program.

Mentoring Programs

The history of mentoring dates back to Greek mythology where the first recognized mentoring role model occurred in *The Odyssey* (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). The character, Mentor, provided guidance to Telemachus through his development into adulthood. In the United States, mentoring focuses on improving a person through guidance, support, help, and direction within diverse and unique programs (Baker & Maguire, 2005).

Dating back to 1902, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) was the first mentoring program in the United States (Baker & Maquire, 2005). BBBSA originally started when Ernest Coulter, a court clerk, began seeing an increased number of boys coming through his courtroom. Recognizing that caring adults could help many of these kids stay out of trouble, Coulter set out to find volunteers. This marked the beginning of the Big Brothers movement (BBBSA, 2011). In the early stages of BBBSA, many of the children were from military families and lacked a father figure due to World War I. BBBSA continued to play a vital role during the segregation era, helping youth deal with societal prejudices involving immigration and race (BBBSA, 2011). From the 1980s until today, BBBSA has over 500 mentoring programs in the United States and has helped young people transition into becoming successful citizens of society (BBBSA, 2011).

In another example, probation officers were involved in the mentoring process. Jane Addams, who won the Noble Peace Prize in 1931 for her work as a pioneer social worker in Chicago (The Nobel Prize, 2012), created the first judicial probation officers program to mentor disadvantaged youth in America (Baker & Maguire, 2005). The

Juvenile Protective Associate was founded in Chicago and probation officers were paid through the city to help serve disadvantaged youth who needed mentoring to correct inappropriate behavior (Baker & Maguire, 2005).

Mentoring between the 1960s and the present time increased through several important actions by reputable people of influence. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy created the Community Mental Health Care Act, which focused on research about mentoring as one of its goals (Goodman, 1972). The implementation of the Tutorial Community integrated peers as mentors to students struggling in school (Topping, 1988). The Tutorial Community emphasized an environment of school-wide peer tutoring to support students of low socioeconomic studying (Goodman, 1972). In the 1980s, as a result from the report, *A Nation at Risk,* American schools were perceived as failing, resulting in political and school leaders demanding an increase in mentor programs (Rumberger, 2004). For the purpose of this study, mentoring programs was defined as "proactive role models in an evolving interpersonal transaction, directly attempt to assist their mentees in benefiting from the great variety of educational possibilities available" (Galbrith & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2000, p. 138).

Graduation Coach, District Supported Online Programs, and On-the-Job Training

Despite being common dropout prevention programs and used commonly among school leaders. There is limited information on each of these respective dropout prevention programs. This section will include information on graduation coach, district supported online programs, and on-the-job training.

Graduation coach. Many schools have employed graduation coaches to help at-risk students reach their potential and to increase graduation rates. The

responsibilities of a graduation coach include providing academic guidance, motivating students, and helping them plan for college and the work force, along with connecting families with school and community resources (Dropout Prevention Act, 2012). The coach's role also can include being an encourager, a role model, or a person whom students want to emulate (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). In addition, students should be able to relate to a graduation coach through various daily school activities (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). For this study, a graduation coach person who is responsible for proving academic guidance, motivating students, and helping them plan for the work force, along with connecting families with school and community service (Dropout Prevention Act, 2012). For the purpose of this study the graduation coach includes a person who specifically works with at-risk students in danger of not graduating with their cohort.

District supported online programs. In the new millennium, the Internet plays a vital daily role in society, education, and the workforce. The Internet "will empower every student and elevate each individual to new levels of intellectual capacity and skill" (Web-Based Education Commission, 2000, p. 7) and educators must adapt to online education programs developed to support students in their quest for knowledge.

From the 1990s to the present day, online education has become extremely popular with school districts as technology has become readily available to all students. According to Sherry (1996), "the most popular media is computer-based communication, including electronic mail, bulletin board systems, and Internet" (p. 339). Between 1994 and 1997, the original K-12 online high schools were developed in Utah, Florida, and Massachusetts (Watson, Winograd, & Kalman, 2004). During the

2008-2009 school year, 24 states operated full-time online high school programs for approximately 175,000 full-time students (Watson et al., 2009). In addition, 45 states had a virtual school or online initiative, full-time online schools, or both (Watson et al., 2009). For this study, district online programs included operating a full-time online high school with a virtual school or online initiative, full-time online school, or both (Watson et al., 2009), which included grade or credit recovery program(s) and/or online education program(s).

On-the-job training. Following World War I, on-the-job training orientated around the philosophy that learning was life-centered emerged as another method to educate students (Knowles et al., 2005). The idea behind on-the-job training was to have students responsible for their own decisions, through readiness to learn concepts and trades relative to real life situations (Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 2005). For the purpose of this study, on-the-job training included programs which focus on having students responsible for their own decisions, through readiness to learn concepts and trades relative to real life situations (Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 2005), which included training program for students to learn a trade and earn certification, along with a high school diploma.

Principals' Perceptions of Dropout Prevention Programs

State and federal policy makers stress the high cost of dropout prevention programs, although, interestingly, there is a paucity of literature covering cost efficacy, student/staff relationships, importance of program structure, and fidelity of implementation for dropout prevention programs. While NCLB has $125 million

earmarked for dropout prevention programs in the United States (USDOE, 2004), these programs appear to have made only a minor impact increasing graduation rates.

On the other hand, however, Tobin and Sprague (2000) have found school mentoring to be cost effective, easy to monitor, and directly impacting student achievement. Budget cuts are a reality that school leaders must continue to manage on a daily basis; consider, for example, Florida's $16.5 billion K-12 budget proposal to cut per-student spending by approximately $703 (Kam, 2011). Given these cuts, school mentoring appears to be a viable option.

Overcoming barriers, changing school culture, and the trust between students and staff has been researched extensively (Coleman, 1961, 1988; Goodenow, 1993; Hallinan, 2008; Newmann, 1981; Osterman, 2000). Moreover, numerous studies have examined the link between a student's relationship with adult staff as a vital factor in student achievement, motivation, and various social developmental benefits (Baker, 2006; Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Davis, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hamre, Pianta, Downer, & Mashurn, 2008). These studies, however, do not address dropout prevention programs and the relationship between staff and students. While Battenhorst (2004) did find the mentor-mentee relationship within mentoring programs ideally should be based on a mutual interest and non-evaluation, the study did not address student to staff relationships within dropout prevention programs. Given that little research is available about the perceived effectiveness of specific dropout prevention programs, school leaders must define clear goals and objectives when implementing dropout preventive programs (Cannister, 1999; Floyd, 1993; Murray & Owen, 1991).

Finally, fidelity of implementation for dropout prevention programs has not been studied, although fidelity of implementing programs at schools has been (Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project, 2008; Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, Todd, & Horner, 2005). This study seeks to uncover whether the impact fidelity of implementation for dropout prevention programs increases graduation rate.

Since limited research has covered dropout prevention programs in regard to cost efficacy, importance of program structure, and student-staff relationship exists, this study investigated how these factors related to high school dropout prevention programs and graduation rate. Usage of the five dropout prevention programs varies from school to school; however, the cost efficacy, importance of structure, and student-staff relationships have not been investigated as factors to determine the efficiency or benefit in raising the graduation rate. This study specifically sought high school principals' perceived perception of dropout program perceived effectiveness, fidelity of implementation, and the importance of cost efficacy, importance of program structure, and student-staff relationships and their perceived ability to increase graduation rate.

Chapter Summary

Dropout prevention programs have been molded primarily through studies and education policy. Since the 1930s, dropout prevention and the tracking of students' not completing school have improved tremendously. Yet, despite improvements in dropout prevention tracking and programs, major changes still are needed.

Chapter 1 included the background of the problem, the purpose and significance of the proposed study, research questions, definition of terms used throughout the study, and limitations and delimitations. Chapter 2 investigated and reviewed current

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literature on dropout rates, along with current education policy and a comprehensive review of five dropout prevention programs. Chapter 3 will present the methodology design and methods for this study, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Chapter 4 will provide data analysis and findings. Finally, Chapter 5 will include a discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research on this topic.

III. METHODOLGY

Chapter 3 presents the design and methods for this study, utilizing mixed methods of both a quantitative non-experimental design strategy and qualitative interviews. The quantitative method allowed the researcher to investigate high school principals' perceptions of the dropout prevention programs in relationship to graduation rate. The quantitative design of this study featured a survey instrument and data collected from Florida's Department of Education website. The qualitative design of this study allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of patterns and relationships exhibited in the quantitative findings, which may have occurred across survey responses, high school principals' perceptions of five dropout prevention programs, and graduation rate. The qualitative interviews also helped support and/or dispute quantitative findings. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative methods were necessary to address the purpose of the study and the research questions.

