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There is ongoing concern regarding the high numbers of students who are either leaving school early or graduating without an adequate education. This problem is closely identified with our nation's children of color and/or those living in poverty. It is vitally important to understand why this is happening within our nation and to identify specific strategies that will alleviate this problem. This research study identified and examined factors that positively affected the academic success rates of at-risk high school students.

Certain students, with certain background characteristics or behaviors, have been labeled as "at-risk." These labels were not always fair, and they sometimes resulted in students being treated in ways that made situations worse. Nonetheless, some of the factors that led to the "at-risk" label really did have deleterious effects on students. There are different broad definitions of "at-risk," some focusing on social factors and others focusing on academic factors. Students with social risk factors were defined as underprivileged, disenfranchised, impoverished and language-impaired.

The research questions for this study were: (a) Which social and academic factors contribute to the success of at-risk high school students?; (b) How does the student-teacher relationship contribute to or hinder the success of at-risk high school students?; (c) How might we better ensure that at-risk students achieve and maintain high success rates throughout their school

experiences on all grade levels?; and (d) What are specific factors and strategies that support high academic and social success levels of at-risk high school students?

The methodology of this study utilized a case study design. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and focus groups. Ten high school students from the same school participated in the study. Questions for the study addressed self-identity, support and engaging work for at-risk students.

The findings in this study revealed that these at-risk students were able to turn their performance around because of self-identity, support from parents, teachers, role models, and engaging work.

FACTORS SUPPORTING THE SUCCESS OF AT-RISK
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Phyllis W. Martin

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Approved by

Dr. Carolyn Riehl
Committee Chair

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother Willie Williams, my husband, Isaac Martin, my daughter, Toi Bailey, my brother Johnnie Williams, and my sister Ramona Shoffner. My family encouraged me to stay the course.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair Dr. Carolyn Riehl

Committee Members Dr. Joanne Chesley

Dr. Carl Lashley

Dr. Kathleen Casey

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Date of Acceptance by Committee

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Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This research study identified and examined factors that positively affected the academic success rates of at-risk high school students. The selection of this topic was predicated upon the ongoing concern regarding the high numbers of students who are either leaving school early or graduating without an adequate education. Research indicates this problem is closely identified with our nation's children of color and/or those living in poverty. I believe that it is vitally important to understand why this is happening within our nation and to identify specific strategies that will alleviate this problem.

The Meaning of At-Risk

Researchers and others have often labeled certain students, with certain background characteristics or behaviors, as "at-risk." In the past, the many definitions of risk differed, and the terminology differed. These labels were not always fair, and they sometimes resulted in students being treated in ways that made situations worse. Nonetheless, some of the factors that led to the "at-risk" label really did have deleterious effects on students, as evidenced by research. There are different broad definitions of "at-risk," some focusing on social factors and others focusing on academic factors. Many students were ostensibly at risk because research demonstrated that their social and demographic

characteristics were associated with poor student performance. Students with social risk factors were defined as underprivileged, disenfranchised, impoverished and language-impaired. Donmoyer and Kos (1993) emphasized the impact that both high student absenteeism and performance below grade level have made on students being designated “at-risk.” These researchers further identified students of color as frequent high school dropouts, not because of anything the student of color did, but because of the social risk factors. For example, Pallas, Natriello, and McDill’s (1989) study (as cited in Donmoyer & Kos, 1993) noted that poor, minority women who were heads of households, reared many high school dropouts.

It was evident that established definitions describing at-risk students shared common terminologies. Definitions of at-risk referred to students as being disadvantaged from low socio-economic environments and being of minority ethnicity. The research identified students suffering from family problems: pressures associated with gang activities, substance and child abuse, teenage pregnancies and lack of parental involvement who did not deserve the additional pressure of being labeled “at-risk.” When we label students, we often fail to give them opportunities they deserve.

Labeling a student at-risk just because he or she is a student of color is just not fair. Within our national educational systems, students who have been identified as “at-risk” have often not been afforded the opportunities to advance academically, culturally, or socially within their various background settings. This

is not acceptable within a nation that promises equal educational opportunities for all students. Educators, parents, and communities must change the way they label students. Labeling students is unfair and prevents too many students from attaining goals that are indeed within their grasps. We should change how we serve these students.

Problems and Challenges within the Varying Definition

There are varying problems and challenges in the broad definitions of at-risk students including labeling students. Social factors have been associated with poor performance. We think of these factors as risk factors. The following are included in this category: single parents, limited education, low-income, teenage parents, divorce, and living in poverty. Prior academic problems tend to be associated with poor performance. These are thought of as academic risk factors. A body of research indicated that identifying students based upon set definitions was highly detrimental to the academic achievements of those students. Parker (2001) cited within the research that there are growing conceptualizations of children and their families as being “at-risk” resulting from preconceived definitions. In place of these labels, we must look at students as individuals who are deserving of all that our nation has to offer academically.

Identification of At-Risk Students

A review of multiple studies revealed which students were at risk and the reasons for the labels. As an example, Swadener and Lubeck (1995) stated the following:

1. By 1991, more than one in five American children (21.8 percent) was being reared within an impoverished environment. One in four children within this group was younger than four years of age. The total number of children living at the poverty level has reached 14.3 million, 4.0 million more than in 1979 (as cited in The Children's Defense Fund, 1992, p. 25).
2. Over the last decade, the percent of children living in single parent families has increased from 21.3 to 24.1 percent.
3. Two million more children were residing in homes in which females were heads of households than in 1980.
4. Ten million children under the age of six, including 1.7 million babies under the age of one and 9.2 million toddlers and preschool children, have mothers who are employed outside the home (as cited in The National Commission on Children, 1991, pp. 21-22).

Researchers Germinario, Cervalli, and Ogden (1992) also cited that certain key social factors defined at-risk high school students. These factors included students living in households where parents spoke very little, if any, English and/or households in which high numbers of high school dropouts also resided.

Additionally, Germinario et al. (1992) reported behaviors within this research, which included students experiencing academic difficulties, frequent complaints of illness, difficulty staying on task and poor personal hygiene. Further, Germinario et al. (1992) reported isolation from peer groups, participation in school disruptive behaviors, divorces, and substance abuse incidents contributed to these risk factors. Any changes in behavioral patterns related to these factors often accelerated the labeling of students as "at-risk" within their respective school settings. The unacceptably hasty labeling of these students appeared to be accelerated further if there were accompanying high

levels of absenteeism. Carter (1998) contended that labeling at-risk students limited educational opportunities for the minority society in the United States.

In my research, I studied what happened with students who had one or more of the academic risk factors, but turned their performance around by doing well in school. Educators across the United States are looking for opportunities to help at-risk students experience success. As a principal, I have been very concerned about the future of students who have been labeled at-risk. In a large school district in the southeastern region of the United States, high school students have been defined as at-risk largely because of the number of students retained beginning at the 9th grade level. The overall retention data demonstrated that students have been retained at a higher rate at grade 9 and are more likely to be African American students as illustrated in Table 1.

These data suggest that students of color, particularly African American students, are more likely than others to have been retained at least once. However, some students experienced success after encountering one or more of the risk factors described by authors in the review of the literature.

Student Success

Scores from high school students' end of year tests and teacher nominations for special awards recognized student success in many high schools. Most high school students who fell within these categories possessed positive academic self-concepts and established highly anticipatory plans for their future after graduation. They were good role models for their peers.

Table 1

2004-2005 Data: Number and Proportion of Students Retained by Grade Level and Ethnicity

	9th grade	10th grade	11th grade	12th grade
African American	402 of 2,429 17%	179 of 1,931 9%	119 of 1,650 7%	72 of 1,543 5%
Caucasian	204 of 2,662 8%	62 of 2,537 2%	23 of 2,357 1%	44 of 2,162 2%
Hispanics	48 of 299 16%	28 of 196 14%	18 of 165 11%	3 of 105 3%
Asian	28 of 262 11%	15 of 192 8%	17 of 174 10%	7 of 151 5%
Multi Racial	22 of 171 13%	11 of 135 8%	11 of 110 10%	2 of 75 3%
Native American	6 of 27 22%	4 of 36 11%	1 of 13 8%	0 of 18 0%

Research suggests that many at-risk students have defied the odds and become successful regardless of their socio-economic levels and challenges within their immediate environment.

My research project explored this area in-depth and provided additional strategies for ensuring that this trend continues to move in a positive and meaningful direction. Studies conducted by Germinario et al. (1992) indicated that student success on the elementary and middle school levels were prime indicators of future academic success on the high school level. It was my goal in this research project to identify specific strategies that would ensure that at-risk students received educational support and advantages that would enable them to be successful not only at the elementary level but also at the high school level. Additionally, this research highlighted the strengths that at-risk students already possessed within these strategies. As an example, many at-risk students excel in athletics. Thus, it was imperative that the strategies evolving from my research project explored elements of these types of successes for at-risk students. These strategies range from their inherent strengths and will extend to the challenges that are unique to their individual personalities, home environments and school settings.

Research Questions

The primary question I explored as I continued work on my research project was, "Which social and academic factors contribute to the success of at-risk high school students?" Additionally, I addressed the following questions:

1. How does the student-teacher relationship contribute to or hinder the success of at-risk high school students?
2. How might we better ensure that at-risk students achieve and maintain high success rates throughout their school experiences on all grade levels?
3. What are specific factors and strategies that support high academic and social success levels of at-risk high school students?

Because it has been demonstrated that students with certain background characteristics tend to develop academic problems, students with these characteristics are labeled “at-risk.” Sometimes the labels themselves are the problem.

Additionally, the research conducted by LeCompte and Dworkin (1991) identified four basic factors that impacted “at-risk” students. They consisted of pupil-related, school-related, constructed, and macro systemic elements. Pupil-related factors included social, cultural, economical and environmental influences that negated the more positive appeal of an academic setting. School-related factors pertained more to specific school settings. They included unprofessional and negative interactions between the student and staff members, inadequate educational opportunities available to the student and a basic lack of knowledge of the staff members identified to work with the students. Constructed factors were comprised of negative and inefficient attitudes among the students and staff members that subsequently led to false and inaccurate perceptions. Macro

systemic factors related to the political, social and economic contexts in which school districts were implanted. These included family income levels, the educational backgrounds of students and low levels of parental participation within the various school settings. High school students are at risk not only because of these various background characteristics but also due to academic problems like retention and poor attendance. Some students with background risk factors and/or prior academic problems do end up succeeding; thus, we need to understand why, so that we can support these students.

In my research, students were identified who had prior social and demographic problems. I was able to ascertain how such a turn around in their performance was made. Because of prior research, I suspected that factors such as strong relationships helped these students, and my research study was to find out exactly what happens and why.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature indicated numerous common factors directly related to the success of at-risk students. The literature further established what we already know, and identified factors we did not yet know. My research addressed the following:

1. Many at-risk students experienced significant problems with their self-identities as well as with exceedingly low self-concepts.
2. The presence of supportive relationships among peers, teachers and parents positively impacted their low self-images.
3. It is common for at-risk students to excel when they are provided activities in which they can be actively engaged and experience high success levels.
4. The highest success levels by at-risk students most often occurred within school settings in which educational opportunities were provided for them in creative, innovative and positive manners.

I referred to self-identity, influences of positive role models, and support from parents and engaging work as I continued to explore the literature for my research study.

Self-Identity: Academic

One of the factors that consistently influenced the academic performance of all students was their self-identity. An at-risk student's self-identity was directly related to his/her self-value system, to the rules that govern his/her behavior and to the communication systems involved in his/her daily interactions with others. These characteristics were then transmitted into adaptive practices necessary for each student's survival and for his/her corresponding success levels in meeting the individual challenges associated with his/her survival needs.

Alfassi (2003) supported this theory in his research by emphasizing the correlation between the self-identities of students and the degrees to which those students persevered and functioned when faced with adverse and challenging situations. His research also verified that the academic achievement of at-risk students was significantly higher among those students who possessed high self-confidence and self-esteem levels. Alfassi based his findings upon the enrollment of thirty-seven students within a curative high school environment where the identified students participated in a learning-centered and innovative academic program geared toward helping students improve their academic achievements through the enhancement of their self-identities. These students were compared with fifteen students enrolled within a traditional high school setting. He concluded that the students enrolled within a structured academic program produced significantly higher academic gains. Additionally, the students enrolled

within the learning-centered program were highly motivated and eager to set reasonable academic goals and then work diligently to attain them.

Research conducted by Fulk (2003) determined that in a Midwestern high school, at-risk ninth graders were concerned about their past academic performance and their ability to be successful in high school. A 51-question survey was distributed to students so they could identify academic concerns. Survey results showed that students rated themselves lowest on study habits, self-regulation, and test anxiety. Students questioned their ability to fulfill graduation requirements. Connections between students' perceptions and lack of strategies and concepts needed for academic success were closely related to their concerns about graduating.

Students developed perceptions of cultural identity based on messages they received about their own and other cultures. Cultural identity may or may not have elements that look like strong academic identity, which might hinder students in school. In the book entitled, *African American Teens Discuss Their Schooling Experiences*, Thompson (2002) reported research based on interviews and questionnaires with 300 African-American students from elementary, middle and high school levels. This study was designed to determine students' attitudes about their own race and that of other cultures. Descriptive efforts to uncover best practices advantageous to the academic identity of African American students were identified. Most of the students lived in low college attendance areas and high poverty regions. Students were given the opportunity to discuss

issues relevant to their school experiences, including habits and attitudes about cultural identity. Thompson (2002) reported students developed attitudes about cultural identity through:

1. Types of exposures and experiences related to the child's race.
2. Messages about other racial ethnic groups that have been encountered from caregivers. (p. 134)

Thompson reported when African American students were very isolated from their culture, they experienced problems of low self-esteem in relation to academic self-identity. Tatum (1992) discussed developments of racial identity of African American students and different strategies utilized by them to get along in schools where white students were the majority. Minority students found themselves in school settings where they attempted to mask their "at-riskness." A case in point is Jasmine, a fifteen-year-old African American female high school student who attended a predominantly white school, lived with her mother in a small, two-bedroom apartment. Jasmine attended the tutorial program so that students would not know that she was at-risk.

Authors Welch and Hodges (1997) studied the relationship between pre college experiences and academic achievements of Black adolescents in two inner city high schools. Welch and Hodges (1977) chose a qualitative case study method to analyze students' achievement behaviors. Their research determined students developed their own definitions of scholarship, although academic deficiencies were found in many African American students. Explanations of

these deficiencies contributed to cultural differences, structural inequalities, social and genetic deficits. Welch and Hodges (1977) concentrated on the psycho-social development of disadvantaged African American adolescents by drawing from their personal and academic experiences in school. Welch and Hodges study (as cited in Fordham 1988) concluded that academically successful Black students in predominantly Black communities made conscious choices to become successful in school and other settings.

Wells and Crain (1997) conducted a five-year study of the St. Louis, Missouri's school inner-district desegregation plan. The plan was implemented because parents and community leaders were displeased with St. Louis' academic success record. The goal of the study was to examine the student transfer program for African American students from the perspectives of the different people who helped create the program, as well as those people who contributed to its success or failure. Semi-structured interviews with more than 300 people were conducted. Researchers gathered data from the United States Census on St. Louis' desegregation plan. Data were collected from school district superintendents, school board members, administrators, teachers, students, parents and other school district personnel participating in the desegregating plan.

Prior to the desegregation plan, only 48% of African American students attended institutions of higher learning: 31% attended four-year colleges and 17% attended a two-year institution. After implementation of the desegregation

plan, 68% of African American students attended four-year colleges, and 44% attended four-year colleges such as Yale, Brown, and Purdue Universities. Results from this study determined African American students were successful because of their aspirations, talents, outgoing personalities, and parental support. This study was important because it suggested that African American students performed better in a predominately white school setting rather than in the inner city school setting; moreover, these students were introduced to positive settings rather than environmental risk factors. The lessons from this research suggested that African American students maintained academic identity in diverse settings. This research also supported the assumption that academic self-identity was a factor that supported at-risk high school students.

Authors Fordham and Ogbu (1986) popularized the research of academic self-identity among African American high school students. They explored the phenomenon of “acting white” among those bright African American students who were discouraged from working hard and doing well because of the fear that their less successful peers would accuse them of “acting White.” Fordham and Ogbu reported African American students developed a sense of identity even though their environment limited their experiences of social and academic support. Successful at-risk students developed protective devices to promote their identity by sustaining boundaries between themselves and the white culture. These authors suggested that African American students were “acting White,” as part of their academic success. However, recent research suggested that cultural

identities and environments motivated African American students and other minority students rather than the phenomenon of “acting White.” Anderson (1988) criticized Ogbu’s model based on inaccurate historical accounts of the value that African Americans placed on education. Halle, Kurtz-Costes and Mahoney (1997) reported that there are examples of African Americans valuing education and not viewing it as domains of Whites.

These studies concluded that academic and cultural identities were factors supporting the success of at risk high school students. Flores-Gonzales (1999) claimed minority groups of students tend to develop different attitudes toward attaining achievement than White students. Flores’ fieldwork at a high school in Chicago, Illinois showed that high achieving Puerto Rican students did not associate school success with “Whiteness,” but with cultural identity. Flores further contended that self-identity was prevalent with other cultures of students. Puerto Rican students were academically successful while maintaining their ethnic identity. These students were neither accused of “acting White,” nor did they mask their academic accomplishments. Flores’ research connected to the study conducted by Wells and Crain (1997). At-risk minority high school students experienced success because of their academic self-identity and willingness to reach their goals and aspirations.

Polite (1997) provided evidence supporting strong cultural identity among African American students attending Catholic high schools. In his research study entitled, “Cornerstone,” 26 inner city schools were surveyed to understand the

common practices of cultural identity of African American students. Site visits were conducted at 22 of the schools where interviews were held with principals using data collection procedures that were developed and implemented nationally. The interview questions were open-ended and addressed the cultural identity of African American students. The researcher reported 91% of these students attended college; the school district maintained an open tracking system where students moved in and out of ability groups utilizing high regards for individual students.

Lipman (1998) compared the cultural identity of two different middle schools within the same district. Each school had the same aligned reform initiatives but different racial and socio-economic mixtures of students and staff. There were different types of relationships between each school of parents and local communities. One school had an existing academic culture, which already had a supportive structure for at-risk students. Evidence of school role models, mentors, and counselors for high-achieving, college-bound students was observable. One teacher mentored and tutored her students before school, after school, and during lunchtime.

In the second school, bridges were created between home cultures and strong standards for student success. A few African American teachers in the school created an African American-centered culture of academic success to support the intellectual aspirations and collective identity of African American students. These teachers promoted an expansive definition of success that

included not only academic skills and knowledge, but also one that included education as a part of the student's responsibility to foster family culture.

Students were asked to examine their own inherited values in materials they read and discussed in school. Teachers talked with students regarding personal qualities required for success in school and linked them to real life experiences in order to prepare them for job opportunities and furthering their education. Lipman (1998) determined that the second school model was more successful for at-risk students because students developed qualities of high self-regard, self-concept and adaptive practices to survive academically.

