

ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS: A CASE STUDY

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Specialist in School
Psychology.

By

Marquessa LaBrett Chappell

Director: Dr. Lori Unruh
Professor and Director of School Psychology Program

Committee Members: Dr. Candace Boan-Lenzo, Psychology
Dr. Bruce B. Henderson, Psychology

May 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my committee members for their guidance and collaboration throughout this process. In particular I would like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Lori Unruh for her support, encouragement and unwavering diligence. I would also like to thank the Transylvania County School District for their willingness to work with me and ultimately, for providing me the opportunity to conduct this case study. Without the help of specifically Dr. Scott Elliot, Director of Secondary Education in Transylvania County, this research would not have been possible. His thoroughness in providing data as well as answering numerous questions was matched only by his kindness and outright willingness to help.

I would like to thank my colleague Adam Hicks who was more help than I am sure he knows. Adam provided technical and statistical assistance when problems arose that I was otherwise unfamiliar with. He was always eager and willing to help.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends. I am eternally grateful for their continued support and encouragement throughout this process; for their perceived interest and curiosity, listening as I rambled continually about literature on high school dropout; and finally for their patience, understanding, and aid in keeping me sane. I would specifically like to thank: my mother for the time she spent reading and re-reading much of my literature review and helping to point out the errors in my first few drafts; my father and step-mother for babysitting their “grand dog” and allowing me the opportunity to write, distraction free; and finally, my fiancé for his continued support and willingness to sacrifice our time together so that I might finish my research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables	v
Abstract	vi
Chapter One: Introduction	8
Chapter Two: Literature Review	11
Developmental Perspective.....	11
Theoretical Framework	12
Reasons for Dropping Out: Individual Factors	12
Academic Achievement	13
Grade Retention	14
Student Engagement and Motivation.....	16
Disruptive Behavior	17
Reasons for Dropping Out: Contextual Factors.....	19
Family Background.....	19
Socioeconomic Background of the Family	19
Family Relationships	20
Parents' Educational Background.....	20
Environment.....	21
School Mobility	22
Economic Responsibilities.....	26
High School Dropout and Ethnic Differences	28
School Factors.....	29
Family and Environmental Factors.....	29
Hispanic Students	31
African America Students.....	33
High School Dropout and Gender Differences	35
Statement of the Problem.....	37
Hypotheses	40
Factors Related to Minority Status	40
Factors Related to School Mobility	41
Factors Related to Grade Retention	41
Factors Related to Gender.....	42
Chapter Three: Method	44
Participants.....	44
Materials	45
Procedure	46
Analyses	46
Chapter Four: Results	48
Descriptive Data.....	48
Factors Related to Minority Status	49
Factors Related to School Mobility	51
Factors Related to Grade Retention	53

Factors Related to Gender.....	55
Chapter Five: Discussion	57
Factors Related to Minority Status	58
Factors Related to School Mobility	59
Factors Related to Grade Retention.....	60
Factors Related to Gender.....	61
Limitations of the Study.....	62
Implications and Recommendations	64
Future Research and Conclusions	66
References	67
Appendices.....	74
Appendix A: Exit Interview Form	74
Appendix B: Proposal Letter	75
Appendix C: Letter of Approval	76

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Ethnic Breakdown in Total Population and Sample Population	45
2. Factors Cited for Early School Withdrawal	48
3. Representation of Minority Status	49
4. Relationship between Minority Status and Factors Related to Dropping Out.....	50
5. Representation of School Mobility.....	51
6. Relationship between School Mobility and Minority Status.....	52
7. Representation of Grade Retention	53
8. Relationship between Grade Retention and Minority Status	54
9. Representation of Gender	55
10. Relationship between Gender and Factors Related to Dropping Out	56

ABSTRACT

ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS: A CASE STUDY

Marquessa Labrett Chappell, SSP

Western Carolina University (May 2011)

Director: Dr. Lori Unruh

High school dropout, or early school withdrawal, is a complex problem that can result from factors in all life domains. Specific factors commonly cited throughout literature in association with early school withdrawal include socioeconomic status, school mobility, and grade retention among others. There is also evidence suggesting that the factors influencing the decision to drop out of school for African American and Hispanic students may differ from the factors that influence White students. Research is conflicting as to specific gender differences among high school dropouts and with regard to the factors that influence such a decision between males and females. This study examined differences in self-reported reasons for prematurely withdrawing from school between minority status (African American and Hispanic) and non-minority status (White) students, as well as between males and females. An additional focus of this study was on school mobility and grade retention as they relate to minority status and impact high school dropout. Results indicate no significant results with regard to: minority status and high school dropout, minority status and factors related to high school dropout, school mobility and minority status, grade retention and minority status, or gender and factors related to high school dropout. However, as hypothesized, within this sample of high

school dropouts, there was a significantly higher proportion of males, students who have experienced school mobility and students who have been retained. These findings support much of the research which suggests that males tend to drop out of school at a higher rate than females and that both school mobility and grade retention are plausible predictors of high school dropout. However, no support was provided for minority status as being a significant factor.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Students' dropping out of high school, commonly referred throughout literature as high school dropout, is an increasingly large problem for schools in the United States. Across the nation, nearly one million students drop out of high school every year (Stillwell, 2009). Dropping out of high school has consequences for both the individual and society. Students who drop out of school are more likely to be unemployed, to earn less than those who graduate, to be on public assistance, and to end up in prison (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009; Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007; Gottlob, 2007). In 2007, the median income for individuals ages 18 to 65 who did not complete high school was approximately \$24,000 compared to approximately \$40,000 for those who had completed their high school education or some form of equivalency (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). The "dropout crisis" as it is commonly phrased, is a nationally recognized issue (Steinberg & Almeida, 2004). This concern was highlighted in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 which called for the identification of schools in which students were not achieving proficient levels of academic skills and/or graduating with a regular high school diploma in the standard number of years (Balfanz & Legters, 2008).

In the state of North Carolina, high school dropout is no less of a crisis. One third of North Carolina's students fail to complete high school, true of more than 38,135 students in the 2005 school year alone (Gottlob, 2007). Compared to the national average freshman graduation rate of 73.2%, North Carolina lags behind with a rate of 71.8% (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). Due to lost revenue from taxes, increased Medicaid

costs, and increased incarceration costs, it is estimated that over a 50 year period, North Carolina will spend 8.5 billion dollars on one year's class of drop outs (Gottlob, 2007).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, among students who drop out of school, African American and Hispanic students comprise a large portion of the population (Stillwell, 2009). As compared to Asian and White students, both African American and Hispanic students express higher levels of disengagement from academics, and when considering withdrawing from school, tend to place less emphasis on the importance of education (Griffin, 2002). The average graduation rate for African American students in any given year is approximately 60%, for Hispanic students 62%, and for White, non-Hispanic students it is 80% (Stillwell, 2009).

Unlike ethnic differences in graduation rates, there is controversy as to whether or not gender differences exist. Some studies cite gender differences, suggesting that males are more likely than females to both drop out of high school before receiving a diploma, as well as report completing eight or fewer years of schooling (Sum & Harrington, 2003). However, other researchers suggest that this pattern, as observed over the past 30 years, is diminishing (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). When examining changes over time, it is important to recognize differences in the definitions of dropout terms. The status dropout rate is a measure of the percentage of all individuals who are not currently enrolled in high school or who do not hold an equivalent degree. Event dropout rates describe the proportion of students who drop out in a single year (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). Event dropout rates in 2007 reported by the National Center for Education Statistics showed no measureable difference between males and females (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). However when analyzing status dropout rates as well as

completion rates, which take into account all drop outs in a particular age range, the Center for Education Statistics reported a measureable difference between males and females with males being more likely to drop out of school (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009).

Although numerous studies have attempted to identify risk factors for dropping out of school, the process by which students become dropouts is still vague (Hess & Copeland, 2001). Research suggests that patterns of dropping out significantly shift when gender and ethnicity are accounted for (Christle et al., 2007; Hess & Copeland, 2001). Most research on dropouts has focused on characteristics that precede the culminating process of dropping out. To better understand the dropout process, the personal attributes of the student, as well as contextual factors that prevent students from graduating high school should be examined in relation to both gender and ethnicity

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Developmental Perspective

While the severe consequences of high school dropout on ensuing emotional functioning and adaptation are well documented, high school dropout is defined not by psychological criteria but rather, educational and legal standards. Even still, research on the conditions that lead to high school dropout, for example, academic failure and disruptive behavior, suggest that particular interpersonal and cognitive factors in development may serve as important mediators (Cairns, Cairns & Neckerman, 1989). Based on this assumption it can be postulated that when severe behavioral and achievement problems monopolize a child's school adaptation, he or she is at an increased risk for becoming stuck in a developmental cycle eventually leading to early school withdrawal.

Although individual factors (cognitive and interpersonal) are known to have an influence on the developmental trajectory of early school withdrawal, it is important also to acknowledge the contexts in which the process occurs. High school dropout does not occur free from the social contexts in which the phenomenon is observed but rather is revealed across both microsocial (e.g., selectively choosing a deviant peer group with which potential dropouts identify) and macrosocial levels (e.g., higher dropout rates in contexts where academic achievement is not valued- inner city and lower SES homes) (Cairns et al., 1989). Based on this perspective, we can assume that the process by which students decide to drop out of school may vary with gender and minority status

depending on the broader social context in which the incident is studied (Cairns et al., 1989).

Theoretical Framework

Rumberger (2004) presented two frameworks that focus on different views for understanding the high school dropout crisis. The first, an individual perspective, focuses on the individual attributes of the student such as his or her values, attitudes, and behaviors. The second, the institutional perspective, focuses on the contexts in which the students live and interact such as families, schools and communities. In this review of literature, I will cover both individual as well as contextual variables as they relate to the phenomenon of high school dropout and as reported in the research.

Reasons for Dropping Out: Individual Factors

The high school dropout rate is a complex problem for which there is no simple answer. The personal as well as economic consequences due to the failure to complete high school have been extensively studied and documented (Gottlob, 2007), however debate still exists as to which factors best predict high school dropout and to what degree. Research suggests that, of all the factors contributing to the decision to drop out of high school, personal characteristics of the individual student have the strongest effect (Lan & Lanthier, 2003). Commonly cited reasons for dropping out include poor academic achievement and grade retention (Allensworth, 2005), student engagement and motivation (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009), and behavioral problems (Christle et al., 2007; Owen, Rosch, Muschkin, Alexander, & Wyant, 2008). Students who are experiencing difficulty in school, becoming disengaged, exhibiting behavioral problems, and performing poorly, are at an increased risk for dropping out of school (Roderick, 1993).