This chapter includes a description of the quantitative and qualitative design strategies and research methods used to complete this dissertation study. This chapter includes the study's research questions, design, and methods, including procedure, data collection, and research instruments. Finally, the chapter introduces the data analysis processes that are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Research Questions

This purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate principals'

perceptions of what relationship exists between dropout prevention programs and increased graduation rates. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the relationship between the principals' perceived effectiveness for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

   H_o1: The principals' perceived effectiveness for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate is unrelated.

2. What is the relationship between the principals' perceived degree of fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

   H_o2: The principals' perceived degree of fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate is unrelated.

3. What is the relationship between the principals' perceptions of cost efficacy for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

   H_o3: The principals' perceptions of cost efficacy for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated.

4. What is the relationship between the principals' perceptions of the importance of structure for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

   H_o4: The principals' perceptions of the importance of structure for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated.

5. What is the relationship between the principals' perceptions of the importance of student-staff relationships for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

H₀5: The principals' perceptions of the importance of student-staff

relationships for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are

unrelated.

Design of the Study

This study utilized quantitative non-experimental methods complemented by a

qualitative interview design strategy. The quantitative non-experimental method

featured a survey instrument (Appendix A) that collected background/demographic

information of participants. Next, a brief explanation of all dropout prevention

programs for this study was presented for participant clarification. Then, five Likert-

type questions investigated high school principals' perceptions of five dropout

prevention programs used during the 2010-2011 academic school year through

perceived effectiveness, fidelity of implementation, cost efficacy, importance of

program structure, and student-staff relationships. Each dropout prevention program,

along with the five Likert-type questions, was defined both on the survey instrument

and in Chapter 1 of this research. Finally, if the principal was willing to participate in

the interview, they were requested to send the researcher an email.

The demographic section of the survey was split into seven items: (a) gender, (b)

race, (c) years teaching, (d) years in administration pool, (e) years served as an assistant

principal, (f) years served as principal, and (g) graduate school training. Gender and

race were important to determine whether there were trends based upon the sex and/or

gender of the participants. Years in the administration pool was the length of time after

passing the Florida Educational Leadership Examination, fulfilling other state

administration requirements, and prior to obtaining an assistant principal position. This

was significant because years in administration pool could shape knowledge of dropout prevention programs.

The qualitative portion of this study relied on interviews that utilized an interview protocol (Appendix B) and was developed based upon semi-structured interviews using Creswell's (2007) qualitative approach to case study research. Furthermore, the researcher conducted interviews with principals from the school district to clarify and/or address any disparity between survey results and actual graduation rate. Interviews also provided a deeper articulation of principals' perceptions of dropout prevention programs that increase graduation rate. Interviewed principals were self-selected by their interest to be interviewed. Finally, the researcher investigated patterns between the principals' perception of dropout prevention programs used in their high school and the principals' perceived impact on selected dropout prevention programs in the future.

According to Creswell, Fetters, and Ivankova (2004), "When used in combination, both quantitative and qualitative data yield a more complete analysis, and they complement each other" (p. 7). Therefore, both the quantitative and qualitative methods were necessary to address the purpose of the study and the research questions.

Sample Site

This study's sample site was a school district in Florida. The sample site of the study focused exclusively on 23 non-alternative high schools. Pseudonyms were used to prevent identification and to maintain the integrity of the school district and each school as well as the school leaders who participated in this study.

The sample targeted a group of 23 high school principals, each representing a non-alternative high school in the school district. Prior to the actual collection of data, the researcher completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirement at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). In addition to the FAU review board, the school district's IRB process also was completed prior to communicating with the high school principals.

Data Collection and Procedures

For this study, the data collection relied primarily on a survey instrument designed to find out which dropout prevention programs each principal used in his or her school and their perception of each dropout prevention program. Each of the 23 principals was sent an email (Appendix C) requesting his/her participation. Within this email there was a link to the actual survey that, if the respondent agreed to participate, was administered by an online survey company. The target response rate for the survey instrument was greater than 50%, or more than 11 participants. After completing the survey, principals' were asked to email the researcher if they were interested in participating in a follow-up interview. These interviews were intended to collect more in-depth qualitative data to compare with the overall survey responses during data analysis. Among all survey respondents, only two principals self-selected to participate in an interview. However, for the purposes of the study, follow up interviews with two principals for purposes of corroboration of survey data based on a low survey response was adequate.

To validate the survey instrument and interview protocol process the following steps were taken. As presented in Chapter 2 of this study, a literature review of dropout

prevention programs filtered the programs selected. The five dropout prevention

programs selected and considered for this study were based upon the dropout prevention

programs derived from the websites of the USDOE, the FLDOE, and the school district.

Specifically, the Institute of Education Sciences (2009) of the USDOE released a report

titled, *WWC Evidence Review Protocol for Dropout Prevention Interventions, Version

2.0*, which outlines "interventions whose primary purpose is to affect behaviors that are

correlated with staying in school or completing school" (p. 2). From this report, the

researcher then searched the FLDOE website and the school district's website. If other

programs were used outside of these five dropout prevention programs, they were not

factored into this study.

Content validity is vital to qualitative research as it is commonly accepted that

scientific inquiry is futile if not validated (Maxwell, 1990). To add credibility to this

study, a review panel of experts, consisting of school leaders from the school district

who were not involved in the study, reviewed the survey instrument and interview

protocol. These individuals were considered experts since they are principals who

focus on dropout prevention strategies at their respective schools. Following feedback

from the review panel, adjustments were made to the survey instrument and interview

protocols. The survey instrument and interview protocol was then piloted by

administering the survey to a cohort of doctoral students in the department of

Educational Leadership and Research Methodology at Florida Atlantic University. The

cohort completed the survey, read the interview protocol, and then responded to the

following three questions: (a) What questions were difficult to understand and/or

answer? (b) Were the descriptions of the dropout prevention programs clearly written?

(c) Did you need questions answered in order to select an appropriate answer? The panel of experts and FAU doctoral students suggested appropriate changes, which the researcher subsequently followed. The survey instrument and interview protocol were adjusted following feedback from the review panel and from the doctoral cohort. Finally, following the content process, 20 high school teachers were given a copy of the survey to gauge the amount of time required to take the survey. To complete this task each participant was instructed to write down the time the survey was started and when it was finished. Using the previously mentioned content validity techniques, "ideals [were] sought through attention to specified criteria" (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001, p. 527), which the researcher followed in order "to [add] validity for each type of inquiry" (Whittemore et al., p. 528), ultimately validating the research process used for this dissertation study.

For this study, perceptions by high school principals was the variable for which dropout prevention programs were used in regard to effectiveness, fidelity of implementation, cost efficacy, structure, and student-staff relationships and varied in terms of program selection and usage at each school site. Table 1 shows the national level dropout prevention programs selected for this study and describes alternative education programs and mentoring programs.

Table 2 shows the state level dropout prevention program selected for this study and describes the role of graduation coach.

Table 3 shows dropout prevention programs specific to the school districts selected for this study and describes district supported online programs and on-the-job training programs.

Table 1

National Level Dropout Prevention Programs Described

Dropout Program	Description of Dropout Program
Alternative education program	An autonomous school within a district focused on developing a sense of belonging for student academic success. For the purpose of this study, an alternative education program is designed for students who have interest in a specific educational program and would include culinary arts, performing arts, magnet programs, or any program within a traditional high school.
Mentoring program	A proactive role model in an evolving interpersonal transaction who directly attempts to assist their mentees in benefiting from the great variety of educational possibilities available.

Note. Alternative education was adapted from NCES, 2008. Mentoring program was adapted from Galbrith and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2000, p. 138.

Table 2

State Level Dropout Prevention Program Described

Dropout Program	Description of Dropout Program
Graduation coach	Person who is responsible for providing academic guidance, motivating students, and helping them plan for the work force, along with connecting families with school and community service. For the purpose of this study, the graduation coach includes a person who specifically works with at-risk students in danger of not graduating with their cohort.

Note. Graduation coach was adapted from Dropout Prevention Act (2012).

Table 3

District Level Dropout Prevention Programs Described

Dropout Program	Description of Dropout Program
District supported online program	Operating a full-time online high school with a virtual school or online initiative, full-time online school, or both. For the purpose of this study, a district supported online program included grade or credit recovery program(s) and/or online education program(s).
On-the-job training	Includes programs that focus on having students responsible for their own decisions, through readiness to learn concepts and trades relative to real life situations. For the purpose of this study, on-the-job training included training program for students to learn a trade and earn certification, along with a high school diploma.

Note. District supported online program was adapted from Watson et al. (2009) and Knowles (1975). On-the-job training was adapted from Knowles et al. (2005).