Westfall and Pisapia (1994) investigated resilient at-risk students in a study commissioned by the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium. This study examined factors contributing to the academic success of 62 resilient and academically successful at-risk students from six school divisions. These students participated in in-depth interviews. Factors identified by students were classified into thematic categories. Students frequently mentioned positive use of time and meaningful involvement in school or other outside activities. Students accepted personal responsibility for their successes and failures. Almost all of the students lived in dysfunctional home settings, but most of the students were able to name one or more persons who had been significant in helping them. The participants in the study were asked what they believed contributed the most to their success. Student responses revealed that there were internal factors, which assisted them with success in different environmental settings. Successful at-risk

students developed goals and values, which supported them academically. These findings strengthened my research in that there were social and academic factors, which supported at-risk students.

Self Identity: Role Models

Keating, Tomishina, Foster, and Alessandri (2002) identified role models as contributors to the success of at-risk high school students. They contended positive mentors served as role models with whom youth might identify in order to enhance their self-identity. Keating et al. (2002) contended positive role models provided meaningful support for at-risk high school students. Zirkel (2002) conducted an empirical investigation regarding implications of race and gender-matched role models for the development of self-concepts in young adolescents of color to project their educational outcomes. Two hypotheses formed the core of this study. The first hypothesis described how young adolescents with at least one race and gender-matched role model showed increased interest in achievement and higher levels of academic performance. The second hypothesis described these relationships as dependent more on the match between participants and available role models than on the occupation of the role model.

From Zirkel's study, examples were provided for the students to understand the meaning of role models. Role models were defined as people who (a) participants knew, (b) were of the same race and gender as themselves, and (c) were noted by the student as sharing a possible career goal or interest.

This research study was qualitative in design. First, students reported on themselves, their goals and aspirations, and were provided information about role models with whom they matched. Second, students reported on activities they enjoyed and described their idols in a series of daily diaries. Third, students' teachers provided evaluations about personalities, performances, and academic potentials of each student in the study. Fourth, students' parents were asked about their perceptions of their child's experiences in school as well as current academic grades. Data collections determined variables of race and gender-matched role models, and were significantly and consistently predictive of a greater investment in achievement concerns on the part of these young people. This study represented valuable ideas about the opportunities available to young people, value placed on members of their own social group, and operational support for student identity and academic outcomes.

Many students of color are considered at-risk; however, Corderio (1991) contended that cultural themes and family roles influenced students' academic outcomes. Observations and data collections from 20 Hispanic students focused on achievement goals. Results from this study indicated that Hispanic students identified positive role models as helping them maintain their cultural identity. Further, the need for positive role models was greater for students whose family members were missing from home settings.

Additional studies provided evidence that role models served as positive advocates for at-risk students. Researchers Hwang, Echols, and Vrongistinos

(2002) collected data using open-ended questions. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between motivational modes of 60 high achieving African American college students' pathways for college majors. Collections of data determined African American students utilized a combination of skills and strategies of intrinsic, extrinsic, future, and social goals to acquire successful outcomes. This research was relevant to my study because role models enhanced and motivated at-risk students. Rosenfield, Richman, and Bowen (1998) claimed parents may be a source of support for at-risk high school students. This research suggested at-risk students received different types of social support associated with daily challenges. These findings further reinforced my assumptions that social and academic supports were factors supporting at-risk students. Positive role models were key attributes to the success of at-risk high school students. Positive role models served as motivators for at-risk high school students to protect their sense of worth instead of failure. Positive effects of parents, teachers, and role models were linked to the effectiveness of students' academic identity. More self-assurance from adults created more success for at-risk students.

Support: Parental

Parental support was crucial to the success of at-risk high school students. There were substantial bodies of evidence that supported parental support as a factor contributing to the success of at-risk students. Kenny, Gallagher, Alvarez-Salvat, and Selsky (2002) provided research focused on

parental support. A close and supporting relationship with extended family members or non-family adults was often important in enabling youth who were exposed to high levels of stress to develop competence.

Some of the themes found across the literature in support for at-risk students were close family members, and the establishment of rules and values. Researchers Sarton and Youniss (2002) claimed parents raised their children through establishing rules and communication in the family due to the degree and quality of parental control. Parental control and involvement had major impacts on young people. This study suggested young people from authoritative homes scored higher on measures of psychosocial development and mental health. Further, Murphy, Kayla, and Valencia (2003) conducted case studies of five African American students who excelled academically during elementary school. These case studies illustrated the importance of roles among African American students in providing the types of social environments and requisitions for school success at the primary school level. These case studies maintained African American students' achievement was a result of cultural values and behavioral expectations of parents and family members who supported and advanced their children's academic success.

Farrell (1990) claimed myths regarding at-risk students and family structures limited students' opportunities. Even though low-income parents may have limited education and broken homes, they still struggle, sacrifice, and are seen by their children as supportive of their learning. In this study conducted by

Farrell (1990), families in the population study were officially below the poverty and educational level. Many of the families endured many struggles and make significant sacrifices. Educators and researchers failed to note that the way children perceived their families was a crucial factor in determining a family's influence. The respondents in the study recognized the necessity of family support in light of local economic and housing situations.

Early interventions and incentives provided support for at-risk students. Taylor (1991) reported that experimental early intervention programs, which provided support for at-risk students, their parents, and teachers were very successful. The goal of these programs was to help volunteers target students, teachers consultations, and parental involvement. The primary focus was on parental involvement concerns, which emphasized parents' efforts to deal with school adjustments and other potential problems of at-risk students. The results of this study concluded that parents were able to understand the problems manifested in their children, handle parenting dilemmas, and work on building meaningful relationships between themselves and the school personnel. By pairing parents and teachers as support models, the results were advantageous and yielded student success. This body of evidence connected to what we already know about parents serving as meaningful role models for their children. The review of the literature indicated that common themes for supporting at-risk students were supportive environments and making sacrifices to reach desired

goals and aspirations. The research further explored factors that raised the level of achievement for at-risk students.

Support: Teacher/Student Relationship

Teachers are important adult figures in the success of at-risk high school students. Educational problems for these students occur prior to high school. The cycle continues as at-risk students are ignored in classrooms and their deficiencies in learning go unremediated. In high school, at-risk students crave help and support but are ashamed and embarrassed. A number of researchers viewed teacher/student relationships as a contributing factor to at-risk student success. Wong, Wiest, and Cusick (2002) contended that a growing number of studies demonstrated increased association of teacher support, perceived competence, intrinsic motivation and academic performance. Students who perceived their teachers as supportive were likely to feel a great sense of pride and competence to be more intrinsically motivated.

Niebuhr (1995) examined teachers' abilities to influence student learning through motivation. A survey questionnaire was administered to 241 high school freshmen, of whom 76 were Black, 158 were White and seven were classified as other. Results from the survey indicated that student motivation was significant in classrooms where strong teacher/student relationships existed and respect and care was evident. This study determined teachers influenced student learning because they made learning meaningful and relevant.

According to researchers Swick and Brown (1999), student achievement increased based upon teachers creating caring relationships with their students. Caring ethics was in the center of the teaching/ learning process. Teachers served as leading people whose primary goal was seeking relationship conditions that develop community harmony, integrity, and academic development among students. Further, Jacobson (2000) contended that getting to know students and providing structures such as individual conferences and meaningful evaluation systems helped learners feel valued as individuals. When students understood basic knowledge, their abilities were affirmed. Jacobson studied Latino students who were paired with teachers to build relationships that improved student achievement.

These teachers created a world in the classroom in which students felt they belonged. Thus, the students developed a sense of pride in doing well in school. Relationship building served as a factor contributing to the success of Latino students. Many at-risk students require a sense of belonging; they have faced negative feedback and lack a sense of pride and family connectedness. These themes connect to my assumptions as factors to aid at-risk students.

Using a sociological conceptualization, Cohen (1981) examined the relationship between implementation and learning outcomes of teacher/student relationships. Data were collected through observations of subjects in nine bilingual classrooms in San Jose, California. Results from the study concluded

that teacher/student talking and working together was a predictor of achievement gains on content-referenced tests.

Researchers Ladson-Billings and Darling-Hammond (2000) reported practices incorporated by successful teachers exploring the validity of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Urban Teacher Assessment. Results from this study indicated teachers who understood students' cultural attributes enabled students to experience success. Teachers made demands for academic success of all students rather than making assumptions about students being at risk. Teachers worked relentlessly to blur the borders between themselves and their students and to develop knowledge that challenged the status quo. This study reinforced educational gains based on connections between informal student/teacher interactions. Additionally, this study showed evidence of disparities between men and women pursuing math and science based majors. This study exposed evidence that informal student-faculty interaction was related to the quality of interpersonal relationships between faculty members and students.

Zullinger and Mentavlos (1998) described teacher programs that provided support for at-risk students in various schools in the Charleston, South Carolina School District. The 12 elementary schools implemented a variety of approaches from teachers providing mutual support to other teachers focusing on specific curriculum areas such as reading and mathematics. The five middle schools in

this district provided mentoring and conflict resolution for at-risk students to assist with their daily interactions with other middle school students. The five high schools provided peer mediation and attitude change programs. The construction of this study allowed at-risk students to make significant changes throughout the school year. Results from the findings indicated positive relationships between parents, peers, and teachers helped at-risk students. Further, research provided convincing evidence that caring relationships and school adjustment affect the success of at-risk high school students.

Engaging Work: Curriculum

Engaging work was a continuous process for teachers, administrators and parents. Several studies have linked the effectiveness of engaging work to the success of at-risk high school students. Learning opportunities that were rewarding and engaging, coupled with active participation by students and teachers created a sense of engaging work for at-risk students. These opportunities provided positive and often enormous contributions to student success. Researchers Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) viewed engagement of at-risk students as being inhibited by a number of factors, some beyond the control of the school.

Engaging work was endorsed by peers, family members, or by other environmental factors. If engagement is to be continuous, students must recognize their own value systems and that of the schools. Researchers Wehlage et al. (1989) examined educational engagement as a complex process

that involved more than simply motivating students. Promoting concepts required attention to the characteristics of students, the tasks they were asked to carry out, the school environment in which the work took place, and the daily outer influences faced by students. A teacher in this study reported the following on engaging work:

. . . it really doesn't make much difference what we're teaching. I'm not a person who feels real strong about subject content because, you know, it's different if you're training a person who you know is going to go out and be a molecular biologist . . . then you can really teach them stuff that is going to help them. Lot of these kids, we have no idea where they're going, what they're going to do. We try to give them the basic skills they're going to need when they're out, but what I teach in science really isn't as important as how I teach it and whether the kids feel that they're getting something out of it. (Wehlage et al., 1989, p. 208)

Doyle (1980) described five aspects of all classrooms that affected teaching and learning processes for students and teachers in common ways. These aspects were multidimensional, and many of the events occurred simultaneously: rapidly paced lessons, unpredictability of students, and teachers' actions witnessed by the entire class. These conditions tended to create the need for classroom management systems that allowed students to be engaged in the learning process. Four classrooms participated in this study to examine the level of student engagement when transitions were made in the classroom. While teachers were able to consider and plan for groups of students, they were not able to circulate in the classroom and work with all students, especially students needing additional attention within the given class time. Each teacher in the study

focused on a certain percentage of at-risk students throughout the school year. Students in these focus groups improved, and their level of engagement increased. This research study was important because evidence indicated that, when teachers focused on providing at-risk students continuous quality time, these students improved academically.

One way to ensure engaging learning for at-risk students is by implementing school-wide programs in which classroom teachers, administrators and support staffs collaborate to provide avenues for students to meet high expectations. When students were held responsible for their learning, they organized, planned, and monitored their progress toward their short and long-term goals. Hudley, Daoud, Hershberg, Wright-Castro, and Polanco (2002) claimed schools must sustain a climate that promotes positive attitudes of enthusiasm and encouragement for student engagement in the learning process.

An increasing body of evidence supported assumptions of effectiveness toward curriculum designs for achievement of at-risk students. Alfassi (2003) contended that curriculum design, academic competence, and confidence of at-risk students were critical. Analyses of high achieving at-risk students enrolled in many different schools determined that students, who were provided high academic standards, guidance, and firm beliefs, significantly increased their capabilities. These students implemented mastery-oriented instruction that enabled them to exercise control over their academic performance.

Ladson-Billings (2001) explored *Teach for Diversity* (TFD), a teacher education program for teacher candidates who desired to teach minority students. The book was written in three voices to include the teacher, educator, and researcher. It examined Ladson-Billings' early career as a novice teacher as well as attributes needed by teachers to teach diverse learners. This literature suggested that novice teachers needed training to work with diverse learners as well as at-risk students.

Opuni (1998) summarized a third-year evaluation of the Houston Independent School District's *Beating the Odds* (BTO) program initiated in the 1988-89 school year. Designed for at-risk secondary students, BTO provided in-school counseling and career guidance, outreach, and family case management. The program facilitated the district's dropout rate and improved achievement in mathematics. Overall, goals were to address curriculum, family-related needs of students, and facilitate development and determination for students to stay in school. Sixty teachers received training and support. Evaluation measures included student self-esteem scores, standardized test scores, attendance rates, and retention rates. Findings indicated that 2,353 secondary students in the BTO program achieved significantly higher academic performance in mathematics, a lower failure rate, and a lower withdrawal rate. This study suggested results were achieved through gathering feedback from students and parents and creating relevant learning opportunities for at-risk students.

Authors Hunt, Soto, Maier, and Doering (2003) investigated the effectiveness of collaborative teaming on the academic and social participation of six students in a classroom. Three of the students in the study were identified as experiencing severe disabilities. The other three were considered academically at risk. An educational team that included general and special education personnel provided students with a support plan. The effectiveness of the support plan was evaluated through behavioral observations and team interviews. Before the implementation of the study, noted intervals of non-student engagement was substantially higher. Following the research study, interactions with at-risk students increased to levels higher than that of non at-risk students in the class. The themes from these researchers suggested at-risk students were supported through high levels of engagement, setting high expectations, and firm beliefs in students' ability to learn.

Engaging Work: Service Learning

A body of evidence points to the importance of providing students with warm and nurturing climates to promote student success outside of the classroom settings. The "Add Health Project" conducted a national longitudinal study on the health of adolescents, which provided evidence on students connecting to service learning. The data for this research was housed at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The study determined that students (both young and old) who had meaningful connections with school, experienced greater academic success, attended school more, and possessed a better

attitude regarding school. Being connected was important to at-risk students because many of them struggled with serious academic deficiencies, lacked parental support, experienced language barriers, and exposed themselves to potential gang activity.

Strategies implemented to assist students with positive outcomes included the following: creating schools within schools, high expectations for all students, opportunities for authentic learning, peer relations, student team building activities, and organized service-learning projects. Student engagement in the curriculum goes beyond the classroom walls to provide lasting and meaningful experiences for at-risk students. Gray, Ondaatje, and Frieken (2000) contended that meaningful service-learning activities combined with strong social purposes that acknowledged the significance of personal and intellectual growth in students were valuable. Service learning promoted active learning that increased students' motivation to learn.

In another study, Jakubowski (2003) contended that building a service-learning component into one's pedagogy made the teaching and learning process more meaningful. Service learning encouraged teachers to recognize students' knowledge and experiences as a valuable element of educational settings. Further, through service learning, at-risk students developed a greater awareness of their abilities to work for change and social justice. Waldstein and Reiher (2001) claimed service learning was attractive to many educators because it expanded horizons for minority students beyond the classroom.

Service learning invited students to be active participants in education, while connecting their educational experiences to the community at large.

Bennin (1999) reported experiences of three teachers who taught a course entitled “Our Lives in Community” using the foundation of a learning community to structure the course. The mission of the study was to enhance learning, help students understand how courses fit together, and to increase student interactions in learning. Because of the study, students formed meaningful relationships and participated in more service learning activities at school and in the community, to develop a clearer connection of working as a group. Other researchers have conducted research on service learning. Bailey (1997) reports the results from a study conducted by the Project HAWKS (Habitat Alliance and Wildlife Keepers) in North California. HAWKS consisted of at-risk students who were brought together for a service-learning project to construct and maintain community gardens in North California. The project was linked to traditional curriculum and students were successful in broadening their understanding of science.

Finch and Mooney (1999) conducted a research study questioning 26 administrators, counselors, and teachers at six middle schools regarding School-To-Work (STW) programs. Participants were asked about organizational, conceptual, and operational reasons for implementing curriculum-focused instruction. The curriculum focused on career exploration, awareness, self-

awareness and contextual development. The results of the study determined that students benefited by enhanced personal development and support.

Major themes have emerged in support of what is already known about at-risk students. We know that positive self-identity, support from parents, peers, teachers, and positive role models affect the success of these students. We also know that engaging work and service learning are contributors to successful outcomes. At-risk students develop a sense of self worth through interactions with adult figures by building meaningful relationships.

What are the things about at-risk students that we do not yet know? Does self worth affect the goals and aspirations of these students? What family values are instilled in them? How do role models, race, and gender influence the success of at-risk students? What positive benefits do service learning projects offer these students?

To enhance clarity I studied students who had one or more of these social and demographic factors but have turned things around and are performing well in school. Who are the students who are now doing well? What has turned them around? What are these students' goals, dreams, desires, and reasons for success now? Which social factors contribute to their success? Moreover, how does the student-teacher relationship contribute to or hinder the success of at-risk high school students? In addition, how do at-risk high school students remain successful in school? My contribution to the research answered these questions.

The prior research has determined that these factors matter, and in my research, I confirmed that these patterns hold in the school I studied.

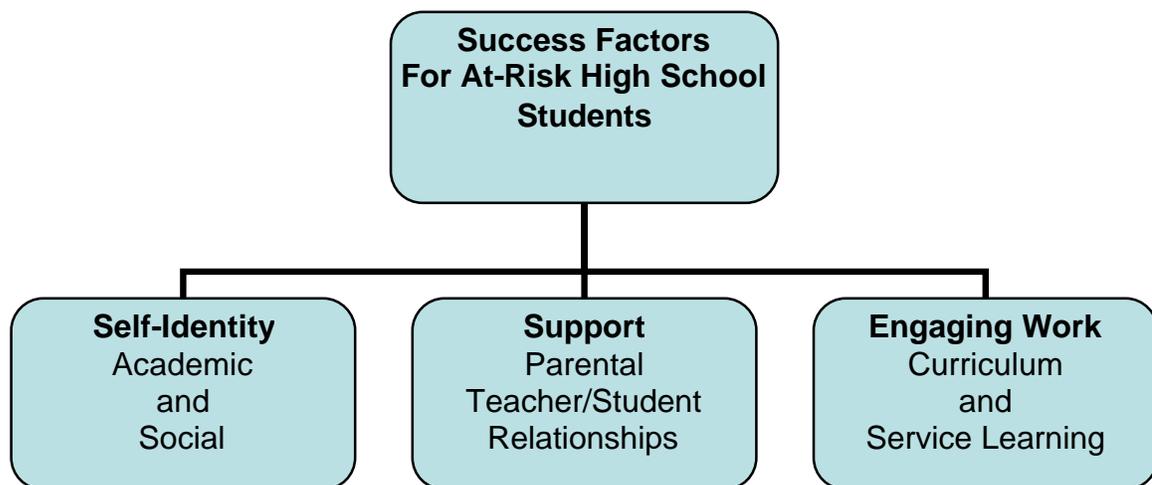


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research shows that students' social risk factors are similar to children from minority backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (1994) suggested that the African American community has a history of struggles, hopes and dreams. The struggles of African Americans include a demand to make meaningful connections to their life experiences and school. As noted earlier, I proposed to answer the following questions in my research: Which social and academic factors contribute to the success of at-risk high school students? How does the student-teacher relationship contribute to or hinder the success of at-risk high school students? How might we better ensure that at-risk students achieve and maintain high success rates throughout their school experiences on all grade levels? What are specific factors and strategies that support high academic and social success levels of at-risk high school students?