Frequently students face more than one risk factor and, as the factors amass, the potential risk for dropping out increases. Therefore, the decision to drop out of high school does not happen abruptly, but instead is the end result of a long term process of disengagement from school (Christle et al., 2007; Princiotta & Reyna, 2009; Roderick, 1993).

Academic achievement. Academic failure has been cited as one of the best known predictors of high school dropout (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Christle et al., 2007; Kaplan, Peck, & Kaplan, 1997; Lan & Lanthier 2003; Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). According to Rumberger (2004) educational achievement depends heavily on both academic stability and academic performance. Not only is academic performance a strong predictor of high school dropout but it also has direct effects on later decisions to return to school. The higher the academic performance of a student is at the time of withdrawal, the more likely he or she is to return to school and to receive a high school diploma or some equivalency (Kaplan et al., 1997; Kolstad & Kaufman, 1989). Both the attributes of dropouts as well as the reasons they give for dropping out, highlight academic failure as a key factor in early school withdrawal (Roderick, 1993).

Poor school performance is indicated frequently by standardized achievement tests, overall grade point average (GPA), and or failure in core classes (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Finn, 1989; Kaplan et al., 1997). In a longitudinal study for the Consortium on Chicago School Research, data was collected on the effects of academic achievement (failure in core courses and number of credits completed during freshman year) on future dropout. The “on track indicator” (combination of both predictors), was shown to be a strong factor in high school graduation. According to the study, “on track students” were 3.5 times more likely to

graduate from high school on time than were “off track students”. A strong correlation between course failure and overall GPA was found. GPA was cited as the strongest sole predictor of future high school graduation (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

School performance is related to measures of self-esteem as well as self-concept (Finn, 1989). Kaplan et al. (1997) proposed a model in which low self-esteem, as a result of poor academic achievement, creates a negative impression of school. In order to feel better about themselves, students who fail academically adopt attitudes and manifest antisocial behaviors that protect against these negative feelings. Academic failures damage students’ self-perceptions both directly and indirectly, causing students to disengage from school in order to avoid embarrassment and maintain feelings of self-worth (Griffin, 2002). Decreased self-esteem as a result of poor academic performance leads to a heightened risk of dropout through the increase of known predictors such as absenteeism and disruptive behaviors (Finn, 1989). Students who drop out tend to have low self-esteem and an external locus of control (Lan & Lanthier 2003). Students who continually experience repeated failures in spite of effort, begin to feel they have no control over the outcomes in their lives. As a result, both performance and motivation are impaired (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Lan & Lanthier, 2003).

Grade retention. Retention rates have grown substantially over the past two decades (Hauser et al., 2000). Often viewed as an indicator of previous school performance, grade retention is consistently cited in literature as a factor that increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school (Allensworth, 2005; Roderick, 1993; Rumberger, 2004). Grade retention has been cited as one of the strongest negative predictors of educational attainment (Ou & Reynolds, 2009).

Dropping out of school is viewed as the consequence of a variety of factors including a weak attachment to school from repeated failures resulting from poor school performance (Christle et al., 2007; Finn, 1989). Unlike negative experiences that increase the likelihood for early school withdrawal, positive experiences such as academic success decrease the likelihood of dropping out by promoting engagement and positive attitudes toward school (Finn, 1989). From this view, retention increases the risk of dropping out by lowering self-esteem and laying the foundation for negative attitudes toward school. Moreover, such retention may produce preconceived adult expectations that could increase the risk for early school withdrawal (Ou & Reynolds, 2008). Although it is likely that some of the relationship between retention and dropout can be explained by differences in school performance such as grades and attendance, Roderick (1993) found that even after statistically controlling for both background as well as school performance, those students who had repeated grades were substantially more likely to drop out than were those students who had never been retained.

Students who experience retention are likely to be overage for grade. Being overage for grade both stigmatizes students and may allow them the eligibility to leave school (at the age of 16 years) while they are still in middle school or during the already difficult transition to high school (Roderick, 1993). Even when controlling for both grades and attendance, being overage for grade level has been shown to significantly increase the probability of dropping out of school (Roderick, 1993). Research suggests that retention rates are much higher for members of minority groups than for the White majority (Hauser et al., 2000). In an analysis of social promotion and grade retention it was found, that by age 9, the odds of “grade retardation” among African American and

Hispanic youth are 50 percent larger than among White youth (Hauser et al., 2000). For those students who are low achieving and already showing signs of disengagement, the immediate impact felt by retention may be a determining factor in their decision to drop out of school (Allensworth, 2005).

Student engagement and motivation. A student's ability to identify with the school community has direct consequences on future academic achievement and ultimately affects whether he or she will remain in school (Griffin, 2002). Students who have developed a sense of belonging in their schools are less likely to drop out (Christle et al., 2007). High school dropout is often cited as a long-term process of disengagement (Christle et al., 2007; Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). Low motivation, as a result of prior academic failures, has been shown to have significant effects on dropout behavior (Kaplan et al., 1997). Even after controlling for both academic achievement and student background, student engagement continues to be a strong predictor of dropping out (Rumberger, 2004). Students who develop an attachment to their school are more academically successful and therefore less likely to drop out (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). When reporting reasons for dropping out of school, students frequently cite disinterest in school as a significant factor (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009).

A common measure of student engagement is absenteeism (Roderick, 1993; Rumberger, 2004). Attendance is highly predictive of both course failure as well as high school graduation (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Ou & Reynolds, 2009). In research on ninth grade indicators of performance, it was found that ninth grade attendance rate was "8 times more predictive of course failure than eighth grade test scores" (Allensworth & Easton, 2007, p.16). When students are not in school, they miss out on educational

learning opportunities that consequently impact their academic performance. As missed days begin to accumulate, students are affected both socially and academically. Students who drop out of high school are more likely to report feelings of alienation than are students who remain in school (Kaplan et al., 1997). Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, Lan and Lanthier (2003) studied the developmental pattern of students who dropped out over a four year period. Results from this study indicate that students who eventually dropped out of school experienced a gradual deterioration in academic performance, relationship with teachers, perceptions of school, and motivation for school work and had furthermore become increasingly withdrawn from school prior to deciding to drop out. The study outlined a decline in engagement and interest in the school values and activities (Lan & Lanthier, 2003).

Disruptive behavior. Disruptive behavior can be described as disorderly conduct or conflict with school personnel that warrants disciplinary action. The relationship between early school withdrawal and delinquent behavior has been consistently documented in research (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Christle et al., 2007; Finn, 1989; Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, & Ritter 1990; Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). Poor academic achievement and course failure are both directly associated with student behavior in high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Nonetheless, deviant behaviors alone, even when controlling for the mediating effects of academic achievement, remain significant (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). In a recent study investigating how high schools with the lowest dropout rates differ from high schools with the highest dropout rates, it was found that the board of education violation rates (i.e., student violations that resulted in a disciplinary action of expulsion, suspension, or alternative placement), were significantly higher for

schools with the highest dropout rates (Christle et al., 2007). Consistent with these findings, a study using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth- 1997 also found suspension from school to be a strong predictor of high school dropout (Suh et al., 2007). Criminal behaviors taking place outside of school such as drug and alcohol use are related to early school withdrawal (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). Frequently, misconduct requires suspension and or expulsion which, in addition, harms academic achievement and promotes disengagement (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). When interviewed, dropouts reported that frequently the decision to drop out of school was “made for them” due to dismissal, suspension, or expulsion (Roderick, 1993). Delinquent behaviors, such as fighting or acting out, further hinder a student’s ability to learn and in turn contribute to decisions to leave school.

The frustration self-esteem model as outlined by Finn (1989) is often cited when referring to a developmental process by which students come to drop out of school. It is hypothesized that frustration or embarrassment as a result of constant academic failure leads to a lowered self-esteem and or self-concept. Viewing the school as the cause of pain, students begin to act out. Finn explains that the oppositional behavior may take the form of deviant or delinquent acts. Misbehavior is viewed as a way of coping with one’s damaged ego and a means through which one may gain the approval of other deviant peers. This postulation is substantiated by other research that highlights high levels of aggressiveness in high school dropouts and further suggests that students who drop out of school tend to affiliate with persons who were also at risk for dropping out (Cairns et al., 1989).

Reasons for Dropping Out: Contextual Factors

High school dropout is a convoluted problem, and in addition to the personal characteristics of the individual student, it is important to acknowledge contextual variables that contribute. In doing so, the environments in which students live as well as the circumstances and situations that surround their existence should be recognized. Contexts, as opposed to individuals, need to be highlighted (Rumberger, 2004).

Family background. The influence of family background on school success is undeniable (Hess & Copeland, 2001; Roderick, 1993; Rumberger, 2004). It has strong and direct effects on academic achievement and has been recognized as the greatest contributor to school success (Rumberger, 2004). Families are fundamental socialization institutions that provide experiences to children that affect their lives indefinitely (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000).

Socioeconomic background of the family. The socioeconomic background of a family commonly measured by parent income or education level has consistently been reported in literature as the most influential factor in determining whether a student will drop out of school (Christle et al., 2007; Kaplan et al., 1997; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Suh et al., 2007). Low socioeconomic status has proven to be a significant and powerful predictor in dropout over and above the effects of academic achievement (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Students from underprivileged families have a higher likelihood of being retained in school and of falling behind in school later on (Roderick 1993). As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2007 the dropout rate for students living in low-income families was approximately 10 times greater than that of students from high-income families (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). Likewise, familial home

ownership is associated with an increased likelihood of high school completion (Hauser, Simmons, & Pager, 2000). Research highlights a significant relationship between dropout rate and socioeconomic status (Christle et al., 2007). A study using the percentage of students enrolled in the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program, found that schools with high dropout rates had approximately three times more students who were receiving free and reduced lunch than did schools with low dropout status (Christle, et al., 2007).

Family relationships. The relationship between parent and child is an interaction within family dynamics that deserves attention. According to Rumberger et al. (1990) compared to their peers, dropouts have a higher likelihood of having a parent with a permissive parenting style. These parents are less likely to provide encouragement or parental monitoring (Roderick, 1993). In addition, involvement of parents in their children's academics, support of their children's autonomy, and high expectations for their children's education are all positively related to academic success (Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Rumberger et al., 1990; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). When investigating different coping styles of high school graduates and dropouts, Hess and Copeland (2001) found that students who reported "family interactions" as a coping strategy were more likely to graduate high school than those who did not.

