TEACHERS’ VIEWS OF WHAT SCHOOLS ARE LACKING IN DROP OUT PREVENTION

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TEACHERS' VIEWS OF WHAT SCHOOLS ARE LACKING IN DROP OUT PREVENTION

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The United States Department of Education (2008) in their Dropout Rate Report for 2006 reported twenty-five percent of high school freshmen will not finish all four years of high school. Schools have tried a variety of strategies to reduce the dropout rate but significant gains have not been seen. There is a lack of knowledge about what ideas teachers have to reduce dropout rates. Fifteen teachers working in a high school with a high dropout rate were interviewed about why they think students dropout, ways to engage students, social support, and how their school is organized. A majority of teachers felt parental involvement was lacking or they did not value the child's education.
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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

A high school diploma is a piece of paper that holds many possibilities. This piece of paper opens the door to more desirable jobs, higher earnings, college, and other opportunities. Even though a high school diploma holds these possibilities many teenagers are leaving high school without it. The United States Department of Education (2008) in their Dropout Rate Report for 2006 reported that twenty-five percent of high school freshmen will not finish all four years of high school. There are a variety of reasons why students drop out and often after trying for years they feel they are never going to succeed in school. Many people in education speak about students not meeting the school’s requirements, but maybe schools are not meeting the student’s requirements. The question should not be why students are unable to connect with their schools but why schools are unable to connect with students. What are schools lacking that would keep students in school?

Teenagers change in every decade, they face new challenges but often their schools do not change or take on these new challenges. More students are coming from single parent households, low wage families, and there are more immigrants that need instruction in their native language and English. Many schools in low income areas have the most trouble with dropout rates because they often have a more diverse student body and more students are from single parent households and immigrant families. The United States Department of Education (2008) reports high school dropouts earn $200,000 less a year than a high school graduate and are more likely to face unemployment and poverty.
For students from low income families getting a high school diploma is important because it can mean more money but the time it takes to get a high school diploma could be time used to make money. If a teenager does not see the benefits of a high school diploma they will often choose the immediate reward of money by working. We need to help school officials figure out why so many students, one in four, are not being reached and getting lost. Then fewer students will fall into these mentioned economic pitfalls of many high school dropouts.

While working at a high school that serves low income and diverse neighborhoods this researcher worked with many students who spoke about dropping out as though it was their only option. Many of these students were freshman and sophomores in high school who were failing at least two of their classes and not engaged academically or socially. They did not see what their school could do to help them in the future and felt that they would be better off not being in school. Knowing what can happen to many people who do not get their high school diploma this researcher tried to help these students see what a high school diploma could do for them. While realizing until schools change to help these students then students are going to continue to drop out. Often when working with teenagers stating facts and numbers means little to them they need to see or experience the benefits. So these teenagers needed to experience what staying in school would mean for them, but the only way they were going to stay in school is if they really feel their school cares about them.

Background of the Problem

The United States has problems with poverty, unemployment, high crime rates, and
overcrowded prisons. Another problem is the high rates of students dropping out of high school and never receiving their diplomas. High school dropouts are more likely to receive low wages, be unemployed, face poverty, be convicted of a crime, and end up serving prison time (Hayes, Nelson, Tabin, Pearson, & Worthy 2002; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Zvoch, 2006;). Not having a high school diploma can be linked to many of the other social problems the United States faces. If schools could figure out ways to prevent students from dropping out, then the United States social problems would not go away but less people would face poverty, be unemployed, less crimes would be committed, and the prison population could be reduced.

Reducing high school dropout rates is not a new problem and figuring out how to calculate dropout rates is an issue. Some in education say that dropout rates decreased between 1972 and 2005 when excluding the prison population. During this time the population of African American males in prison who dropped out of high school had more than doubled (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). This means that the numbers can be skewed depending on how they are calculated, but the United States Department of Education (2008) reported that one in four freshman will not graduate from high school. Some data may show that the high school dropout rate is around ten percent of the population but this does not count students who dropout before the tenth grade, the age of sixteen, or are incarcerated (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Hayes et al., 2002). This percentage can be worse when examining data for minorities. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008), a group committed to improving the United States education system, found that about fifty percent of Hispanics and African
Americans graduate from high school. So a state that is diverse like California is more overwhelmed by the dropout issue. Also students from lower income families are more than two times as likely to drop out compared to students from middle income families. So inner city high schools with student bodies largely made up of minorities and low income families need help.

Having a high school diploma gives young people options but many young people are leaving school without it. As schools have turned more to teaching toward the standardized tests that are required by the federal legislation No Child Left Behind more students have been falling through the cracks and dropping out. No Child Left Behind requires schools to meet a certain level of achievement on their standardized tests, otherwise they are deemed failing. Often students who do not meet the standards set by the federal government are also told they are failing, and some may feel pushed out of their school while others drop out because they already view themselves as failures (Meier & Kohn, 2004). Since schools are now teaching toward standardized tests students are less interested in what they are learning because they do not think it has anything to do with their real life. There are also many other reasons students drop out: unengaged in school, failing grades and too many absents to name a few reasons. Some factors that can deem students more at risk than other students are low socioeconomic status and minority status (Christle et al., 2007; Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). This means schools are losing large number of students who are minorities and/or low socioeconomic status. The United States public education system has trouble reaching a large portion of its population. Some outside the public school system may feel that this is a problem for the
school system but this is a problem that affects all of society.

In a newspaper article focused on high school dropouts Rumberger (2008) stated that high school dropouts affect all of society, not just the person who dropped out. California loses $46.8 billion for every 120,000 students that dropout. This occurs because high school dropouts are more likely to be on food stamps, pay fewer taxes, go to jail, and have more health issues. Money is not the only way society is affected. As more jobs require a college degree there will be fewer jobs for those without a high school diploma. Meaning more people then jobs available and not enough people qualified to do the jobs that require a college degree (Rumberger, 2008). Right now high school graduates are four times more likely to be employed when compared to high school dropouts (Lever et al., 2004). As more unskilled jobs move overseas and jobs in the United States require college degrees or high school diplomas the unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma will keep rising. Communities will be affected by loss of productivity and more money will go towards supporting those who are unemployed Lever et al., 2004; Rumberger, 2008). Half of the prison population is made up of high school dropouts. In a year the state of California spends around $5000 per student and $28,000 per prison inmate (Cassel, 2003). Even if a little more money was spent on education, California would save money if more students graduated. This is not only true for California. In the United States it costs more to support a prisoner than educate a child. If schools were able to spend more on students and lower the dropout rate, then everyone would benefit.

Even with all these numbers and facts about why it is important for the youth of
America to graduate from high school, logic says the education system should be promoting learning, and helping students achieve success academically including a high school diploma. By reducing the dropout rate and improving education in the United States we can lessen the demand for welfare, food stamps, and cut down the growing prison population saving billions of dollars. If minority students in California graduated at just the same rate as Caucasians then $101 billion would be added to the state’s economy (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). This would come from more productivity, less spending towards supporting prisoners, reduction in crimes committed, and less spending for health care.

With so much to gain from reducing dropout rates it is important for high schools to find solutions that work. Often standards that are set for schools to meet are not created by those who have to implement them. Instead teachers and school administrators are told what to teach and are given programs that someone else created to prevent dropout rates (Meier & Kohn, 2004). Teachers should be treated as professionals and be given the freedom to teach what they think is appropriate for their students. Teachers are directly working with students and they are who should be thinking of programs that can prevent dropout, because they more than anyone know what students needs are in the classroom. Solutions that work are those that reach at risk students. Teachers who work with these students may have some ideas that can work to reduce dropout rates.

Statement of the Research Problem

As students in high schools continue to drop out there is a lack of knowledge about what teachers think schools are lacking to combat this problem. This is important
knowledge to obtain because teachers are the ones working directly with the students and may have a better idea of what schools need to do to reach their students. It is also important because dropout rates are growing while prisons get fuller and more people try to support themselves and their family while earning low wages. Many different techniques and programs have been tried to keep students in school but rarely are the teachers, who are the ones working with these students, asked about what they think needs to be changed in schools.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to learn what teachers think schools lack when it comes to preventing students from dropping out. Often those that design new programs for preventing at risk students from dropping out are not teachers who are working directly with the students. Teachers have direct contact with the students and they should be asked what they think schools can do to reach students that are currently not being reached. Their knowledge and expertise should be used. The secondary purpose of this study would be to see if it is hard for teachers to really change what they teach or reach out to at risk students when they have to meet the standards that are set by No Child Left Behind.