Research Approach

I chose qualitative research as my research design because it allowed me to study the perspectives, successes, challenges and struggles of at-risk high school students. Although both qualitative and quantitative research are concerned with participant points of view, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggested qualitative research stressed socially-constructed nature of the participants'

perspective through detailed interviews and observations. Qualitative research activates interactions between two or more people, which leads to negotiated, conceptually based results. Riehl (2001) reported qualitative research introduces new voices and themes in conventional settings. Qualitative research connects practices and policies closer to educational outcomes.

Qualitative research consists of interpretive materials that make the world visible. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) reported qualitative research involves a variety of studies bringing meaning to the world around us through life stories, focus groups, artifacts, and visual texts that describe problems and situations in an individual's life. Qualitative research offers validity and reliability in the methods used to collect data. Silverman (2005) defined validity as truth according to the account of the participant representing the social phenomena. He defined reliability as the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers.

For my study, I used qualitative research to validate my findings through methods that support validity and reliability of interviews, observations and focus groups. My research uncovered what we do not know about students who are now doing well. To improve the validity and reliability of my research, a number of strategies were used. Student attendance, reports cards, discipline records, and family histories will serve as valid and reliable resources. I documented students who were once at risk but are now doing well. I focused on the success of 10 at-risk students from one Guilford County high school. I extracted key

themes from the research on each of these factors, and I asked the students about them (see Figure 2).

Academic Self-Identity	Support Role Models Parental Teacher/Student Relationships	Engaging Work Curriculum and Service Learning
self-esteem	competence	relationships
goals	values	expectations
motivation	pride	confidence
positive attitude	motivation	mastery-oriented
survive	rules	motivation
confidence	goal setting	goals
aspirations	expectations	positive attitude
adaptive practices	relationships	team building
integrity	aspirations	competence
caring	caring	caring

Figure 2. Key Themes from the Research

Data Collection

My data collection procedures for at-risk high school students were interviews, observations, and focus groups.

Interviews

My first method of conducting qualitative research was by gathering reliable information through interviews. Interviews enabled me to establish a rapport with the students involved in the research. Interviews were utilized in this research as a method of listening and connecting to the themes identified in the literature as support factors of at-risk students. Interviews are one of the most dominant ways to understand experiences of the students involved in the research.

Interviews focused on the “hows” of people’s lives, Fontana and Frey (2000) viewed interviews as structured, unstructured, and open-ended. In structured interviews, the interviewer asked all participants the same series of pre-established questions. All participants received the same questions in the same order and sequence. The interviewer’s role was neutral, never stating his or her opinion of the participant’s response. Generally, unstructured interviews were open-ended and informal, allowing more flexibility and responsiveness to emerging issues for both interviewers and participants. Unstructured interviews provided greater depths of data than other qualitative types. Oral history is a form of unstructured interview. I used semi-structured interviews to gather research on academic analysis and themes presented in the literature for my study.

Interviews help researchers find meaning in the experiences of participants. Reissman (1993) claimed story telling is what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us. The story metaphor

emphasizes that we create order and construct texts in particular contexts.

Telling language enables us to descend into the realm of our primary perceptual and emotional experience. Harrington and Boardman (1997) claimed interviews are life history studies of individuals' myths about themselves. By finding meaning in experiences and then expressing this meaning in words, the speaker enables the community to think about the experience and not just live it.

I wanted to hear the stories of struggles, challenges, and obstacles that at-risk students faced to become successful. Interview-based research can stimulate the range of learning. Clews and Newman (2005) reported interviews served as catalysts for learning from groups of people in relation to concepts of identity. Interviews are used throughout research to determine individuals' perceptions, opinions, and reactions to initial findings and potential solutions. Furthermore, interviews provided in-depth reflective processing of participants' stories. I used interviews because the results were trustworthy and accurate. Fontana and Frey (2000) stated:

It seems that everyone, not just social researchers, relies on interviews as a source of information, with the assumption that interview results in telling true and accurate pictures of respondents. One cannot escape being interviewed; interviews are everywhere. (p. 646)

Interviews are the most acceptable method of collecting participants' responses to real-life situations. According to Stewart and Cash (2000), an interview is a communication process involving predetermined questions and serious purpose.

As I focused on results of the interviews, narratives emerged. Dillard (1995) suggested that interviews showed relationships of narratives, which involved acts of systematic inquiry. They also involved relationships and interaction between the participants and researchers. Narrative research has changed the educational probe, Casey (1996) reported:

Making generalizations about teachers based on demographic data no longer seems sufficient; even surveys become suspect when the researcher cannot be sure of asking questions of any salience to the subjects. Participants' structured conversation has become an imperative addition to the research repertoire. (p. 239)

I conducted interviews to give voice to at-risk high school students' experiences. At-risk students' interviews revealed cultural, conceptual experiences and identified factors, which created success for students. Data showing numerous perceptions were collected in the interviews. Interviews were conducted with open-ended questions. I recorded the interviews, and participants were allowed flexibility to speak openly and freely without intrusion from the researcher. I protected each participant's anonymity throughout the interview process.

In the initial interview, I facilitated an understanding of the study, collected background information, answered questions and established rapport and trust with the participants. Building relationships was critical to providing participants a feeling of comfort while engaging in conversation with me. I established trustworthiness of the findings through analyzing the data. Other forms of

research such as surveys may limit insight into this phenomenon of support for at-risk students. An open format guided the interview questions. I looked for themes and patterns in the interviews. I coded interviews regarding commonalities shared by the participants.

Observations

My second approach to gathering information was through observations. I observed as well as listened to students' interaction reports. This researcher visited participants' classrooms three times to observe student engagement with peers and teachers. These observations included interactions with participants during classes, at lunch, and in the hallways. Why observe students in classroom settings? I wanted to explore factors creating success for at-risk high school students. How do at-risk children achieve academic excellence? Observational research allows researchers to identify relationships that occur in classroom settings regarding particular behaviors of students.

Researchers Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) reported observational research findings were considered strong because the researcher validated the collection of information about specific behaviors of students. Observational research will allow me to reflect upon unique, specific behavioral patterns of at-risk students in their classroom performances. I observed situations and incidents that were especially revealing regarding the actions of students in both formal and informal settings. I sorted out situations to include students' responses and behaviors to learning, expectations, attitudes, self-esteem, and academic identity.

Field notes and observation forms were maintained on all participants. Credibility was established through the extended engagement and observational visits in my high school. Building relationships was critical so that the participants felt comfortable engaging in conversation with me. Trustworthiness and reliability of the findings were established through analyzing the data and providing descriptions of the findings.

Observations served as excellent sources of data collection for my study. Observations allowed me to see students receiving feedback from positive role models and teachers. I looked for evidence of support for teacher/student relationships and engaging work patterns. The observation form is located in the appendix.

Focus Groups

My final approach for gathering research on factors supporting at-risk students was through focus groups. Hunt, Hatae, Doering, Karasoff, and Goetz (2000) suggested focus groups permit key stakeholders opportunities to share their perceptions and to listen and respond to the views of other members within the focus groups in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Members within the focus group hear themselves and receive feedback from the interactions. Dodd and Lilly (2000) reported focus groups extend boundaries of flexibility to work collectively or individually. The use of focus groups in my research permitted students to have control of their thoughts, and familiarity within the

school setting. They orally clarified how they overcame and thus, experienced success.

Whitney (2005) defined focus groups as discussions whereby participants analyze, problem solve and reflect on particular topics. Dialogues in focus groups compare opinions and perspectives while providing the researcher with broader views than other types of research methods. Whitney suggested focus group data stand alone as a supplementary source to embellish other data sources. Focus groups serve as tools for program evaluations, and research determines the topics of discussion.

Ho and Crowley (2003) suggested that key tenets of focus groups should include background, knowledge and experience. I used focus group methods to identify problems, goals, aspirations, and to assess outcomes for success. The discussions during the focus groups helped me understand which factors support at-risk students who now are doing well in school.

Research Participants

Since the participants were demographically at risk, I used academic risk factors as criteria for selecting the participants in my research. My research criteria were current 11th graders who have been in the designated school for three years. Ninth grade students were identified by reviewing records of the following: (a) attendance less than 80%, (b) failed two or more classes in 9th grade, (c) suspended one or more times in 9th grade, and (d) reviewed ninth-grade End of Course Tests results.

The successes of 11th-grade participants were determined by participants' progress during the fall of their 11th-grade semester. Participants were identified as successful if they had attendance greater than 90%, were passing all classes, and scoring on grade level on all end of grade tests. I received nominations from teachers who taught 11th graders and who are doing well now in high school. I observed the same 10 students during classes and at lunchtime, interviewing each student twice. Two focus group sessions with these ten students was held at which time data from the literature was verified. I determined what needed to take place at Pride City High School.

I met with parents, students, school administrators, and teachers to explain the research in detail and answer questions. The purpose of the meeting was to collect background information and explain the overall process. A face-to-face meeting was held with parents to gain consent to conduct the research. Parents and school administrators were provided a detailed letter regarding the research. I wanted to ensure trust and establish rapport with participants and parents in the study. Gleason and Dynarski (1999) suggested that establishing a rapport was a process of reducing anxiety quietly and building trust. Rapport assists participants in dialoguing about their background and culture.

Research Setting

Pride City High School

Pride City High School was identified as an at-risk high school in Guilford County. Pride City High School's student enrollment was 1, 657 in grades 9-12.

The demographics of the school included the following: 96% African American students, 1% Asian students, 1% Hispanic students, 0.3% multiracial students, and 0.7% Caucasian students. Pride City High School's free and reduced lunch ratio is 62.3%. Pride City High School retained 117 students in the following grade levels at least once during the 2003 school year: 71 ninth-graders, 30 tenth-graders, 13 eleventh-graders, and three 12th-graders. Pride City High School retained 26 students, resulting in these students having been retained two or more times.

Pride City High School was established in 1929, and African American students continue to be the predominant population of students enrolled. The school has a rich legacy and heritage of greatness. Pride City High School is located in one of the oldest African American communities. The school is a community school with extended community resources. It has served as an historical landmark for the Civil Rights Movement and African American families. The challenges for Pride City High School are to merge the rich legacy with high academic standards. Ten students from Pride City High School were selected to participate in this study.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using transcribed audiotapes, notes, and coding of themes, patterns, and gaps from the data. Tape-recorded interviews allowed the researcher to listen to the tapes repeatedly to identify themes, slippage, and

selectivity. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher searched for patterns that showed a turnaround in student performance.

Subjectivity

As a researcher, I kept in mind my own subjectivity. Peshkin (1998) defined subjectivity as a characteristic that affects the results of an investigation. Subjectivity may shape the finding from research studies. Subjectivity stems from researchers' class, status, and value systems, while interacting with participants in the research process. In his article entitled "In Search of Subjectivity-One's Own," Peshkin discussed six I's that he uncovered. Peshkin reported subjectivity as (a) the Ethnic Maintenance I, (b) the Community Maintenance I, (c) the E-Pluribus-Unum I, (d) the Justice-Seeking I, (e) the Pedagogical-Meliorist I, and (f) the Nonresearch Human I. Peshkin (1998) claimed subjectivity was present during his research process, affecting the quality of all his research, not just observational investigation. Further, Peshkin reported that subjectivity filtered, shaped, blocked, and transformed what happened from the beginning of a research project to its culmination in written statement.

The Ethnic-Maintenance I was important for me because I was the principal of Pride City High School, a graduate of Pride City High School, and an African American female. I had roots and traditions of my own embedded in the school. My father and extended family members graduated from Pride City High School. I was concerned about the number of at-risk students who were leaving our high school early and those who were not experiencing successful outcomes.

In addition, it was important for me not to be offended by statements that participants made about the school or teachers.

The Community-Maintenance I was relevant because this study was conducted during a period of reform for high schools in Guilford County and across the state. I was a resident of Guilford County, and I needed to separate my personal thoughts of schools and school reforms.

I have always been concerned about the rights of all students but especially students who are disadvantaged, underprivileged, and impoverished. The Justice-Seeking I was difficult to control. For example, when I listened to students talk about the difficulty they experienced with teachers, I had to remain calm and not be tempted to reprimand those teachers. Peshkin (1998) suggested that we must be aware of our personal qualities that intersect with the research. I made sure that the data represented was of a trustworthy nature.

As a researcher, I was very concerned about the labels placed on at-risk students. Although I worked hard to be subjective, there were times when my voice meshed with the research. Dillard (1995) reported that voices of the researcher and the research seem to blend. At times, this was evident in the study.

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION

This study identified and examined factors that can positively affect the academic success of at-risk high school students. This study was developed to answer the following questions:

1. How does the student-teacher relationship contribute to or hinder the success of at-risk high school students?
2. How might we better ensure that at-risk students achieve and maintain high success rates throughout their school experiences on all grade levels?
3. What are specific factors and strategies that support high academic and social success levels of at-risk high school students?

To gain insight as to why some students were able to turn their performance around, I used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research activates the interaction between two or more people producing new voices and themes in conventional settings (Riehl, 2001). My research was conducted utilizing interviews, observations, and focus groups. I interviewed each participant for one hour followed by two focus groups that were held in the Media Conference Room of Pride City High School. As mentioned in Chapter III, participants were current 11th graders who had been in the same school for three consecutive years. Five males and 5 females participated in the research.

These participants were selected based on their 11th-grade fall semester success rates. The risk criteria for these participants were centered on their 9th-grade records. These participants were identified as failing two or more subjects and their school attendance rate was less than 80%. In addition, they were not proficient on the End of Course Tests, and their classroom behavior caused them to be suspended from school at least twice. Four of the participants lived with both parents and six were from single parent settings. Three of the participants' parents graduated from high school and one participant's mother received her master's degree. All participants were experiencing success at the end of the first semester during their 11th-grade year. They passed all subjects, their school attendance was greater than 90%, and each passed all of the End of Course Tests along with other standardized test required by the school system.

I talked with several of the participants' parents to address questions about the study. Because I was appointed principal of the school in July 2004, a third party, Mr. Daniel Williams who served as the eleventh-grade administrator, was available to allow the participants to withdraw from the study at any time. Data were collected from the participants' interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and cumulative records during the specific periods of March 17, 2006 through May 31, 2006.

Pride City High School was the first predominately Black high school in North Carolina. The school was established in 1929 and named after a former college president. Building upon its legacy and heritage, Pride City was a

landmark for the black community during segregation. In the early years, students from the school excelled in academics, sports, drama, dance, debate, music, and other extracurricular activities. Now 76 years later, numerous social and demographic changes have resulted from desegregation and redistricting. A magnet school was specifically designed to encourage students to continue their interest in the area of science, math and technology. At the time of this study, Pride City High School had a student population of 1,657 students, 98% of whom were African Americans. Approximately 63% of the students at Pride City High School were classified as economically disadvantaged. Pride City High School received \$265,000 in Federal Title I dollars, under the No Child Left Behind Act for the 2003-04 school year.

The mission of Pride City High School, as it appears in the mission statement, is to work in partnership with all Pride City stakeholders promoting academic excellence, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. Pride City High School shares the following beliefs:

- Our school is a safe and caring place for teaching and learning
- Every student should be given the knowledge, skills, and support services to succeed in high school
- Every student can and will learn
- Parents, staff, students, community agencies, and Pride City stakeholders must partner to achieve academic success

During the 2005 school year, Pride City High School engaged in a series of major initiatives that were designed to improve the overall climate of the school and academic success of its students. The following initiatives were implemented:

- Staff Training on Reading in the Content Area
- The hiring of facilitators for Literacy and Mathematics to provide direct instructional support to all staff
- The hiring of additional school counselors, a student support specialist, and a full time social worker
- Professional Development for teaching in a 90 minute block schedule
- A Comprehensive School Reform Grant using the Comer School Development Process Model

The students were encouraged to take Advanced Placement courses although less than 10% of the students scored at the mastery level of three or higher. New and repeating ninth and tenth-grade students dramatically affected the school's average daily attendance rate of 93%. The ninth-grade students accounted for the majority of student disciplinary actions and suspensions. The major challenge for Pride City High School was to increase student performance levels in order to meet federal requirements of Adequate Yearly Progress.

The School Administration

On July 1, 2004, I was named principal of Pride City High School. This assignment provided me the opportunity to work with teachers, parents, and students while increasing tests scores and creating a climate for learning. I talked

with students to gain their perspective on what was working at Pride City High School and how we could improve the school. For this research, I relied on the 11th-grade administrator, Mr. Williams, to serve as a third party person in order to allow participants and their parents to withdraw from the study at any time.

The participants in this study created their own pseudonyms. As stated previously, 5 males and 5 females were the subjects of the study. The following is the list of participants.

Table 2

List of Participants

Participants (pseudonyms)	Race	Gender
Jackson Briggs	African American	Male
Christine Bowden	African American	Female
John Brown	African American	Male
Mary Smith	African American	Female
Mike Carson	White	Male
Chris Robbie	African American	Male
Mike Mills	African American	Male
Brittany Evans	Hispanic	Female
Lynn Smith	African American	Female
Faith Evans	White	Female

Do Student-Teacher Relationships Hinder or Help At-Risk High School Students?

To understand how participants felt about themselves and their perceptions on how their teachers related to them, I talked with them through interviews and focus groups. In addition, I observed their performance in classes, in the hallways, and during lunch. To avoid pulling the participants out of core instruction, I met with them during lunch and during their elective classes. I was very protective of each student's core class time. The questions from the interviews were divided in three categories: self-identity, support: parents, positive role models, teacher/student, and engaging work through the curriculum and service learning.

I began the interview by asking participants about themselves:

1. What do you like about yourself?
2. Where do you hope to be in your life five years from now?
3. What are you doing to prepare for your future?
4. What adults have positively influenced your life up to this point? How?
5. What do you like about school?

The self-identity questions were:

1. How did you feel when you were not doing well in school? What hindered you?
2. Who encouraged you to do better? Why do you think they wanted to encourage you?

3. How do you deal with students who think you have changed?
4. How do you account for the changes that you have made?
5. How do you interact with students at this school? How do you and other students feel about one another?
6. How good are you in school subjects? In what subjects do you do well? What do you like or dislike about the subjects? Why?

I asked the participants the following questions to analyze supportive relationships:

1. How do you feel about your teachers? Do they help you? How does that make you feel?
2. Who encourages your efforts in school?
3. How does your family feel about your school and your performance?
4. Do you like your neighborhood? What is it like? What type of neighborhood would you like to live in one day? Why?