The principal's perception of these five dropout prevention programs in relation to graduation rate were variables used in this study. As defined previously in Chapter 1, graduation rate, which was the dependent variable for this study, referred to the four-year or extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (Other Academic Indicators, 2011). Within the survey, each principal identified which of the five dropout prevention programs were used at their school during the 2010-2011 school year. The high school principal then rated each dropout prevention program used on a five point Likert-type scale to determine: (a) perceived effectiveness in increasing graduation rates, (b) perceived fidelity of implementation, (c) perceived cost efficacy, (d) perceived importance of program structure, and (e) perceived quality of student-staff relationships.

Table 4 illustrates a sample of the scoring scale used by the principals to determine the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs.

Table 4

Scoring Scale to Determine Effectiveness of Dropout Prevention Programs

Score	Selection
1	Most effective
2	Effective
3	Neither effective nor ineffective, neutral
4	Ineffective
5	Most ineffective

Following the quantitative analysis, the researcher then conducted follow up interviews with principals who completed the survey instrument and opted to be interviewed. The qualitative process was used to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between dropout prevention programs and graduation rate as perceived by the principals. In addition, the qualitative process helped the researcher clarify and/or address any disparity between survey results and graduation rate. The target sample size for qualitative interviews was three principals. In order to participate in the qualitative portion, a principal had to email the researcher. The principals selected for the qualitative portion are representative of the larger population in the school district. Furthermore, through the interview process used in this study high school principals' perceptions in effectiveness of dropout prevention programs, fidelity of implementation, cost efficacy of dropout prevention programs, importance of program structure, and

student-staff relationships within dropout prevention programs allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the principals' perceptions. Finally, through the interview process, survey information and graduation rate were classified to discover irregularities between the respondents' survey data and their interview responses.

Methodological Limitations

This study had a maximum number of 23 respondents, which limited the power of the selected analysis methods. The target sample response rate for this study was greater than 50%. In addition, the small sample size limited the power associated with the test of the correlations used during the findings. However, through qualitative analysis, the researcher was able to strengthen to a nominal degree the reliability of the data boundaries in order to gain a better understanding of patterns and relationships. Furthermore, qualitative interviews helped support and/or dispute the quantitative findings.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methods and design used to conduct research to investigate the relationship between principals' in Florida perceptions of dropout prevention programs effectiveness and increased graduation rates. This chapter described the processes used to select the sample participants and collect the data for the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Quantitative data was collected through surveys and qualitative data through interviews with selected principals who also had responded to the survey. Qualitative data was primarily used to helped gain a deeper articulation on which group of dropout prevention programs principals perceived to increase graduation rate. Chapter 4 provides data analysis and

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findings. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a discussion of findings, conclusions, and

recommendations for future research studies on this topic.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The principals' perceptions of whether or not a relationship exists between dropout prevention programs and graduation rates have not been studied thoroughly, while overcoming barriers, changing school culture, and the trust between students and staff have been researched extensively (Coleman, 1961, 1988; Goodenow, 1993; Hallinan, 2008; Newmann, 1981; Osterman, 2000). Moreover, numerous studies have examined the link between a student's relationship with adult staff as a vital factor in student achievement and motivation as well as various social developmental benefits (Baker, 2006; Crosnoe et al., 2004; Davis, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hamre et al., 2008). These studies, however, did not address dropout prevention programs and the relationship between staff and students.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate principals' perceptions of dropout prevention programs in relationship to increased graduation rate in one school district in Florida. More specifically, this study investigated principals' perceptions of five dropout prevention programs through perceived effectiveness, fidelity of implementation, cost efficacy, importance of program structure, and student-staff relationships in order to increase the graduation rate.

This chapter reintroduces the research questions and hypotheses. Then, the demographics for the site and participants are reviewed. In order to present the

findings, the quantitative section includes descriptive statistics and each null hypothesis, while the qualitative section includes the data analysis and data findings.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the relationship between the principals' perceived effectiveness for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

   H_o1: The principals' perceived effectiveness for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate is unrelated.

2. What is the relationship between the principals' perceived degree of fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

   H_o2: The principals' perceived degree of fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate is unrelated.

3. What is the relationship between the principals' perceptions of cost efficacy for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

   H_o3: The principals' perceptions of cost efficacy for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated.

4. What is the relationship between the principals' perceptions of the importance of structure for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

   H_o4: The principals' perceptions of the importance of structure for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated.

5. What is the relationship between the principals' perceptions of the importance of student-staff relationships for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate?

   H_o5: The principals' perceptions of the importance of student-staff relationships for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated.

Site and Participant Demographics

This section includes the site and demographics for the participants used in this study.

Site

The survey instrument was sent to each traditional high school principal in the school district. The sample of 23 high school principals yielded a return rate of 52%, or 12 respondents.

Participants for qualitative follow up interviews emanated from the survey respondents who agreed to be interviewed. Two principals participated in 20-minute audio taped interviews. The researcher then transcribed each interview for a total of 12 pages of qualitative data. Table 5 shows the characteristics of each site of the study and the dropout prevention programs used at each site during the 2010-2011 school year. As mentioned in previous chapters, the dropout prevention programs were selected based upon common usage in the United States, Florida, and the school district. In the event a dropout prevention program was not used in a school, the high school principal would score the respective program a 0 and it would not be factored into the data analysis. The five dropout prevention programs used for this study were: (a) alternative

Table 5

Characteristics of Each Site and Dropout Prevention Programs Used

Site Code	Graduation Rate Percentage	School Size	Dropout Prevention Programs Used
S1	85	over 2, 500	AE, DOP, OJT
S2	90	over 2,500	MP, DOP, OJT
S3	73	under 2,000	AE, MP, GC, DOP, OJT
S4	77	2,001-2,500	AE, MP, GC, DOP, OJT
S5	92	over 2,500	AE, MP, DOP, OJT
S6	94	over 2,500	AE, MP, DOP, OJT
S7	70	under 2,000	MP, DOP
S8	92	over 2,500	AE, MP, GC, DOP, OJT
S9	76	2,001-2,500	MP, GC, DOP
S10	82	2,001-2,500	MP, GC, DOP, OJT
S11	88	over 2,500	AE, MP, DOP, OJT
S12	87	2,001-5,500	AE, MP, GC, DOP, OJT

Note. AE- alternative education, MP- mentoring program, GC- graduation coach, DOP- district online programs, and OJT- on-the-job training.

education (AE); (b) mentoring program (MP); (c) graduation coach (GC); (d) district

supported online program (DOP); and (e) on-the-job training (OJT).

Demographics of Participants

The demographic section of the survey was split into seven items: (a) gender, (b)

race, (c) years teaching, (d) years in administration pool, (e) years served as an assistant

principal, (f) years served as principal, and (g) graduate school training. The two

participants interviewed were White males. One of the participants had a Master's

degree, while the other has a Specialist degree. Table 6 shows the demographics of

respondents for this study.

Table 6

Participant Demographics

Site Code	Gender	Race	Year(s) Teaching	Year(s) in Application Pool	Year(s) as Assistant Principal	Year(s) as Principal	Highest Degree
S1	Male	Black	20	0	2	10	Specialist
S2	Male	White	8	1	5	13	Doctorate
S3	Male	White	4	1	4	8	Specialist
S4	Female	White	6	2	11	18	Doctorate
S5	Female	White	6	0	0	9	Master's
S6	Male	White	4	0	10	15	Master's
S7	Male	Black	3	1	8	1	Doctorate
S8	Male	White	8	1	5	13	Doctorate
S9	Female	White	15	0	3	8	Master's
S10	Male	Hispanic	25	9	3	6	Master's
S11	Male	White	4	2	2	5	Master's
S12	Male	White	12	0	10	12	Master's

Quantitative Analysis and Findings

The quantitative data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software 19.0. For all research questions, graduation rate was the dependent variable. For the purpose of this study, the significance level was $\alpha=$ 0.05 with a two-tailed test. However, during data output using SPSS, the researcher considered a one-tailed probability in respect to an alpha of 0.025.

This section begins with the descriptive statistics for each null hypothesis. Following the descriptive statistics, the analysis and findings from each null hypothesis are presented. Since this is the quantitative results section, it should be noted that because of the small n-value, there was low power available in the proceeding results sections.