Parents' educational background. A parent's educational background is closely associated with the educational expectations that they hold for their children (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Rumberger et al., 1990). Hauser et al. (2000) found that post-secondary education of parents significantly increases the likelihood that a student will graduate from high school. Each additional year of a mother's post secondary-education

results in approximately a 10% decline in the chances of their child dropping out of high school (Hauser et al., 2000). A parent's involvement in his or her child's education (e.g. help with homework, involvement in school activities and relationships with teachers and the school community) has direct effects on a student's drop out behavior. Students who experience more parental academic involvement are more likely to graduate from high school (Ou & Reynolds, 2009; Rumberger et al., 1990; Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). Moreover, research has highlighted that after performing poorly; an important factor in whether a student remains in school is the involvement of the parents in their child's education (Rumberger, 1990).

The effects of family income and parental education are often explained through the human capital theory. In the human capital theory, behavior is seen as being driven by the economic self-interest of individuals. With respect to the educational outcomes of children, parents are viewed as "gate keepers", as either providing or withholding opportunities. Human capital theory posits that parents make choices about the time, effort and resources they will devote to their children based on their means, income and capital. As a result; children's thoughts and ideas about education and the importance thereof are affected (Haveman & Wolfe, 1994). In addition, children from underprivileged families, those with parents who are more likely to be managing multiple responsibilities may, as a result, receive less parental interaction and or encouragement, thus impacting their educational attainment.

Environment. The environments in which children live and go to school have significant effects on both education and quality of life. Dropout rates differ from region to region (Cataldi & KeywalRamani, 2009; Hauser et al., 2000). According to the

National Center for Education Statistics, in 2007, both the South and West regions had approximately 10% higher dropout rates than did the Northeast or Midwest; of all high school dropouts, 68.9% lived in either the South or the West (Cataldi & KeywalRamani, 2009). A drastic contrast between central cities and suburban rings has also been pointed out by Hauser et al. (2000). In their study of 167,400 youth from the ages of 14 to 24, it was found that central cities consistently had higher dropout rates when compared to suburban areas.

Poverty and school failure are strongly related (Christle et al., 2007; Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). In 2004 there were between 900 and 1,000 high schools in the country in which the likelihood that a student would graduate from high school was a mere 50% chance (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). These schools were found in a concentrated area of major cities and a subset of states. Poverty was found to be the strongest correlate of “poor promoting power”, a label given to schools who failed to graduate 50% of the student body (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Neighborhoods with a high concentration of poverty tend to have a large quantity of schools with low graduation rates (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). Cristle et al. (2007) found that compared to schools with high dropout rates, schools with low dropout rates employed administrators with approximately five years more experience. The imbalance of allocated resources between low promoting and high promoting schools is obvious, yet in some areas with a high concentration of low promoting schools, students have no choice but to attend a school in which graduating is not the norm (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

School mobility. Students change schools for a variety of reasons thus making research on the educational impact of such change difficult. Residential moves do not

necessarily include school changes, although frequently this is the case. Families choose to move for a variety of reasons including financial difficulties, changes in the family dynamics such as divorce or remarriage, and job relocation; however, some families choose to move in search of better schools and educational opportunities for their children (Xu, Hannaway & D'Souza, 2009). Although these “positive” moves are acknowledged, the focus of the present research is on student school mobility, as it negatively impacts academic achievement and increases the risk for school dropout. Student school mobility is defined as “students making non- promotional school changes” (Xu et al., 2009 p.1).

Research supports negative consequences associated with school mobility such as high rates of absenteeism (Allensworth & Easton, 2007), low math and reading achievement scores, poor school performance, and later well being (Reynolds, Chen, & Herbers, 2009), low educational attainment (Ou & Reynolds, 2008) and ultimately high school dropout (Reynolds et al., 2009; Rumberger & Larson, 1998).

School mobility contributes to a wide variety of negative outcomes for students, both academic and social. Transferring schools introduces inconsistencies in learning environments and causes disruptions with peer relationships. When a child moves from one school to another, there is no assurance that the subject matter, curriculum, or school expectations will be constant. Such discontinuity, in addition to adjustment difficulties, can lead to poor school performance and ultimately impede learning (Reynolds et al., 2009). Beyond the strictly academic effects of school mobility, mobile students must contend with adjusting to a new school environment both psychologically and socially (Xu et al., 2009).

Although most empirical studies investigating the effects of school mobility on school dropout have not focused on the timing of mobility, high school dropout has been associated with both elementary and high school mobility (Reynolds et al., 2009). In a longitudinal study using a nationally representative sample of a kindergarten cohort, it was found that although the structure of American schools sometimes encourages school mobility, during the first four years of schooling, family decisions play the largest role in determining school moves (Burkam, Lee, & Dwyer, 2009). It was found that just over half of America's kindergartners remained in the same school free of transfer by the end of third grade. Of the children who changed schools, mobility rates were similar for males and females, however, varied considerably for different socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Consistent with previous research, Burkham et al. (2009) concluded that being from a lower socioeconomic status family and or being African American increased the risk for school mobility. Compared to nearly 60% of White and Asian third graders, only 45% of African American third graders were enrolled in the same school they had attended in kindergarten.

Not surprisingly, the frequency of school change also has significant impacts on early school withdrawal. Recurrent mobility is associated with significantly higher dropout rates (Ou & Reynolds 2008; Reynolds et al., 2009). Reynolds et al. (2009) found that with each additional school move, the probability for dropping out of school increases by an average of 8.4 percentage points. Recovering from a single move can be difficult for a child; however for those children who make multiple moves, the compounded effects of such changes over time become severe (Xu et al., 2009).

Students who make non-promotional school changes differ from those who do not (Xu et al., 2009). At risk and low performing students are often disproportionately represented in the mobile group (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). In addition, there are many demographic factors that place students at risk for school mobility such as minority status, low-income, limited English proficiency, and parental education (Xu et al., 2009; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). In a study on the prevalence, trends, and effects of school mobility among middle school students in North Carolina, it was found that while mobility rates for White students remained stable across four cohorts from 1997 to 2000 at approximately 29%, African American students became increasingly mobile (Xu et al., 2009). African Americans in the first cohort exhibited school mobility rates 18 percentage points higher than that of Whites and in the fourth cohort, the gap widened to 21 percentage points. School mobility rates for Hispanic students although relatively high, actually showed a decrease of 4 percentage points over time (Xu et al., 2009). Confirming prior research (Rumberger & Larson, 1998), Xu et al. (2009) found for all cohorts, that African American students had the highest mobility rate followed by Hispanics and White students. Moreover, when moving, African American students were more likely to move to lower quality schools, this was not the case however, for Hispanic or White students.

Being of minority status is not the only factor that influences school mobility. Regardless of ethnicity, students eligible for free/reduced lunch, those who have limited English proficiency, and those who receive special education services, are more likely than their peers to experience school mobility (Xu et al., 2009). Unlike their financially

stable classmates, students from low income households are also more likely when moving; to move to lower quality schools (Xu et al., 2009).

Economic responsibilities. Youth who are making an early transition into adult roles are at an increased likelihood for dropping out of high school (Apel, Bushway, Paternoster, Brame, & Sweeten, 2008; Roderick, 1993; Rumberger, 2004). There is a vast amount of research outlining the effects of paid employment on academic achievement, delinquent behavior and high school dropout (Apel et al., 2008; Rumberger, 2004; Warren & Cataldi, 2006). However, research reports different effects for intensive versus moderate work (Apel et al., 2008; Lee & Staff, 2007; Warren & Cataldi, 2006). In addition, there is debate as to whether or not observed benefits or consequences are in fact due to differences in SES and other contextual variables or possibly may be attributed to pre-existing personal characteristics as opposed to being a direct effect of the hours worked (Lee & Staff, 2007). There is general consistency in the finding that intensively employed (i.e., more than 20 hours per week) students are more likely to drop out of school (Apel et al., 2008; Warren & Cataldi, 2006). Dropouts often cite working too many hours as a factor that contributes to early school withdrawal and consistently attribute their need to acquire a job, to financial problems in the home (Meeker, Edmonson, & Fisher, 2009).

Warren and Cataldi (2006) found that students who work 20 hours or more a week are about twice as likely to drop out of school compared to their peers who worked less intensively. However, those students who did not work at all looked more like intensive workers in that they exhibited lower grades and were less involved in school than their peers who were considered moderate workers. In comparing the likelihood of

dropping out of school between non-workers (never having held a job) and intensive workers (those working greater than 20 hours), Lee and Staff (2007), found that intensive workers were 1.5 times more likely to drop out of high school.

The impact of intensive employment in high school, however negative on academic achievement and school success, has been documented as having positive consequences on delinquent behavior. According to Apel et al. (2008) the transition to formal work coincides with a significant and powerful decrease in both delinquency and school suspension. Even after controlling for selection, the results indicated that intensive work leads to both decreases in deviant behavior and increases in school dropout. For high school students, the decision to work and to work intensively varies by educational objectives, socioeconomic background and previous academic achievement (Lee & Staff, 2007). However, the effect of intensive work on drop out behavior is significant (Apel et al., 2008; Lee & Staff, 2007; Roderick, 1993).

Another economic factor that is commonly associated with high school dropout is school age pregnancy (Manlove, 1998; Meeker et al., 2009; Roderick, 1993; Upchurch, 1993). Teenage mothers have lower educational attainment than other mothers (Upchurch, 1993). Much like high school dropout, teenage pregnancy is affected by both family background as well as individual factors. Both family structure and socioeconomic background are related to school age pregnancy. Similarly school factors such as high grades and test scores, academic engagement, and future college aspirations are all associated with a decreased risk for teenage pregnancy (Manlove, 1998). In attempting to define the variables that prevent students from graduating high school, Meeker et al. (2009) surveyed and interviewed recent high school dropouts. Of the 158

participants, over one quarter listed pregnancy and or parenting a child as a factor that disabled them from graduating high school. However, Manlove (1998) suggested that although there is a positive relationship between dropping out of high school and the risk of school age pregnancy, a large proportion of teens that become pregnant do so after dropping out of high school. Therefore, the reduced educational attainment collectively reported for teenage mothers may be due to their disengagement prior to pregnancy. A substantial amount of research supports the finding that the observable impact of teenage pregnancy on academic achievement and attainment may partly be the result of underlying socioeconomic factors and influenced by a set of unobservable variables much like that of high school dropout (Manlove, 1998; Rumberger, 2004; Upchurch, 1993).

High School Dropout and Ethnic Differences

Dropping out of high school results from an interaction among various factors. Although there is no sole predictor of high school dropout and students of every ethnicity are at risk, certain subgroups are at a higher risk than others. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, over a 35 year span from 1972-2007, the percentage of Hispanic students who were dropouts was consistently higher than that of African Americans and Whites. Among ethnic groups considered, Whites had the lowest dropout rates (5.3%) followed by African Americans (8.4%) and then Hispanics (21.4%) (Cataldi & KeywalRamani, 2009). In subsequent sections, research on the differences among groups in relation to the known factors associated with high school dropout, will be outlined.