Theoretical Framework

Self-determination theory can be used to explain personal motivation and how one’s environment affects their motivation, self-regulation, and well-being. Ryan and Deci (2000) propose that humans are born to be curious, motivated to learn and use their knowledge. They also propose that this desire and motivation can be ruined by outside
sources. Those who grow up in a supportive, motivating environment where they are inspired to grow and learn become internally motivated and their personality develops from this environment. Those who grow up in an environment where they do not feel supported or are told they are worthless lose the motivation they are born with and often lack internal motivation and self-regulation. They also propose that humans have three needs: competency, autonomy, and relatedness. If these three needs are met it allows humans to grow, develop self-regulation, and keep internal motivation. These three needs need to be met in many different ways and situations. People need to feel that they can overcome a challenge, are supported to be independent, and they need to feel that they are part of a group that respects and listens to them. When a human feels all of this they are motivated and engaged.

Lastly, Ryan and Deci (2000) propose that there are two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Humans are born with intrinsic motivation. This is shown by a child’s curiosity and desire to master new skills such as walking and talking. This motivation can be affected by outside sources. If a child is not supported in their attempts to walk or talk, their motivation may lessen and they will take longer to develop these skills. This happens in all aspects of a person’s life. For example if a child in school is constantly told they cannot do something, then they may begin to believe they cannot achieve academic success and their motivation wavers. The other kind of motivation is extrinsic which self-regulation is, meaning one is willing to do something that they do not find enjoyable because they know that in the end there will be a positive outcome. They are willing to wait and work for their reward. Some people do not develop this kind of
motivation and, thus, when they do not see an immediate reward they are not motivated to do the work. Ryan and Deci (2000) do believe that some are extrinsically motivated to please others and some are extrinsically motivated by their own will. Sometimes one is extrinsically motivation to do something to please someone else and do not worry about oneself. An example being a child playing football to please a parent though they dislike playing and would rather participate in a different activity. Then there is extrinsic motivation that is aimed at pleasing oneself. An example would be a child telling their parent that they do not like football and would rather play the piano. Ryan and Deci (2000) believe extrinsic motivation that is aimed to please someone else only rewards those around us and does not teach self-regulation.

Self-determination theory explains the problem of students dropping out clearly. Students are more likely to stay in school if they are internally motivated, supported by their environment and are engaged (Murray & Naranjo, 2008). High school dropouts often say they dropped out because they were told they were a failure, were not challenged enough, their environment was not conducive to learning, or they were not supported by their school (Strom & Boster, 2007; Suh et al., 2007). Being challenged, supported, and feeling respected is how a student’s needs of competency, autonomy, and relatedness are met. If a student is not motivated to learn, does not feel supported, and cannot see the reward of a high school diploma they, are much more likely to dropout. Students who have been taught to put off the reward understand that school may not always be enjoyable but the reward at the end is enough. Other students cannot wait and cannot see the reward. It is true that motivation is affected early on in a person’s
environment but teachers and school administrators can affect motivation in high school students. Students who drop out often grow up in environments where they are not supported to be independent, do not feel they are competent, and do not feel that they are heard. Then these students enter school already lacking motivation to learn and often are labeled a failure. High schools need to reach out to these students and support and promote them to develop motivation.

Very few students enjoy every class, every assignment, and every lecture in high school but some have the self-regulation to see that all the non enjoyable moments will bring a reward, a diploma, a paper that can get them a good job or into college. The problem is those who do not have the self-regulation to see the non enjoyable moments can lead to anything that is useful. These are the students that schools need to focus on; they need to help them develop this self-regulation by meeting their needs of competency, autonomy, and relatedness.

The self-determination theory proposes that people will grow and succeed when they are motivated intrinsically and extrinsically. High schools are currently not focusing enough attention on students who do not hold one or either of these motivations. Some may feel it is the family’s job to give their children the environment to develop intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, but some families do not and schools should try to step in. If students are not motivated, then they are not going to care about math, English, history or science. When students are motivated it makes the teacher’s job easier. Schools need to know that not all students are internally motivated and may need more building up then other students. Instead schools use standardized tests to rate student’s abilities and those
that are rated low feel less competent and less motivated to learn. Instead teachers should be allowed to measure student’s abilities in many ways and use these measurements to figure out what students need to succeed. The problem is not only standardized testing but also helping students develop self-regulation and internal motivation. Students cannot be taught these two things but schools should create environments where students want to learn, feel challenged, are supported by teachers and school administration, and feel that they are capable to do anything. If students are not supported, encouraged, and challenged, there is little hope for their needs of competency, autonomy, and relatedness being met.

There are many reasons why students drop out from high school but these reasons are often related to student’s inability to delay gratification; instead, they need instant gratification. Students are not engaged in school because they do not see the point. Students do not do well academically when they are not engaged in the learning process. Students skip school when they do not see the point of going to school. No one is born thinking school is pointless but instead some do not develop motivation and self-regulation during early childhood experiences and are then unable to succeed in school. High schools can work to promote changing student’s views. Self-determination theory would say that students drop out because their needs of competency, autonomy, and relatedness are not being met and thus they do not develop motivation, intrinsically or extrinsically. If the United States wants to prevent dropout rates, then they need to commit to not just teaching school subjects but also work with the community and parents to teach students that the work they do in school may not be enjoyable but it leads
to a piece of paper that opens many doors. They also must encourage and support students. Teachers need to be given the freedom to measure student’s success in a variety of ways.

Major Questions

There are few questions that the researcher would like to have this study answer. One question is what teachers think their school is lacking that is could keep students in school. Also what changes would they make in their school to prevent students from dropping out? Another question is whether teachers see the standards set by No Child Left Behind as impeding them to reach out to students that are at risk for dropping out.

Definition of Terms

Some terms that are going to be used may need a little more clarity. One of these terms is, at risk for dropping out. This term refers to students in high school that are deemed more likely than other students to drop out. They fall under what have been deemed risk factors for dropping out. Some of these risk factors are ethnicity, socioeconomic status, grades, and past school behavior. Another term that needs to be defined is engagement. Engagement means how invested are the students in school academically and socially, which can be any healthy activity they are involved in or peer group they are part of. Another term is No Child Left Behind: this is a federal legislation that was passed in 2002 to have stronger accountability in schools, apply higher standards, and to give parents more choices.

Assumptions

This project assumes that teenagers do not just drop out because they are not smart
academically or that they just cannot succeed academically. Instead this project assumes that teenagers are not only dropping out because of grades but also because they do not feel supported, are not engaged, or that their life outside of school is influencing them more than school. This project assumes No Child Left Behind created by the federal government is not reducing dropout rates and new strategies need to be found. This project also assumes teachers have not been utilized enough in finding ways to reduce high school dropout rates. By this it is meant that dropout prevention programs created by the government or school districts have not used teachers' knowledge enough when planning prevention programs. Another assumption is school social workers have a part in helping reduce dropout rates by helping to build a supportive environment.

**Justification**

Social work is about helping to create change in society. The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (1996) states one value for social workers is social justice. Social justice is striving to create change in society in areas of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and any other societal injustices. Helping to reduce dropout rates means less poverty, more minorities educated, high employment, and more people being able to decide their own path. Education is an important stepping tool in everyone's life and it is important as social workers to recognize the injustices that are brought by not having a diploma or that could be happening in schools to hinder students from graduating. Social workers want to help their clients to have as many opportunities to succeed as possible, and one thing that can really help a client succeed is a high school diploma. Studies have shown those who do not graduate are more likely to face
unemployment, low earnings, poverty, and serve prison time (Hayes et al., 2002; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Zvoch, 2006). Having a high school diploma can open up many opportunities whereas not having one closes these opportunities.

As social workers we should be worried about the high amount of students that are not graduating. The Department of Education (2008) reports that one in four students do not graduate in the United States and dropout rates are much higher for schools that serve low income and diverse neighborhoods. The Department of Education (2008) found that students in lower incomes households are six times more likely to drop out compared to students in high income families. They also found that Hispanics students are more than twice as likely to dropout when compared to Caucasian students. African American students are almost three times as likely to dropout compared to Caucasian students. These are the schools that need the most help and they are full of teachers who are working directly with these students and they have a perfect view to see what schools are missing when it comes to preventing students from dropping out. Social workers cannot make change by themselves; instead they must work in collaboration with many professionals to make change happen.