I asked the following questions to determine the participants' engaging work patterns:

1. Do you have any hobbies and interests outside of school? If so, what?
2. How do these hobbies and interests help you with your school subjects?
3. How do your hobbies and interests help you with your career goals?
4. Have you participated in any activity outside of school that helped you with a school project? What were the benefits of the outside project?

5. Are you involved in an outside activity that is connected to your career goals and future? How has the outside activity helped you?

6. Are you employed? What helps you or motivates you on your job?
Why?

The interviews and focus group sessions were tape recorded and transcribed. Observations of participants in classes, hallways, and lunchtime were noted and documented. Participants appeared to be comfortable talking with me during the sessions. Tables 3-23 represent responses from the interview questions.

Discussion and Analyses of Interview Data

There were common themes reflected in the interviews of the participants. Most of the participants had high self-esteem, confidence, goals, and positive attitudes. Themes of caring were presented in the interviews. Participants shared the importance of caring and how persistent teachers helped them turn their performance around. Participants gave credit to most teachers for supporting them through listening and providing guidance. In one interview, the participant said that the coach served as a father figure because he had no father. Positive relationships with family members influenced the confidence of the participants. One participant, Christine Bowden, talked about wanting to be just like her mother. She reported that her mother had everything together. She said her mother attended school and earned her master's degree.

Table 3***Responses to Interview Question “What Do You Like About Yourself?”***

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	<p>I am able to stand-up for what’s right within my community. I like school and the other little things that are going around.</p> <p>I’m able to make decisions on my own; I’m not pressured into doing things that everybody else wants me to do like smoking and stuff. That’s real heavy going around anyway. I am not easy to pressured, I overcame a bunch of things.</p> <p>That’s what I like about myself; I have a very strong character.</p>
Christine Bowden	I like that I’m an outgoing person. I speak-up for myself. I just like to have fun. If I don’t understand something I will ask questions.
John Brown	I’m a hard worker. I want to make a career out of what I do and enjoy it.
Mary Smith	I like everything. My talents and my energetic self, I like everything.
Mike Carson	What I like about myself is that I work hard in whatever that I do. And as far as getting my work done, I make sure I do it each and everyday, so I can get out of high school.
Chris Robbie	I like the simple fact that I’m a cool person, and that people like me because of that.
Mike Mills	How I pursue things and take advantage of the opportunities that I have.
Brittany Evans	I like my attitude now, my eyes and my hair.
Lynn Smith	I like about myself most because I look at things in a positive way.
Faith Evans	I like that I’m a bright student, and I’m looking to be successful in life, and I won’t take failure as an answer setting to my priorities.

Table 4

Responses to Interview Question “Where Do You Hope to be in Your Life Five Years from Now?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Well, not in prison, financially stable making it on my own and not worrying about how the next bill will be paid because it will already be paid.
Christine Bowden	I hope that I can be helping somebody. I want to be a Child Psychologist. I hope to finish school and have my own little company one day.
John Brown	I hope to own my own clothing line, store or art store, art supplies, anything that deal with art.
Mary Smith	Hopefully I'll be in college trying to get my masters degree in Math Education or becoming a Social Therapist Teacher.
Mike Carson	Well I'm hoping to own my own technology and engineering business. That is what I am going to college for, because I wanna be good at what I do, so—I'm hoping to own my own business.
Chris Robbie	At a job and well off.
Mike Mills	Somewhere doing something I enjoy.
Brittany Evans	Actually I'm undecided right now.
Lynn Smith	I hope to be somewhere, where I have a good career in what I am doing and a job that I like. Who wants to get up every morning feeling like they don't want to go to work?
Faith Evans Faith Evans cont.	I would hope to have finished college, pursued my career in Culinary Arts, if that's where it leads me, and gone further with my education.

Table 5***Responses to Interview Question “What are You Doing Now to Prepare for Your Future?”***

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Well, I’m playing football right now. That is kinda helping me with my future. Because I can go all the way because God blessed me with these talents. I have them for a reason and for me not to blow it on getting in trouble or anything else.
Christine Bowden	Being more focused in school doing what I got to do and taking classes that will help me with my goals and colleges.
John Brown	Trying to go to school. I just came from an interview at the School of the Arts in Winston-Salem. I heard nothing but good things.
Mary Smith	I’m passing all my grades with 3.0 GPA; I’m studying hard, and trying to pass all my tests to go to college.
Mike Carson	Working hard each and everyday, and I’m making sure I do my work just to get up out of high school and see where I go from there.
Chris Robbie	Making sure I have all of the classes that I need so I can go to college.
Mike Mills	I’m taking classes at Davis Academy. It’s gonna help me with the field that I’m gonna be applying for some day in Metals Technology.
Brittany Evans	Staying focused in class, just staying focused.
Lynn Smith	Taking school more seriously, studying so I’ll be able to get out of high school and go to college one day.
Faith Evans	I take Culinary Arts, I’m going to get an 80 or better on my Culinary Arts VOCATS exam. I will take Culinary Arts II next year as a senior. I hope to get a scholarship for two years at TCC.

Table 6

Responses to Interview Questions “What Adults Have Positively Influenced Your Life up to This Point? How?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Well there’s actually two people, Ms. Smith for helping me out and I feel like Coach Norris has positively influenced me for the simple fact that he’s helping me do something that I felt like I would never have a chance to do again. I felt like he was a positive influence because I never had a father. He’s kinda playing that male role in my life now.
Christine Bowden	Really everybody in my family, but mostly my mama because I really want to be like her. She still goes to school, she has her master’s, she has everything so she, I look up to her. I want to be just like her.
John Brown	My sister and my father. My sister has been encouraging me to go to school since I moved here and my father, he’s just been there. He’s been having my back; telling me positive things.
Mary Smith	Well . . . my grandma, my aunt, my momma, and all my teachers, and the staff at school.
Mike Carson	My parents, coaches, teachers but most definitely my parents. They made sure I worked hard each and everyday by keeping my grades up. I’m working hard getting my homework and stuff done.
Chris Robbie	My teachers and my parents.
Mike Mills	My parents and my teachers. They push me forward.
Brittany Evans	My coach, Ms. Cary, and my oldest sister. Because my sister, she graduated from this school and she just told me to just keep my head up and make sure I just keep my head in the books. She said don’t put boys before education.
Lynn Smith	My mom and my step-dad and some of my teachers.
Faith Evans	My manager was mainly about the only person that really influenced me. Because she’s in college and she’s young. She knew to tell me what’s right and what’s wrong and not mess up my life. She was always giving me positive advice.

Table 7***Responses to Interview Question “What Do You Like about School?”***

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	What I like about school is that there are teachers here who care about students. Some teachers like in other schools just don't care about students. I feel like here there are teachers who care about seeing us succeed in life. When we do make it, we can think back and tell them thank you.
Christine Bowden	It keeps me out of trouble. I like to come because it keeps me out of trouble. I would rather be here than out in the streets. I want to be here learning than be out in the world that I don't know nothing about. I like learning. I like the teachers and the kids. I like coming to school because you get to learn and have fun at the same time.
John Brown	I like the fact that some teachers are willing to help anytime. They're willing to stop whatever they are doing. Teachers say, here you go, and this is what you need to do, just do it.
Mary Smith	One, it's one of our black high schools. I like the people here, friends, and the way I learn here.
Mike Carson	Everything.
Chris Robbie	Everybody here that I associate with is cool, because we get along well.
Mike Mills	The atmosphere, it's a place to be comfortable. You feel safe about it.
Brittany Evans	I don't like school.
Lynn Smith	It's just, coming here and being comfortable.
Faith Evans	I like to come, have fun when I can, and do my work when it's supposed to be done.

Table 8

Responses to Interview Questions “How Did You Feel When You Were Not Doing Well in School? What Hindered You?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	<p>I didn't feel like my life was over or anything like that, but I felt like I was failing myself because I knew I was smart. I knew I did not apply myself. I made myself look stupid among my peers and among my family. I felt in some kind of way that I could overcome what was happening to me. I was doing very badly. I was at that point that I was hitting rock bottom bad, but it was bad enough to let myself know that I needed to wake-up!</p> <p>I was skipping, hanging around the wrong crowd. There were a ton of reasons that hindered me from doing well in school but basically skipping and hanging around the wrong crowd were the main reasons.</p>
Christine Bowden	<p>It made me feel terrible because I looked at students who didn't do their work and those that did. I felt that I was right in the middle. It made me feel down about myself. I knew I was smart, but I just didn't know what I was doing. It made me feel real bad. I really wanted to show the teachers that I was smart.</p> <p>I looked at students from middle school and high school. I did not want to be like them. I wanted to be better than that; I wanted to go further.</p>
John Brown	<p>I felt like I could do better, I felt like I was just b.s.--ing around, “just shooting the breeze” when I could have “stepped it up” and wouldn't had to worry about it later on. So now I'm just cramming trying to get it all done.</p> <p>I hindered myself, just wanted to chill with my friends, just hanging around.</p>
Mary Smith	<p>At first I didn't know that I couldn't achieve, I got tired of doing nothing. I just got tired of it.</p> <p>The people around here that hung around and the peer pressure.</p>

Mike Carson	<p>I felt like I wasn't being a good role model for my brothers and sisters. If they saw what I was doing then they would turn around and do the same thing and I felt that I had to change myself for them. And plus, I wanted to be a good example for the rest of my family; I wanted to get of high school.</p> <p>The point of knowing that everybody in my family graduated from high school. I just wanted to work hard and get up out of high school. I think people around me prevented me from doing what I was supposed to do. I think I prevented myself from doing what I wanted to do. Because there were points where I did not do my work because of the people around me. And then sometimes I felt like I didn't want to do my work at all and I wouldn't do it and that's what stopped me.</p>
Chris Robbie	<p>I didn't really care about anything.</p> <p>It wasn't anything in particular; it's just that I didn't care.</p>
Mike Mills	<p>It was more like a thing where I knew I could do it, and then it was as if I let some things take me off track, so I just didn't know what to do.</p> <p>Like seeing other people do things and watching them do it and hearing them talk about it.</p>
Brittany Evans	<p>I felt bad, because I just kept doing badly. I knew I wouldn't graduate, so it made me just sick and tired. I knew I had to change my whole attitude.</p>
Lynn Smith	<p>When I wasn't doing well, it was more like I wasn't really thinking about it until it kinda hit me that I wasn't doing the right things. I figured out that I needed to straighten up and do things the right way.</p> <p>Hanging out with the wrong people influenced me not to care about things.</p>
Faith Evans	<p>To tell you the truth, I felt bad, and I knew that wasn't me because I've never made bad grades in school but my ninth grade year.</p> <p>I saw that I was getting behind and that I was coming back to Pride City High School from _____ High School. I saw that I was going to be with my old friends from _____ Middle School. I wasn't gonna graduate with them, so I got my head together and got on, in the right grade and stuff.</p>

Table 9

Responses to Interview Questions “Who Encouraged You to Do Better? Why Do You Think They Wanted to Encourage You?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Of course, Ms. Smith. For one thing, she cared and did not want to see me fail. Of course, not just me, but lots of other students.
Christine Bowden	Teachers, all my teachers at every grade level. They really knew who I was. They wanted me to know who I was. They could see inside that I was a good student.
John Brown	My sister because she was always on me. She really let me know that I should get ready for school. I’m practically like the only one, me and my sister. I will probably be the only one in my family who will really graduate from college.
Mary Smith	Teachers, grandma, mom, aunt. I want to keep my family tradition going, everybody in my family graduated from Pride City High school.
Mike Carson	My parents and my uncle. Well, my uncle always said I was a humble person. He always wanted me to graduate from high school because all my family graduated from Pride City High School. He said I would always be the next one, so hearing him say that all the time just made me wanna work harder just to get out of high school.
Chris Robbie	My parents and my teachers. Because they wanted to see me doing better for myself. They said I had so much potential from what they saw in my work.
Mike Mills	My parents and my teachers. They were telling me that I could do the things that I was suppose to be doing and that I needed to do more of them.
Brittany Evans	My sister because she knew what to do with her life, and so she wanted me to do better too.
Lynn Smith	It was mostly teachers and my parents. They told me I wasn’t doing the right thing and they showed me things that I could’ve been doing and telling me I was a smart kid.
Faith Evans	Myself. Only myself.

Table 10

Responses to Interview Question “How Do You Deal with Students Who Think You Have Changed?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Well, I deal with them; I'm not going to say I don't speak to them. If you can't accept me for what I am now, you really didn't care about me anyway. It's not like I don't like them, it's just something they are going to have to get use to because it's me.
Christine Bowden	I don't deal with them at all. Sometimes I try to give them advice but if they don't take it, I just keep my head up and go the other way.
John Brown	I really could care less cause, as long as they ain't affecting me. If they ain't affecting the way, I make money and the way I live, they can go on about their business.
Mary Smith	I try to change them or just leave them alone.
Mike Carson	They know I have changed and they don't say nothing about it. They saw what I did my 9 th grade year. Now they see what I'm doing now.
Chris Robbie	Teachers say I've changed for the better; I thank them on that because I'm glad that somebody noticed it. If they say I have not, then I just don't need the negative energy.
Mike Mills	I don't pay them any attention.
Brittany Evans	My attitude has changed. If anybody says anything to me now I just hold my tongue. Previously I would tell them off.
Lynn Smith	I just let them think what they want to think.
Faith Evans	I tell them I've changed. If you're not gonna be my friend because I'm doing my work, then that's fine too.

Table 11

Responses to Interview Question “How Do You Account for the Changes That You Have Made?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	It's for the better. My mama told me that life's lesson would teach a rising teenage male a lesson. I feel like life has taught me a lesson. I grasped the concept quickly. A wake-up call is the last thing anybody wants. You can be kicked out of school or dropped from the roster in school.
Christine Bowden	I wish I could make more changes, but I think I did a good a good job. I believe in myself and so does my mama. I'm staying out of trouble. I have come a long way.
John Brown	I made a lot of changes, so I just take each one of them day by day.
Mary Smith	I'm passing. I'm gonna graduate early, a semester early. I got more credits than I expected.
Mike Carson	Hearing my family say graduate, and knowing that everybody who graduated in my family graduated from this high school changed me. I just wanted to work hard and get up out of high school myself.
Chris Robbie	My parents and my teachers wanted me to do better.
Mike Mills	Good. I feel good about 'em.
Brittany Evans	I don't know.
Lynn Smith	In a positive way, I guess. I like 'em
Faith Evans	I really don't know.

Table 12

Responses to Interview Questions “How Do You Interact with Students at this School? How Do You and Other Students Feel about One Another?”

Participants	Response
Jackson Briggs	I’m not going to say that I’m the person going around telling them what they need to do or how to do it, or even telling them to straighten up. They take heed for the simple fact that they know where I can from. They know what I went through. They know that what I say is not a bunch of bogus stuff.
Christine Bowden	<p>I talk to everybody; I have friends. I see someone, like an outcast, standing in the hallway; I’ll go up and talk to them. I’m friendly with everybody. If I see somebody who looks like they had a bad day, I go back, talk to them, and tell them every thing is going to be al right.</p> <p>It’s like a competition. It’s a mind thing. Inside you think that a person thinks down about you or high about you. In your mind, you are thinking the same thing. I think that we all should be doing the same thing and that’s graduate.</p>
John Brown	I know what I need to know and I let them know what they need to know. They ain’t gonna affect me and how I’m living.
Mary Smith	I’m popular around here. Everybody knows me and likes to speak to me. I don’t have a problem with anybody in this school.
Mike Carson	I’m cool with everybody. I try to get to know everybody that I possibly can. I think I react great with the students.
Chris Robbie	<p>My parents and teachers caused me to do better.</p> <p>When I’m in class, it’s all on an educational level. When I’m outside of class or at lunch and stuff, I’m “chillin” and having a good time with my friends.</p>
Mike Mills	Good. I feel good about other students, but if they have a negative attitude against me, I just push them out of the way.
Brittany Evans	I’m a social person, but I don’t think about making friends at this school.
Lynn Smith	In a positive way, I guess.
Faith Evans	I get along with some students, but when it comes to getting my work, I don’t interact with anyone.

Table 13

Responses to Interview Questions “How Good are You in School Subjects?

In what Subjects Do You Do Well? What Do You Like or Dislike about the Subjects? Why?”

Participants	Response
Jackson Briggs	I love English; it helps me with my grammar. I also enjoy History. In History, I get to learn more about the world and people. My classes were challenging.
Christine Bowden	Pretty good if I stay focused. I do well in English and History.
John Brown	Well, I'm just horrible in Math. I'm going to bring it up. Sometimes it's hard to deal with the teachers in the classes. It depends on the teacher. If you have a problem with the teacher it's gonna affect in the class. I like World History and Social Studies 'cause I can bring it back to what's happening today in the world. I don't like reading and writing, but I can do it.
Mary Smith	I like Math; I have a 3.0 GPA that should explain it. I do well in Math and Social Studies. I don't like Writing and Reading although I passed the tests. They are just too hard for me to comprehend.
Mike Carson	I work hard everyday in school. My teachers said on every report that I am a hard worker. Hearing those comments made me want to keep working to improve.
Chris Robbie	I got an award today. I'm god in Math, English, and Art.
Mike Mills	I feel comfortable with my subjects. I like Science subjects and Social Studies. I don't like Math; it's just too much stuff to remember half the time.
Brittany Evans	Ok, I can say I do well in Science.
Lynn Smith	I guess its more subjects that I don't like that I have to pay more attention such as Social Studies. I enjoy Physical Science.
Faith Evans	I'm very good in all my subjects when I work and put my head to it. I dislike Social Studies, it's just too much stuff to think about and learn.

Table 14

**Responses to Interview Questions “How Do You Feel about Your Teachers?
Do They Help You? How Does That Make You Feel?”**

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Well there’s actually two people. Ms. Smith for helping me out and I feel like Coach has positively influenced me for the simple fact that he’s helping me so something that I felt like I would never have a chance to do again. I felt like he was a positive influence because I never had a father and he’s kinda playing that male role in my life.
Christine Bowden	My teachers wanted me to do well. I am not saying I was the teacher’s pet; however, I had a special bond with my teachers. I am thankful for my teachers, because if it were not for them I would not be here. We have good teachers to learn from at this school.
John Brown	I only had one teacher that we bumped heads as soon I got in the class.
Mary Smith	They help me and I pay attention to what they say.
Mike Carson	My teachers are great. When I’m doing something wrong, they are on top of it.
Chris Robbie	Well with some of them, I’m cool. I appreciate them helping me, but a couple of them I don’t really care about.
Mike Mills	I feel good about them. They help me with make up work. They tell me when I’m not doing something right and help me after school in tutoring.
Brittany Evans	They are okay.
Lynn Smith	I feel they are doing what they’re supposed to do. They are doing the best thing they can.
Faith Evans	I get along with all of them.

Table 15

Responses To Interview Question “Who Encourages Your Efforts In School?”