Descriptive Statistics and Null Hypotheses

Graduation rate at each site was used as the dependent variable for this study. As defined in Chapter 1, graduation rate meant the four-year or extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (Other Academic Indicators, 2011). For this study, the graduation rates at the 12 high schools used in this investigation ranged from 70% to 94%. It should be noted, as discussed in Chapter 1, during the 2010-2011 school year the graduation for the state of Florida was 70.6% (FLDOE, 2012). However, NCLB's counts graduates as the recipients of standard diplomas and General Education Degree's (GED) awarded to high school students but not special diplomas and GED's awarded to adult students (UDOE, 2002). Using the NCLB definition to calculate graduation rates in the United States for the 2010-2011 school year, they ranged from 59% in the District of Columbia to 88% for Iowa with Florida having a 71% graduation rate (High School

Graduation Rates). Meaning within Florida this school district is performing pretty well

when compared to other school districts in the state. However, when compared

nationally, the schools selected fall into the range of graduation rate, with a few schools

surpassing the top states. The overarching research questions and five null hypotheses

guided the data analysis. Each research question and null hypothesis addressed the high

school principals' perceptions of five dropout prevention programs and their

relationship to graduation rates during the 2010-2011 school year with specific regard

to: (a) effectiveness of dropout prevention programs to increase graduation rates, (b) the

fidelity of the implementation by school leaders, (c) cost effectiveness of each dropout

prevention program, (d) the importance of program structure, and (e) the quality of

student-staff relationships.

As presented in Table 5, not every high school used each dropout prevention

program included in this study. The following table shows the perceptions each

principal had based upon their experience with each dropout prevention program.

When completing the survey instrument (Appendix A) principals' were asked to rate

their experience with regard to perceived effectiveness in relation to the dropout

prevention program increasing graduation using a 5 point Likert-type scale. Table 7

shows the perceptions each principal had in relation to increased graduation rate. It

should be noted, as shown in Table 7, a rating of "most effective" or "effective" is a +

symbol, while a rating of "ineffective" or "most ineffective" is a – symbol. If the

dropout prevention program was considered "neither effective nor ineffective" an N

symbol was used.   Finally, if the dropout prevention program was not used in the

school N/A was used to inform the reader.

Table 7

Principal Perception of Dropout Prevention Programs in Relation to Graduation Rates

Site Code	Graduation Rate Percentage	Perception of Alternative Education	Perception of Mentoring Programs	Perception of Graduation Coach	Perception of District Online Programs	Perception of On-the-Job-Training
S1	85	+	N/A	N/A	+	N
S2	90	N/A	+	N/A	+	+
S3	73	+	+	+	+	N
S4	77	+	+	+	+	+
S5	92	+	+	N/A	+	+
S6	94	N	N	N/A	-	N
S7	70	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
S8	92	N	+	+	+	+
S9	76	N/A	N/A	+	+	N/A
S10	82	N/A	+	-	+	N
S11	88	N	N	N/A	+	+
S12	87	+	+	N/A	+	+

Perceived effectiveness of dropout prevention programs. To address

Research Question 1 regarding the relationship between the principals' perceived

effectiveness for each dropout prevention programs and graduation rate, a correlation

was used in analysis. The null hypothesis for Research Question 1 was that the

principals' perceived effectiveness for each dropout prevention program and graduation

rate is unrelated. Research Question 1 was meant to determine the principals'

perceptions of which dropout prevention program had the most effect on high school

graduation rate. As noted in Table 5, not all schools used every dropout prevention

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program. For example, four schools used all five dropout prevention programs. Four schools used four of the five dropout prevention programs. Three schools used three of the dropout prevention programs, whereas one school only used two of the dropout prevention programs selected for this study. If the program was not used, per Table 5, the principals scored the program a 0 and it was treated as a null variable. As a result the program was not factored into the analysis. Table 8 shows the result of the basic correlation tests for effectiveness of dropout prevention programs as perceived by the principal participants in this study. No correlation between graduation rate and perceived effectiveness for any dropout prevention program was significant. Therefore, none of the null hypotheses were rejected.

Perceived fidelity of implementation. To address Research Question 2 regarding the relationship between principals' perceived degree of fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate, a correlation was used in analysis. The null hypothesis for Research Question 2 was that the principals' perceived degree of fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate is unrelated. Research Question 2 was meant to determine the importance of the principals' perceptions of the fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate. Table 9 is the result of the basic correlation test for perceived fidelity of implementation of dropout prevention programs.

Table 8

Perceived Effectiveness of Dropout Prevention Programs as Correlated to Graduation Rate

		Alternative Education (AE) (n=8)	Mentoring Program (MP) (n=11)	Graduation Coach (GC) (n=6)	District Online Program (DOP) (n=12)	On-the-job Training (OJT) (n=10)	Graduation Rate (GR) (n=12)
AE							
	r	1.	.296	.226	.301	.565	.145
	p		.350	.481	.341	.056	.653
MP							
	r	.296	1.	.534	.698	.738	.169
	p	.350		.074	.012	.006	.599
GC							
	r	.226	.534	1.	.518	.336	-.200
	p	.481	.074		.084	.286	.534
DOP							
	r	.301	.698	.518	1.	.850	.423
	p	.341	.012	.084		.000	.170
OJT							
	r	.565	.738	.336	.850	1.	.529
	p	.056	.006	.286	.000		.077
GR							
	r	.145	.169	-.200	.423	.529	1.
	p	.653	.599	.534	.170	.077	

Note. AE- alternative education, MP- mentoring program, GC- graduation coach, DOP- district online programs, and OJT- on-the-job training.

As seen in Table 9, the correlation between on-the-job training and graduation rate was moderately correlated at 0.698 in regards to fidelity of implementation. The associated two-tailed p-value of 0.012 was smaller than our alpha value of 0.025. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected and there was a relationship found between graduation rate and on-the-job training. There were no statistically significant correlations with graduation rate and any other dropout prevention programs.

Perceived cost efficacy. To address Research Question 3 regarding the relationship between principals' perceptions of cost efficacy for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate, a correlation analysis was used. The null hypothesis for Research Question 3 was that the principals' perceptions of cost efficacy for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated. Research Question 3 was meant to discover the perceived importance of cost efficacy for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate. Table 10 shows the result of the basic correlation test for cost efficacy for each of the dropout prevention programs. No correlation between graduation rate and perceived cost efficacy for any dropout prevention program was significant. Therefore, none of the null hypotheses were rejected.

Table 9

Perceived Fidelity of Implementation of Dropout Prevention Programs as Correlated to Graduation Rate

		Alternative Education (AE) (n=8)	Mentoring Program (MP) (n=11)	Graduation Coach (GC) (n=6)	District Online Program (DOP) (n=12)	On-the-Job Training (OJT) (n=10)	Graduation Rate (GR) (n=12)
AE							
	r	1.	-.239	.335	.123	.523	.275
	p		.454	.286	.704	.081	.387
MP							
	r	-.239	1.	.467	.573	-.037	-.206
	p	.454		.126	.052	.909	.520
GC							
	r	.335	.467	1.	.597	.333	-.104
	p	.286	.126		.041	.291	.748
DOP							
	r	.123	.573	.597	1.	.429	.333
	p	.704	.052	.041		.164	.290
OJT							
	r	.523	-.037	.333	.429	1.	.698
	p	.081	.909	.291	.164		.012
GR							
	r	.275	-.206	-.104	.333	.698	1.
	p	.387	.520	.748	.290	.012	

Note. AE- alternative education, MP- mentoring program, GC- graduation coach, DOP- district online programs, and OJT- on-the-job training.

Table 10

*Perceived Cost Efficacy of Dropout Prevention Program as Correlated to Graduation
Rate*

		Alternative Education (AE) (n=6)	Mentoring Program (MP) (n=11)	Graduation Coach (GC) (n=6)	District Online Program (DOP) (n=12)	On-the-Job Training (OJT) (n=10)	Graduation Rate (GR) (n=12)
AE							
	r	1.	-.409	.335	.253	.700	.222
	p		.186	.288	.428	.011	.488
MP							
	r	-.409	1.	.278	.088	-.186	-.282
	p	.186		.382	.785	.562	.374
GC							
	r	.335	.278	1.	.450	.325	-.027
	p	.288	.382		.143	.302	.934
DOP							
	r	.253	.088	.450	1.	.752	.445
	p	.428	.785	.143		.005	.147
OJT							
	r	.700	-.186	.325	.752	1.	.467
	p	.011	.562	.302	.005		.126
GR							
	r	.222	-.282	-.027	.445	.467	1.
	p	.488	.374	.934	.147	.126	

Note. AE- alternative education, MP- mentoring program, GC- graduation coach, DOP-
district online programs, and OJT- on-the-job training**.**

Perceived structure of dropout prevention programs. To address Research Question 4 regarding the relationship between principals' perceptions of importance of structure for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate, a correlation analysis was used. The null hypothesis for Research Question 4 was that the principals' perceptions of importance of structure for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated. Research Question 4 meant to determine the perceived importance of structure of each dropout prevention program and increased graduation rate. Table 11 is the result of the basic correlation test for the perceived importance of program structure. As seen in Table 11, No correlation between graduation rate and perceived importance of program structure for any dropout prevention program was significant. Therefore, none of the null hypotheses were rejected.