Delimitations

This project is focused on gaining knowledge from teachers but there are other areas that will not be covered in this project. The researcher will not be enacting a program to help students at risk of dropping out or evaluating a program that does this. No school will be evaluated based on their dropout rates or dropout programs. This project is not going to be rating dropout prevention programs. Instead it is gaining
knowledge from teachers on what schools need to do to help reduce dropout rates. This project is, also, not evaluating teachers on what they do in the classroom. Instead it is getting their thoughts on how they might change their schools. This project is about gaining knowledge that is lacking and not looking at the numbers of students that are dropping out. The students’ opinions on how schools can change to meet their needs will not be part of this project.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

High school students not graduating from high school is not a new problem that the United States faces, but it also is not a problem that is not going away. The United States Public Education system is constantly trying to find strategies for reducing the high school dropout rate. Currently twenty-five percent of all freshmen in high school will not graduate (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Schools have not made enough changes that will stop students from leaving school before they graduate. They have tried to target at risk students and at risk schools but many programs are not working. The No Child Left Behind act was created to reward schools that had high test scores, hold schools accountable, and allow parents flexibility in where they could send their child to school. The problem is No Child Left Behind has shown to do little to help those most in need. Schools need to find new ways to keep students in school other than standardized testing.

Many schools are not producing the test scores that the government wants them to and so the students at these schools continue to meet barriers to progress. Students are going to stay in school if they feel it will help them in the future and are engaged. Students are dropping out in high numbers for a variety of reasons but one is that some have been told they are failures through the system of standardized testing that United States education has adopted under No Child Left Behind. Literature aimed at reducing the United States' dropout rate was not about standardized testing but looking outside of
the classroom and tests to see what would keep students at school. No Child Left Behind is supposed to hold schools accountable but is only focusing on grades and not the many other aspects of school.

This literature review will be organized into four themes that were found throughout the literature on dropout prevention. These four themes were chosen because they were continually found in the literature and they show that schools need to use the resources they already have to work to reduce dropout rates. The four themes are there is no universal dropout program or risk factor, social support, school organization and transitions, and engagement in school. All four themes were found in the literature and often the literature focused on more than one of themes in their articles. No universal dropout program or risk factor was selected as a theme because it is important for schools to reduce dropout rates in a way that works for their individual school. This means it is important to work with school staff and not rely on an outside source to provide dropout prevention programs. Social support and school organization were both chosen because they been found to be the small changes that schools can make and these changes can be made in way that works for each individual school. Engagement in school was chosen because the literature made it clear that as hard as schools work if they do not engage their students then they are going to lose their students.

No Universal Dropout Program or Risk Factor

There is no disputing there are certain risk factors that can help to predict who may drop out; low socioeconomic status, ethnicity, academic failure, and behavior problems (Kemp, 2006; Lever et al., 2004; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Nowicki, Duke, Sisney,
Stricker, & Tyler, 2004; Suh & Suh, 2007; Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007; Van Dorn, Bowen, & Blau, 2006). The problem is focusing on these risk factors alone will not be enough. There are students who do not have these risk factors that drop out and there are students who do have these risk factors that do not drop out. It would be beneficial for schools to target students who are high risks for dropping out but each school needs to assess their high risk students differently. Schools must realize each individual has their own personal experience which will predicate if they graduate or drop out. Most of the literature states that since every school is different and every student body is different schools should create their own dropout programs or their own personal methods for reaching out to the students who are at high risk for dropping out (Cassel, 2003; Feinstein & Peck, 2008; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Nowicki et al., 2004; Zvoch, 2006). If schools recognize each student’s individual experience, students will see their school is interested in them and not solely their test scores.

One important point to note is that researchers do not feel schools need to make an individual program for each individual student. Instead schools need to create a school environment which appreciates and validates each student. Often students drop out of high school because they get lost and fall through the cracks. It is important to find a variety of ways to reach these students in a variety of ways. Teachers and school administrators should not stick to one thing to get students to engage in school. Suh and Suh (2007) studied how well prevention programs directed at certain at risk groups worked. They found there often are such a variety of risk factors for dropping out that it is impossible to pin down two or three, let alone one. They, also, found the more risk
factors a student has the harder it was to predict if the student would drop out, which makes developing prevention program directed at certain risk factors difficult. Suh and Suh concluded, as did other researchers, that prevention programs need to be school wide and include a variety of options (Feinstein & Peck, 2008; Hayes, Nelson, Tabin, Pearson, & Worthy, 2002; Strom & Boster, 2007; Suh et al., 2007; Zvoch, 2006). There is no single reason why high school students drop out, so there should be no single way to prevent drop out. There may be students needing counseling, some may need stronger relationships with teachers, and some may be in need of social skills.

The literature about what has worked for high school dropout prevention is varied but there were certain aspects most of the programs had in common: flexibility, creating small schools or communities, focusing on all students, creating a caring supportive environment, and not assuming low academics is the number one reason students dropout (Cassel, 2003; Feinstein & Peck, 2008; Hayes et al., 2002; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Nowicki et al., 2004; Strom & Boster, 2007; Suh & Suh, 2007; Suh et al., 2007; Zvoch, 2006.). Often academics are viewed as a major predictor for dropping out. Suh et al., (2007) discovered low academics are often not the real reason a student drops out. Grades are the visible factor schools see but often there is an issue outside of the grades that explains why the student is not going well in school. It is important to consider this and not focus solely on grades. Grades can be used as an indicator but not the only indicator (Hayes et al., 2002; Suh et al., 2007; Strom & Boster, 2007). This is why it is important for schools to be flexible and recognize students as individuals.

Schools which often have the highest dropout rates are schools that do not use the
whole school to combat their dropout issue (Cassel, 2003; Strom & Boster, 2007).

Schools that use the whole school often are better at finding different strategies for different students. These schools recognize there is not a singular reason students drop out and realize every student and staff member can help each other: the small things matter (Feinstein & Peck, 2008; Murray & Naranjo, 2008 Nowicki et al., 2004; Strom & Boster, 2007; Suh & Suh, 2007; Zvoch, 2006). Cassel (2003) studied prison inmates who dropped out of high school and many of them said they had been considered behavior problems or at risk and were placed with other students in the same category. They felt they were being hidden away by their school. Cassel (2003) pointed out this hindered their personality development and they were made to feel inferior. If they had been part of the regular school and the dropout program had focused on the whole school, they may have developed the skills necessary to stay in school. They would have been around students who could have been positive role models for them and could have developed relationships that would have kept them in school.

Most of the literature was against universal dropout programs, but there is literature that does support universal programs. Janosz, Archambault, Morizot and Pagani (2008) found certain risk factors were associated with higher rates of dropout and that there can be one strategy that works for all students. The risk factor they found to be the one most corresponding with dropping out was instability in a student’s life. Students who dropped out often came from unstable families, attended numerous schools, moved numerous times, and lived in unstable communities. These factors led the students to drop out because they could not handle school. They found the way schools could combat this
issue was to create stability in student’s lives. School is a constant every day event, and if students feel safe and supported then they gain some stability. This stability at school can combat the instability in their outside lives. They did admit that instability can be hard to counter and demands a big commitment.

No other article mentions instability as a risk factor. Instability may be a dropout factor that needs to be researched more. One thing to be considered is instability can be created by coming from a low income family, being a minority, feeling like an academic failure, and having behavior problems. Many of the students who were found to be at risk were inner city youth and often they live unstable lives. Bemak, Chi-Ying, Siroskey-Sabdo (2005) found there are certain students who should be the focus of dropout prevention; inner city youth and minorities. They felt the same program can be implemented with any inner city youth or minority and there will be positive results. Their main reasoning for inner city youth and minorities being the most at risk is because their problems outside school are preoccupying them (Bemak et al., 2005). These preoccupations may be the instability in their lives that Janosz et al., (2008) found as the highest risk factor for dropout. These findings might be in the minority but should be kept in mind. Many high school students experience instability and some do drop out and some do not. Also instability can include so many students who focusing on the whole school could be what is happening, especially for high schools in inner cities that have a majority of minority students and students preoccupied with outside issues.