School factors. Differences across ethnic groups of factors known to contribute to high school dropout are apparent. Some of these factors such as grade retention and academic disidentification are directly related to school.

Students who are able to identify with their school and their academics are at an increased likelihood for completing school (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Christle et al., 2007; Griffin, 2002; Rumberger, 2004). Both African American and Hispanic students, as compared to White students, tend to suffer academic disidentification at a increased rate and, as an outcome, value education less when considering school withdrawal (Griffin, 2002). One study, focused on the relationship between academic disidentification and school completion in minority groups, examined a cross sectional, random sample of high school students (grades 9 -12) (Griffin, 2002). It was hypothesized that the relationship between GPA, an indicator of academic achievement, and school persistence, would differ across ethnic groups. Furthermore, it was expected that GPA would be a stronger predictor for remaining in school for Asian and White students than for Black and Hispanic students. The hypothesis was confirmed, illustrating a statistically significant interaction effect for GPA and race such that GPA was a weaker predictor of school persistence for both African American and Hispanic students in comparison to Asian and White students (Griffin, 2002). This finding supports the literature on academic disidentification and suggests that African American and Hispanic students tend to place less importance on academic achievement than either Asian or White students (Griffin, 2002).

Family and environmental factors. The relationship between ethnicity and high school dropout can be explained at least partially by the differences in residential location

as well as family and socioeconomic background (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Hauser et al., 2000). In examining the relationship of ethnicity, family background, and high school dropout, Hauser et al. (2000) analyzed population surveys of 167,400 youth who were at an increased risk for high school dropout. It was found that among ethnic groups, Whites were advantaged in terms of parental education, followed by African Americans and Hispanics respectively. In addition there were significant differences in household income and home ownership. Approximately 85% of White students came from families in which their home was owned compared to about 65% of Hispanics and 55% of African Americans (Hauser et al., 2000). Another difference within ethnic groups is the likelihood of being employed while in high school. A study analyzing the effects of paid employment on high school dropout found that African American students were significantly less likely than their White peers to be employed during their sophomore to senior years in high school (Warren & Cataldi, 2006). The specific intensity of such employment (i.e., the numbers of hours worked) was not explored.

The location in which students live and attend school also has effects on their academic achievement and school success. The south, a region known for having high dropout rates, is home to more than half of all African American (Hauser et al., 2000). Research further suggests that minorities are more likely than Whites to live in central cities another area known for high dropout rates (Hauser et al., 2000). Furthermore, school mobility, a factor associated with school dropout, is the highest for minority students (Xu et al., 2009). According to Balfanz and Legters (2004) 46% of African American students and 39% of Hispanic students attend schools where graduation is not the norm. Schools with a high percentage of minority students are 5 times more likely to

have weak promoting power (50% fewer seniors than freshman as measured four years earlier) than schools with a majority White population (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

Confirming these results, an additional study on schools with the most significant dropout problems, found that those high schools that had higher dropout rates were also the same ones that had lower percentages of White students (Christle et al., 2007).

Although previously outlined research suggests that Hispanic and African American students are subject to many of the same risks associated with early high school withdrawal, it is assumed that the influence of such factors vary with relation to beliefs, values, and culture and therefore are manifest in dissimilar and separate ways with respect to ethnicity.

Hispanic students. Hispanic students comprise a large proportion of the high school dropout population in the United States (Cataldi & KeywalRamani, 2009; Hauser et al., 2000). In 2007 approximately 37% of Hispanic students born outside the United States were considered high school dropouts, compared to a substantially lower number for those who born in the United States (Cataldi & KeywalRamani, 2009). However, regardless of immigrant status, the odds of Hispanic student dropping out of high school are 1.4 times as large as their White non- Hispanic peers (Hauser et al., 2000). A study examining early high school dropouts, (those who left school prior to the 10th grade) found the proportion of Hispanic high school dropouts to be twice that of White students (Olatunji, 2005). Not unlike other ethnic groups, the issue of high school dropout within the Hispanic culture is a complicated problem. Because of the heterogeneity of the Hispanic population in the United States, much research on high school dropout is inconsistent (Nesman, 2007). Not ambiguous however, are the correlations of risk

factors such as English language learner, single parent home, poverty, and segregation, with an increased risk for dropout (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Rodriguez, 2008).

For Hispanic students specifically, acculturative stress and loss of social supports due to migration often present barriers to academic success (Olatunji, 2005). Oftentimes, for the Hispanic student, a sense of belonging at school is absent. Rodriguez (2008) explains that “a significant number of students go through their day-to-day experiences feeling invisible, anonymous, ignored, and even dehumanized” (p. 260). In a participatory study of Latino student dropout, Nesman (2007) found negative interactions with adults and lack of support for progress in school to be the most frequently reported reasons for considering high school dropout. Many Latino students attributed the decision to drop out to a lack of caring on the part of the adults in their lives, emphasizing both low expectations and discriminatory discipline as significant factors. Students explained that they often rebelled against administration and authorities they perceived as treating Hispanic students unfairly, furthermore citing “getting into trouble” as a powerful contributor to dropping out (Nesman, 2007). As a result, association with deviant peers and lack of motivation for school are significantly increased for students of Hispanic background (Kaplan et al., 1997). When questioned about other factors that contributed to high school dropout, Hispanic students explained that because their families were relatively inexperienced with education, they received little support and limited communication from the school community (Nesman, 2007). For students who are recent immigrants, linguistic issues and a lack of language assistance in schools have been linked to dropout (Nesman, 2007).

Of late, educational policy, such as the No Child Left behind Act of 2001, has been highlighted as contributing to the high rates of high school dropout among the Hispanic population. Outsized inner city schools, those comprised of a large minority population in particular, are feeling enormous pressure imposed by high stakes testing. As a result, schools are rigorously preparing students for a test rather than promoting academic engagement and developing relationships, two factors known to be especially important for the school success of Hispanic students (Rodriguez, 2008).

In addition to other cultural effects, Hispanic students in particular are highly likely to take on adult roles that may interfere with their ability to continue school (Nesman, 2007; Olatunji, 2005). Often, family responsibilities such as assisting with housework, providing child care, and serving as translators for parents, take priority over school-related activities. These responsibilities often limit the Hispanic students' involvement in school and in-turn increase their likelihood for dropping out (Nesman, 2007). In many traditional Hispanic families, children share the responsibility of supporting and providing for the family (Meeker et al., 2009; Olatunji, 2005). Work, not school, is often viewed as a normative experience in the Hispanic culture and frequently fulfills the cultural expectation to contribute (Olatunji, 2005). The effects of paid employment, much like in other ethnic groups, vary depending on work intensity as well as type of job (Olatunji, 2005). However, unlike their White peers where work experience is divided equally between males and females, for youth of Mexican origin, over 60% of employed status students were male (Olatunji, 2005).

African American students. African American students are disproportionately represented among students who drop out of high school (Lan & Lanthier, 2003). A

variety of socioeconomic family background factors previously outlined and associated with high school dropout often plague African American students. Compared to their peers, African Americans are more likely to live in districts and even regions that are known for having the highest dropout rates (Hauser et al., 2000). Compared to other ethnic groups, African Americans are most likely to attend schools where graduation is not the norm, and are more likely than Whites to be age 19 or older while still in high school, increasing their risk for dropping out (Hauser et al., 2000).

African American students are notoriously disadvantaged in terms of both parental education and household income, common measures of socioeconomic status. Home ownership, which has been associated with a 30% decline in the odds of dropout, is lower for African Americans than any other ethnic group (Hauser et al., 2000). African American students are more likely than White students to live in single parent homes, in households where the mother is the head, and in homes where the household head is unemployed, all of which are associated with an increased risk for high school dropout (Hauser et al., 2000).

From 1973 to 1994 African American high school students saw an increase of female headship from 38% to 54% and among Whites this increase was 11% to 16%. In addition, compared to 11% of White students, 31% of African American students lived in households whose head was unemployed (Hauser et al., 2000).

The relationship between school success, cognitive achievement, and socioeconomic status, has been long documented. The long history of disproportionate representation within the lower socioeconomic classes has undoubtedly contributed to negative academic patterns seen in the school achievement of African Americans (Steele,

1997). African American students tend to identify with academics to lesser extent than do their White peers (Griffin, 2002). In an effort to protect one's self esteem, students attempt to discredit the importance of academic achievement so as to alleviate any negative self perceptions. This process, commonly referred to as academic disidentification (Steele, 1997) hinders African American students from developing a sense of belonging in school and in turn, has direct consequences on their future school success (Griffin, 2002). In addition to academic disidentification, African American students must compete with "stereotype threat". Defined by Steele (1997) "the event of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in, that has relevance to one's self definition" (p.661). In a school domain, for which a negatively associated label exists, African Americans must contend with the possibility of conforming to the stereotype, or being regarded or criticized in terms of it (Steele, 1997). Steele (1997) explains that the possibility of conforming to the negative stereotype becomes self- threatening, and facilitates further disengagement and disidentification from academics and ultimately school.

High School Dropout and Gender Differences

Research on gender differences in high school dropout is controversial. There are both studies that highlight significant gender differences in dropout rates (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Hauser et al., 2000; Kaplan et al., 1997; Sum & Harrington, 2003) and studies that either, found no significant differences with respect to gender (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009; Lan & Lanthier, 2003) or found a significant difference such that low SES and being female, increased ones risk of high school dropout (Battin-Pearson et

al., 2000). The statistics from public high schools, as collected and analyzed by Sum and Harrington (2003) revealed that from 1995- 2003, an eight year span, males were considerably more likely than females to withdraw from high school without receiving a regular high school diploma. The ratio was 100 females per 136 males (Sum & Harrington, 2003). Conversely, in measuring those students who dropped out of school in the 2007 school year, the national education statistics reported no measurable differences in dropout rates for males and females (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). However, the status dropout rate for 2007, which measures the percentage of individuals who are not enrolled in high school and who do not have a high school credential, was 9.9% for males and 7.7% for females, confirming the finding that males were more likely than females to be high school dropouts (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). This finding, although not representative of dropouts in a single year, provides a more expansive view of the dropout problem.