Perceived student-staff relationships. To address Research Question 5 regarding the relationship between principals' perception of importance of student-staff relationships for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate, a correlation was used in analysis. The null hypothesis for Research Question 5 was that the principals' perceptions of importance of student-staff relationships for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated. Research Question 5 was meant to determine the perceived importance of student-staff relationships for each dropout prevention program and increased graduation rate. Table 12 is the result of the basic correlation test for importance of program structure.

As seen in Table 12, no correlation between graduation rate and perceived importance of student-staff relationships for any dropout prevention program was significant. Therefore, none of the null hypotheses were rejected.

Table 11

Perceived Structure of Dropout Prevention Program as Correlated to Graduation Rate

		Alternative Education	Mentoring Program	Graduation Coach	District Online Program	On-the-Job Training	Graduation Rate
		(AE) (n=8)	(MP) (n=11)	(GC) (n=6)	(DOP) (n=12)	(OJT) (n=10)	(GR) (n=12)
AE							
	r	1.	-.186	.247	.564	.077	.577
	p		.564	.439	.056	.813	.049
MP							
	r	-.186	1.	-.099	-.113	-.346	-.383
	p	.564		.759	.727	.271	.219
GC							
	r	.247	-.099	1.	.088	.215	.004
	p	.439	.759		.786	.503	.990
DOP							
	r	.564	-.113	.088	1.	.490	.624
	p	.056	.727	.786		.106	.030
OJT							
	r	.077	-.346	.215	.490	1.	.106
	p	.813	.271	.503	.106		.743
GR							
	r	.577	-.383	.004	.624	.106	1.
	p	.049	.219	.990	.030	.743	

Note. AE- alternative education, MP- mentoring program, GC- graduation coach, DOP- district online programs, and OJT- on-the-job training.

Table 12

Perceived Student-Staff Relationship for Dropout Prevention Programs as Correlated to Graduation Rate

		Alternative Education (AE) (n=8)	Mentoring Program (MP) (n=11)	Graduation Coach (GC) (n=6)	District Online Program (DOP) (n=12)	On-the-Job Training (OJT) (n=10)	Graduation Rate (GR) (n=12)
AE							
	r	1.	-.293	.034	.016	.288	.194
	p		.356	.916	.961	.364	.547
MP							
	r	-.293	1.	.399	.465	.211	-.257
	p	.356		.199	.127	.510	.420
GC							
	r	.034	.399	1.	.659	.507	-.158
	p	.916	.199		.020	.093	.624
DOP							
	r	.016	.465	.659	1.	.834	.295
	p	.961	.127	.020		.001	.353
OJT							
	r	.288	.211	.507	.834	1.	.379
	p	.364	.510	.093	.001		.225
GR							
	r	.194	-.257	-.158	.295	.379	1.
	p	.547	.420	.624	.353	.225	

Note. AE- alternative education, MP- mentoring program, GC- graduation coach, DOP-district online programs, and OJT- on-the-job training.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Data analysis for the qualitative component began with the researcher

transcribing and the coding both interviews. The coding involved careful review of the

two transcripts using two different layers of coding; open and axial.

Open coding is typically the first layer of qualitative data analysis of transcribed

or documented text in which the researcher looks for any patters that arise across

recorded data (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe this

qualitative process as "reviewing through [the] data for regularities and patterns as well

as for topics [the] data cover" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 173). Bogdan and Biklen

(2007) continue regarding the products of an open coding process stating: "These words

and phrases are coding categories. They are a means of sorting the descriptive data

collected so the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other

data" (p. 173).

The next layer of coding utilized for analysis of the two principals interviews is

termed "axial coding" (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), axial coding

"is a coding scheme and can be quite simple, as in identifying a theme that can be

illustrated with numerous incidents, quotes, and so on" (p. 164). Therefore, the

categories which emerged from the open coding process were compared to the data for

repeated incidents. Once repeated incidents of the categories were found, thematic data

units began to emerge.

Finally, a constant comparative level of data analysis was employed to fine tune

the themes which emerged from the axial layer of coding. According to Merriam

(1998), the "constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with

another to determine similarities and differences" (p. 18). For example, in this study, the constant comparative method allowed the researcher to juxtapose Principal Clark's interview with Principal Wayne's interview and subsequently segments of data from their interviews identified themes which helped to investigate principals' perceptions of dropout prevention programs in relationship to increased graduation rates. These three layers of analysis yielded the study's findings.

Qualitative Findings

This section shares the emergent patterns from the qualitative data in relationship to the quantitative findings. Following the qualitative data analysis process which included open and axial coding followed by the constant comparative analysis method, the categories that emerged offered thematic findings through themes. One pattern discovered during the qualitative process was the perceived effectiveness of on-the-job training and graduation coach. That trend, apparent across both interview data sets, did not corroborate the quantitative data which found no correlation between on-the-job training and graduation coach and increased graduation rate. Another pattern discovered during the qualitative process was alternative education programs were perceived as a dropout prevention program in regards to importance of structure and student-staff relationships. Similar to the previously mentioned pattern, this trend was not corroborated by the quantitative analysis. Finally, on-the-job training was perceived by school leaders when implemented with fidelity to increase graduation rate. This qualitative pattern corroborated the quantitative finding which found a moderate correlation between on-the-job training and graduation rate in regards to fidelity of implementation. Following these steps, the researcher wrote the qualitative findings.

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An example of a central pattern discovered during the interview process centered on on-the-job training. The quantitative results indicated on-the-job training and graduation rate showed a moderate statistical significance in regards to perceived fidelity of implementation. The qualitative results from both interviews with the principals corroborated this correlation between on-the-job training and graduation rate. When asked why he believed on-the-job training increased graduation rates and decrease dropout rates, Principal Clark stated:

> They're actually learning, they're on the job, they can see the relevance of how they can take those skills and use them once they graduate and they like it; they enjoy it. They're doing something that they want to do and it keeps them in school. We have like a little café where they would sell food every, once every couple of weeks so the students got the whole feeling of, you know, running a business.

Principal Wayne reinforced the observations of Principal Clark when he stated, "our academies … have created a lot of different partnerships with many organizations in the area." The qualitative coding supported these findings with multiple mentions of the benefits of on-the-job training to increase graduation rate.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative methods discussed in Chapter 3. The first section of the chapter reintroduced the research questions and null hypotheses. The next section included site participant demographics for this study, showing more White participants than any other race, along with more males than females. Following the site and participant demographics, the quantitative

analysis were presented, which included descriptive statistics and investigated potential

relationships, which gave insight into the null hypotheses. Finally, the qualitative

analysis, including data analysis and findings, were introduced. Chapter 5 will include

a discussion of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research on this

topic.

V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With the implementation of education initiatives such as No Child Left Behind (2002) and, more recently, Race to the Top (2009), it is imperative for school leaders to understand why graduation rates remain stagnant despite an increase in awareness of the difficulties students face if they fail to graduate. The negative results on the economy of failing to graduate range from large government subsidies in the form of food stamps, housing assistance, and welfare payments (Waldfogel et al., 2007), which dramatically increase incarceration rates, to more frequent health issues and diminished life spans (Moretti, 2007; Muenning, 2007). The economic burden of student dropouts on the U.S. economy is a motivating factor for the government to establish a system of accountability and dropout prevention programs that dramatically reduce the associated costs of academic failure.

This chapter starts with the purpose of this study. Following the study's purpose, a discussion on the findings is reviewed. The chapter ends with conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research was to investigate principals' perceptions of dropout prevention programs in relationship to increased graduation rate in one school district in Florida. More specifically, this study investigated principals' perceptions of five dropout prevention programs through perceived effectiveness, fidelity of implementation, cost efficacy, importance of program structure, and student-staff

relationships in order to increase the graduation rate. Despite varying estimates of the actual number of dropouts in the United States, along with an increase in school leaders' and policy makers' awareness of the problem, the graduation rate has remained stagnant with more than one half million young adults dropping out of high school on a yearly basis (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). The reason these dropout rates have not declined despite the use of a myriad of dropout prevention strategies remains unclear.

Discussion of Findings

This section reintroduces the significance of the study and recaps selected dropout prevention programs as well as the research questions that drove this study.