No one student is the same as another. Students who drop out do not all do it for the same reason. Instead they all have a variety of reasons. Schools need to keep this in mind
when focusing on dropout prevention. Since there is no one way to predict which student will drop out researchers have found schools can make the biggest impact by focusing on the whole school. Focusing on the whole school creates an environment which makes students want to stay in school. Most of the literature does not think schools need to have to have individual prevention programs for certain at risk students and some literature does think there are certain risk factors that need more of a focus. Students who have behavior problems or are doing poorly in school or are not engaged may need more attention. The literature clearly points out that students will stay in school if they feel wanted and are empowered by their schools. Since targeting the whole school is a way to combat high dropout rates it means that there are few areas that schools need to really focus on to make this possible. School organization and the transition from middle school to high school should be a concern for high school staff. The support students get in the school is important in making the school come together and students feeling they have a place in their school. No student is the same but if schools focus on changing their social climate then students with a variety of risk factors or no risk factors will have been reached in a variety of ways. Schools that are facing high dropout rates need to change their approach to how they can reduce dropout and focusing on the whole school has been found to be beneficial

Social Support

Social support is an essential component of combating dropout rates and keeps students from falling through the cracks. If schools are going to combat dropout by focusing on the whole school then social support is going to be how students know their
schools care about them. Social support comes in many different fashions from teachers, school administration, school counselors, school social workers, peers, and family members. High school students are influenced by a variety of people and can be one of the easiest influenced age groups. School staff’s jobs are to be supportive of students, help students create positive peer relationships, and support parents to be actively involved in their child’s education.

The literature about social support shows students are most influenced by peers, family, and school staff. Most often the biggest influence is a student’s peer relationships because high school students usually spend more time with peers than they do school staff and family (Legault, Pelletier, & Green-Demers, 2006). Students’ peer relationships can be categorized in different groups: lacking peer relationships, negative peer relationships, or having strong peer relationships. Students who lack peer relationships have a high dropout rate (Bemak et al., 2005; Janosz et al., 2008; Legault et al., 2006; Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008; Terry, 2008). Terry (2008) investigated reasons for why high school dropouts had dropped out and found that one of the highest risk factors was not having friends at school. Often these were students who were described as lacking in social skills: not caring about socially acceptable behavior, little interest in the well-being of others, and who other students described as weird. Often they were students who were seen as unsuccessful students but not for grades but for lacking friends. Legault et al., (2006) not only found lacking friends to be a risk factor but also can cause some students to have less academic motivation. They found that since high school students are easily influenced by peers having peers in school can make them
more academically motivated. Students who lacked friends had less interest in doing well in school since they did not go to school to be with their peers. They were less likely to see the future rewards school could bring and instead saw school as a place full of people they do not like with nothing to offer them.

Lack of peer relationships is not the only dropout risk factor associated with peer relationships. The kinds of peer relationships students have are also important. Students who have positive peer relationships in which they feel supported are more likely to stay in school. Often students with positive peer relationships have peers who are academically motivated and thus they motivate each other to stay in school (Legault et al., 2006; Terry, 2008). Often they want to stay in school not only because they think graduating is important but to continue having the strong peer relationships. Students whose peers are not motivated in school are influenced by this lack of motivation and are more likely to drop out if their peers do or if their peers pressure them to drop out (Legault et al., 2006). Negative peer relationships are peer relationships students find to be stressful, not supportive, and feel at any moment they could lose their friends. These kind of relationships bring instability, stress, and can lead to drop out (Bemak et al., 2005; Legault et al., 2006; Suh et al., 2007; Terry 2008). So schools should find ways to be supportive and to work with students to develop positive peer relationships.

Literature shows a key role of school counselors and social workers should be to work with high schools students in groups to help them form the social skills they need for positive peer relationships (Bemak et al., 2005; Cassel, 2003; Hayes et al., 2002; Legault et al., 2006; Neild et al., 2008; Suh et al., 2007; Terry, 2008). This could be seen
as a prevention or intervention programs for students. Counselors should form groups based on similar needs of students while making sure students have positive role models in the group. Not only will students improve their peer relationships but they may see their school has more to offer than only academics. These counseling groups can help the students and empower them to make their time in school valuable. Peer relationships have a major influence on students' decisions to drop out or stay in school thus schools should focus on supporting positive relationships between students.

Another important influence on students is their family: parents, guardians, extended family members, siblings, or anyone living in their home. Literature shows that within the family parents have the greatest influence, even if they do not live with or are close to their child (Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Terry, 2008). Literature showed a correlation between students who dropped out and having parents who dropped out. This was found with both students who lived with their parents and those that did not. The higher the academic achievement of a parent the more likely a student was to stay in school. Parents are, also, influential based on their attitude toward education. High school students who think their parents do not care about their education are more likely to drop out. Students are more likely to graduate if they think their parents do care and are supportive in them of their progress through school (Legault et al., 2006; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Strom & Boster, 2007; Terry, 2008). Some risk factors for dropping out can originate within the family; low socioeconomic status or if the family is unstable. Schools cannot change these factors for students but they can help students to overcome them by providing protective factors and trying to promote parental involvement in their
schools (Christle et al., 2007; Hayes et al., 2002; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Strom & Boster, 2007; Terry, 2008). Murray and Naranjo (2008) interviewed high school dropouts and found some felt their high schools did not promote parental involvement. Instead their schools pushed their parents away and made their parents less supportive of their education. High schools who do not promote parental involvement are disempowering parents and losing an important ally for keeping students from dropping out.

School staff cannot do everything. They cannot be the only social support in every one of their students’ lives. It is crucial for them to involve the students’ family, this way schools and families are on the same page. Students will get the same message at home that they get in school. There are students who have peer relationships that occur outside of school and Terry (2008) thinks these peers should be welcomed onto school campuses just as parents should be. By bringing those who the students feel are important in then the students will see that their schools wants to support them and those they are close to. If others in their lives are welcomed by their school then these influential people may be more supportive of the student’s education. Schools should still be careful who they allow on their campuses since some outside peers may be a negative influence but schools may surprise students by embracing those who the student finds to be important in their lives. Students often turn to negative peer relationships because they are trying to find something they are missing and schools need to support them while giving them tools to find more positive relationships (Christle et al., 2007; Hayes et al., 2002; Terry, 2008).

School staff cannot be students only support system but they do play an important
role in supporting students. Students who have close relationships with teachers feel closer with their school. Students who feel their teachers or other school staff cares about their well-being are more likely to graduate (Christle et al., 2007; Legault et al., 2006; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Neild et al., 2008; Strom & Boster, 2007). Teachers who support students emotionally are important but they may make the biggest impact when they show students how much they believe in them academically (Legault et al., 2006).

High school students need to know there are people who believe in their ability especially if they do not get this message anywhere but school. Teachers should give the message to all students so as not to miss students who are not outwardly showing they need support but inside are craving it. Teachers can be an academic motivator by giving positive feedback and showing proof that a student can succeed (Legault et al., 2006; Strom & Boster, 2007). Use the little things as proof, nothing is too small. It can be a good grade on an assignment to remembering to bring back a signed permission slip.

Teachers are not the only school staff who are important. Students will feel accepted and that their well-being is important to their school if there is a positive school climate that starts from the top. Cassell (2003) found schools with lower dropout rates had principals who the students knew, which did not only push their teachers to be supportive of the students but were themselves available to students. Another important part of the school staff is the counselors and/or social workers on campus. These staff members are there to support students and have a variety of jobs. They can also be influential in changing a school environment if they support the rest of the school staff not just the students (Hayes et al., 2002; Suh et al., 2007). If high schools create a better
working environment then staff will have more motivation to work closely with students.

The more support high school students have the more likely they are to stay in school. Schools cannot change a student’s home life or force them to stop being friends with peers that are not seen as positive. They can support the students’ families; give them the skills to find better friends, and to make better choices. English, history, math, and science are the basic subjects high schools teach but it is important to combine teaching these subjects with teaching life skills thus giving the students a holistic experience. Schools can reach students in a variety of ways: strive for parental involvement, teach life skills, be a positive support and show students they can succeed. By being supportive of students in more than academics high schools can lessen dropout rates without providing a specific program to students. High schools are full of staffs that want to help students so it is important for high schools to call on these desires to give support to as many students as possible. With so many students not graduating it could show high schools are not making full use of the support they can provide to students.

*School Organization and Transitions*

The best dropout prevention programs are designed to include the whole school and a key part of this is how high schools are organized. Schools which are overcrowded with no small learning communities are the schools that are unable to effectively stop students from getting lost and dropping out (Neild et al., 2008). High schools with a large student body can organize their schools in ways that allow staff to be more supportive, give the feeling of being a smaller school, and find students who might be getting lost who could potentially drop out. Another important part of school organization is how high schools
welcome in their freshman class. Does the school work to make the transition smooth and not just throw the students in without preparing them? For many students high school means more freedom, which can be a good or bad. Schools need to find a way to give freedom without giving students too much freedom where they do not feel supported, abuse the freedom, and get lost.