Although research regarding gender differences with respect to high school dropout has been conflicting, many studies report differences in areas known to contribute to school success. Allensworth and Easton (2007) in their study of course grades, failures, and attendance in the Chicago Public Schools, pointed out that in their freshman year, boys were more likely than girls to have very low GPA's. The same study found that boy's failure and absence rates were higher than girls while their rates of studying were lower (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Highlighting other gender differences, research on the change in the perceptions of school and self after school withdrawal suggests that, of those students who drop out of high school, males hold more positive perceptions about themselves and report better relationships with peers than

females (Lan & Lanthier, 2003). In addition to differences in factors related to academic achievement, literature has also documented variables associated with high school dropout that appear to be specific to female students. In an attempt to gain a clearer picture of the barriers to school success faced by high school students, Meeker et al. (2009) surveyed 158 current and recent students from general educational development (GED) programs. Of the 158 participants, 41 listed pregnancy and parenting as a factor that prevented them from completing high school. This was the most frequently reported response and not surprisingly, of the 41 participants, 34 were female; only seven were male.

Statement of the Problem

High school dropout is a national concern. In light of the most recent economic declines and skyrocketing unemployment rates, obtaining a job has become increasingly more difficult. Due to an abundance of workers and a lack of employment positions, America's workforce has become more competitive than ever. With an increased demand for highly educated employees, high school dropouts are often in a disadvantageous position. The effects of high school dropout however, are not only felt at the individual level; the public costs associated with high school dropout are staggering. High school dropouts are more likely than those with higher levels of educational attainment, to be living in poverty, to be in need of public assistance, and to be incarcerated, further straining the economic stability of the state (Gottlob, 2007).

High school dropout is a complex problem and results from factors in all life domains including both individual as well as contextual. Factors commonly cited throughout the literature in association with early school withdrawal include: academic

achievement, attendance and grade retention; student engagement, motivation; behavior problems, socioeconomic status, parental involvement and education, school mobility, school location, the home environment, and economic responsibilities such as employment (Allensworth, 2005; Apel et al., 2008; Christle et al., 2007; Kaplan et al., 1997; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Princiotta & Reyna, 2009; Suh et al., 2007). Additionally, students may be forced to contend with more than one risk factor compounding the effects and therefore increasing the risk for dropping out. The decision to drop out of school is not made after one failed quiz or a single discipline referral but rather is a gradual process of disengagement from school (Christle et al., 2007; Princiotta & Reyna, 2009; Roderick, 1993).

Among those students who drop out of school, African American and Hispanic students comprise a large portion of the population (Cataldi & KeywalRamani, 2009). African American and Hispanic students are more likely to be disadvantaged in terms of parental education and household income and are more likely to face barriers above and beyond that of non-minority students (Hauser et al., 2000). They are more likely to reside in areas known to have high dropout rates and are disproportionately represented in some of the lowest achieving schools in America (Hauser et al., 2000). Beyond having higher rates of dropout, there is also evidence suggesting that the factors influencing the decision to drop out of school for African American and Hispanic students may differ from the factors that influence White students (Christle et al., 2007; Griffin, 2002; Olatunji, 2005; Steele, 1997). However more information is needed to confirm these findings and to better understand how these differences impact individual groups. Two salient factors commonly cited in association with high school dropout are school

mobility and grade retention (Allensworth, 2005; Burkam et al., 2009; Reynolds et al., 2009; Roderick, 1993; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). In addition to increasing the likelihood of high school dropout, research further indicates significant variability in the occurrence of such factors between ethnic groups, citing a higher probability for minority students as compared to non-minority students, to experience both grade retention and school mobility (Burkam et al., 2009; Hauser et al., 2000). Such prominent factors as they occur across ethnicities and relate to high school dropout warrant further investigation.

Historically males have dropped out more frequently than females however some studies suggest that this trend may be diminishing (Cataldi & KewalRamani, 2009). Currently, due to conflicting data, it is still unclear whether or not gender differences in high school dropout rates exist. However, previous studies have highlighted differences in reasons reported for dropping out of school between males and females and have consistently outlined a gender gap in academic achievement, one of the most commonly associated factors with high school dropout, citing females with higher performance (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Further research examining these differences is needed.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships of minority status, school mobility, grade retention, and gender as they relate to high school dropout. An additional focus of this research is on the differences in self-reported reasons for prematurely withdrawing from school across three ethnic groups including African American, Hispanic and White as well as between males and females. Data includes information from one school system within the Southeastern part of the United States. The following hypotheses will be explored.

Hypotheses

Factors Related to Minority Status

1. It is predicted that there will be a significant relationship between minority status and high school dropout with more minority status students represented in the dropout sample. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, among students who drop out of school, minority status students comprise a significantly large portion of the population (Stillwell, 2009).

2. It is predicted that there will be a significant relationship between minority status and factors identified related to their dropping out of school with minority status students more likely than non-minority status students to cite “Contextual Factors”.

Research in this area has consistently highlighted minority students as being disadvantaged in terms of the following “Contextual Factors”:

- “Difficulty Adapting to English”, as research has highlighted being an English Language Learner (ELL student) increases the risk for dropping out of high school (Rodriguez, 2008).
- “Employment Necessary”, as research has suggested that minority students are often plagued by socioeconomic disadvantages relative to non-minority students. They often attribute their need to acquire a job to financial problems in the home (Meeker et al., 2009). In addition, for Hispanic students, work often fulfills the expectation to contribute to the family (Olatunji, 2005).
- “Low Expectations of Family, Peers, or Culture”, as research suggests that both the societal and cultural academic expectations for both Hispanic and African American students are low relative to White students. Moreover, a

parent's educational background is closely associated with the educational expectations that they hold for their children (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000) and research indicates that minority students are often disadvantaged in terms of parental education (Hauser et al., 2000).

Factors Related to School Mobility

3. It is predicted that there will be a significant relationship between school mobility and high school dropout with more of those students who have experienced school mobility represented in the dropout sample. Research supports a wide array of negative consequences associated with school mobility, including, high rates of absenteeism, low math and reading achievement, and high school dropout (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Reynolds et al., 2009; Rumberger & Larson, 1998).

4. It is predicted that there will be a significant relationship between school mobility and minority status in which minority status students will be more likely to confirm having previously changed schools than non-minority status students. Research suggests that minority students and those from lower socioeconomic status families are more likely than non-minority status students to be mobile (Burkham et al., 2009). It is indicated that mobility is highest for African Americans followed by Hispanic and then Whites (Xu et al., 2009).

Factors Related to Grade Retention

5. It is predicted that there will be a significant relationship between grade retention and high school dropout with more of those students who have been retained represented in the dropout sample. Retention is consistently highlighted in the literature

as a factor that increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school (Allensworth, 2005; Roderick, 1993; Rumberger, 2004).

6. It is predicted that there will be a significant relationship between grade retention and minority status in which minority status students will be more likely to have been retained than non-minority status students. Previous research has highlighted ethnic differences in retention (Hauser et al., 2000). Furthermore, empirical studies on the factors associated with academic success such as student engagement, academic disidentification, family support and involvement, and basic socioeconomic status; have consistently cited minority students as being disadvantaged in these terms (Griffin, 2002; Hauser et al., 2000; Nesman, 2007). As a result of such disparities, it is expected that learning and academic performance will be negatively impacted resulting in higher levels of grade retention for minority students as compared to non-minority students.

Factors Related to Gender

7. It is predicted that there will be a significant relationship between gender and high school dropout with more males represented in the dropout sample than females. Although there is new research suggesting that this relationship is diminishing, the bulk of research over the past 30 years highlights a pattern of gender differences in high school dropout rates. This body of research consistently suggests that males are more likely than females to drop out of high school before receiving a diploma (Caltaldi & KeywalRamani, 2009; Sum & Harrington, 2003).

8. It is predicted that there will be a significant relationship between gender and factors related to dropping out of school with male students more likely to cite “Individual Factors” such as “Academic Problems” and female students more likely to

cite “Contextual Factors” such as “Pregnancy” and “Need to Care for Child”. Research on the gender gap suggests that males have lower GPAs, worse attendance rates, and more course failures than females (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). When interviewed on reasons for dropping out of school, research has highlighted female dropouts as often citing both pregnancy and the need to care for child frequently, relative to males (Meeker et al., 2009)

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Participants

Due to the nature of the proposed research, archival data was used. This data included information on former high school dropouts ($N=267$) from the 2005 to the 2010 school years. All dropouts were from a combination of three high schools within the same school district in rural Western North Carolina. In this sample, 154 students (57.7%) were male and 113 (42.3%) were female. The sample population was overwhelmingly Caucasian, 230 students (86.1%), 14 students (5.2%) were African American, 12 students (4.5%) were Biracial, 10 students (3.8%) were Hispanic, and 1 student (.4%) was American Indian. As shown in Table 1, the sample population (86.1% Non-minority and 13.9% Minority) is ethnically representative of the population in the school district (86.3% Non-minority and 13.7% Minority). While district wide statistics on retention and school mobility were unable to be obtained, North Carolina state statistics report, an annual retention rate of 5.0% per grade level (K-12), and highlight a school mobility rate of approximately 17%. In stark contrast to these state statistics, of all students represented in the dropout sample, 44.6% had experienced school mobility and of those in which retention data was available on, 74.8% had been retained at some point during the course of their academic career. This was a sample of convenience based on both location and school system approval. To see the ethnic breakdown for the dropout sample as well as the district wide population, see Table 1.

Table 1

Ethnic Breakdown in Total Population and Sample Population

	Total Population (School District)	Sample Population (Dropout Sample)
Caucasian	86.3%	86.1%
African American	5.1%	5.2%
Biracial	4.6%	4.5%
Hispanic	2.9%	3.8%
Asian	.8%	0%
American Indian	.3%	.4%

Materials

Data for this study was collected from an existing database consisting of all relevant information from Exit Interview Forms minus any identifying information. The Exit Interview Form (see Appendix A) was previously developed by the school system in alignment with state law (G.S. 115C-47) requiring that all school districts develop a system for referring dropouts to appropriate services. The form consisted of 21 reasons commonly cited for dropping out of school and in addition included demographic characteristics such as sex (referred to as gender) and race (referred to as ethnicity) as well as questions regarding both grade retention and school mobility.

The forms were completed during exit conferences that provided opportunity for discussion regarding factors related to the decision to drop out. Students who completed the forms were required to select the most significant factor related to the decision to drop out and were not permitted to select multiple factors. In most cases a counselor, student advocate, or administrator was able to sit down with the student and assist him or her in completing the form and officially withdrawing. There were some circumstances

when a school official was not able to interview the student who was dropping out and the administrator had to provide an approximate reason for a student's leaving school. In determining this reason, both conversations and interventions that had been underway with the student were considered by the school official. The form did not have a field to differentiate the conditions under which the form was completed. The complete Exit Interview Form is included in Appendix A.