Dropout Prevention Programs

Dropping out of high school has been a social issue that dates back to the 1960s (Dorn, 1996). Recent educational reforms have put tremendous pressure on school leaders to account for every child's success in school. Historical events and technology developments have led to many of the dropout prevention programs most commonly used in Florida high schools today. For the purpose of this study, the dropout prevention programs were derived from websites of the USDOE, the FLDOE, and the school district. Specifically, the Institute of Education Sciences (2009) of the USDOE released a report titled, *WWC Evidence Review Protocol for Dropout Prevention Interventions, Version 2.0*, which outlines "interventions whose primary purpose is to affect behaviors that are correlated with staying in school or completing school" (p. 2). From this report, the researcher then searched the FLDOE website and school district's website. Based upon those steps, the following five dropout prevention strategies were

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selected: (a) alternative education, (b) mentoring programs, (c) graduation coach, (d) online district supported programs, and (e) on-the-job training. In order to discover the relationship between each of these programs and graduation rate, a mixed methods study was used.

For this study, there were five null hypotheses. Table 13 shows each null hypothesis and the result.

Table 13

Null Hypotheses and Results Used in This Study

Null hypotheses	Results
H$_o$1: The principals' perceived effectiveness for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate is unrelated.	Failed to be rejected
H$_o$2: The principals' perceived degree of fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate is unrelated.	Rejected
H$_o$3: The principals' perceptions of cost efficacy for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated.	Failed to be rejected
H$_o$4: The principals' perceptions of the importance of structure for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated.	Failed to be rejected
H$_o$5: The principals' perceptions of the importance of student-staff relationships for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate are unrelated.	Failed to be rejected

Perceived Effectiveness

In the quantitative analysis of Research Question 1, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected. However, the qualitative analysis which consisted of interviews of high school principals supported a potential relationship between on-the-job-training and

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graduation rates. To recall, this research question addressed the principals' perceived

effectiveness for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate. When asked

about why he felt on-the-job training was an effective way to increase graduation rate,

Principal Clark stated:

> That's probably one of the strongest indicators to keep students in school
>
> because of the relevancy. That they're actually learning, they're on the job, they
>
> can see the relevancy of how they can take those skills and use them once they
>
> graduate and they like it; they enjoy it. They're doing something that they wanna
>
> do and it keeps them in school.

Principal Clark's perception of on-the-job training being "one of the strongest

indicators" of the qualitative evaluation was indicated.

Though unsupported by the quantitative analysis, the qualitative analysis found

that graduation coach was also perceived as an effective dropout prevention program.

During his interview Principal Wayne indicated only Title I schools in this school

district offered a graduation coach as a dropout prevention method. Principal Wayne

stated, "Unfortunately we do not have one. Not being a Title I school, that's one of the

benefits we don't receive." Principal Clark, based upon his interview, did see a value to

having a graduation coach and his comment disputed the quantitative findings:

> The ones that are more school based and have a school education background I
>
> think are stronger because they know the system. They get that faster. The
>
> Americore, once they get to know the system, I think both are excellent. They
>
> get to know kids. Time is built in for them to work with kids, to help talk kids

through the whole process of why education is important. Put them on a plan

for success. They have the time to follow up.

Principal Clark stated a graduation coach was "excellent" once "they know the system."

Perceived Fidelity of Implementation

Research Question 2 focused on the relationship between the principals'

perceived degree of fidelity of implementation for each dropout prevention program and

graduation rate. The null hypothesis, the principals' perceived degree of fidelity of

implementation for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate, was rejected

and a correlation of 0.698 was found between on-the-job training and graduation rate.

This finding was significant because no other studies had directly evaluated the

relationship between perceived fidelity of implementation of dropout prevention

programs to graduation rate; however, multiple studies (Cohen et al., 2007; Florida's

Positive Behavior Support Project, 2009; Sugai et al., 2005) used fidelity as a variable.

Sandomierski (2011) found no statistically significant relationship between

implementation and disproportionality in suspensions for students. The finding from

this study contradicted the findings that there was a relationship found between

graduation rate and on-the-job training, but confirmed the findings that other dropout

prevention programs and graduation rate lack a relationship with regard to perceived

fidelity of implementation.

Perceived Cost Efficacy, Perceived Structure, and Perceived Student-Staff
Relationships

During the extensive literature review on the selected dropout prevention

programs it was discovered that minimal research investigated the perceived importance

of cost efficacy of dropout prevention programs, perceived importance of program structure, and perception of student-staff relationships for dropout prevention programs. Within this study, each of the null hypotheses for Research Questions 3, 4, and 5 failed to be rejected.

The No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law in 2002 and has allotted $125 million specifically for dropout prevention programs in the United States (USDOE, 2004). Even with money specifically earmarked for dropout prevention programs, in 2011 only 53% of African American male and 65% of Hispanic male students graduated from high school in the state of Florida (FLDOE, 2012). Interestingly, all this expenditure the cost efficacy investigated in Research Question 3 was still unable to be uncover a definitive relationship both through quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Research Question 4 addressed principals' perceptions of importance of structure for each dropout prevention program. Although the quantitative analysis fails to reject the null hypothesis, during the qualitative interviews, both high school principals discussed a potential connection between the importance of dropout prevention program structure and increased graduation rate. During his interview Principal Wayne discussed alternative education programs and the perceived importance of structure within the program:

> Mainly [it] provide[s] an opportunity for students to become interested in a class that they may not have taken if they were not enrolled [in an academy] … and expose them to a class that they may not otherwise have been a part of.

Principal Clark supported Principal Wayne's statements when he stated, "They're following where the job market is going and we've got to work closely with them … match up to the student's interest as well … they have an interest where they might get a job." The perceived importance of program structure for alternative education programs based upon both qualitative interviews was found to engage students, which resulted in an effective method to keep students in school.

Research Question 5 addressed the principals' perceptions of the importance of student-staff relationships for each dropout prevention program and graduation rate. For this particular question graduation rate failed to reject the null hypothesis. However, during the qualitative interview it was uncovered that alternative education programs that had strong student-staff relationships yielded a positive outcome for the school and students. Principal Clark stated:

> Our partnership … was different, where students actually took dual enrollment courses … that would then lead them into a field they hopefully would apply to; well most of the students would apply to a school that has [that] track. We have a variety of programs that we're trying to match up to what the work force is looking for, what the economic council is looking for ... most principals would try to get the [alternative education programs] that … will retain students, and maybe even perhaps attract high end kids.

Principal Wayne reinforced these sentiments when he stated, "They may have had discipline issues but once they get into the academy they see what they're doing, they enjoy the class enough where I feel it keeps them engaged in school." During the interview, both Principal Clark and Principal Wayne made statements to support a

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potential relationship; they believed that student-staff relationships within alternative

education programs lead to students engaged in school and increased graduation rate.

The potential relationships discovered, focused on the perception that a student-staff

relationship established in the alternative education program, changed students who

used to have "discipline issues" to students who are engaged in school.

Mentoring programs tend to be the most popular among dropout prevention

programs, with over 500 mentoring programs in the United States (BBBSA, 2011). In

this study, a mentoring program was used in 11 of the 12 high schools. In the

quantitative portion of this study mentoring programs showed no statistical significance.

However, previous studies have suggested when a student feels more connected to an

adult there are significant and positive effects (Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson, &

Abbott, 2001; Portwood, Ayers, Kinnison, Waris, & Wise, 2005). Interestingly, the

qualitative findings discovered that buy in from faculty is a potential reason why

mentoring programs were perceived to have a positive relationship to graduation rate.

Principal Wayne believed that buy in from faculty is vital to the mentoring program

success and supporting this, when asked about why he thought school leaders across the

school district have different perceptions of mentoring programs, he replied:

> I don't know that there would be anybody who would be against having a formal
>
> mentoring program. The difficulty is getting the buy in from the number of
>
> people who need to be involved. But ultimately you need a staff, an entire
>
> faculty, and really an entire staff, who are willing to step forward and take on a
>
> handful of students at a minimum to be their assigned mentor and that can be the

difficulty because you're asking people to do stuff outside of their time and outside of their contract in the end.

Principal Clark reinforced Principal Wayne's comments concerning staff buy in when he stated:

Obviously some teachers get frustrated easily and can appear that they don't care but maybe just out of frustration. [Many times] the first mentor a kid that sees every single day [is a classroom teacher].

The need to have a faculty and staff willing to put in the extra hours and connection to students is an indicator that supported the success of mentoring programs in previous studies (Hawkins, et al., 2001; Portwood, et al., 2005).

Significance of the Study

Unlike previous studies that investigated an adult advocate in school (Larson & Rumberger, 1995; Quint et al., 2005; Shirm et al, 2006; Sinclair et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 2005) or studies that focused on classroom behavior and student social skills (Dynarski et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 2005; Snipes et al., 2006), this study was unique and significant because it investigated dropout prevention programs to discern a correlation between principals' perceptions of dropout prevention programs used and increased graduation rate. This investigation, with its specific focus on principal's perception dropout prevention program participation, was necessary to tease out which programs might assist in increasing graduation rate. An investigation focusing on dropout prevention program selection was necessary to discover effective strategies that may prevent high school students from leaving school before they obtain diplomas. Findings offer insight into commonly used dropout prevention programs in

Florida and their relative efficacy in raising graduation rates. Identifying these patterns and insights will assist school leaders and policy makers in developing strategies to increase graduation rate. This study was conducted in one of the most diverse and largest urban school districts in the United States.