Research has shown students who feel supported are more likely to do better in school (Bemak et al., 2005; Feldman & Matjasko, 2006; Legault et al., 2006). In high schools with large student bodies it can be hard for faculty to support students and it is hard to know who needs the most support and how to supply it (Rycik, 2007). Neild et al., (2008) found that large inner city high schools have more opportunities for students to roam the halls and skip class without getting in trouble. They also found this started in ninth grade and caused students to feel their schools did not care what they did and if they dropped out no one would notice. Schools in inner cities cannot be blamed for being big and not having enough supervision instead they need to be organized in ways that allows them to have better supervision without having to hire a bigger staff. The literature found one of the most effective things high schools can do is organize the school into small learning communities (Lever et al., 2004; Neild et al., 2008; Nowicki et al., 2004; Van Dorn et al., 2006; Zvoch, 2006). This means that students are separated into learning communities and often have many classes with the same students. The most effective part is each learning community has certain teachers who are able to meet weekly to discuss their community and who may need more attention. This allows staff to be more supportive and with more attention being paid to them, students are less likely to feel no
one would care if they dropped out.

These small learning communities are only effective if the staff is committed to them and students understand what they are part of. Teachers that collaborate are able to provide more support to more students. Murray and Naranjo (2008) found school staff who collaborated on teaching and intervention plans felt they were meeting the needs of more students and were less overwhelmed by their jobs. Collaboration is an integral part of small learning communities. Not only collaboration between teachers but also between teachers and students. Small learning communities allow students to form bonds with teachers that can follow them through high school. They are found to be more motivated because they feel more challenged from the support they are constantly provided by teachers (Nowicki et al., 2004; Van Dorn et al., 2006). Some of the most effective small learning communities separate students into different theme communities. Often the themes correspond with subjects or careers the students are most interested in such as humanities or science and students are provided with the classes they need to graduate and go on to college (Cassell, 2003; Van Dorn et al., 2006).

Van Dorn et al., (2006) investigated how inequality in high schools leads to high dropout rates. They found that if schools become student focused, which means everyone gets attention no matter skin color or religion a student is, then all students are more likely to achieve. This means that if schools focus on what students are interested in and give them the skills they need for the future then more students are likely to stay in school. Christle et al., (2007) found dropout rates reduced if high schools focused on the students’ needs and interests. They found high schools which taught more towards
students’ interests and provided social activities students were interested in had low dropout rates. They found students will become attached to their school and have a desire to get a diploma when they see their school cares about what they care about. Small learning communities are not only about academic education but education for life, which is providing opportunities to make positive social relationships and learn how to conduct one’s self in social situations.

Nowicki et al., (2004) evaluated a small learning community designed for at risk students but who mixed in students not as high of a risk for drop out. They found teachers provided students with more opportunities to gain control of their education and to get an education in social relationships. These students had a higher graduation rate than students not part of the learning community who were deemed low risk for dropping out. All of these studies were done at large inner cities high schools that organized their schools to feel like they were much smaller and students responded positively. Students want to feel protected when they are at school and providing close relationships with teachers, other students, and opportunities for academic success gives students the feeling of being protected. Small learning communities are one way schools can organize to reduce dropout rates and so is focusing on incoming freshman students and their differing needs compared to the older grades.

Research has found that the most critical time for dropout prevention is at the transition from middle school to high school (Cassel, 2003; Christle et al., 2007; Hayes et al., 2002; Lever et al., 2004; Neild et al., 2008; Suh & Suh, 2007; Zvoch, 2006). It is hard to come up with a concrete percentage of students who drop out before tenth grade or
decide in ninth grade they will drop out. Schools, often, do not count students who drop out before tenth grade in their dropout rates or categorize them as having transferred to a new school (Suh & Suh, 2007). Moving from middle school to high school is a big step for any student and it can be hard for students to go to a relatively structured small school to a big school with more freedom. Freshman can feel overwhelmed by the changes, may not be ready for the changes and get lost in their new school. Research has shown introducing students to their new school early is important and so is providing a semi structured system for them to enter in to with an immediate support system in place (Lever et al., 2004; Neild et al., 2008; Zvoch, 2006). One of the most effective transitions is small learning communities, just as they are the most effective for any student in any grade. They may be most important for freshman students as to provide them with a solid start to high school.

Investigations of schools which had specific transitions programs or small learning communities for freshman found students were able to create lasting relationships with school staff, find mentors, set goals, were more motivated, were more challenged, and had low dropout rates (Lever et al., 2004; Neild et al., 2008; Zvoch, 2006). When students set goals, are motivated, and are challenged they feel empowered. One thing differed in freshman small learning communities from learning communities for other grades was that the freshman were separated from the rest of school with their classes and space (Neild et al., 2008; Zvoch, 2006). Learning communities after ninth grade can still be effective when mixing grades because it allows for students to mentor each other but in ninth grade students do better when there with students in their own grade (Zvoch,
Freshman students have different needs than their older peers because they are getting used to a new environment, easily influenced, and their school grade makes them a high risk for dropout. If schools can transition freshman into high school in a smooth structured manner then they will feel more supported and prepared for their next three years. Giving them their own space keeps them together and cuts down on fighting and skipping class, while also providing them with their own small school within a larger one.

Schools that can have both smooth transitions for freshman and small learning communities would be the most effective for reducing dropout rates but no research mentioned both programs directly. Most researchers agreed that schools need to focus on the students' needs and not the school's and this would mean providing a smooth transition and small learning communities. Small learning communities are a dropout prevention program that is directed at the whole school and provides social support. It also allows students to find a way to become invested in their school in and outside of their academics.

*Engagement in School*

The staff at a high school can be supportive and organize their school to fit the students' needs but if students are not engaged in school they are not likely to stay in school. No one likes to go somewhere every day where they feel they are an outsider. It is important for schools to provide students with opportunities to get engaged in the classroom but also outside of the classroom. Students who are not able to take part in extracurricular activities are more likely to drop out than those who do participate (Bemak et al., 2005; Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Janosz et al., 2008; Kemp, 2006;
Marquez-Zenkov, 2007; Nowicki et al., 2004; Peck, Roeser, Zarrett, & Eccles, 2008). For this reason it is important to figure out what are barriers for students who are not participating in extracurricular activities and find ways to break them down. Being engaged outside the classroom can cause students to be more engaged in the classroom and find academic success.

Students who are engaged in school are the students who students who are most likely to stay in school (Marquez-Zenkov, 2007). Kemp (2008) found that high school principals felt extracurricular activities to be one of the best dropout prevention strategies. This was true for the student body as a whole but even more important for students who were not doing well in the classroom, had a disability, considered at risk, or deemed a behavior problem. Engagement does not only mean they are engaged in the classroom but outside the classroom, they have friends, are in clubs, sports and/or participate in other activities outside of academics. Students do not come to school just to learn, many come to school to see their friends and have a social experience (Kortering, 1999). Students have a better ability to socialize with their peers when they are participating in clubs, sports, or other activities outside the classroom then in the classroom. Researchers have found often students from low income and minority families are less likely to participate in activities outside the classroom and are thus less engaged in their school (Bemak et al., 2005; Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Janosz et al., 2008; Peck, Roeser & Zarrett, 2008; Suh & Suh, 2007). This may be because a student has a job, their family cannot afford the fees or equipment, or the student does not feel wanted at their school so they do not participate in anything outside of what they have to do.
It is important for schools to engage minority students as they are over represented in the population of students who drop out. The United States Department (2007) reported for their 2006 Dropout Rate Report that Hispanics students are two point five times as likely to drop out as compared to White students. Feldman and Matjasko (2007) found that Hispanic students had the lowest rate of participation in the schools they evaluated and had the highest dropout rates. The Hispanic population is the fastest growing population in the United States so the dropout rate could increase if Hispanics do not become more engaged in their schools. Feldman & Matjasko (2007) pointed out that schools need to evaluate their policies and see if they are discriminating against certain students when it comes to availability of extracurricular activities. Janosz et al., (2008) also, found that minorities were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities but found peers had the biggest influence on whether students participated. They felt it was not schools’ policies but instead what students’ friends thought of extracurricular activities that was the barrier. For both of these studies it may be a mixture of minority students feeling they did not belong in certain activities because the population that made up the participants was low in minorities and this is why their peers did not look favorably on extracurricular activities.

Literature has found implementing programs or activities outside of the classroom that engage students at risk of dropping out or are completely unengaged from their school can bring students into the school and engage them. Some schools do not have the money to allow students to participate if they cannot pay the fee. This is when school counselors or other staff should try to work with outside community agencies to see if
they can sponsor or provide a free after school activities (Feldman & Matjasko, 2007).