Procedure

Permission to conduct this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board at Western Carolina University. A proposal letter (see Appendix B) was sent to the Office of Superintendent in the county in which the data was gathered and permission was granted by letter of approval from the school board (see Appendix C).

Data from the Exit Interview Forms was provided by the school district in a database with all identifying student information removed. The information was reviewed and the data was entered into the SPSS software for analysis.

Analyses

Initially, basic descriptive data with regard to the most commonly cited reasons for early school withdrawal in this school system was collected and frequencies were calculated. To test the hypotheses for this study, a total of eight Chi-Square analyses were completed. Four Chi-Square Test of Independence and four Chi-Square Goodness of Fit analyses, were conducted.

For analyses directly related to grade retention, all cases that were coded as "retention unknown" ($n=53$), were filtered. Due to limited minority representation in the school system, when attempts were made to conduct analyses looking at relationships

across different ethnic groups, assumptions of chi-square were violated. Therefore, the ethnic groups were pooled to create two groups (Non-minority/White and Minority/all other). In addition, reasons for dropping out ($n=21$), due to insufficient cell counts, were combined to form three groups (Contextual, Individual, and Community College). The three groups were based on the theoretical framework for understanding factors that relate to high school dropout presented by Rumberger (2004). Reasons coded as “Individual” were individual attributes of the student such as his or her values, attitudes, and behaviors. Reasons coded as “Contextual” were those that involved the contexts in which the students live and interact such as families, schools and communities. Finally a third group, “Community College”, was created as it did not fit within this framework and due to the more positive undertone, constituted a separate category.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Descriptive Data

In addition to the statistical analyses that will be discussed below, descriptive data was obtained regarding factors related to dropping out of school in this school system.

Frequency counts indicated that “Attendance” was the most commonly cited factor for high school dropout (16.5%) followed by “Unstable Home Environment” (15.4%) and “Community College” (13.9%).

Table 2

Factors Cited for Early School Withdrawal

Factors	Frequency	Percent
<u>Individual Variables</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>46.8</u>
Attendance	44	16.5
Lack of Student Engagement	29	10.9
Failed to Return after Suspension	24	9.0
Academic Problems	10	3.7
Suspected Substance Abuse	8	3.0
Runaway	4	1.5
Expulsion (Permanent)	2	.7
Marriage	2	.7
Incarcerated in Adult Facility	1	.4
Discipline Problems	1	.4
<u>Contextual Variables</u>	<u>105</u>	<u>39.3</u>
Unstable Home Environment	41	15.4
Decision to Work Over School	31	11.6
Health Problems	12	4.5
Pregnancy	7	2.6
Moved	5	1.9
Low Expectations	4	1.5
Need to Care for Child	3	1.1
Employment Necessary	2	.7
Difficulty Adapting to English	0	0
<u>Enrolled in Community College</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>13.9</u>
Unknown	0	0

Factors Related to Minority Status

Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be a significant relationship between minority status and high school dropout with minority students represented at a significantly higher level than non-minority students in the population of students who had dropped out. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated that there was no significant difference in the proportion of minority status students identified in the dropout sample (13.9%) as compared with the value of 13.7% that is representative of the total district population, ($\chi^2=.006$, $p=.94$).

Table 3

Representation of Minority Status

	Sample Population (Dropout Sample)	Total Population (School District)
Minority	13.9	13.7
Non-minority	86.1	86.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Hypothesis 2 predicted that there would be a statistically significant relationship between minority status and factors identified related to their dropping out of school with minority status students more like than non-minority status students to have cited “Contextual Factors” such as, “Difficulty Adapting to English”, “Employment Necessary”, and “Low Expectations of Family, Peers, or Culture”. The chi-square test for independence indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference, ($\chi^2 = 1.60$, $p=.45$) between minority and non-minority status students with regard to reason for dropping out.

Table 4

Relationship between Minority Status and Factors Related to Dropping Out

Minority Status		Factors			Total
		Individual	Contextual	Comm. College	
Minority	Count	15	18	4	37
	Percent	40.5	48.6	10.8	100.0
Non-minority	Count	110	87	33	230
	Percent	47.8	37.8	14.3	100.0
Total	Count	125	105	37	267
	Percent	46.8	39.3	13.9	100.0

Factors Related to School Mobility

Hypothesis 3 predicted a significant relationship between school mobility and high school dropout with more of those students who had experienced school mobility represented in the dropout sample. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated that there was a significant difference in the proportion of students who had experienced school mobility (44.6%) as compared to 17% that is represented in the North Carolina State statistics, ($\chi^2=143.83$, $p=.000$).

Table 5

Representation of School Mobility

	Sample Population (Dropout Sample)	Total Population (State Wide Data)
Mobile	44.6	17%
Not Mobile	55.4	83%
Total	100.0	100.0

Hypothesis 4 predicted that there would be a significant relationship between school mobility and minority status in which minority status students would be more likely to have confirmed having previously changed schools than non-minority status students. The chi-square test for independence indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference, ($\chi^2 = 2.58, p=.11$) between minority and non- minority status students with regard to school mobility.

Table 6

Relationship between School Mobility and Minority Status

Minority Status		School Mobility		Total
		Not Mobile	Mobile	
Minority	Count	16	21	37
	Percent	43.2	56.8	100.0
Non-minority	Count	132	98	230
	Percent	57.4	42.6	100.0
Total	Count	148	119	267
	Percent	55.4	44.6	100.0

Factors Related to Grade Retention

Hypothesis 5 concerned the relationship between grade retention and high school dropout. It was predicted that there would be a significant relationship between grade retention and high school dropout with more of those who have been retained represented in the dropout sample. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of students who had been identified in the dropout sample as retained (74.8%) when compared to 65% that is represented in the North Carolina State statistics, ($\chi^2 = 8.97, p = .003$).

Table 7

Representation of Grade Retention

	Sample Population (Dropout Sample)	Total Population (State Wide Data)
Retained	74.8	65.0
Not Retained	25.2	35.0
Total	100.0	100.0

Hypothesis 6 predicted that there would be a significant relationship between grade retention and minority status in which minority status students would be more likely to have been retained than non-minority status students. The chi-square test for independence indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference, ($\chi^2 = 1.52$, $p=.22$) between minority and non-minority status students with regard to grade retention.

Table 8

Relationship between Grade Retention and Minority Status

Minority Status		Grade Retention		Total
		Retained	Not Retained	
Minority	Count	19	10	29
	Percent	65.5	34.5	100.0
Non-minority	Count	141	44	185
	Percent	76.2	23.8	100.0
Total	Count	160	54	214
	Percent	74.8	25.2	100.0

Factors Related to Gender

To examine Hypothesis 7 which predicted a significant relationship between gender and high school dropout with more male students represented in the dropout sample as compared to female students, the proportion of expected and observed values of males and females were analyzed. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of males and females identified in the drop out sample (57.7% and 42.3% respectively) as compared to the hypothesized value of 50%, ($\chi^2 = 6.3, p=.012$).

Table 9

Representation of Gender

	Sample Population (Dropout Sample)	Estimated Population
Male	57.7	50.0
Female	42.3	50.0
Total	100.0	100.00

Hypothesis 8 predicted that there would be a significant relationship between gender and factors related to dropping out of school with male students more likely to have cited “Individual Factors” such as “Academic Problems” and female students more likely to have cited “Contextual Factors” such as “Pregnancy” and “Need to Care for Child”. The chi-square test for independence indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference, ($\chi^2 = 1.71, p=.43$) between males and females with regard to reason for dropping out.

Table 10

Relationship between Gender and Factors Related to Dropping Out

Gender		Factors			
		Individual	Contextual	Comm. College	Total
Male	Count	74	56	24	154
	Percent	48.1	36.4	15.6	100.0
Female	Count	51	49	13	113
	Percent	45.1	43.4	11.5	100.0
Total	Count	125	105	37	267
	Percent	46.8	39.3	13.9	100.0

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the complex relationships of minority status, school mobility, grade retention, and gender, as they relate to high school dropout. In order to achieve this goal, differences in the representation of such factors within a sample of high school dropouts, were examined.

Previous research indicated that among students who drop out of school, minority status students comprise a large portion of the population (Stillwell, 2009) and furthermore that the factors influencing the decision to drop out of school for African American and Hispanic students may differ from the factors that influence White students (Christle et al., 2007; Griffin, 2002; Olatunji, 2005; Steele, 1997). Research suggested that minority status students are more likely than non-minority status students to be influenced by Contextual Factors such as “Difficulty Adapting to English”, Employment Necessary” and “Low Expectations of Family, Peers, or Culture (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Hauser et al., 2000; Olatunji, 2005; Rodriguez, 2008). Empirical studies on high school dropout consistently highlighted the associative effects of school mobility and grade retention on early school withdrawal and cited minority status students as having a higher likelihood of experiencing such academic setbacks (Allensworth, 2005; Burkham et al., 2009; Reynolds et al., 2009; Rmberger & Larson, 1998). Finally, although some research suggested that this trend may be diminishing, the bulk of research continues to indicate gender differences in dropout rates as well as in the factors that influence the decision to drop out (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Cataldi & KeywalRamani, 2009;

Meeker et al., 2009; Sum & Harrington, 2003). Results from the current study in light of previous research findings are discussed in subsequent sections.

Factors Related to Minority Status

In this study, contrary to previous research, no significant relationships were found between minority status and high school dropout. Minority students did not drop out of school at a significantly higher rate than non-minority students. Additionally, no significant differences were found in the factors cited for early school withdrawal between the two groups.

The lack of significant difference in dropout rates between minority and non-minority status students may suggest that the minority students within this small rural school system represent a different population than those in larger urban cities that are often the basis for other dropout research. This rural setting may represent a contextual variable that is consistent across all students reducing any differences based on minority status alone. A more thorough analysis of this population would need to be conducted in order to confirm this.

The relationship between factors cited for early school withdrawal and minority status, although insignificant, represent a relationship in the direction hypothesized based on previous research. Based on observations of the overall trend which highlights more minority status students as having cited Contextual Factors and more non-minority status students as having cited Individual Factors for early school withdrawal, it is possible that had the sample size been larger, more significant results would have been found.

Research suggesting that minority status students are more likely than non-minority status students to have difficulty adapting to English, take on adult roles, lack support for

progress in school, and have an overall lower socioeconomic background (Hauser et al., 2000; Nesman, 2007), supports the overall direction of relationship as observed between minority status and Contextual Factors in this school system.