Policymakers and education officials have been working continuously to address some of the specialized needs of urban school children (Goertz & Stiefel, 1998; Hunter, 2000). Maurer (1982) focused on the average dropout rate of students from U.S. high schools, which was an alarming rate of 26% at the time of the study. That number climbed to a staggering 50% when the school was located in an urban area. In the 1980s, nearly half of large urban high school students dropped out of school before graduation (Maurer, 1982, p. 470). The graduation rate currently remains around 50% in major urban school districts throughout the United States. The 2009 report, *Cities in Crisis: Closing the Graduation Gap*, reveals the nation's 50 largest metropolitan school districts have an average graduation rate of 53%, with 10 school districts having graduation rates of 45% or lower (Swanson, 2009).

Conclusions

A significant finding from this study was the correlation between a principals' perceived degree of fidelity of implementation with regard to on-the-job training and increased graduation rate. Through an examination of Research Question 2, it was evident that on-the-job training was perceived as a successful dropout prevention program when implemented with fidelity. The quantitative findings were corroborated by the qualitative findings as well. For example, Principal Wayne, when asked about on-the-job training, replied:

We have students who can leave here ready to pick up a job with various

certifications, from you know electrical and plumbing … So it can be a very

positive experience for students who are looking to go that route. Whatever we

[principals] can do to make sure that after their [students] four years here they're

gonna walk across that stage and receive their diploma that's what we need to

do.

Essentially, high school principals perceived that the implementation

level of fidelity for on-the-job training has a relationship to increased graduation rate.

In other words, when a principal believed the dropout prevention program was executed

thoroughly by their school, it likely increased graduation rate.

This finding was significant because perceived fidelity of implementation for

dropout prevention programs has not been studied, although fidelity of implementing

programs at schools have been (Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project, 2008;

Coehen, et al., 2007; Sugai, et al., 2005). In this study, on-the-job training was used in

10 of the 12 high schools. On-the-job training has centered on the idea that students

become responsible for their own decisions, through readiness to learn concepts and

trades relative to real life situations (Knowles, 1975; Knowles, et al., 2005). The

USDOE through policies such as NCLB (2002) had $125 million for dropout

prevention (USDOE, 2004), while RTTT (2009) provided $4.35 billion designed to

encourage and reward states for education innovation and reform, and including

increased graduation rates (USDOE, 2009). However, in Florida, school leaders faced

an educational budget cut of $1.75 billion K-12 which cut per-student spending by

approximately $703 per student (Kam, 2011). Given Florida's educational budget cut,

despite the USDOE's value placed on dropout prevention programs and increased graduation rate through policies such as NCLB and RTTT, school leaders must understand the importance of fidelity of implementation and its relationship to graduation rate for dropout prevention programs such as on-the-job training.

Furthermore, a finding of the study suggests a lack of knowledge exists among school leaders regarding which dropout prevention programs are effective and which programs are not based on sound research. This appears to have resulted in a variety of perceptions about the general effectiveness of dropout prevention programs regardless of the school graduation rate.

As noted in Table 7, regardless of 2010-2011 graduation rate there is an inconsistency of which dropout prevention programs are perceived by school leaders to be effective. For example S7 had a graduation rate of 70%, the lowest of my participants, but according to their survey respondent did not partake in any dropout prevention programs. Whereas S4 had a graduation rate of 77% and rated all dropout prevention either effective or most effective. In contrast S6 has a graduation rate of 94%, the highest in of my participants, and responded that 3 out of the 5 dropout prevention programs had neither an effective nor ineffective impact on graduation rate. Moreover, S6 did not implement a graduation coach and responded that district online programs had ineffective or most ineffective impact on graduation rate. To further the disparity of continuity among school leaders S12, had a graduation rate of 87% and responded that all dropout prevention programs, except for the use of a graduation coach at this school, were rated either effective or most effective. Whereas S11 had a graduation rate of 88% and responded that alternative education programs and

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mentoring programs had neither an effective nor ineffective impact on graduation rate.

In the case of S11, district online programs and on-the-job training were considered

effective or most effective dropout prevention programs. It should be noted, a

graduation coach was not utilized at this school. Table 7 reinforced the notion there

was an inconsistency in both perceptions of dropout prevention programs and program

implementation of participants in this study. This held true regardless of school size or

graduation rate.

The disparity among participants within this study illuminates the lack of

knowledge which causes dropout prevention programs to be effective or not. This lack

of knowledge appears to be inherent among policy makers and school leaders within the

United States. Since the literature these five dropout prevention programs' is deficient,

principals and school leaders are left in the dark as to what works and what does not.

For example, the Dropout Prevention Act (2002) does not recommend use of a

particular dropout prevention program (USDOE, 2004). Since there is no actual

evidence of effectiveness of these programs, this study focused on perceptions alone.

The researcher could not utilize research for any knowledge, only experiential wisdom.

Even though NCLB has 125 million dollars earmarked for dropout prevention programs

(USDOE, 2004), this study confirmed an inconsistent perception of these programs

among high school principals. This research has demonstrated that there would be an

added value for education policy makers and school leaders to understand which

dropout prevention programs are most effective. These findings are supported by the

previous studies (Cannister, 1999; Floyd, 1993; Murray & Owens, 1991) that school

leaders must define clear goals and objectives when implementing any dropout prevention programs.

<div align="center">

Recommendations

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Many of the dropout prevention programs investigated in this study, several of which are commonly used at the national, state, and school district levels suggested a lack of knowledge exists among school leaders in regarding which dropout prevention programs are effective and which programs are not based on sound research. This section includes recommendations for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future researcher regarding the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs stems from a need to ensure school administrators and policy makers have access to empirical and rigorous researcher regarding of effectiveness of various prevention programs in terms of the impact on graduation rates. In particular these recommendations come from an apparent lack of knowledge principals had about the dropout prevention programs due to either access or quality of research available to them which resulted in perceptions alone being used based on participants experiential wisdom.

- Future research should investigate whether socioeconomic status of students (SES) impacts selection of dropout prevention programs and graduation rate, when moderated by SES.
- Future research should investigate whether size of high school impacts selection of dropout prevention programs and graduation rate, when moderated by large school size.

- Future research should use a cluster analysis to investigate interrelationships between dropout prevention programs to determine what relationships, if any, exist.

- Future research should determine the impact of selection of dropout prevention programs on graduation rate, using social ecology as a lens to drive the study. A social ecology lens would help determine if outcomes of the dropout prevention program(s) are moderated by race, class, and gender.

- The current study could be replicated however, using a much larger sample size. It would be advised to have a minimum sample size of 75-100 schools to better understand relationships between dropout prevention programs and graduation rate.

- Research utilizing predictive equations to determine whether variables similar to those exposed in this study impact graduation rate.

- Research to explore any possible relationship between the demographical profiles of school administrators (e.g., degree earned, race, gender, years as a teacher, years in administrative pool, and years served as an assistant principal) and their perceptions of effectiveness of various dropout prevention programs.

- Future research should investigate graduate school training of school leaders to determine whether there could be an impact on perceptions of dropout prevention programs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Dropout Prevention Program Survey School Year 2010-2011

DROPOUT PREVENTION: A STUDY OF PREVENTION PROGRAMS USED BY HIGH SCHOOLS

TO INCREASE GRADUATION RATES

Investigator: Christopher L. Simmons

This survey is designed to gauge your perceived effectiveness of a particular dropout prevention program in order to increase high school graduation rates. Your candid responses to this survey were an essential part of this research and will be held in the strictest confidence. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. If you have any questions or need assistance completing the survey, do not hesitate to contact me, Christopher Simmons, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. Thank you in advance for your assistance and valuable participation.