Besides not being able to afford to take part in an extracurricular activity research shows a barrier to participating is students who are not allowed to participate due to poor grades or suspensions (Legault et al., 2006; Suh et al., 2007). Most high schools have policies which require students to have a certain grade point average to participate in school sports or other activities. Many schools also do not allow students to participate when they are suspended and they may get additional punishments from their extracurricular activity for being suspended. The literature understands it is important for students to do their school work to be able to participate but think schools should provide students more help they need in the classroom so they can participate in the activities they really enjoy. The more stable an extracurricular activity is the more likely the student will continue with it and stay in school, so it is important to be aware of students who have to stop participating based on grades or suspension (Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Janosz et al., 2008; Kemp, 2008; Legault et al., 2006; Suh et al., 2007). Students who already have trouble in the classroom and are told they cannot participate in their extracurricular activity may slowly begin to disengage from school. A process of disengagement can happen and it leads to students to dropping out because they feel they have lost the things they were good at. Janosz et al., (2008) found students who participated in extracurricular activities in an unstable manner had a much higher rate of dropping out compared to students with more stable participation. They linked this to the fact that risk factor for dropping out is instability in life so if an extracurricular activity is not stable, as the rest of their life, it can disheartened the student and lead them to
disengage. Engagement is important factor in keeping students in schools so it is important to realize students who are disengaged or are becoming disengaged. High school staff need to be aware that suspension and being banned from participation due to poor grades can cause students to become disengaged from school. High schools need to find ways to punish students without alienating them. Nowicki et al., (2004) and Bemak et al., (2005) both evaluated high school programs for students who were deemed a behavior problem, had high suspension rates, had poor grades, and/or came from unstable environments. The programs were in addition to the students’ regular school day including some classes that were part of their program. Both research groups found the students who participated were able to engage in school in a new way. Many of them had not been able to participate in other activities but just having a place where they belonged empowered them to do better in school and become more involved in other activities. Bemak et al., (2005) noted that students developed new attitudes and dedication towards school. This could mean for some students to do better in the classroom they may need to be engaged in something outside of the classroom to develop a desire to want to do well in school. Schools may not want to allow students into certain extracurricular activities but there should be a safety net in place for students who cannot participate. Students should not feel they cannot be part of their school because they have poor grades and get in trouble. They will keep getting poor grades and into trouble since they have no reason to change. Peck et al., (2008) found high school students who participated in any positive extracurricular activity where twice as likely to graduate then those that did not participate.
Studies researching student engagement have found students who drop in their engagement in school or have no engagement are more likely to drop out than students who are actively engaged (Janosz et al., 2008). Students who were engaged in school felt their school offered them more opportunities to be successful and more options for their future. Students who were not engaged in school did not see school as being a tool that would help them in their future (Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Janosz et al., 2008).

Feldman & Matjasko (2007) studied students who were at risk and compared those that did drop out and those that did not. They discovered students who were part of something outside of the classroom which was linked to their school were more motivated to work hard in the classroom.

The literature points out that often students become disengaged from school because the only aspect of school they participate in is in the classroom. If they are doing poorly in the classroom then they have little confidence in their abilities and feel there is nothing that they are good at that the school offers to them. Whereas if the student is involved in an activity where they feel part of something or are good at then they are more motivated to do well in the classroom and see the value in school. High school students have trouble seeing the future or waiting for the reward of a high school diploma and that can be why it is too hard for many to stay in school. Students who get rewarded by activities they take part in, good grades, strong friendships, and the feeling of being part of something have the ability to see the future and are constantly being rewarded (Bemak et al., 2005; Janosz et al., 2008; Kemp, 2008; Legault et al., 2006; Nowicki et al., 2008; Suh et al., 2007). Suh et al., (2007) found that a positive view of the future
significantly increased students desire to stay in school. Students will have a more
positive view of the future if they feel competent and schools should help to find areas
where they can find competency.

Being engaged in school does not just mean having friends and participating in the
classroom. It also includes feeling part of something, feeling competent and participating
in activities linked with school outside of the classroom. Schools need to find ways to get
students involved and must be willing to investigate barriers that keep students from
getting involved. If schools want to create a school environment where students feel
supported then opening up activities to more students will give more students the ability
to make positive peer relationships and create bonds with school staff.

Summary

High schools which have the most problems with dropout rates in the United States
have large, ethnically diverse populations who have a variety of needs. It is impossible
for schools to cater to each individual student’s needs. Instead schools should organize
their school in a way that makes students feel their well-being is a top priority. Give
students the ability to work with each other and staff to create a school environment that
reduces dropout rates. Schools do not need to have a specific dropout prevention
program. Instead, the literature shows if they focus on the whole school and organize
their school around being a supporting community then dropout prevention will form on
its own. Some schools may need to focus more on certain students but no school can
focus on one risk factor because it can be almost impossible to predict which student will
drop out and which will stay in school. Students need to feel their schools want them
there, that they are learning something useful, and that a diploma is reachable and useful in the future.

One of the most important factors that keep students in school is when they are engaged in school, engaged in the classroom and outside the classroom. If schools are organized in a way that allows students to take part in more activities, feel their school is small community, have support, and find something that makes them see what high school has to offer, than students are less likely to dropout. School staff need to work together to provide an environment that is open and not too overwhelming for students and to find what they as a school can change to get more students engaged. One in four students are not graduating, one in four students are not being reached, and one in four students are not engaged. High schools can change these statistics and should be motivated to change this based on the simple fact that it does not just benefit the student but society. They need to use the resources they already have in place to create more resources for students. They need to make school atmosphere better for both staff and students, because that will create a more encouraging environment for students to develop within.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Design
This was an exploratory study, focused on learning high school teachers’ views and ideas on dropout prevention. This study was done by conducting interviews with teachers. Each teacher was asked nineteen questions from a questionnaire. They were asked three-closed ended question, five demographic questions, and eleven open ended questions. This was a qualitative study focused on obtaining in depth answers about strategies to reduce student dropout at their school. This design was chosen because the literature on finding ways to reduce high school students from dropping out contains little information about what teacher have to say on this topic. Exploratory studies often are conducted to gather information about a topic where there is currently little information (Royse, 2008). There is already much information on high school dropout prevention, but new methods need to be found because dropout rates continue to be high. Teachers may have ideas about new methods, so their views and ideas need to be explored. Instead often prevention programs come from outside of schools or school administrators. Teachers work directly with students, they must have some ideas about strategies which could keep students in the classroom. So this study is not only about finding new strategies for reducing high school dropout rates but also about exploring teachers’ views on what schools are lacking in dropout prevention.

Variables

There are few questions this researcher would like to have this study answer. One
question is what teachers' think their school is lacking that would keep students in school. The variables of interest are teachers' opinions on what their school is not doing to prevent students from dropping out. This variable of interest was measured in questions 4, 7, 9, 10 and 14 on the questionnaire (appendix A). Another major question is whether teachers mention the standards set by No Child Left Behind as impeding them to reach out to students who are at risk to drop out. This variable was teachers' views about No Child Left Behind, whether it is hindering them to reach out to at risk students. This variable was measured in questions 1, 2, 3, and 5 (appendix A). No Child Left Behind is not mentioned in this questionnaire because this researcher did not want to take the focus away from dropout prevention, but is interested in seeing if the topic is mentioned.

Participants

The population of interest is high school teachers, mainly teachers who teach ninth and tenth grade. Fifteen teachers working at Hiram Johnson High School in Sacramento California were interviewed. Teachers teaching mainly ninth and tenth grade were the first ones asked to participate. The sample came from a list of teachers obtained from the Vice Principal of Curriculum and Instruction which denotes teachers who primarily taught ninth and tenth grade. A majority of the teachers at the school are female, so a majority of the fifteen interviewed were female. This method of selecting participants was a non-probability sample of convenience (Royse, 2008). Royse explains non-probability samples of convenience as a way to get a quick read about a subject and not trying to get a large sample size instead focusing on depths of answers. It is a sample of convenience because this researcher knows this high school and is not trying to interview
teachers from many different high schools. Instead this study was done to get an understanding of how a group of teachers view their own school and how there may be a variety of views in one school.