Factors Related to School Mobility

As hypothesized, a significant relationship between school mobility and high school dropout was found. Of all students who dropped out of high school in this school system between 2005 and 2010, 44.6% had previously experienced school mobility. This finding serves to further substantiate other already existing data on the negative consequences associated with school mobility (Reynolds et al., 2009; Rumberger & Larson, 1998) and further suggests that particularly for this school system, school mobility is a likely predictor of high school dropout. This has significant implications for how this small rural school system integrates new students into its schools so as to support their continued academic performance. Because this is a tight, close knit community, it is possible that new students may find it difficult to overcome the sense of being an outsider.

The current study found no significant relationship between school mobility and minority status. The prediction of a significant relationship with minority status students having a higher rate of school mobility than non-minority status students was not confirmed. However, while insignificant, an observation of basic frequencies and percentages indicates a relationship in the direction hypothesized. The lack of significant results is likely impacted by the limited minority representation in the sample population. Had the sample been larger and a more balanced ethnic representation been obtained it is possible that more significant results would have been found. Regardless of minority

status, it will be important for this school system to recognize the needs of all students who move into this school system from other communities.

Factors Related to Grade Retention

As hypothesized, a significant relationship between grade retention and high school dropout was found. Of all students in the dropout sample on which retention data existed, 74.8% had been retained at some point during their school career. Results correspond with previous research highlighting the negative consequences associated with grade retention (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Lan & Lanthier, 2003) and furthermore, suggests that for this school system, grade retention is a likely predictor of high school dropout. In order to improve dropout rates, this school system needs to identify alternative academic interventions to the traditional practice of grade retention.

The current study indicated no significant difference in the retention rates of minority status students as compared to non-minority status students. The prediction of a significant relationship between grade retention and minority status in which minority status students would be more likely to have been retained than non-minority status students, was not confirmed and actually the opposite was found. Although the results were insignificant, observations of the relationship between minority status and grade retention indicated that, for this school system, non-minority status students have a higher likelihood of being retained than minority status students. It is postulated that the lack of significant results in the direction hypothesized is a consequence of using a homogenous sample of only high school dropouts. Unlike previous research studies on which the hypothesis was based, the sample population for the current study was made up of strictly high school dropouts. Previous studies indicating higher levels of retention for minority

status students as compared to non-minority status students involved all students who were retained within a school, not just those that were retained and then later dropped out. School wide retention data on all students would be beneficial for the district to collect.

Factors Related to Gender

With regard to gender, the hypothesis predicting a significant relationship between gender and high school dropout was confirmed. In this school system, male students represented 57.7% of the dropout sample, a statistically larger portion than females. Findings from this study support previous research suggesting that males continue to drop out of school at a higher rate than females.

However, the hypothesis with regard to gender and factors cited for early school withdrawal was not confirmed. While no significant results were found, basic observations of frequencies indicate that for this school district, a higher percentage of males withdrew to enroll in community college than females and that overall, both males and females cited Individual Factors as influencing their decision to drop out of high school more often than Contextual Factors.

Although results from this study do not support the hypotheses based on research on the gender gap in academic achievement or studies documenting differences in reported reasons for withdrawing from school between males and females, they do however, support other research suggesting that of all the factors contributing to the decision to drop out of high school, personal characteristics of the individual student have the strongest effect (Lan & Lanthier, 2003). It is possible that had the sample size been

larger and the original reasons for dropping out ($n=21$) therefor not combined, significant results may have been found.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. Insufficient participant numbers made analyzing specific differences in factors related to dropping out across ethnic groups impossible. A major shortcoming was a sheer lack of minority representation in the school system. When attempts were made to conduct analyses regarding relationships across different ethnic groups, assumptions of chi-square were violated. When ethnic groups were pooled to create two groups (Non-minority/White and Minority/all other) non-minority status students still accounted for 86.1% of the total dropout sample, a number very consistent with the ethnic representation of the total district population.

Although an overall acceptable sample size was obtained ($n=267$), because participants had a total of 21 original reasons from which they could choose for dropping out of school, a minimal amount of students were represented in each category thereby violating the cell size assumption of chi-square. While the factors ($n=21$) were combined to form three groups (Contextual, Individual, and Community College) based on the theoretical background presented by Rumberger (2004) some factors as represented on the Exit Interview Form were vague and did not fit perfectly into one of the three groups leaving room for subjective interpretation. Furthermore, hypotheses based on the original 21 specific factors for dropping out of school as they related to differences in minority status and gender were compromised.

Additionally, in this study, the sample consisted of only high school dropouts. Although this was acceptable and convenient for examining factors related to dropping out, it did not lend itself well to analyzing differences in school mobility and grade retention as they related to minority status. Results on the relationships of minority status and school mobility and minority status and grade retention are limited by the fact that only those students who dropped out of school were included in the sample.

Also, it is important to note that most research in the area of high school dropout highlights factors that contribute to high school dropout based on objective analyses of data such as attendance rates, test scores and discipline referrals. Data for this study was somewhat “messy” due to the fact that reasons for dropping out of school were self-perceived and reported reasons and therefore may or may not necessarily represent the truest reason for dropping out. It is possible that students failed to cite the actual reason for early school withdrawal due to unawareness, embarrassment, or a wide array of other personal reasons.

Other limitations of the study pertain specifically to The Exit Interview Form from which the archival data was obtained. The Exit Interview Form consisted of 21 reasons commonly cited for dropping out of school. Students were asked to choose one statement that most closely resembled the reason they were withdrawing from school. Research consistently highlights the compounded effects of a variety of factors on high school dropout. It is likely that by restricting participant’s choices to only one, results were limited and moreover, failed to account for the intricate and multifaceted nature of the high school dropout phenomenon.

The conditions under which the Exit Interview Forms were completed represent yet another limitation to the study. The forms were most commonly completed during exit conferences that provided opportunity for discussion regarding factors related to the decision to drop out, however there were some circumstances when students failed to notify the school of their decision to drop out and neglected the exit conference. Although school officials reflected on previous information on the student and attempted to choose the most appropriate reason for a student's leaving school, the form did not have a field to differentiate the conditions under which it was completed.

A final limitation of the study is the restricted ability to generalize results to other populations. Because this study was a case study based on one rural school district in Western North Carolina, the validity of the findings in other locations and settings is unknown.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of the present study confirmed some of the proposed hypotheses. Although there were no significant relationships with regard to differences in ethnicity and/or gender for factors cited for dropping out of school, other significant results confirming relationships between gender, school mobility, and grade retention with high school dropout, highlight some interesting and educationally appropriate findings.

Implications from such findings suggest that a substantial number of factors impacting a student's decision to drop out of high school are within the scope of school policy. Findings highlight not only the need for a varied approach in prevention and intervention programs but also urge program planners and school administrators to take a

critical look at attendance as well as retention and school mobility as prominent factors related to early school withdrawal in this school system.

School officials should consider a transitional program that provides additional academic and supportive resources for students that transfer into the district. Additionally, in designing both intervention and prevention programs for addressing high school dropout, the school system should consider the Individual Factors most commonly cited by former high school dropouts in the district.

It is recommended that, in light of the current study in combination with other existing research highlighting the negative consequences associated with grade retention, the district policy on grade retention be reviewed. A strong stance in opposition of grade retention should be taken.

Final recommendations in light of this research include the reorganization of the Exit Interview Form to include a field indicating the conditions under which the form was completed. The elimination and combination of broad and overlapping factors with the possibility of allowing students to choose a primary and an additional secondary reason for school withdrawal should be considered. Providing written definitions for each factor so as to reduce subjectivity would also be beneficial. Finally, adding space for attendance rate, discipline referrals and suspension rates, as well as GPA and number of credits earned, would be helpful in later determining the impact of such salient factors on the decision to drop out of school and should be reflected upon in the reorganization of the Exit Interview Form.

Future Research and Conclusions

Based on the interesting findings with regard to the low representation in the dropout sample of minority students who had been retained, further research on the impact of school mobility and grade retention on high school dropout across differing ethnic groups is needed. Additionally the inclusion of other factors such as socioeconomic status, social emotional functioning, and discipline problems would add to the importance of the research findings.

High school dropout continues to be a large problem in this school district, in North Carolina, and across the United States. The costs of the “dropout crisis” weigh heavily on individuals as well as society. However significant the current crisis is, there is hope. Many of the factors identified throughout this study (e.g., grade retention, school mobility and attendance) as contributing to high school dropout, can be alleviated by changes in school policy as well as in the implementation of prevention and intervention programs directed at known predictors of high school dropout.

Hopefully, future research in this area will continue to expand on this study and provide a more conclusive picture of the need for differentiation in prevention and intervention programs directed at high school dropout across ethnic groups.

References

- Allensworth, E. M. (2005). Dropout rates after high-stakes testing in elementary school: A study of the contradictory effects of Chicago's efforts to end social promotion. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 27(4), 341-364.
doi:10.3102/01623737027004341
- Allensworth, E. M., & Easton, J. Q., (2007). *What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago public high schools: A close look at course grades, failures, and attendance in the freshman year* (Research Report). Retrieved from University of Chicago, Consortium on Chicago School Research website:
http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=116.
- Apel, R., Bushway, S. D., Paternoster, R., Brame, R., & Sweeten, G. (2008). Using state child labor laws to identify the causal effect of youth employment on deviant behavior and academic achievement. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 24(4), 337-362. doi:10.1007/s10940-008-9055-5
- Balfanz, R., & Legters, N., (2004). *Locating the dropout crisis: Which high schools produce the nation's dropouts? Where are they located? Who attends them?* (Report 70). Retrieved from Johns Hopkins University, Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk website:
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/crespar/techReports/Report70.pdf>.
- Balfanz, R., & Legters, N., (2008). NCLB and reforming the nation's lowest- performing high schools: Help hindrance, or unrealized potential? In G. Sunderman (Ed.),

Holding NCLB accountable: Achieving accountability, equity, & school reform
(pp. 191-222). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Battin-Pearson, S., Newcomb, M. D., Abbott, R. D., Hill, K. G., Catalano, R. F., &
Hawkins, J. D. (2000). Predictors of early high school dropout: A test of five
theories. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(3), 568-582. doi:10.1037/0022-
0663.92.3.568

Burkham, D.T., Lee, V.E., & Dwyer J. (June, 2009). *School mobility in the early
elementary grades: Frequency and impact from nationally-representative data*.
Paper prepared for the Workshop on the Impact of Mobility and Change on the
Lives of Young Children, Schools, and Neighborhoods, Washington, DC.