Tell us about yourself

1. Gender: ◯ Male   ◯ Female

2. Race: ◯ White   ◯ Black   ◯ Hispanic   ◯ Other

3. Years teaching _____

4. Years in administration application pool _____

5. Years served as an assistant principal _____

6. Years as a principal _____

7. Graduate School Training (*complete all that apply*):

    a. Master's Degree (*write in school & degree*)_____

    b. Specialist Degree (*write in school & degree*)_____

    c. Doctorate Degree (*write in school & degree*)_____

    d. Certification Degree (*write in school*)_____

8. Your high school graduation rate during the 2010-2012 school year _____

Appendix A *continued*

For the purpose of this study the dropout prevention programs will be defined as such:

Alternative Education Program	An autonomous school within a district focused on developing a sense of belonging for student academic success. For the purpose of this study an alternative education program would include culinary arts, performing arts, magnet programs, or any program within a traditional high school, designed for students who have interest in a specific educational program.
Mentoring Program	A proactive role models in an evolving interpersonal transaction, directly attempt to assist their mentees in benefiting from the great variety of educational possibilities available
Graduation Coach	Person who is responsible for proving academic guidance, motivating students, and helping them plan for the work force, along with connecting families with school and community service. For the purpose of this study the graduation coach includes a person who specifically works with at-risk students in danger of not graduating with their cohort.
District Supported Online Program	Operating a full-time online high school with a virtual school or online initiative, full-time online school, or both. For the person of this study a district supported online program included grade or credit recovery program(s) and/or online education program(s).
On the Job Training Program	Includes programs which focus on having students responsible for their own decisions, through readiness to learn concepts and trades relative to real life situations. For the purpose of this study on-the-job training included training program for students to learn a trade and earn certification, along with a high school diploma.

Appendix A *continued*

9. Based upon your experience at this high school, please rate the following dropout prevention programs with regards to their effectiveness increasing graduation rates, during the 2010-2011 school year:

Dropout Prevention Program	0 Not used at this school	1 Most Effective	2 Effective	3 Neither Effective nor Ineffective, Neutral	4 Ineffective	5 Most Ineffective
Alternative Education Program	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Mentoring Program	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Graduation Coach	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
District Supported Online Program	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
On the Job Training Program	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

10. Based upon your experience at this high school, please rate the following dropout prevention programs with regards to the fidelity of implementation by school leaders during the 2010-2011 school year:

Dropout Prevention Program	0 Not used at this school	1 Complete Fidelity	2 Some Fidelity	3 No More Fidelity as any other program	4 Minimal Fidelity	5 No Fidelity
Alternative Education Program	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Mentoring Program	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Graduation Coach	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
District Supported Online Program	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
On the Job Training Program	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

Appendix A *continued*

11. Rate the following statements about cost effectiveness of dropout prevention programs, based upon your perception of this school during the 2010-2011 school year:

	0 Not used at this school	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
Alternative Education Program were cost effective dropout prevention programs	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Mentoring Program were cost effective dropout prevention programs	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Graduation Coach were cost effective dropout prevention programs	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
District Supported Online Program were cost effective dropout prevention programs	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
On the Job Training Program were cost effective dropout prevention programs	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

Appendix A *continued*

12. Rate the following statements about the importance of structure for dropout prevention programs based upon your perception of this school during the 2010-2011 school year:

	0 Not used at this school	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
Alternative Education Program were too complicated to be effective	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Mentoring Program were too complicated to be effective	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Graduation Coach were too complicated to be effective	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
District Supported Online Program were too complicated to be effective	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
On the Job Training Program were too complicated to be effective	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

Appendix A *continued*

13. Defining student-staff relationship as, "developing and sustaining trust," please rate the following statements about relationships within dropout prevention programs, based upon your perceptions:

	0 Not used at this school	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree
Alternative Education Program have highly effective student to staff relationships	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Mentoring Program have highly effective student to staff relationships	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Graduation Coach have highly effective student to staff relationships	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
District Supported Online Program have highly effective student to staff relationships	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
On the Job Training Program have highly effective student to staff relationships	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

If you would like a copy of survey results, please write in your email address:
If you were willing to participate in a 30 minute interview (face to face, phone, Skype) to enhance my knowledge on dropout prevention programs at your high school during the 2010-2011 school year, please email me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

Appendix B

School Personnel Interview Protocol

Dropout Prevention: A Study of Prevention and Programs Used by High Schools to

Increase Graduation Rates

Hello. My name is Christopher Simmons. I am a graduate student in FAU's Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, Educational Leadership K-12. I'd like to speak with you about your perceptions of dropout prevention programs employed at your high school and their impact on graduation rates.

You have already read and signed the consent form and completed the dropout prevention programs survey, but I want to give you another opportunity to withdraw from this study if you feel it necessary. This conversation will take approximately 30 minutes. It will be a confidential face to face interview. Is this something that you were still willing to do?

I just want you to know that I am required to read a script so my language might seem a little awkward.

I really appreciate that you have taken time out of your busy schedule to talk to me about your perceptions with dropout prevention programs and their impact on graduation rates. Information from this interview will also be combined with other academic data. Furthermore, results from this study will be presented to my dissertation committee. The results of this study may be made available to local, state and national audiences and may be submitted to scholarly research journals for publication.

My questions will focus on your perceptions of the dropout prevention programs specifically alternative education programs, mentoring programs, graduation coach, district supported online programs, and on the job training programs, your understandings of these programs and your feelings about the sense of importance improving graduation rates.

There is no right or wrong, desirable or undesirable answers. Feel free to express your opinions, whether they were positive or negative. I just want you to openly share with me what you really think and feel. There were no anticipated risks to you as a participant in this interview other than the small amount of risk associated with confidential studies where a breach of confidentiality might occur. However, measures will be taken so that this is very unlikely to occur. With your permission, I will be audio-tape recording the discussion so that I do not miss anything you have to say. When we were finished with any audiotapes they will be erased and all data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for 3 years in the investigator's office. Your responses

Appendix B *continued*

will be kept confidential as a code will be used as identifiers instead of your name. No information will be shared unless required by law.

There is no compensation or other direct benefits to you for participating in this research. You may also choose not to respond to any or all of the questions without an explanation. You may also decline to participate in this interview without any consequences.

If you have any questions about participants' rights, you can direct those to the FAU-IRB Office.

Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

If yes, turn on tape recorder and continue as follows:

Again my name is Christopher Simmons. Today is _____, and I am speaking with _____. I've just turned on the tape recorder and would like for you to verify I have your permission to tape our conversation now that the tape is running.

As I mentioned, I am tape recording the discussion so that I don't miss anything you have to say.

Do you have any questions before I begin asking questions?

Procedure

Pause

This part of the interview will focus on your experiences with dropout prevention programs during the 2010-2011 school year.

1. What is your experience with alternative education programs at this high school?
2. How has an alternative education programs been implemented at this high school?
3. What is your experience with mentoring programs at this high school?
4. How has mentoring programs been implemented at this high school?
5. What were the expectations of mentor?
6. What is your experience with the graduation coach at this high school?
7. What were the expectations of the graduation coach?

Appendix B *continued*

8. What is your experience with district supported online programs at this high school?
9. How has districted supported online programs been implemented at this high school?
10. What is your experience with on the job training programs at this high school?
11. How has on the job training programs been implemented at this high school?
12. In your experience which dropout program or programs were most effective in regards of improving graduation rates? Why?
13. What recommendations would you suggestion to improve the dropout prevention programs at this high school?
14. **Well I'm about done now**. Can you provide any additional comments that you feel may assist me in understanding dropout prevention programs in regards to increasing graduation rates?
15. Is there any other information regarding your experience with dropout prevention programs that you think would be useful for me to know?
16. Have I left anything out to ask you?

Okay, well, thank you very much for letting me talk to you today. Your time is very much appreciated, and your comments have been very helpful.

Now I'd like to give you some contact information. If you have any questions about this research please contact me, Christopher Simmons, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮ or Dr. Meredith Mountford, my faculty advisor, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮.

If you have any questions or concerns about research participants' rights they may be directed to the FAIIRB Office Florida Atlantic University Research Integrity, 777 Glades Road, SU Bldg 80/Suite 106, Boca Raton, FL 33431. The phone number is 561-297-2318.

Thank you so very much for meeting with me today. Your time, which I know is valuable, is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful.

Turn off tape recorder. Thank them again, and say goodbye.

Principal E-mail

Dear [insert name]:

Today I am writing you as a graduate student and researcher. I need your assistance to collect valuable data that will not only aid me to finish my doctoral degree but will also enhance the quality of dropout prevention programs in South Florida. I am asking school leaders like you, to participate in a brief survey regarding the impact of high school dropout prevention programs selection to increase graduation rates.

This is a short survey and should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete. Please click on the link below to go to the survey website (or copy and paste the survey link into your internet browser).

INSERT WEBSITE

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and all of your responses will be kept confidential. Should you have any further questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ or my faculty advisor, Dr. Meredith Mountford, at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓.

Thank you for participating in this study!

Christopher Simmons
Doctoral Candidate
Florida Atlantic University
▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

Research at Florida Atlantic University involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (FAU IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Florida Atlantic University Research Integrity, 777 Glades Road, SU Bldg 80/Suite 106, Boca Raton, FL 33431. The phone number is 561-297-2318

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