This is a qualitative study so it is important not to have too many participants and to try to focus on a specific population. The decision to interview fifteen participants was made because this way there will be a variety of answers but not too much information. If there is too much information then a majority of information will not be reported or used, but instead lost. Since this is a qualitative study the sample size should not be too big because the focus is on the answer not the amount of participants. The problems that come with this population are that the Sacramento City Unified School District had to approve the study and teachers had to be persuaded to give a few minutes to this study during their already busy days.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this research study was developed by this researcher. It contains nineteen questions, both open and closed ended. There are five demographic questions at the end asking for gender, years teaching, how many years teaching at Hiram Johnson, subject they primarily teach, and grade they primarily teach. In producing this instrument this researcher used their literature review to develop areas which should be covered when interviewing teachers. Then these areas were broken down into specific questions. The literature about dropout prevention focused on these areas: no universal dropout program or risk factor, social support, school organization and transitions, and engagement in school. All of these factors were used to develop questions for the
Teachers were asked about how their school was organized, was this conducive to engaging their students, what strategies does their school currently use to engage students, why are their students dropping out, and what new strategies could be used. These areas are important because high school students who are unengaged in school have a higher probability of dropping out. It is important to know what the school is currently doing to prevent dropout and this could help to describe the school’s organization. Knowing why teachers think students drop out is important in understanding what areas the school needs to improve, since students drop out for a variety of reasons and each school is going to have its individual issues. Lastly asking for their ideas on new strategies is an important question because this study is focusing on teachers ideas from new strategies.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data will be gathered from Hiram Johnson High School teachers. Cooperation was obtained by first asking the Vice Principal of Curriculum and Instruction if she was willing to allow her teachers to participate. She agreed to participate if the study was approved by the Sacramento City Unified School District. A request to conduct research was filed with the school district. Once the request to conduct research was granted this researcher met with the Vice Principal to have her sign a permission slip allowing her teachers to take part in this study. The Vice Principal then informed teachers of the study taking place and asked them to take a few moments to take part. Teachers who taught ninth and tenth grade were first contacted to take part and once fifteen teachers agreed
then this researcher started meeting with them. Before conducting interviews each teacher was given a consent form to read and if they were still willing to participate then the interview was conducted. Teachers were asked nineteen questions concerning finding new strategies for reducing high school dropout. All interviews were recorded with permission from the participants. The problems in obtaining the data were delays in starting because the school district took much time in approving the study. The other problem was getting some teachers to buy into doing the study, though many were willing to participate.

Once the data was collected the researcher took the data and found themes in the responses. These themes, which are common answers or ideas in responses of the teachers, were used to analyze the findings of this study. To make sure the data is analyzed correctly, the open ended answers were listened to at least twice and notes were taken on all answers.

Protection of Human Subjects

Potential risks for the human subjects in this study were they might feel uncomfortable saying what they think their employer, the school, needs to change to reduce dropout rates. This study asked teachers their opinion of their school and this might be uncomfortable for some to say. This risk is protected by this researcher being the only one beside the participant present for the interview and the only one to listen to the recording of the interview. There was no identifying information in their answers or on the questionnaires. Once all data was collected it was locked into a file cabinet in the home of the researcher to protect the privacy of the participants, after the study has been
accepted by the University, the data will be destroyed. Results were reported in such a way that no individual could be identified. If any participants felt they needed to speak with someone after being interviewed they were given the contact information for their local Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Before teachers were interviewed they were given a consent form to sign to get informed voluntary participation. This consent form contained information about the study and the risk level of the study, and notified them they could drop out of the study at any time without penalty. Teachers were informed this study does not have any personal benefit to them. Once teachers read this consent form if they were willing to be part of the study they signed the form. Request for Review by the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects was submitted and approved by the University as “minimal risk” (approval number 08-09-055).
Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Findings

There were three major questions I hoped to have answered while conducting my interviews with the teachers from Hiram Johnson High School. The first one being what teachers think their school is lacking that could keep students in school. Second, what changes they would make in their school to prevent students from dropping out. Lastly I was interested to see if the standards set by No Child Left Behind would be mentioned as barrier to reaching at risk students. All three of these major questions were addressed in different questions from the questionnaire, which directed questions towards how supportive is the school environment, how engaged are students and how involved are parents.

Teachers gave an array of different answers for strategies but an important finding was all except one teacher thought dropout was a problem at the school. The one teacher who thought it was not a problem, clarified he did not think their dropout rates were any worse than any other inner city school. This means these teachers are constantly dealing with dropout and finding ways to combat the problem. One clear theme stood out: most of the teachers felt they are doing all they can to try to engage students in school, but because of lack of parental involvement students are still dropping out.

The sample group was all teachers at Hiram Johnson High School. Eight males and seven females were interviewed. Their total years teaching ranged from 3-38, and their years teaching at Hiram Johnson ranged from 1-29. All participants had at least one class
with freshman, and twelve taught primarily freshman and sophomore students. One theme that became clear was most teachers who were interviewed felt they, as teachers, were doing as much or more than is possible to engage, challenge, and support students. When answering the question asking if the school faculty holds high expectations for students’ academic achievement, thirteen teachers mentioned feeling that most of the faculty does have high expectations. A few mentioned they communicate these expectations by honoring students who do well in school or through classroom rewards. One teacher stated “For an inner city school I believe our faculty does an outstanding job of expecting much from our students”. Another said, Yes, I believe a greater percentage of the teachers do hold high expectations for all their students, but we often let many slip through the cracks due to overwhelming number of students who just don’t work or don’t show up for class. One teacher felt a majority of teachers do hold high expectations but also stated, “A minority of teachers under challenge students, teach using dull methods, and don’t seem to revise their approach based on students needs or beyond the time spent actually interacting with students during the 8:30-3:00 time period”. The rest felt the school “bends over backwards” to help the students and provide as many opportunities to succeed as possible. This was the first year the school had implemented a Freshman Academy, which removes the freshman from the regular small learning communities and puts them in their own small learning community. The freshman go through orientation and are supposed to be given time to build bonds with teachers and other peers. Many of the teachers are not sure if this program is working but see it as another way the school
changed to be more supportive. One teacher mentioned that Freshman Academy was implemented to catch at risk students early on and get them engaged in school and find appropriate support. This program, they hope, will help school faculty catch the students who may fall through the cracks early on.

Only three teachers mentioned teachers may not be doing as much as they could do to help students. Two teachers stated clearly they thought most teachers do not hold high expectations for students. One teacher stated they felt most teachers do not challenge their students at all and give grades based on attendance.

A minority of faculty expect students to learn at an academic level, the rest give grades based upon attendance. Some faculty do not even teach the full curriculum, because they feel that students have enough to do already. I wish this was not the case, but some faculty are proud to announce these tragic facts and I think, 'Wow, you are robbing students of a free education'.

When teachers were asked how they would rank how supportive the schools climate is, all except two teachers answered "Very Good" or "Good". The same two teachers who did not feel teachers held high expectations were the two who did not choose "Very Good" or "Good". Most teachers spoke about the many supports the school has in place for students including Healthy Start, LINK program, tutoring, small learning communities, Freshman Academy, Stop the Violence program, Advanced Academics, and Apple 1 to 1 program. Most feel this is more supports than most schools have in place but until the students take the responsibility to accept their education only then will these efforts actually reduce dropout rates.
A theme that popped up in almost every interview was accountability; many of the teachers felt students need to be held more accountable. Five teachers mentioned students’ attitudes need to change for dropout rates to decrease. Students, in their opinion, were not trying in school and think by just showing up they will pass. One teacher mentioned the school does not hold students accountable enough because some students get in trouble for not coming to school some do not, some students get in trouble for not doing their work and some do not. Students should be owners of their education but often do not see it as an education they want. “Some of the dropout strategies the school has in places reaches student. Some students just don’t find what they are looking for in the school environment so they will continue to not attend or participate in class”.

Lack of student accountability was a theme for why student dropout but an even more common theme was lack of parental involvement for being why students are not engaged in school and dropout. Question 11 asked why teachers think students drop out and twelve out of fifteen respondents mentioned lack of parental involvement or the fact that students are not taught to value education by their parents. One teacher said:

The inner city school poses the challenge to overcome the fact that many of our students’ families do not value education. This is shown in parents lackadaisical attitude of attending school functions. We start with an uphill battle to instill benefits of being educated to a student who does not have any frame of reference about education.

Another teacher summed it up by saying there is “no parental involvement”. Many of the teachers mentioned feeling the school tries quite hard to bring parents into the school but
parents do not seem to respond to them.

About 10% of the parents are engaged. The other 90% are not or just halfway engaged. Example: When we have open house or back to school night I can count on less than two hands how many parents come to those events. We even offer a dinner for them if they do come! We have tried everything! The staff really cares.