Participants	Response
Jackson Briggs	My aunts, mom, coach, and my principal.
Christine Bowden	My counselor, Ms. Stable.
John Brown	My sister, she is always on me. She let's me know what I should do to prepare for school.
Mary Smith	My family and teachers.
Mike Carson	Coach, stayed on top of whatever I did. He made sure I got to class on time; he made sure I was not late and I had all my materials. You know, he was top of whatever I did. He made sure I didn't get any D's. He didn't want C's. He wanted A's and B's, he knew I worked hard for him. That's the main reason I'm trying to get up out of here. I worked hard for him.
Chris Robbie	My teachers encourage me because they want me to do better.
Mike Mills	My teachers and guidance counselors
Brittany Evans	My sister.
Lynn Smith	I'd say myself and close friends.
Faith Evans	Myself, only myself.

Table 16

Responses to Interview Question “How Does Your Family Feel about Your School and Your Performance?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	They actually feel like I'm doing very good compared to how I used to do.
Christine Bowden	Everybody in my family has influenced my life. Although I really, want to be like my mama because she goes to school and has her master's, I look up to her, I really want to be like her. My school performance is important to my family. I have nothing to do but go to school. My family doesn't just want me to go school; they want me to get all the education I can get. Most of my family did not go to school except for my mother and father. My grandfather, grandparents, and aunts really want me to go to school and better myself. My mother stays on me. She made sure my homework was done and that I was involved in school. She made sure that my grades were right. My mother has been really on my case, I know I just can't take anything to her.
John Brown	They're always saying that I can do better, cause I can.
Mary Smith	My family expects me to graduate from this school. Everyone in my family graduated from Pride City High School. My grandma, aunts and mama all graduated from Pride City. My grandma has influenced me the most. She has tried to get me what I needed to be successful and motivate me to graduate from Pride City High School.
Mike Carson	My parents and uncle encouraged me to do better in school. My uncle always said they wanted me graduated from Pride because most of our family graduated from Pride. He always said that I would be the next family member to graduate. Hearing those words just made me work harder to graduate from high school.
Chris Robbie	They want me to have what they didn't.
Mike Mills	Basically, my parents are always pushing me forward. I feel good about the fact that they listen to me.
Brittany Evans	They care, but they do not really know much about the stuff that goes on in school. They never had a chance. My older sister helps me with the things I do not understand. She was willing to sit down and help me.
Lynn Smith	My mom and dad gave me good information about how I show go about doing things the right way.
Faith Evans	The only person that notices it is my grandmother.

Table 17

Responses to Interview Questions “Do You Like Your Neighborhood? What is it Like?”**What Type of Neighborhood Would You Like to Live in One Day? Why?”**

Participants	Response
Jackson Briggs	I ‘m not gonna say rich, but the type of lifestyle you don’t have to worry about anything happening to your children.
Christine Bowden	I love my neighborhood. I grew up in my neighborhood. I like the people. Everybody cares about each other. You can just go next door if you need something.
John Brown	It’s a good neighborhood and I like to keep it straight. I like to keep it positive. It’s a real chilled environment, even though I stay in an apartment complex. I just keep everything in line. I help people out when they move in. If I see trash at their front door, I might take it out for them.
Mary Smith	It’s all right.
Mike Carson	I like my neighborhood. All the kids go to school just like me. Their parents are the same as my parents. They make sure their kids stay out of trouble. It’s not the neighborhood that makes you; it’s what you make of it yourself.
Chris Robbie	It’s just all right, because it’s just old people and _____ in my neighborhood.
Mike Mills	My neighborhood is the kind of place where people just hang out with each other. If something happens in the neighborhood people sit down and discuss it. If something was going on in the neighborhood, people looked out for each other’s house. We have a playground in our neighborhood and kids go down there and have a good time. I want to live in one neighborhood that’s better than the one I’m living in now, but you know it’s basically a good neighborhood. You know where people communicate with each other and have a good time.
Brittany Evans	It’s boring. It’s quiet.
Lynn Smith	I’d like to live in a neighborhood better than the one I live in now. I wanna live in a neighborhood where I can go outside and have a family cookout, without people coming along doing things they’re not suppose to do.
Faith Evans	I like my neighborhood. There are lots of children in my neighborhood, so, I really don’t go outside. I work most of the time.

Table 18

Responses to Interview Questions “Do You Have Any Hobbies and Interests Outside of School? If So, What?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Yes, I actually like to make money. I like to cut grass.
Christine Bowden	I like going to church and church programs. We have study groups at church. It showed me that other people cared and helped me focus in school.
John Brown	I like to draw; I hope to own my own art store. I have taken Art I, Art II, and Advanced Art. I was accepted to the School of The Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I will start air brushing tee shirts in a couple of weeks.
Mary Smith	I was a cheerleading coach at Windsor Community Center. I enjoyed working with kids and helping them get ready for becoming a cheerleader. Cheering helped me. I’m popular, everybody knows me, and I’m friendly with the kids.
Mike Carson	Oh yea, basketball. My brothers and sisters play basketball. I like to play the coach.
Chris Robbie	Cartoons and computers.
Mike Mills	I like to make rockets.
Brittany Evans	No.
Lynn Smith	I like sports.
Faith Evans	I work all the time and that’s about all I do.

Table 19

Responses to Interview Question “How Do These Hobbies and Interests Help You with Your School Subjects?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	They help me to concentrate more in class so that I can make that dollar.
Christine Bowden	You have to do good in school to be rewarded. I have to do good in school in order to play basketball. If I do good in school, I can play basketball.
John Brown	I take advanced art classes. I hope to own my own art store, art supplies, just something dealing with art, one day. This summer I hope I can learn different things in this art school. I want to start airbrushing tee shirts in a couple of weeks.
Mary Smith	They keep me out of trouble.
Mike Carson	My coach and I play games about basketball. I have to do well to play basketball.
Chris Robbie	They really don't.
Mike Mills	I enjoy working with my hands. I'm taking classes at Davis Academy. These classes will help me with my interest in Metal Technology. I like to make rockets. In my first block class, we learned how to draw blueprints for the rockets.
Brittany Evans	I don't know.
Lynn Smith	I don't have a hobby, but I think hobbies help all students.
Faith Evans	I just work all the time.

Table 20

Responses to Research Question “How Do Your Hobbies and Interests Help You with Your Career Goals?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Football has helped me with my future goals, because I will be able to go all the way, because God blessed me with talent.
Christine Bowden	It keeps me active. It always keeps me thinking. I like to keep myself occupied.
John Brown	I’m a hard worker. I want to make a career out of what I do and enjoy it. I hope to own a clothing line, or a store, or an art store, art supplies, anything that deals with art.
Mary Smith	I like working with kids in math.
Mike Carson	In basketball, you have to work as a team. On a job, you must work the same way as a team.
Chris Robbie	I like working with computers, I want to do something with computers in my future.
Mike Mills	The class that I’m taking now, you have to know how to read blueprints. I figured that if I learned how to read them, it would help me later.
Brittany Evans	I don’t know.
Lynn Smith	No
Faith Evans	I am taking courses in Culinary Arts. I hope to get a scholarship to attend Technical Community College for two years before going on to a four-year college. I also work part-time job. When I’m at work, I don’t get into trouble. I spend more of my time working and making plans for Culinary Arts School.

Table 21

Responses to Interview Questions “Have You Participated in Any Activity Outside of School that Helped You with a School Project? What Were the Benefits of the Outside Project?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Not that I recall.
Christine Bowden	Church programs have benefited my success in school. We have study groups at church. These study groups showed me that other people cared about me. Other people outside of school shared an interest in me.
John Brown	Yes, Young Life. I attended a camp at A & T and the Cultural Art Center in Greensboro, North Carolina.
Mary Smith	Yeah, the Boys and Girls Club.
Mike Carson	I can't recall.
Chris Robbie	No.
Mike Mills	I had to do a project on how people act in different ways at different ages and things like that. Volunteering helped me do it because I was around them for most of the summer. It was easy for me to do it.
Brittany Evans	I can't think of one.
Lynn Smith	No.
Faith Evans	No.

Table 22

Responses to Interview Questions “Are You Involved in an Outside Activity That is Connected to Your Career Goals and Future? How Has the Outside Activity Helped You?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	No just cutting grass and making money.
Christine Bowden	No, not at the moment.
John Brown	No.
Mary Smith	Being with kids helped me to get ready when I become a math teacher.
Mike Carson	No.
Chris Robbie	Not yet.
Mike Mills	I’m hoping to get into an apprenticeship over the summer.
Brittany Evans	No.
Lynn Smith	No.
Faith Evans	No.

Table 23

Responses to Interview Questions “Are You Employed? What Helps You or Motivates You on Your Job? Why?”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	Working has helped me become a man. It helps me not to depend on my mom all the time. No man wants to own anybody or ask for nothing. I do little things that I can do to make money, like cutting grass.
Christine Bowden	I like to work with people. I'm a people person. I love to see people smile. I work at the Kids Foot Locker and I want to be a Child Psychologist.
John Brown	Yes, I work at Stephanie's Restaurant off Randleman Road.
Mary Smith	No.
Mike Carson	No.
Chris Robbie	No.
Mike Mills	No.
Brittany Evans	I don't like working.
Lynn Smith	No.
Faith Evans	Yes

My mother stayed on me. She made sure that I did my homework and that I was involved in school. She checked up on me and made sure my grades were right. (Christine Bowden, April 2006)

One of the challenges for all of the participants was the uncertainty of making the needed changes when they realized they were not doing well in the 9th and 10th grades. Participants talked about how they skipped classes, hung around the wrong crowd and just did not care about anything. Participants explained that skipping classes and hanging with the wrong crowd was a way for them to escape the demands of school.

Self-Identity

Eight of the participants were highly confident in their ability to do well. Participants talked about self-identity and setting goals for themselves. Six of the participants discussed their future plans. One participant talked about being a Child Psychologist. Another participant talked about a career in Culinary Arts. However, one of the participants named Brittany struggled with setting goals. She said her parents did not talk about planning for future goals nor did they build her self-confidence and self-esteem. It appeared that her parents were grateful that the older sibling could assist Brittany with major decisions.

They care, but they do not really know much about the stuff that goes on in school. They never had that chance. My older sister helps me with things I do not understand. She was willing to sit down and help me. (Brittany Evans, April 2006)

More significantly, Faith, another participant, seemed strong and confident during the interview sessions. During the interview, she talked about depending on her manager at work and herself. Faith shared that teachers did not support her because of her cold-hearted attitude. She believed that some teachers were afraid of her.

My manager is mainly about the only person that really influenced me. She told me not to mess up my life and told me what was right and what was wrong with some of the things I shared with her. My manager was in college. (Faith Evans, April 2006)

Support

Nine of the participants interviewed expressed pride in the changes they made. They attributed the changes to the establishment of rules and values from positive adults. One participant talked about his experiences in elementary school.

When I was growing up in first grade to sixth grade the main support was this belt called "Black Joe." Black Joe told me if I did not do well in school, he was going to see me every afternoon until I started doing well in school. That actually motivated me. (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

All participants acknowledged the importance of caring relationships, support and motivation between parents and students, but they differed on how it played out in their lives. For example, Mike Carson felt that his coach and teachers made him work hard everyday to keep his grades up because they cared about him as a person.

They let me know that there's somebody out there who cares. That is very important when it comes to us growing up in the world. There's somebody else who cares. My coach expected my English project to be good. He told me that he only wanted A's from me. (Mike Carson, April 2006)

However, Faith Evans understood the role of teachers but found support from her manager on her job. Faith believed that her teachers did not like her and she felt the same way about them. Faith stated that she thought she intimidated teachers. She did not listen to teachers and they did not help her because of her intimidating attitude.

I had a cold-hearted attitude toward teachers. I did not like the way teachers looked at me and I didn't do my work. By not doing my work, I was seeing that I was being left behind so I knew I needed to make a change. My manager was always there for me. She would let me know what was right. She helped me a lot. (Faith Evans, April 2006)

Most participants believed parents, positive role models, and teachers treated them with respect. Teachers cared about their academic success, career goals and aspirations.

One interesting note was ownership of the neighborhood by male participants. One participant shared that he kept the neighborhood in order. If something went wrong in the neighborhood he fixed it. Another participant noted that he loved the closeness in his neighborhood.

My neighborhood is the kind of place where people just hand out with each other. If something happens in the neighborhood people sit down and discuss it. If something was going on in the neighborhood, people looked out for your house. We have a playground in our neighborhood and kids go down there and have a good time. (Mike Mills, April 2006)

Mike reported everyone was like family in the neighborhood. He shared that many fun events occurred in his neighborhood including cookouts and picnics. Many of the participants talked about how the community supported each other in times of need.

Engaging Work

At-risk students tend to be engaged when teachers provide emotional support, information, and additional assistance with schoolwork (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Nine of the participants enjoyed the way teachers made school interesting. They also felt that they had good grades and relationships with the teachers.

My teachers wanted me to do well. I am not saying, I was the teacher's pet, however, I had a special bond with my teachers. I am thankful for my teachers, because if it were not for them I would not be here. We had good teachers to learn from at this school. (Christine Bowden, April 2006)

One of the participants, Brittany, talked about always feeling as if she had to compete with her twin sister. She described her sister's success versus her lack of self-confidence about her own schoolwork. Four of the participants were involved in extracurricular activities. Three participants had outside hobbies, which supported future career goals. Seven of the participants worked after-school and weekend jobs. One participant talked about her after-school job.

Most of my leisure time was spent working. I worked all of the time. Working kept me out of trouble and I did not worry about getting in trouble. (Faith Evans, April 2006)

Another participant talked about having to pay bills. Working was a way for him to support himself and not worry about where he was going to get the money to help pay bills he created.

Working has helped me become a man. It helped me not to depend on my mom all the time. No man wants to own anybody or ask for nothing. I do little things that I can do to make money, like cutting grass. (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

A participant named Mike talked about how an outside project helped him to understand his class work better. He described how he worked on drawing a blue print on an outside activity to help with his English project. All participants were pleased with the changes they made and were quick to acknowledge individuals who supported their dreams, goals, and aspirations.

Observations

Observational data served as authentic verification of students' behavior (Griffee, 2005). I observed each participant in their classes, hallways, and at lunch. I conducted these observations on each participant to determine academic self-identity and positive feedback received from teachers in the classroom. I wanted to know whether these factors created success for at-risk high school students. On my second set of observations, I looked at situations and incidents that revealed the actions of students formally and informally with other role models and engagement in the curriculum. Participants did not change their behavior or routine as I visited the classes. My daily classroom visits and learning walks seemed natural to the students. Most students in the school saw me in

their classrooms on a regular basis. Tables 24 and 25 show the participants who displayed academic self-identity in classes and received positive feedback from teachers.

Table 24

Classroom Observations

Participant	Self-Identity Academic	Positive Feedback from Teachers
Jackson Briggs	Ask questions	Yes
Christine Bowden	Helped student in class	Yes
John Brown	Raised hand to ask for classification	Yes
Mary Smith	None	Yes
Mike Carson	Started working on assignment before others	Yes
Chris Robbie	Assisted a student	Yes
Mike Mills	Group Leader	No
Brittany Evans	None	No
Lynn Smith	Came in early for assistance from teacher	Yes
Faith Evans	Helped teacher distribute materials	Yes

Discussion and Analyses of Observation Data

The observations revealed that each participant appeared interested in the content of the classes. Participants were willing to answer teachers' questions without hesitation. Their confidence level and understanding of the material was evident. All participants reacted positively to the feedback presented by the teachers. As suggested by Croninger and Lee (2001) the academic behavior of at-risk students became stronger as they approached graduation.

Table 25***Observations Outside the Classroom***

Participant	Positive Feedback from Role Models/Peers	Engagement in Curriculum
Jackson Briggs	Football Coach	Yes
Christine Bowden	Teacher	Yes
John Brown	Role Model	Yes
Mary Smith	Peer	Yes
Mike Carson	Coach	Yes
Chris Robbie	Peers	Yes
Mike Mills	Teacher	Yes
Brittany Evans	Coach	No
Lynn Smith	Role Model	Yes
Faith Evans	Manager at Work	Yes

When I needed help with my work or tutoring, my teachers stepped in and told me changes that I needed to make in my work and that I can do better. (Lynn Smith, April 2006)

Focus Group Data

Two focus group sessions were held with participants. These focus groups permitted participants to interact with each other and elaborate upon their experiences, opinions and attitudes (Morgan, 1998). After listening to the tapes repeatedly, I coded the responses to the questions in the categories of self-identity, support from parents, teachers, and role models, and engaging work. All of the participants responded to different questions. Participants' responses are shown in Tables 26-32.

The data from the focus groups permitted me to think critically about factors supporting at-risk high school students. As stated by Gentilucci (2004),

Table 26

Self Identity: “Describe Two Events that Account for the Changes that You Have Made”

Participant	Response
Jackson Briggs	What do you mean by events? Do you mean like stuff that went on in school? I think it was for me, sports in school and my family giving me the motivation that I needed.
Chris Robbie	I think that’s everybody’s choice. I mean, I think everybody gonna say, school, friends, sports, and family.
Mike Mills	I ain't really into sports; I think it was being motivated by my hobbies.
Mary Smith	School and friends.

focus groups serve as powerful determiners of learning, motivation and support.

All of the participants shared positive attitudes about self-identity and self-esteem. The role of the parents and teachers motivating the student to make positive changes in their performance was evident. One participant, Brittany, shared her concern about her teachers.

My coach was the only teacher who helped me. When teachers first meet me they think I have a bad attitude. (Brittany Evans, April 2006)

She only acknowledged one of her teachers as making a difference in her life.

Brittany admitted that her attitude was an obstacle for her success at school.

Table 27

Self-Identity: “How Would an Adult Figure Describe You?”

Participant	Response
Lynn Smith	Basically, I wouldn't know because my parents made me work hard. My friends made sure I stayed out of trouble, There's plenty of people I could say, but I don't know how to say it.
Chris Robbie	Well, it's kinda hard to say, but I would say they'd described me as somebody who was very progressive.
John Brown	Well, from what I heard and what they write down I'm a great leader, outstanding, very fun to teach, with good qualities.
Brittany Evans	Do you mean in a bad way or in a good way? Because when teachers first saw me they thought I was a mean person. I am really a nice person. I'm a leader too, and I like to help people. It's just that some teachers described me as having a bad attitude. I do have a bad attitude sometimes, but it's only with certain teachers, but overall, I'm really a nice person
Faith Evans	I'm a good person, but at times you know I can be on the other side you know what I mean. A while back I was a cold-hearted person, I didn't care much about stuff, but I think I changed. Most people think I'm fun to be around, I'm a down-to-earth person.
Christine Bowden	How would somebody describe me? Well, a joy to teach, fun, I'm very playful, a leader, that's pretty much it. And, talkative, very aggressive and smart; and full of potential.
Mike Carson	I think they would describe me as being responsible and respectful and overall a good person.
Mary Smith	They described me as being loud first, and aggressive. I am a leader. I can be respectful. I might be loud, but I'm very respectful, I'm just a fun and good-hearted person.

Table 28

Support: “Who and What Were the Important Persons or Events that Helped You Turn Things around and How?”

Participant	Response
Christine Bowden	Teachers and parents.
Faith Evans	Myself, I’m self-motivation. Because I think that when we get out school, it is most important, so you must drive and push yourself.
Mike Carson	Self-motivation.
Chris Robbie	I agree. Yep.
Mary Smith	That pretty much sums its up for me too.