Cairns, R. B., Cairns, B. D., & Neckerman, H. J. (1989). Early school dropout:
Configurations and determinants. *Child Development*, 60 (6), 1437-1452.
doi:10.2307/1130933

Cataldi, E. F., KewalRamani, A., & National Center for Education Statistics (2009). High
school dropout and completion rates in the United States: 2007 Compendium
Report NCES 2009-064. *National Center for Education Statistics*, Retrieved from
ERIC database.

Christle, C. A., Jolivette, K., & Nelson, M. (2007). School characteristics related to high
school dropout rates. *Remedial and Special Education*, 28(6), 325-339.
doi:10.1177/07419325070280060201

Finn, J. D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(2),
117-142. doi:10.2307/1170412

- Gottlob, B. J., Milton & Rose, D. F. F. (2007). *The high cost of low graduation rates in North Carolina: School choice issues in the state* (Research Report). Retrieved from the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation website:
<http://www.edchoice.org/downloadFile.do?id=256>.
- Griffin, B. W. (2002). Academic disidentification, race, and high school dropouts. *The High School Journal*, 85(4), 71-81. Retrieved from
http://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/foundations/bwgriffin/research/hsj_academic_disidentification.htm
- Hauser, R.M., Pager, D.I., & Simmons, S.J. (2000). *Race-Ethnicity, social background, and grade retention* (Working Paper No. 2000-08). Center for Demography and Ecology. The University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Hauser, R. M., Simmons, S. J., & Pager, D. I. (2000). *High school dropout, race-ethnicity, and social background from the 1970s to the 1990s*. Retrieved from The Center for Demography and Ecology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison website: http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~hauser/Trends2001_03.pdf
- Haveman, R., & Wolfe, B. (1994). The determinants of educational attainment: High school and beyond. In *Succeeding generations on the effects of investments in children* (pp. 143-187). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Hess, R. S., & Copeland, E. P. (2001). Students' stress, coping strategies, and school completion: A longitudinal perspective. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 16(4), 389-405. doi:10.1521/scpq.16.4.389.19899
- Kaplan, D. S., Peck, B. M., & Kaplan, H. B. (1997). Decomposing the academic failure–dropout relationship: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Educational Research*,

90(6), 331-343. Retrieved from

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ551375&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ551375

Kolstad, A., & Kaufman, P. (1989, March). *Dropouts who complete high school with a diploma or GED*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

Lan, W., & Lanthier, R. (2003). Changes in students' academic performance and perceptions of school and self before dropping out of schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 8(3), 309-32. doi: 10.1207/S15327671ESPR0803_2

Lee, J. C., & Staff, J. (2007). When work matters: The varying impact of work intensity on high school dropout. *Sociology of Education*, 80(2), 158-178. doi:10.1177/003804070708000204

Manlove, J. (1998). The influence of high school dropout and school disengagement on the risk of school-age pregnancy. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 8(2), 187-220. doi:10.1207/s15327795jra0802

Meeker, S. D., Edmonson, S., & Fisher, A. (2009). The voices of high school dropouts: Implications for research and practice. *International Journal on School Disaffection*, 6(1), 40-52. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ871305&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ871305

- Nesman, T. M. (2007). A participatory study of school dropout and behavioral health of Latino adolescents. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, 34(4), 414-430. doi:10.1007/s11414-007-9082-2
- Olatunji, A. N. (2005). Dropping out of high school among Mexican-origin youths: Is early work experience a factor? *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(3), 286-305.
- Ou, S., & Reynolds, A. J. (2008). Predictors of educational attainment in the Chicago longitudinal study. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(2), 199-229.
doi:10.1037/1045-3830.23.2.199
- Owen, J., Rosch, J., Muschkin, C., Alexander, J., Wyant, C., & Duke University, Center for Child and Family Policy. (2008). *Dropout prevention: Strategies for improving high school graduation rates*. Center for Child and Family Policy, Duke University.
- Princiotta, D., Reyna, R., & National Governors Association, Center for, Best Practices. (2009). *Achieving graduation for all: A governor's guide to dropout prevention and recovery*. NGA Center for Best Practices.
- Reynolds, A.J., Chen, C.C., & Herbers, J.E. (2009, June). *School mobility and educational success: A research synthesis and evidence on prevention*. Paper presented at the Workshop on the Impact of Mobility and Change on the Lives of Young Children, Schools, and Neighborhoods, Board on Children, Youth, and Families, National Research Council, Washington, DC.
- Roderick, M. R. (1993). *The path to dropping out: Evidence for intervention*. Westport, CT: Auburn House.

- Rodriguez, L. F. (2008). Latino school dropout and popular culture: Envisioning solutions to a pervasive problem. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 7(3), 258-264.
- Rumberger, R.W. (2004). Why students drop out of school. In G. Orfield (Ed.), *Dropouts in America* (pp.131-148). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Rumberger, R. W., Ghatak, R., Poulos, G., & Ritter, P. L. (1990). Family influences on dropout behavior in one California high school. *Sociology of Education*, 63(4), 283-299. doi:10.2307/2112876
- Rumberger, R. W., & Larson, K. A. (1998). Student mobility and the increased risk of high school dropout. *American Journal of Education*, 107(1), 1-35.
doi:10.1086/444201
- Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 613-629. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.52.6.613
- Steinberg, A., & Almeida, C., (2004). *The dropout crisis: Promising approaches in prevention and recovery*. Jobs for the Future. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov>
- Stillwell, R., & National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *Public school graduates and dropouts from the common core of data: School year 2006-07 first look*. NCES 2010-313 National Center for Education Statistics.
- Suh, S., Suh, J., & Houston, I. (2007). Predictors of categorical at-risk high school dropouts. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85(2), 196-203. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini>.

jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ762859&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ762859

- Sum, A., & Harrington, P., (2003). Northeastern University, Boston, MA Center for Labor,Market Studies. *The hidden crisis in the high school dropout problems of young adults in the U.S.: Recent trends in overall school dropout rates and gender differences in dropout behavior.*
- Upchurch, D. M., (1993). Reply: Childbearing and schooling: Disentangling temporal and causal mechanisms. *American Sociological Review*, 58(5), 738-40.
- Vallerand, R. J., Fortier, M. S., & Guay, F. (1997). Self-determination and persistence in a real-life setting: Toward a motivational model of high school dropout. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(5), 1161-1176. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.72.5.1161
- Warren, J. R., & Cataldi, E. F. (2006). A historical perspective on high school students' paid employment and its association with high school dropout. *Sociological Forum*, 21(1), 113-144. doi:10.1007/s11206-006-9005-7
- Xu, Z., Hannaway, J., & D'Souza, S. (2009). Student transience in North Carolina: The effects of school mobility on student outcomes using longitudinal data. *National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research*

Appendices

APPENDIX A: Exit Interview Form

Transylvania County Schools

Exit Interview for Students Withdrawing as W2

Date of interview: _____ Person conducting interview: _____

Name: _____ Grade: _____

Withdrawal date: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____

Sex: _____ Race: _____

Circle the reason student states for dropping out of school (reason code in NC WISE):

ABUS	Suspected substance abuse	EMPL	Employment necessary
ACAD	Academic problems	EXPL	Expulsion (permanent)
HEAL	Health problems	HOME	Unstable home environment
INCR	Incarcerated in adult facility	ATTD	Attendance
MARR	Marriage	WORK	Choice of work over school
CHLD	Need to care for child	MOVE	Moved, school status unknown
COMM	Enrolled in comm. college	PREG	Pregnancy
DISC	Discipline problems	RNAW	Runaway
LANG	Difficulty adapting to English	ENGA	Lack of student engagement
UNKN	No other known reason	LTSU	Failed to return after long term susp.
EXPC	Low expectations of family, peers, or culture		

Additional information provided by the school regarding the student's reason for leaving school: .

Plans after school: _____

Has the student always been enrolled in Transylvania County Schools? Yes/No

If not, grade student enrolled in TCS: _____

Has this student ever been retained? Yes/No If yes, grade(s) retained: _____

Did this student ever attend DRS? _____ If so, which grade(s): _____

_____ THIS STUDENT HAS BEEN REPORTED TO THE SCHOOL DRIVER'S
LICENSE COORDINATOR.

APPENDIX B: Proposal Letter

3/15/2010

Western Carolina University
Cullowhee NC, 28723

Mr. Jeff McDaris, Ed.D
Superintendent

Transylvania County Board of Education
225 Rosewald Lane, Brevard, NC 28712

Dear Dr. McDaris,

I am writing in hopes to gain school board approval for conducting a descriptive research study using data obtained by the Transylvania County School System. The thesis is a requirement for my MA/SSP degree at Western Carolina University.

As a graduate of Rosman High School in Transylvania County, I was anxious to explore ways in which I could meet my program requirements as well as provide some useful information to the district. In outlining possible options, I contacted Scott Elliot who was very helpful in supplying information that has ultimately provided the foundation for what I hope to be a very exciting and valuable study.

The purpose of the study, entitled "High-school dropout: a closer look at ethnicity and gender", is to examine the differences in self reported reasons for dropping out of high-school based on both ethnicity and gender. I would like to use previously obtained data generated through the "Exit Interview" process done on those students whom have formerly dropped out of high school in Transylvania County. Requested data would include all information on the exit interview form with the exception of Names of Students and or Interviewers. Data collection would begin in the 2010-2011 school year and feedback would be provided to Transylvania County by the 2012-2013 school year.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider my proposal. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. mlchappell2@catamount.wcu.edu

If agreed upon, a letter of approval is requested.

Sincerely,

Marquessa L. Chappell
WCU School Psychology Program
MA/SSP Candidate, Class of 2012

CC: Dr. Scott Elliot
Director of Secondary Education

APPENDIX C: Letter of Approval

April 7, 2010

Marquessa L. Chappell
331 Park Drive
Cullowhee, NC 28723

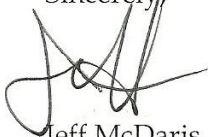
Dear Marquessa:

Thank you for writing me regarding your proposal to conduct a research study using data obtained from the Transylvania County Schools. Your thesis topic, "High School Dropouts: A Closer Look at Ethnicity and Gender," is a timely and valuable one. You have my permission to use any pertinent data from the Transylvania County Schools as it relates to the study. I would ask that you adhere to the following guidelines in conducting your research:

1. Adhere to all Transylvania County Board of Education policies regarding student privacy;
2. Work closely with Dr. Scott Elliott, Director of 9-12 Curriculum and Instruction, to ensure that you receive the most accurate and up-to-date information; and
3. Provide a copy of your research proposal and Institutional Review Board application to Dr. Elliott once both have been approved by the university.

Best wishes on your Master's program at Western Carolina. I look forward to reading your study.

Sincerely,



Jeff McDaris, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

jh

P.S. This sounds great! Thanks. Jeff