Table 29

Support: “Do You Believe that Your Teachers Care about You? Why?”

Participant	Response
Mary Smith	Yeah, somewhat.
Brittany Evans	Some of them do, some of them don’t.
Christine Bowden	I have teachers that tell me everyday, “I care about you, I like you.”
Jackson Briggs	Some teachers care, but they show it in a different way. It might not be the way that we want them to show it, but in the long run it’s gonna help us. Even though they kick us out of class; we have different opinions about things, it’s gonna help us in the long run
Mike Carson	Our progress, I mean our grades, the way we study, learn; the way they helped us reach our goals.
John Brown	I also think they think it’s their job and by helping a student or by telling a student, “you can go to college,” makes a teacher feel they have done a good job to prepare students for the future.

Table 30

Support: “What Do You Like about this School?”

Participant	Response
Christine Bowden	The people.
Mary Smith	Yea, the people, it's different types of people. You got your good people, your fun people; you just got all different types of people. And teachers, for me, you have very good teachers here.
Jackson Briggs	Good principals.
Mary Smith	Plus the principals.
Brittany Evans	I don't like this school, because people wanna be like other people. It's just drama all the time. I mean, that's all it's about, this school is about fashion. If a person got on this, another person may get mad at that person. I just don't like this school.
Christine Bowden	That's not the school, that's just a group of people.
Brittany Evans	But it's the people in the school and some of the teachers too. It's some teachers that help though, but there's nothing about this school I like.
John Brown	<p>I like the teachers, cause they're willing to help. Some teachers will go out their way and some teachers won't.</p> <p>What I like about the school is the discipline, the discipline plan because you can get in trouble, and feel like you shouldn't get the punishment, but you get it anyway. It will help you, it will make you understand like, okay, I don't wanna do this again. I think we need the discipline. I think it's what everybody needs, but especially what I need. If I don't have discipline, then I would not be here today.</p>
Faith Evans	I really don't care, because I might just be fine with a teacher or it's just not my day.
Brittany Evans	<p>Actually the discipline in this school doesn't mean anything to some people. Because they can get suspended like 5,000 times and they still do the same 'ole thang when they come back to school. Some of the things and some of the rules are good for some of the students but half of these students don't really care about being suspended. They don't care about being in trouble.</p> <p>I think it's too easy to get in trouble, and then get away with it.</p> <p>They gonna do it again.</p>

Table 31

Engaging Work: “Which Subjects Do You Enjoy the Most and Why?”

Participant	Response
Mary Smith	I like Math because it's harder, it gets me working, it gets me thinking, it gets me motivated. I'm gonna major in math. I'm going to get my degree in Math Education.
Jackson Briggs	English and US History, History, because you get to learn more about the world and people that you don't know. You learn about events that are important to your life. English, because it helps me with everyday things like grammar, the way I speak and read. I love English.
Mike Mills	I like Math, I like numbers, and I think it's hot.
Brittany Evans	I like dance too, because it relieves stress. I can explore boundaries for myself.
Chris Robbie	I like Computer Applications I, II, and Small Business, those subjects are cool. I like anything that deals with computers, math.
Jackson Briggs	I thought you were talking about the main subjects, like Math, English, stuff like that. I like drama, too.
John Brown	I like Art. I like History.
Lynn Smith	I used to like PE, wow--, I wish I still did.
Faith Evans	I think I like my block class the most.
Mike Carson	I like any class that poses a challenge. I like to sit there and think for a minute, I love it. The answers to questions are so simple.
Mike Mills	Yea, I don't like simple stuff. I get bored easily. In my first block, it's a science class, it's not hard, it's easy.
Brittany Evans	I also liked the after-school activities because without them, such as Step Team, I would not have stayed in school. Step Team has kept me out of trouble, so that's another reason why I think I was picked for this thing because I've been out of trouble for a good long time.

Table 32

Final Question: “Is There Anything that Somebody Else Wants to Add that We Did Not Mention?”

Participant	Response
Christine Bowden	I would like to say this experience has made me actually sit and realize the things that I do like. When we were talking in the interview, it made me actually realize that I admire the teachers, school and my parents and family. Those things are important to me.
Lynn Smith	Yea—me, too. I agree. I like what she said.
Brittany Evans	Again, I really like after-school activities.
Mike Carson	You need it to occupy your time. I think we should keep the after school activities. Coaches too.
Jackson Briggs	Oh yea, we need coaches, good teachers, good coaches, good administrators. Yea, because those will be the ones to set you straight.

CHAPTER V

WITHIN CASE ANALYSIS

To begin analyzing my data, I must first start with each individual student and examine their responses to my research questions. In this chapter, I will present case studies on each student.

Christine Bowden

Christine was the youngest of five children and the only girl. Christine lived with both parents. She enjoyed playing basketball with her brothers. Christine described herself as a people person who was friendly and never met any strangers. "I like that I'm an outgoing person. I speak up for myself and just like to have fun. If I don't understand something I will ask questions."

Christine enjoyed cheering up other students who had a bad day. She reflected upon her 9th grade year as a year of several bad days and bad choices:

It made me feel terrible because I looked at students who didn't do their work and those that did. I felt that I was right between. It made me feel down about myself. I knew I was smart, but I didn't know what I was doing. It made me feel real bad. I really wanted to show the teachers that I was smart. (Christine Bowden, April 2006)

Christine's academic year as a ninth grader was good. She maintained a C average and passed all of the standardized tests for ninth and tenth grades. She received four unsatisfactory marks in all core academic subjects. In tenth

grade, her academic performance continued to improve, but her classroom behavior continued to decline. Christine attributed the unsatisfactory conduct grades to associating with the wrong groups and seeking attention.

Christine smiled as she talked about her mother. She said her mother was everything; they were very close. Christine reported that she began involving her mother in everything that she did. There was evidence that her relationship with her mother helped her school engagement (Gonzales, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). Christine's mother served as a positive role model for her. Christine said her mother worked hard to get a masters degree. Christine made tremendous progress as an 11th-grade student. She had no unsatisfactory grades for discipline, and was on the A/B honor roll first semester of her 11th-grade year. Christine planned to attend college and wanted to be just like her mother when she became an adult. Her plans included pursuing a career as a Child Psychologist.

Christine Bowden's self-identity was low because she did not view herself as a good student. Her mother was instrumental in motivating her to achieve. The involvement of Christine's mother served as a factor to support high academic and social success.

John Brown

John was an excellent art student. During the time of this study, he told me he was accepted to attend The School of the Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. John credited himself as a hard worker with goals and aspirations.

I'm a hard worker. I want to make a career out of what I do and enjoy what I do. I hope to own my own clothing line, or store, or art store, art supplies, anything to deal with art. (John Brown, April 2006)

John appeared to be very motivated and goal oriented. He was very confident about his future. Throughout the interview with John, I noticed that he was very independent. His independence may have meant that he was working hard on his own. As stated by Ames and Ames (1989) some students work hard on their own to accomplish and pursue their interests. John moved to Greensboro, North Carolina when he was in the fourth grade. He lived with an older sister in an apartment complex. John maintained a C average during his 9th and 10th grade years but struggled with not passing end of course exams. However, he received an "A" in his favorite class, Art I and centered his success in Art I.

I felt like I could do better. I felt like I was just 'b.s.---ing' around, just 'shooting the breeze' when I could have 'stepped it up' and wouldn't have to worry about it later on. So now I'm just cramming trying to get it all done. (John Brown, April 2006)

He was absent 12 days in ninth grade. John stated his self-esteem was low when he first entered high school. "I felt lost and lonely." John said that things began to change for him in the second semester of his tenth-grade year. John was in the 11th grade during this study. He was enrolled in Advanced Placement Art. His grade point average was a B in most of his classes. John worked after school in a local restaurant in town. He was recognized as the 2004 Poet

Laureate for his school system. John said that his sister had always been there for him and he just wanted to make her proud of him.

John Brown was very motivated and goal oriented. Because of his achievement, one could say that John was confident. These qualities were factors, which assisted John in turning his performance around.

Mary Smith

Mary was a bubbly, high energy 11th-grader who lived with her mother and brother. She was identified as a student with behavioral problems who made loud outbursts in classrooms. Mary admitted that her teachers did not like her when she entered high school. Her teachers were concerned about her success in ninth and tenth grades. She recalled those two years as disastrous times. Although Mary experienced behavioral concerns, academically she maintained a B average. She did not pass the end of course test in two core subjects: Biology and Physical Science. She missed 28 days of school in ninth and tenth grades.

Mary believed that participating in school activities helped her get her life together. Participation in extracurricular activities provided extrinsic rewards to students and helped establish meaningful relationships in schools (Hwang et al., 2002). Mary attributed her changes to her involvement in after-school activities. Mary was one of the leading dancers on the school's modern dance team. In her leisure time, she volunteered as a cheerleader coach at one of the community centers with elementary children. Mary talked about her future.

Hopefully, I'll be in college trying to get my master's degree in Math Education or become a Social Therapist Teacher. (Mary Smith, April 2006)

Mary looked forward to graduation. She will be the first one in her family to graduate from college.

Mike Mills

Mike's school records suggested that he was quiet and easygoing. He enjoyed helping others:

I had to do a project on how people act in different ways at different ages and things like that. Volunteering helped me do it because I was around them for most of the summer. It was easy for me to do it. (Mike Mills, April 2006)

Mike had an interest in Metals Technology. He took special courses at Weaver High School. As suggested by Mahoney and Cairns (1997), extracurricular activities linked patterns of adaptation for at risk students. This was the case for Mike. Mike liked science and social studies, which were his favorite courses.

Mike was retained in the ninth grade. During those two years, he received five unsatisfactory marks in Algebra I, Physical Education and Health, Spanish I, World History, and Honors Civic and Economics. His grades were D's.

At the beginning of the second semester as a tenth-grader, the light came on inside Mike's head. Mike planned to attend college and wanted to live in a better neighborhood:

I want to live in one neighborhood that's better than the one I'm living in now, but you know it's basically a good neighborhood. You know where people communicate with each other and have a good time. (Mike Mills, April 2006)

Mike Mills' positive attitude and motivation served as a factor that supported his academics and social success level. Mike participated in engaging work opportunities learning which allowed him to experience success.

Lynn Smith

Lynn was proud of her positive way of thinking. She shared there was always a bright side to everything. When Lynn was in the ninth and tenth grades, her way of thinking was not positive. She allowed several things to hinder her progress:

When I wasn't doing well, it was like, I wasn't really thinking about it until I guess, it kinda hit me. I wasn't doing the right thing, so I figured out then that I needed to straighten up and do things the right way. (Lynn Smith, April 2006)

During this period, Lynn realized that she was giving in to peer pressure. Lynn lived with her aunt and really loved school. In the ninth grade, Lynn failed English 9, Algebra I, and Physical Education and Health. During her tenth-grade year, she made the A/B honor roll and continued the same trend during first semester in the 11th grade. Lynn planned to finish high school and attend college. She planned to be a nurse one day because she liked helping people.

Lynn Smith set goals and expectations for herself. Her positive attitude assisted her in turning her performance around.

Faith Evans

Faith liked the fact that she was an independent thinker.

I like that I'm a bright student and I'm looking to be successful in life, and I won't take failure as an answer to my priorities. (Faith Evans, April 2006)

Faith credited the wisdom of her grandmother and herself, as helping her make positive choices in her life. Her mother and stepfather made few comments about her career goals or future plans. Faith did not want to graduate with younger students who lived in her neighborhood. This motivated her to remain focused on completing her work in order to graduate with her own classmates. Faith spent two years in ninth grade because of failing grades in Physical Science, and Keyboarding. In tenth grade, she made the honor roll and was recognized first semester in the 11th grade as an honor roll student. She received four unsatisfactory grades in the tenth grade, and none during her 11th-grade year. Faith's attendance was not a problem; she passed the entire end of course exam requirements. Faith planned to pursue a career in Culinary Arts. She also hoped she would receive a scholarship to attend one of the community colleges in her city. She was taking courses at Davis Academy in Culinary Arts.

Faith Evans' survival characteristics were encouraged by her manager at her job, her grandmother, and herself. She set goals, established self-esteem, and established confidence to pursue a future in Culinary Arts.

Mike Carson

Mike cruised into the room as he greeted me with his smile. There was visual evidence that Mike suffered from polio but it never dimmed his smile during the interview. Mike displayed a happy-go-lucky attitude. He lived with his father, stepmother, two brothers and two sisters. He was the oldest child in his family. Mike expressed the pleasure of doing fun activities with his brothers. Mike talked about how he felt when he did not do well in ninth and tenth grade:

I felt like I wasn't being a good role model for my brothers and sisters. If they saw what I was doing then they would turn around and do the same thing, and I felt that I had to change myself for them. And plus, I wanted to be a good example for the rest of my family, I wanted to be up out of high school. (Mike Carson, April 2006)

Mike had to repeat ninth grade because he failed too many subjects. This was the turning point in his life. His strong family influence made him turn his life around.

The point of hearing my family say graduate, and everybody graduated from high school, I just wanted to work hard and get up out of high school myself. I think people around me prevented me from doing what I was supposed to do. I think myself prevented me from doing what I wanted to do also because there were points where I didn't do my work because of the people around me. And then sometimes I felt like I didn't want to do my work at all and I wouldn't do it and that's what stopped me. (Mike Carson, April 2006)

After a second year in ninth grade, Mike went from straight F's to B's in English 9, and C's in Algebra I. Unfortunately, Mike experienced behavior concerns and received unsatisfactory marks in World History, Earth Science, and

Algebra I. Mike was absent 20 days during his first and second year in ninth grade. He had been successful in completing and passing the English 9, Algebra I, Physical Science, and Computer Skills at high levels. Mike was proud of the fact that his father graduated from the same high school that he attended which motivated him. Mike planned to attend college after high school. He attributed his ambitious thoughts to having a caring coach:

Coach, he stayed on top of whatever I did. He made sure I got to class on time, he made sure I was not late and I have all my materials. You know, he was on top of whatever I did. He made sure I didn't want no D's, he didn't want no C's. He wanted A's and B's, he knew I worked hard for him. That's the main reason I'm trying to get up out of here, I worked hard for him. (Mike Carson, April 2006)

Meaningful relationships with teachers who believed Mike could graduate were a motivating factor critical to Mike's success. At the completion of this study, Mike hoped he would have enough credits to graduate in the fall of 2006.

Mike Carson set high expectations and values for himself. The student/teacher relationship strengthened Mike Carson's academic success.

Jackson Briggs

Jackson Briggs was an only child living with his mother and two aunts. He had a great interest in athletics and set the goal of being drafted by the National Football League as his life aspiration. Jackson shared how good he felt being on the football team.

Football has help me with my future goals because I will be able to go all the way because God blessed me with talent. (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

Jackson invested in sports. This feeling of investment helped to develop his self-esteem (Katz, 1994). Jackson was pleased by the respect he received from his teammates and family. At the beginning of Jackson's 9th grade year, he struggled academically and behaviorally to stay in school. He failed Algebra IA, Algebra I and World History his first time in 9th grade. He received unsatisfactory conduct grades in two of his subjects. This caused Jackson to repeat the 9th grade.

Jackson shared his feelings at that time:

I didn't feel like my life was over or anything like that, but I felt like I was failing myself. I knew how smart I was and not applying myself made me look stupid among my peers and among my family. I felt in some kind of way, that you could overcome all of that. I was doing badly. I was at that point that I was not at rock bottom bad, but it was bad enough to let myself know that I did need to wake-up! (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

Jackson's second time in ninth grade was better. He failed one class but received unsatisfactory conduct grades in three subjects. Jackson did not pass any of the end-of course exams in ninth grade. He missed 35 days of school in the two years of ninth grade and was suspended 13 days.

At the time of this study, Jackson was on track for graduating in 2007. He said something happened to him during that second time in ninth grade. He said the sports were the key and having people around him who cared and supported him positively:

Well there's actually two people, Ms. Smith for helping me out and I feel like Coach has positively influenced me for the simple fact that he's helping me do something that I felt like I would never have a chance to do again. I felt like he was a positive influence because I never had a father

and he's kinda playing that male role in my life. (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

As suggested by Manson (2005), positive teacher/student relationships removed barriers and replaced hope for students. At the beginning of his 11th-grade year, Jackson passed the North Competency Test, had perfect attendance, excellent conduct, and maintained a B average.

Jackson said the turning point in his life was the sports. Jackson stated that he felt blessed to have the athletic ability. "I can go all the way because God blessed me with talents. I have these talents for a reason and I can't blow it." Jackson was a starter on the Pride City High School football team that year.

Jackson Briggs' self-identity and success was enhanced by his involvement in sports, and relationship with the coach. Jackson's grades, attendance, and behavior improved, allowing him the opportunity for engaging work.

Chris Robbie

Chris was one of the most popular students in the school. During the school's annual awards program, Chris received the "Most Improved Math Award." The student body clapped for him for at least 2 minutes.

Chris' improvement could have been associated with the changes he made:

Teachers say I've changed for the better, I thank them on that because I'm glad that somebody noticed it. If they say I have not changed, then I just don't need the negative energy. (Chris Robbie, April 2006)

Chris was often observed opening the doors for teachers and served as a peer tutor for students in Math. Before this study, Chris was thought to be a member of a gang while in ninth and tenth grades. He grew up in a large family, four sisters and four brothers. He lived with his mother and had been a teenage father for three months, at the time of this study. Academically, Chris had been successful. He received A's in Introduction to Math and Algebra I during his ninth-grade year. He made the B honor roll his tenth-grade year, but had problems controlling his temper. This caused him to receive six unsatisfactory conduct grades. At the time of this study, Chris had scored well on all end of course exams including Algebra I, Computer Skills, and English 9. Chris had a desire to attend college and work with computers after earning his degree.

Chris Robbie's survival skills were dominant during the interview. He credited teachers, family, and peers for the changes he made. His confidence level and pride were demonstrated when he spoke of not wanting negative energy. Chris' interest in computers served as a strategy to engage at-risk students in meaningful school experiences to support their academic and social success.

Brittany Evans

Brittany had a twin sister upon whom she depended for emotional support. Brittany shared that she liked her new attitude, hair, and eyes. She was fashionably dressed during the interviews. Brittany lived with her parents, her

twin sister, and an older sister who helped her in school. She reported that her coach and sister guided her in decision-making:

My coach and my oldest sister helped me. Because my sister graduated from this school and she just told me to just keep my head up. Make sure I just keep my head in the books, don't put boys before education. (Brittany Evans, April 2006)

Her parents had little or no education and were uncomfortable about making school choices and decisions. Brittany shared her parents' expectations for her schooling:

They just expect me to graduate. They want me to go to college, but as long as I graduate, that's all that matters. They don't want nothing bad you know, in my future. (Brittany Evans, April 2006)

Brittany reflected on her attitude. She reported that she had a negative attitude when she was in the ninth and tenth grades. Although her grades were good, her attitude prevented her from participating in extracurricular activities. She received six unsatisfactory conduct grades in ninth and tenth grades. In grade 11, she had all satisfactory conduct grades. Her main goal was to graduate from high school and make her family proud.

Brittany Evans' family values and support were factors that helped her. Brittany's pride and motivation helped to turn her performance around. She recognized that she needed to change her attitude about school to improve her academics and participation in social events.

The 11th-grade administrator shared that the participants in the study greatly improved academically and behaviorally. He shared that participants' changes were drastic and some of the participants often talked about dropping out of school. He believed that the participants had low self-esteem and at the time when they were ninth graders did not understand the importance of doing well in school.

CHAPTER VI

CROSS CASE ANALYSES

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to identify and examine the factors that can positively affect the academic success rate of at-risk high school students. This chapter is organized to compare the different participants' responses to questions that relate to self-identity, support, and engaging work.

Self-Identity

High school at-risk students developed skills to regulate their high school life. A positive attitude toward oneself enhanced the success of at-risk students (Hinckley & Alden, 2005). Having a positive attitude also affected at-risk students' value systems, expectations, and daily interactions with others (Alfassi, 2003). At-risk students developed their own definitions of self-identity and scholarship through challenges and obstacles. Although these challenges persisted, at-risk students experienced success because of self-identity and their willingness to reach their goals and aspirations.

Once students were provided opportunities to experience success, they are afforded the opportunity to be unique individuals (Sagor & Cox, 2004). Through motivation and determination, at-risk students controlled themselves

and made meaningful choices (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003; Reglin, 1998; Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

Some of the themes found across the literature in support of at-risk students were parents, teachers, and positive role models that contributed to the successful experiences of at-risk students. More assurance from adults created more success for at-risk students. Close family adult members, extended family members, and non-family adults supported the success of at-risk students (Kenny et al., 2002). Supportive relationships were important because at-risk students developed confidence when exposed to high levels of stress. Supportive relationships provided at-risk students with positive social environments and structures for school success. At-risk students received different types of social support associated with day-to-day challenges (Rosenfield, Richman, & Bowen, 1998). Through the interviews, observations, and focus groups, I was able to determine how the student-teacher relationship contributed to or hindered the success of at-risk high school students.

Given the literature, I expected to find that all ten students would have supportive relationships with at least one teacher. I found that several students did not have such relationships. Four of the students shared that teachers assisted them in turning their performance around, and six students stated that family members and role models assisted them in turning their performance around. The six students who felt teachers did not support them compensated their lack of support by seeking guidance from parents, peers, and positive role

models. These students shared that teachers were judgmental and did not respect their rights as students in their classes. There were differences in the responses from students about teachers who played a role in their success and those from parents and family members who contributed to a student's success. As it turned out, it did not matter that it was a teacher, as long as an adult took an interest in the student. The table below illustrates which participants believed that teachers, parents, and extended family contributed to their success.

Table 33

Sources of Support for Students

Participant	Teacher	Parent and Extended Family	Non-Family Members
Jackson Briggs	Highly supportive	Little support or influence	None
Christine Bowden	Little support or influence	Highly supportive	None
John Brown	Little support or influence	Highly supportive	None
Mary Smith	Little support or influence	Support from Grandmother	None
Mike Carson	Highly supportive	Little support or influence	None
Chris Robbie	Highly supportive	Little support or influence	None
Mike Mills	Little support or influence	Highly supportive	None
Brittany Evans	Highly supportive	Little support or influence	None
Lynn Smith	Little support or influence	Highly supportive	None
Faith Evans	Little support or influence	Little support or influence	Highly supportive

Positive role models who provide structure, rules, and trust for at-risk students can strengthen the support for students (Sarton & Youniss, 2002). Teachers who display caring attitudes can nurture and sustain students (Nodding, 1992). In a high school setting, the absence of teacher-student relationships can cause negative peer bonding, which can overshadow school success, and discourage at-risk high school students (Farrell, 1990).

All of the participants stated that an adult figure positively influenced their lives. Four participants in this study had a great deal of contact with teachers. They shared that a teacher or coach contributed to their success. Jackson Briggs shared how two teachers helped turn him around.

Well, there's actually two people who helped me one Ms. Smith and Coach. They positively influenced me for the simple fact that they helped me do things that I thought I could not do. My coach influenced me because I never had a father and he played that male role in my life. I love my teachers because they want me to do good. My teachers care about me and they just don't say they care they show it. They really care about me because that's the right thing for them to do. The students must put forth efforts. Students must bring 50 percent of the effort and the teacher has to bring 50 percent to meet students half way. (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

Teachers can provide students with positive validations and engagement. At-risk students worked well when teachers identified their strengths. During this study, I noticed that Jackson Briggs and Mike Carson often referred to situations where they felt validated by teachers. Mike Carson stated:

My coaches and teachers make sure I work hard each and everyday to keep up my grades, homework and other stuff. My teachers are great. I

mean, when I think I'm doing something wrong, they already know that I have done something wrong. They are on top of things. (Mike Carson, April 2006)

Most participants shared the values of caring attitudes by teachers because they were not judged as being at-risk. Chris Robbie seemed surprised about his teacher's belief in him. He stated:

My teacher has positively influenced my life up to this point. They want to see me do better because they have seen the potential in me. I'm cool with my teachers. I appreciate them helping me. They want me to succeed and accomplish great things. (Chris Robbie, April 2006)

. Brittany Evans recalled a time when her attitude prevented her from establishing meaningful relationships with her teachers.

My attitude has changed. If anybody says anything to me now I just hold my tongue. Previously I would tell them off. I like my teachers now. My dance coach told me to keep my head in the books and not on boys. My teacher made me feel special and I have more potential than I thought I had. (Brittany Evans, April 2006)

Jackson Briggs, Mike Carson, Chris Robbie, and Brittany Evans attributed their success to a caring competent teacher. They felt their teachers motivated them and believed that they should be respected. They were made to feel that they had an opportunity to succeed. The teachers motivated them and established high expectations, which served as factors that supported their relationships with teachers. Brittany Evans talked about how rules and values served as factors for her success with teachers. These guiding themes served as

support factors that contributed to the success of at-risk high school students.

The themes served as models to create positive relationships between teachers and students (Gomez, Allen, & Clinton, 2004).

On the other hand, the other six participants valued positive relationships between parents, extended family members, and students. As stated by Morris and Morris (2000), African Americans generally had high expectations for their children. This was evident with the parents in this study as viewed by the participants. Christine Bowden shared in her interview how her parents influenced her life:

Everybody in my family has influenced my life. Although I really, want to be like my mama because she goes to school and has her master's, I look up to her, I really want to be like her. My school performance is important to my family. I have nothing to do but go to school. My family doesn't just want me to go to school; they want me to get all the education I can get. Most of my family did not go to school, but my mother did and my father did. My grandfather, grandparents, and aunt really want me to go to school and better myself. My mother stays on me. She made sure my homework was done and that I was involved in school. She made sure my grades were right. My mother has been really on my case, I know I just can't take anything home to her. (Christine Bowden, April 2006)

Data from the interviews of the participants show a beneficial relationship between parents and students identifying goals, aspirations and self-regulation.

John Brown talked about the motivation and drive that his family provided for him:

My sister and my father have helped me. My sister encouraged me to go to school since I moved to Greensboro, and my father has been there for me as well. My father always tells me positive things. However, my sister

has been my main influence. She has always been there for me. She told me to prepare for college because I will be the only member of our family graduating from high school and college. I know I can count on my sister. (John Brown, April 2006)

The participants also showed how their parents had authority, customs, and traditions that were passed down to them. Mary talked about expectations her grandmother and mother established for her:

My family tradition was for me to graduate from this school. Everyone in my family graduated from Pride City High School. My grandma, aunts and mamma graduated from Pride City. My grandma has influenced me the most. She has tried to get me what I needed to be successful and motivate me to graduate from Pride City High School. (Mary Smith, April 2006)

Mike Mills viewed his parents as influences in his life in a positive manner.

Basically, my parents are always pushing me forward. I feel good about the fact that they listen to me. (Mike Mills, April 2006)

Throughout this study, the participants mentioned the support of parents and extended family members. Their parents conveyed support by listening to them and by demonstrating compassion, love, and kindness. Lynn Smith reported that through the guidance of her parents she now has goals to attend college.

My mom and dad gave me good information about how I should go about doing things the right way. (Lynn Smith, April 2006)

Faith Evans commented on the fact that her manager at work positively influenced her:

My manager was the main person who really influenced me. She is in college and she's young so she knows how to tell me what's right and what's wrong. She has told me not to mess up my life and always makes positive statements to me. No one in my family has graduated. Basically everyone in my family has been just waiting around waiting to see if I'm going to make it. I know I will. (Faith Evans, April 2006)

At-risk high school students' supportive relationships with parents, extended family members, and positive role models were contributors to their success. The students' perceptions of increased support from parents and extended family members, gave them a feeling of pride, which contributed to their success in school (Domagala-Zysk, 2006). Participants Christine Bowden and Lynn Smith responded that values, rules, and expectations were factors that their parents and family members talked about during their high school experience. Mary Smith and Faith Evans discussed supportive themes of pride and motivation. John Brown talked about setting goals. He described one goal which was to own his own art business. These 5 participants addressed the fact that other adults outside of the school setting positively contributed to their school success.

Support for at-risk high school students was critical. All participants were not doing well as ninth and tenth-graders; however, after establishing meaningful support systems with teachers, parents, and extended family members, they were able to turn their performance around. The student-teacher relationship

contributed to the success of at-risk high school students through establishing meaningful relationships, having a caring attitude, and taking a genuine interest in the students. The teachers assisted students in developing them as individuals. Teachers viewed each of the participants as individuals instead of labeling them as at-risk (McPhail, Pierson, Freeman, Goodman, & Ayappa, 2000).

Themes emerged from participants' interviews and focus groups that were echoed in the research. Building relationships, feelings of confidence, and positive attitudes were mentioned by the students as ways to better ensure at-risk student success rates (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Table 34 shows that participants involved in engaging work and extracurricular activities ensured their success.

Table 34

How Do At-Risk Students Achieve and Maintain High Success Rates?

Participants	Engaging Work/ Service Learning	Extra Curricular School Activities
Jackson Briggs	No	Yes
Christine Bowden	No	Yes
John Brown	Yes	Yes
Mary Smith	No	Yes
Mike Carson	No	Yes
Chris Robbie	Yes	No
Mike Mills	Yes	No
Brittany Evans	No	Yes
Lynn Smith	No	Yes
Faith Evans	Yes	No

All ten of the participants were engaged in some form of after school activity or service learning that ensured their success. Faith Evans talked about her after school job and her interest in attending Culinary Arts School:

I am taking courses in Culinary Arts. I hope to get a scholarship to attend the Technical Community College for two years before going on to a four-year college. I also work a part-time job. When I'm at work I don't get in any trouble. I spend more of my time working and making plans for Culinary Arts School. (Faith Evans, April 2006)

Mike Mills demonstrated how engaging work helped him achieve and maintain high success rates.

I enjoy working with my hands. I'm taking classes at Davis Academy. These classes will help me with my interest in Metals Technology. I like to make rockets. In my first block class we learned how to draw the blueprints for the rockets. I volunteered in an old folks home, I guess I can say that. I had to do a project on how people act in different ways at different ages. It helped me understand older people and it was easy for me to be around them. (Mike Mills, April 2006)

Chris Robbie and John Brown shared their outside interests. Chris stated:

I like working with computers, I want to do something with computers in my future. (Chris Robbie, April 2006)

John was excited about his interview for art school in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. John stated:

I take advanced art classes. I hope to own my own art store, art supplies, just anything dealing with art, one day. This summer I hope I can learn different things in this art school. I want to start airbrushing tee shirts in a couple of weeks. (John Brown, April 2006)

A body of evidence pointed to Mahoney and Cairns (1997) suggesting the importance of providing at-risk students with rewarding experiences inside and outside of the classroom setting. To better ensure that at-risk students achieve and maintain high success rates throughout their school experiences, they should be engaged. Students should be engaged beyond the classroom and should be provided lasting and meaningful experiences. Through engaging work, at-risk students' horizons were being expanded. Students became active participants (Waldstein & Reicher, 2001). Faith Evans, Mike Mills, Chris Robbie and John Brown expanded their success rates and learning through engaging work.

Findings from interviews, observations, and focus groups indicated that extracurricular activities permitted the participants to be successful without grades. They had a break from the standard schedule and class offerings. Extracurricular activities included organized sports, student government activities, yearbook, and newspaper. These activities provided the students with opportunities to create a vision, a positive attitude and to gain more confidence (McNeal, 1995).

One participant, Mike Carson, commented on the fact that playing basketball helped him:

My coach stayed on top of whatever I did. To play sports I had to get to class on time and make sure I had all my materials. My coach did not want D's nor C's. I had to make A's and B's. I worked hard. (Mike Carson, April 2006)

Extracurricular activities offered high school students greater opportunities that suited their abilities and interests (Kinney, 1993). Mary Smith, Brittany Evans, and Lynn Smith were involved in organized sporting activities. Mary Smith commented:

I was a cheerleading coach at Windsor Community Center. I enjoyed working with kids and helping them get ready for becoming a cheerleader. Cheering helped me. I'm popular, everybody knows me, and I'm friendly with the kids. (Mary Smith, April 2006)

One participant, Christine Bowden, talked about her involvement in church:

I like going to church and church programs. We have study groups at church. It showed me that other people care and helped me focus in school. (Christine Bowden, April 2006)

All of the participants experienced confidence, relationships, and a positive attitude in their interviews and focus groups. Students talked about how these engaging experiences built their confidence and allowed three participants to consider career opportunities generated from engaging work experiences. A key theme emerged during each of the participants interviews related to engaging work.

Engagement in learning activities and school environment is an important factor and strategy that supports high academics and social success levels of at-risk high school students. When students started maintaining positive self-views and positive attitudes, their chances of school success improved (Finn & Rock, 1997).

Table 35

Specific Factors and Strategies Supporting High Academic and Social Success of At-Risk High School Students

Participants	Influence of Self-Identity or Self-View	Influence of Positive Attitude
Jackson Briggs	X	
Christine Bowden		X
John Brown	X	
Mary Smith		X
Mike Carson	X	
Chris Robbie	X	
Mike Mills	X	
Brittany Evans		X
Lynn Smith		X
Faith Evans	X	

All of the participants in this study felt that high academics and social success levels supported their success. All five of the male participants and only one female participant felt self-identity or self-view was a factor. One female participant, Faith Evans stated:

I turned things around for myself. It was self-motivation. I think that when you get outta school, it is most important; so you must drive and push yourself. (Faith Evans, April 2006)

Jackson demonstrated his self-identity:

I am able to stand up for what's right within my community and in school. I am able to make decisions on my own. I'm not pressured into doing things that everybody else wants me to do, like smoking. I have a very strong character. (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

Four of the female participants talked about a positive attitude. Christine Bowden stated:

I talk to everybody; I have friends. If I see someone, like an outcast, standing in the hallway, I'll go up and talk to them. I'm friendly with everybody. If I see somebody who looks like they had a bad day, I go back and talk to them and tell them, everything is going to be all right. (Christine Bowden, April 2006)

Through classroom observations, participants demonstrated using class time wisely, asking questions during class, assisting other students, and spending extra time in the classroom. Christine Bowden commented about one of the classes:

If I don't understand something, I will raise my hand and ask the teacher to explain. (Christine Bowden, April 2006)

John Brown talked about the teacher role as a strategy for success:

I like the fact that teachers have helped me. They were willing to help me anytime. They stopped what they were doing. This was what I needed. (John Brown, April 2006)

The participants in this study identified factors and strategies that helped them achieve high academic and social success levels. In the participants' interviews and focus groups, key themes emerged from the literature review and in my data. The themes were self-identity, support, and engaging work. The tables below show the participants who gave responses that connect to the given theme. The first and last initials identify participants.

Table 36***Self-Identity Themes***

Key Themes	JB	CB	JBr	MS	MC	CR	MM	BE	LS	FE
Self-esteem	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Goals	X	X	X	X		X	X			X
Motivation	X	X	X				X	X		X
Positive Attitude	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Survival	X	X	X			X				X
Confidence	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Aspirations	X	X					X	X	X	X

Table 37***Support Themes***

Key Themes	JB	CB	JBr	MS	MC	CR	MM	BE	LS	FE
Competence		X		X			X			X
Values	X	X		X	X		X			
Pride	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Motivation	X	X	X				X	X		X
Rules	X	X			X				X	
Goal Setting	X	X	X		X		X			X
Expectation		X	X		X				X	X

Table 38***Engaging Work Themes***

Key Themes	JB	CB	JBr	MS	MC	CR	MM	BE	LS	FE
Relationship	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Expectations	X	X					X			X
Confidence	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Mastery-Oriented		X		X			X		X	X
Motivation	X	X	X				X	X		X
Goals	X	X	X	X			X	X		X
Positive Attitude	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

To analyze the factors supporting the success of at-risk high school students, I interviewed 10 high school students with similar characteristics in one high school. All of the students were current 11th-graders who during their ninth and tenth-grade years had not done well academically. In the study, I compared the responses from the participants in order to answer the research questions identified in Chapter I.

How Does the Student-Teacher Relationship Contribute to or Hinder the Success of At-Risk Students?

Research conducted by Croninger and Lee (2001) suggested that students who came from socially disadvantaged backgrounds benefited from a positive student-teacher relationship. In this study, I discovered that the participants from Pride City High School conveyed through interviews the importance of the student-teacher relationship and their success. The participants talked about the changes they made because of the student-teacher relationship. Successes for these participants were developed through teacher support. They referred to the following teacher characteristics as contributors to their success:

- A caring attitude
- Good listening skills
- Providing nurturing attention
- Speaking encouraging words
- Identifying students' strengths
- Non-judgmental attitudes

Student success has been recognized in several ways including scores from standardized tests, attendance, grades, and behavior. Given the converging evidence, many at-risk students have defied the odds and become successful students (Germinario et al., 1992).

Christine Bowden contributed her success to her teachers:

My teachers encouraged me to do better. All of my teachers at every grade level. They really knew who I was. They wanted me to know who I was. They saw that within me was a good student. (Christine Bowden, April 2006)

Most of the participants recalled how their teachers helped them turn their performance around. Lynn Smith commented:

They told me I was not doing the right things. They showed me things that I could do instead. They told me I was a smart kid and what I should do. (Lynn Smith, April 2006)

Jackson Briggs talked about what hindered him as a ninth-grader entering high school. He said that when he started respecting his teacher his performance was better.

There are teachers here who care about students. They are not like some teachers in other schools. I feel these are teachers who care about seeing us succeed in life. When we make it, we can think back and tell our teachers thank you. (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

The participants felt that their teachers helped turn their performance around.

How Might We Best Ensure that At-Risk Students Achieve and Maintain High Success Rates Throughout Their School Experiences at All Grade Levels?

In this study, I found that establishing open communication with students, active involvement, motivation, and goal setting was consistent indicators ensuring success of at-risk students (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). These indicators were not only consistent with student-teacher relationships, but with parents, family members, and positive role models. Parental support was key in demonstrating academic success of at-risk students through school engagement, motivation and self-regulation (Dweck, 1986).

Mike Carson commented on his family support:

My parents and uncle encouraged me to do better in school. My uncle always said they wanted me to graduate from Pride because most of our family graduated from Pride. He always said I would be the next family member to graduate. Hearing those words just made me work harder to graduate from high school. (Mike Carson, April 2006)

John Brown demonstrated his evidence of achievement through his sister:

She is always on me. She really lets me know what I should do to prepare for school. I will be the only one to graduate and go to college. (John Brown, April 2006)

Mike Carson commented on the motivation he received from his family:

Now I really want to graduate with my class. At one point I just wanted to graduate with my younger brothers and sisters. The point of graduating with my class will make my family proud of me. (Mike Carson, April 2006)

Parents, teachers, positive role models, and extended family members significantly predicted the academic success of at-risk students at all levels (Taylor, Hinton, & Wilson, 1995). At-risk students benefit from positive relationships, which allowed them to maintain high success rates.

What are Specific Factors and Strategies that Support High Academic and Social Rates of At-Risk High School Students?

Several documented studies suggested that at-risk students possessed intrinsic qualities that supported them academically and socially (Alderman, 1990). Participants in this study talked about what hindered their success and what qualities they used to turn their performance around. The following table shows hindering factors that emerged from the interviews.

Table 39

Factors That Limited At-Risk Students' Academic and Social Levels

Participants	Pressure from Peers	Skipping Class	Self
Jackson Briggs	X	X	
Christine Bowden			X
John Brown	X		X
Mary Smith	X		
Mike Carson			X
Chris Robbie			X
Mike Mills	X		
Brittany Evans			X
Lynn Smith	X		
Faith Evans			X

All of the participants talked about their inward potentials to do better. Faith Evans stated:

I'm a good person now, I can be on the other side too, if you know what I mean. A while back, I was a cold-hearted person. I didn't care much about stuff. I needed to change. I did not want to be like some of the kids I saw in high school. (Faith Evans, April 2006)

Brittany Evans talked about how her attitude hindered her:

I had a bad attitude. Some teachers described me as a person with an attitude. However, I am really nice. I'm a leader and I like helping people. (Brittany Evans, April 2006)

Lynn Smith talked about the peer pressure:

It was hanging out with the wrong people that influenced me. I just didn't care about anything. (Lynn Smith, April 2006)

Self-Identity

Each of the participants stated that their self-identity, setting goals, and positive attitudes were the specific factors that supported them in turning their performance around. Alfassi's (2003) research emphasized the correlation between a student's self-identity and the way he or she faced challenging situations. Lynn Smith stated:

I always looked at things positively. When I wasn't doing well, I didn't like myself. It kinda hit me that I wasn't doing the right thing so I figured out that I needed to straightened up and do things the right way. (Lynn Smith, April 2006)

At-risk students achieve success through past experiences and their desire to set meaningful goals (Alderman, 1990). Faith Evans commented:

To tell you the truth, I felt bad. I never made bad grades in school, but my ninth grade year. I was getting left behind so I got my head together and got back in the right grade. (Faith Evans, April 2006)

Key themes emerged during the focus groups. Each participant demonstrated positive attitudes. John Brown commented:

I am a great leader, an outstanding person and fun to teach. (John Brown, April 2006)

Table 26 lists the occurring themes, which merged from participants.

Table 40

Occurring Themes from Participants

Participants	Setting Goals	Positive Attitude	Motivation
Jackson Briggs	X		
Christine Bowden		X	
John Brown	X		
Mary Smith			X
Mike Carson			X
Chris Robbie		X	
Mike Mills	X		
Brittany Evans		X	
Lynn Smith		X	
Faith Evans	X		

Strategies that Support High Academics and Social Success Rates of At-Risk Students

Caring Teachers

In the focus groups, students defined caring teacher as people who supported them academically and socially. Caring teachers helped the students improve their academic self-identity. One of the themes that ran throughout student interviews was the need for helpful and caring teachers. John Brown demonstrated his feelings for his teacher:

I like the teachers because they are willing to help you. They go out of their way to make sure you have what you need. (John Brown, April 2006)

The participants talked about the teachers who encouraged, listened, and knew them personally. Some of the participants talked about how teachers helped them enjoy subjects. Jackson Briggs shared that his teachers designed the lessons and made them engaging.

I love English; it helps me with my grammar. I also enjoy history. In history I get to learn more about the world and people. My classes were challenges. (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

Chris Robbie shared his interest in computers and math through the guidance of his teachers. Each of the participants' grades changed after establishing meaningful relationships with teachers. Positive effects were observed in the academic performance of at-risk students. Supportive student-teacher

relationships positively impacted school and extra-curricular activities (Murray & Malmgren, 2005).

Support from Parents and Role Models

Parental support and positive role models were strategies that supported at-risk students. Parents have the ability to socialize their children to achieve or not (Noller & Callan, 1991). The participants talked about discipline and high expectations of parents. Jackson Briggs shared how his mother made him display good behavior at school:

The main support was this belt called “Black Joe.” When I was in elementary school my mother told me that if I didn’t do good in school, “Black Joe” would see me every afternoon until I started doing good. That actually motivated me. (Jackson Briggs, April 2006)

Implementing specific factors and strategies to ensure support for at-risk students will help maintain high academic and social success rates.

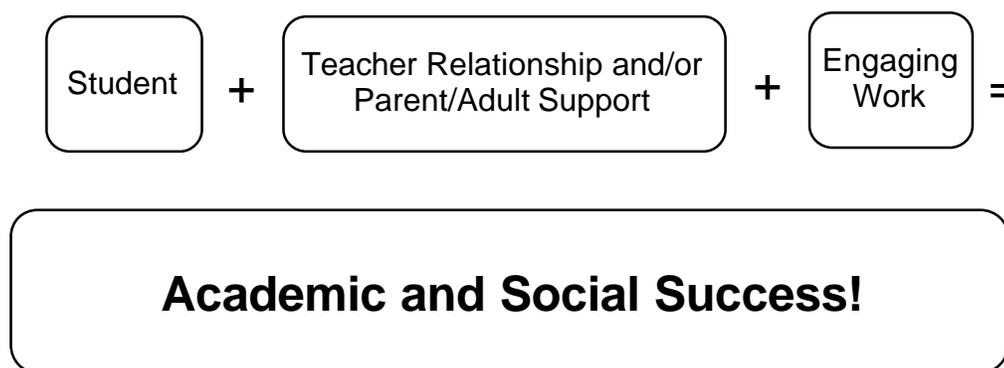


Figure 3. Key Factors to Academic and Social Success

One of the most notable findings during the interviews and focus groups was that the participants did not refer to poverty, socio-economical backgrounds, or other risk factors. The participants in my study qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. These students did not have social privileges or economic resources; however, they set high goals and aspirations for themselves and did not attribute either their problems or their achievement to their social conditions.

This chapter presented case studies of each participant in the study, interpretations of the cases through cross case analyses, and data analyses/interpretation and findings.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

High school students are at-risk at alarming levels. They have been considered at-risk because of family backgrounds, socio-economic status, neglect, academic achievement levels, and abuse. At-risk high school students bring emotional, social and diverse learning needs to school. Concerns from teachers, parents, administrators, and school boards anticipate continued increases in the number of at-risk students (Reyes & Jason, 1993). School systems have funded extensive programs to assist teachers and administrators in learning more about students who are at-risk by implementing school and community support for at-risk students. Some of these funded programs have been successful while others have failed to ensure the success of these students.

As we continue to examine factors that increase the success of at-risk students, it stands to reason that there are already existing factors and factors about which we do not know. In an effort to determine these factors, we must look at the students who succeed regardless of the challenges in their social environments. This study was designed to learn from student participants what factors supported their academic and social success in high school.

The ten students who participated in this study were selected because they were identified as at-risk. The students attended the same high school for three consecutive years. Student participants acknowledged that they had made significant changes, which helped them turn their performance around. Factors contributing to their success included self-identity, support from parents, teachers, positive role models, and engaging work. Changes made by the students were:

- Developing a strong sense of self-identity, self-worth and values.
- Developing a positive attitude toward teachers, school, and challenging social experiences.
- Setting high expectations, motivation, and aspirations.
- Learning how to make good decisions by avoiding pressure from peers.
- Engaging in special interests and hobbies outside of school.

Despite extraordinary hardships, the students in the study developed characteristics that helped them succeed. They became students who were able to experience meaningful relationships, develop high self-esteem, motivation, sound values, and good decision-making strategies (McMillian, Reed, & Bishop, 1992).

One participant, Jackson Briggs, stated that he was very comfortable with himself:

I was not pressured into doing things that everybody else was doing. That's what I liked about myself, I have a very strong character.

A nurturing school experience and positive attitude toward teachers helped these at-risk students improve their academic and social skills (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). One participant, Mike Carson, talked about how his attitude helped him experience success:

I work hard everyday in school. My teachers said on every report card that I was a hard worker. Hearing those comments made me want to keep working to improve. (Mike Carson, April 2006)

Student participants attributed their school success to meaningful relationships with teachers. Positive student-teacher relationships through established high expectations have determined to be a supportive factor for school success (Bernard, 1991; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). The following are factors students cited as having contributed to positive student-teacher relationships:

- Teachers cared about students as individuals.
- Teachers were non-judgmental.
- Teachers capitalized on student's positive attributes instead of focusing on past unsuccessful school backgrounds.
- There was a willingness to help students at any time; extra time was given whenever needed.
- Teachers served as parents, coaches, and role models.
- Supportive relationships were established through teachers and students.

The participants talked about the support they received from parents and role models. One participant, Lynn Smith, commented on the expectations her family had for her:

My family thinks I am doing well compared to what I was doing a while back. I feel better about myself. My family expected me to succeed. (Lynn Smith, April 2006)

The students in this study were motivated to succeed through engaging work experiences. Positive classroom experience and outside interest provided these students with high reinforcement for success. Special interest and hobbies allowed at-risk students to gain satisfaction and rewarding experiences (Brodinsky & Keough, 1989). Schools that set goals and motivated students through engaging work increased opportunities for at-risk students' success (McMillan et al., 1992). The participants determined that engaging work facilitated their interest in career choices and served as a factor for them to remain in school. Mike Mills talked about how his classes were preparing him for the future.

I'm taking classes at Davis Academy. It's gonna help me with the field of Metals Technology. In this class we learned how to draw blueprints. When I made rockets at home I thought about what we did in the class at Davis Academy.

I also volunteered at an old folks home. I had to do a project on how people act differently at different ages. The volunteering helped me do the project because I was around old folks for the summer. It was easy for me to do the project. (Mike Mills, April 2006)

Other participants shared their interest in engaging work experiences. Faith Evans and John Brown discussed their interest in outside courses that sparked their future interests. Faith Evans shared the following:

I enrolled in Culinary Arts classes. I hope I can get a scholarship at the Technical Community College for two years to pursue a career in Culinary Arts.

John Brown demonstrated his interest in art in one of the interviews.

I like to draw I hope to own my own art store. I have taken Art I, II and Advanced Art. I was accepted to the School of The Arts in Winton-Salem, North Carolina. I will start air brushing tee-shirts in a couple of weeks.

The students talked about how engaging work increased their interest in school, provided an arena for success, and served as a safe and nurturing environment. In addition, they discussed the courses they enjoyed in school. They had visual and concrete evidence of success through an increase in grades, attendance, and self-regulation in classroom settings.

Jackson Briggs shares the following:

I did well in English. I have an A average. I have improved since my ninth-grade year. My ninth-grade year was very difficult.

Researchers Finn and Rock (1997) suggested that parents, teachers, and positive role models supported the increased levels of engaging work for at-risk students. Engaging work experiences involve at-risk students taking initiative to dialogue with teachers, parents, and positive role models to seek appropriate guidance and direction.

On the other hand, Christine Bowden talked about her church activities that served as engaging work experiences:

Church programs have benefited my success in school. We have study groups at church. These study groups showed me that other people cared about me. Other people outside of school shared an interest in me.

Based on the responses during interviews and focus groups, self-identity, support from parents, teachers, positive role models, and engaging work were factors that supported the academic and social success of at-risk students.

Lessons Learned/Strategies that Support the Success of At-Risk High School Students

Most of my administrative experiences have been in school settings where disproportionate numbers of at-risk students have been in attendance. As a former elementary, middle, and high school principal, I noticed certain behaviors that existed among many at-risk students. Most of the students came from impoverished backgrounds with low socioeconomic status, and disadvantaged settings. There was something different about some of the students who did well in school. This study revealed that at-risk students face adverse settings, abuse, high absenteeism, poverty, language barriers, and the lack of exposure to academics and social success; but some have turned their performance around. In most cases, the successful students were aware that they were not doing well but certain events and adult influences helped them make changes. This study further revealed that each student participant knew that they were smart. Self-identity, motivation, support from parents, teachers, positive role models, and engaging work supported their success.

During the classroom observations, these high school students were seen coming to class before class started, talking with teachers after school, and attending study sessions on Saturdays. The 11th-grade administrator, Mr. Williams, commented on the progress of each student:

These students have many dramatic changes. If they did not make changes, I'm afraid they would have dropped out of school. (Mr. Williams, April, 2006)

Self-identity, combined with support from positive adult figures and engaging work, developed the success of these students (McMillan et al., 1993). Students said that developing a strong self-identity was a key factor in turning their performance around. The following are ways to assist school principals, administrative staff, teachers, and other staff members in ensuring self-identity of at-risk high school students:

1. Create a school climate that fosters high expectations
 - a. School administrators, teachers, and staff should build on students' strengths
 - b. Develop the belief that all students can learn by communicating this belief to students several times a day. Student participants shared that their teachers believed in them and that belief was a positive factor in turning their performance around
2. Hold students accountable for academic excellence
 - a. Confer with students on a regular basis to review student progress and academic goals
 - b. Maintain a portfolio on each student so that students and parents can monitor their academic success

- c. Recognize and praise students for their efforts and accomplishments.

Students reported that support from teachers, parents, and adult figures were beneficial to their success. The following are recommendations for support of at-risk students:

1. Provide professional development for school staff to ensure support and care in classrooms.
 - a. Teachers and staff ensure student success by listening, motivating and providing students with different opportunities to succeed.
 - b. Teachers and staff provide meaningful instruction that connects and embraces the various cultural backgrounds of students
 - c. School administrators, teachers, and staff purchase instructional materials that address character education qualities and reflect upon the ethnicity and culture of the school
2. Build shared visions
 - a. Invite parents and the school community to be a part of improving learning for all students.
 - b. Encourage retired educators and community members to join in mentoring and tutoring programs
 - c. Families and communities can provide job shadowing opportunities for students
3. Minimize the number of standard, low level courses and tracking systems for students.
 - a. Tracking encourages school administrators to place at-risk students in low level courses. Heterogeneous grouping provides at-risk students broader opportunities for success.

- b. Involve parents more in the four year plans for high school students.

There was a noticeable improvement in the academic performance of students when they were involved in engaging work through the curriculum, service learning, and extra curricula activities. The following are considerations for principals and other educators to increase the academic performance of at-risk students:

1. Encourage students to participate in engaging work
 - a. Provide learning opportunities that promote active engagement for students in core subjects as well as the arts, music, sports, and service learning. Learning opportunities must be meaningful and relevant to students
 - b. Students must be able to apply what they learn to real life experiences
 - c. Expose students to a rich curriculum
 - d. Develop a service learning policy for all students in the school
2. Make classrooms meaningful and culturally relevant
3. Assist students as needed and monitor their performance to ensure their progress.
4. Utilize alternative assessment tools that measure what students know. Alternative assessment tools include student presentations, oral interviews, and special projects
5. Reward students for their accomplishments

Conclusions

At Pride City High School, I learned that there were some at-risk students who had a strong sense of self-identity, self-worth and value. Situations and important people in their lives motivated them. I learned that only a few teachers influenced the lives of these students. These teachers were nonjudgmental, supportive, and were willing to help students as needed. These teachers were the main force that kept these students in school.

Parents, role models, and other adult figures provided high standards and support for at-risk students. At-risk students in this study wanted their parents and extended family members to be proud of them. These students demonstrated pride in the family traditions of graduating from Pride City High School.

This study showed that strategies were needed to help at-risk high school students experience success. Further research on factors supporting at-risk students' success is needed. It would be interesting to conduct a study to determine where the difficulty for at-risk students begins. This would allow school leaders to correct the problems and start intervention for at-risk students at an early age. It also seems to me that my findings are consistent with theories about resilience in children and young adults, particularly the strategies and supports that help them to succeed in the face of adversity. Further research could draw this theory in more closely as a way to understand the patterns I observed with

these students and it could provide guidance for how schools can address the problems of at-risk students.

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APPENDIX

DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOLS

Interview Questions

The general questions served as guidelines for me to get students to talk about themselves. The interviews began with the following questions to help the sessions emerge:

What do you like about yourself? Where do you hope to be in your life five years from now? What are you doing now to prepare for your future?

What adults have positively influenced your life up to this point? How?

What do you like about school?

These questions permitted students to talk about themselves and feel comfortable in the interviews.

I began the interviews with the following statements:

You have experienced things that could have changed your decision to stay in school, and you are doing well. I want to ask some questions about people or things that helped you make changes in your life. I am not here to judge you in any way.

I divided interview questions into the following categories: self-identity, support from role models, teachers and parents, service learning for curriculum, and engaging work. I conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews by asking the following questions:

Self Identity

1. How did you feel when you were not doing well in school? What hindered you?
2. Who encouraged you to do better? Why do you think they wanted to encourage you?
3. How do you deal with students who think you have changed?
4. How do you account for the changes you have made?
5. How do you interact with students at this school? How do you and other students feel about one another?
6. How good are you in school subjects? In what subjects do you do well? What do you like or dislike about your subjects?

Support

1. How do you feel about your teachers? Do they help you? How does that make you feel?
2. Who encourages your efforts in school?
3. How does your family feel about your school and your performance?
4. Do you like your neighborhood? What is it like? What type of neighborhood would you like to live in one day?

Engaging Work

1. Do you have any hobbies and interests outside of school? If so, what?
2. How do these hobbies and interests help you with your school subjects?
3. How do your hobbies and interests help you with your career goals?
4. Have you participated in any activity outside of school that helped you with a school project? What were the benefits of the outside project?
5. Are you involved in an outside activity that is connected to your career goals and future? How has the outside activity helped you?
6. Are you employed? What helps you or motivates you on your job? Why?

Observation Form

Name of Student	Race	Student displayed academic self-identity (Yes or No)	Student received positive feedback from role models (Yes or No)	Student received positive feedback from teachers (Yes or No)	Student displayed engagement in curriculum (Yes or No)

Focus Group Questions

I began the focus group by stating the following:

Today I am going to ask you some questions about how you feel, now that you are doing well in school. I want to begin by saying that everyone will have an opportunity to express himself or herself. This is not a contest, so let us not judge anyone. It is important to respect the rights of others. Please listen and give the other person an opportunity to speak. Please do not talk while someone else is talking.

Ten 11th-grade students participated in the focus groups. They represented the school's demographic population.

I asked the focus group the following questions:

1. Describe two events that account for the changes that you have made.
2. How would an adult figure describe you?
3. Who and what were the important persons or events that helped you turn things around? How?
4. Do you believe that your teachers care about you? Why?
5. Who are the most helpful adults in your life outside of school? In what ways are they helpful to you?
6. What do you like about this school?