It really pisses me off; if the parents don’t care their kids won’t either.

This teacher was very passionate in their feelings about how the school cannot do anything more if the parents do not start getting involved. Other teachers were also passionate but some of the teachers felt the school may be able to do more to engage the parents to help the student become more involved.

Through the interviews I found teachers felt students’ dropout most often because of lack of parental involvement and some felt they could do little to change this. There were other common answers for why students’ dropout: gang involvement, needing to get a job to help the family, and not understanding what a diploma means. Another common answer was that students entered freshman year not prepared for high school. Many teachers spoke about how students have constantly been moved up to the next grade but did not learn what they should have in their last grade level. They felt students came to high school expecting to be moved on to the next grade without having to do the work. Three teachers recognized part of the problem was that the school does promote students to the next grade level who are not getting all the credits for their grade level. The problem is the student does not realize this and they get to their senior year and realize they will not be able to graduate and do not see how they could possibly catch up. One
teacher summed this up as follows:

Students are not held accountable for learning the prerequisite materials in the lower grades, but are advanced to the higher grades. Then they get to high school, and four years later do not graduate because of credit deficiency. The act of graduating at the end of high school is the first time the student is held accountable, and instead of rising to the challenge of learning, the student takes the easy path and drops out. By the way, many students have heard ‘you will not be promoted unless you learn the required material’ and of course the student is promoted. So, the student gets to high school and hears ‘you won’t graduate unless you complete the required credits’ and waits four years to learn that this time it is a true statement. This day of reckoning is a sad day, and I am sorry to admit I have witnessed it many times.

This teacher explained she felt this issue was not only the high schools issue but needs to be addressed in the lower grades. Freshman students come to high school with little knowledge of how things work, what class credits are, and that being promoted to the next grade level does not mean they earned all the credits they needed to. All the teachers in some way mentioned some students are not ready or prepared for high school. Either because their parents are not preparing them, their prior school did not prepare them, or because they are too caught up in their life outside of school.

Most teachers felt they were doing as much as they could to keep kids in school and feel nothing will change until parents get involved and students take responsibility for their education. They did have ideas for new strategies the school could use to engage
parents and reduce dropout rates. The same teachers who thought students drop out because of lack of parental involvement mentioned this in strategies to make school climates more supportive. One teacher stated clearly the main strategy for reducing dropout rates is getting “All parents engaging and being proactive with their child and the school”. Another teacher stated a strategy should be aimed at hosting more events which parents want to come to and will want to invest volunteer hours. This was a theme, providing parents with events to get them out to the school so they can socialize with each other and school staff.

Eleven teachers did say they feel the only way to engage the students are to offer more hands on or real world classes. One teacher mentioned classes like wood shop need to be brought back or have an auto shop class. One teacher felt the only way to reduce dropout rates was to completely change the school.

The school should change to an alternative education site catering specifically to our students, such as core group of teachers who hold high expectations who are skilled at building rapport and tailor curriculum to students’ interests. The curriculum should be 1/2 day employment, 1/2 day cross-curricular projects relating to subject matter and linked to standards curriculum.

Seven of the teachers mentioned some time during the interview changing the curriculum to make it relevant to the students. One teacher stated that the world the students live in is their real world, so school should reflect their real world. Students will see a diploma as more useful if they can see how it helps them. “Forget college prep; turn this school into a trade school that directly leads to jobs”. Some teachers feel this school is going to do
best if it changes its expectations from college to get jobs straight out of school.

Eight teachers felt the school can do more and most stated teachers have to be willing to work past the last bell; which most recognized as being a difficult thing to convince teachers of if they do not think it will help. Ideas for strategies was an increase in direct communication between parents, teachers, and students through home visits, better translation services, and giving parents a chance to visit the school and sit in on classes. Some felt if parents think the students are learning things which will be useful to their lives parents might also be more involved. So a trade school idea or alternative curriculum may not only be appealing to students but also to parents.

The other ideas for strategies were directed at getting the students involved in their education early, freshman and sophomore year. Ideas for getting them involved were giving “tangible rewards for improving grades and earning good grades”. Most of the teachers recognized the students they work with need to see the reward and do not see their diploma as a reward, especially since they have to wait four years to get that reward. Another common thing mentioned was having real consequences for students who get trouble or are involved in gangs. One teacher wanted to make it clear that they did not feel the students who cause trouble do not deserve an education but felt they may get their needs met better in a different environment, such as independent study or alternative high schools.

No Child Left Behind was never mentioned specifically by any of the teachers. One teacher said since the school has to meet certain standards in English, Math and other basic subjects that this has caused the school to get rid of music, fine arts, and industrial
art classes. They felt the classes that were being taken out of the school were the classes the students enjoyed the most and connected most to their lives. Another teacher mentioned it is hard to meet the needs of all the students when the school is looking to meet certain standards set by the state. Another teacher expanded on not meeting students' needs in a different way then would be expected.

Frequently, I fear that my students who come in with more highly developed academic skills aren't challenged enough, as so much teaching energy goes toward 'teaching to the middle' or even teaching to the students with severe academic challenges. In many classes, it's not uncommon for the vast majority of students to be reading at the 3rd/4th grade level. Guiding grade level and advanced students toward self directed applications of learning would challenge them more while the needs of the below basic students are being addressed.

This may mean the standards set by the state can also make it hard to help advanced students because teachers are trying to make sure everyone else catches up. For most of the teachers it seems they are conflicted on what to do with their students, whether to make class more real world or make sure California education standards are being met.

Teachers being supported was only mentioned by three teachers but it stills seem important to include this information. When interviewing the teachers it was clear they feel they often do more than is asked of them but few recognize this. This may be why many were blaming lack of parental involvement of students' dropout because they feel they do so much to help the students. At the same time some of the answers the teachers gave showed they are fed up with the fact that parents are not involved, students do not
come to school or participate, and are not prepared. Burn out could be a problem in a school with so many needy students, so it makes it important for teachers to be recognized. Not only the teachers who go above and beyond but every teacher needs to hear they are doing their job well. One teacher felt teachers who work past the last bell should be rewarded in some way but also felt all teachers should be provided with a time where they can all socialize in a relaxed environment because there is little time for this during the school day.

Coming back to the major questions it is hard to find one thing all the teachers think their school is lacking when it comes to reducing dropout rates. Across the board it seems teachers know dropout is problem and feel parents need to be more involved for the school to have any chance of reducing dropout rates. There were a variety of strategies offered. Most teachers felt getting their parents involved had to be a priority, thought they had different ideas for getting their parents involved. Another important thing to point out is that some teachers do feel the school has to completely change so the students can relate the things they do and learn in school to their real life and their future. Lastly state standards were not mentioned much and when they were it seems they make it hard to not just reach at risk students but the advanced students as well.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions
The purpose of this study was to find out what teachers think is lacking in dropout prevention. There were a variety of strategies offered but there were also teachers who were frustrated to the point of feeling there were no more ideas they could offer up or do to reduce the dropout rate. There are, also, some teachers who feel they as a school staff need to do more to engage the parents in the school, so the parents want to be involved in their children’s education. After speaking with fifteen teachers from one school it was clear most of them feel the thing their school is lacking in dropout prevention is parental involvement. Many of the teachers interviewed felt they did all they could to help their students, but until the parents step up and do the same then students will continue to drop out.

It is important to note all teachers interviewed felt dropout was an issue. One teacher put it in terms of numbers, “We start with many more freshmen, say eight hundred, and only graduate about three hundred at the end of four years”. All except three teachers felt lack of parental involvement was the one of the main reason students drop out of high school. One teacher said, “The top reason students dropout is parents not engaged and unstable home lives”. Most of the teachers saw this as something they could not change until parents decided they wanted to change. Though there were some teachers who had ideas for getting parents involved that stepped outside the box. “We need to invest time in building relationships with the families of struggling students and serve them. For example, help single moms with home repairs and/or teachers eat dinner
with students’ families”. Other ideas were having more events for parents, home visits, and allowing parents to come to campus anytime to sit in on their child’s classes.

Another important note was teachers feel they can try to engage students and create programs to help them but nothing will change until students think education is valuable. Teachers mentioned students see their parents go through life without an education or they are unable to connect what they are learning to their real life so they do not understand the value of education. Some teachers felt by changing courses to be more hands on and career oriented then students would recognize the value of education. It is also important to note many teachers felt students came to high school thinking they can sail by and then get to their fourth year and realize they have few credits and will never catch up in time to graduate. This could mean the lower grades are doing students a disservice by passing them to the next grade if they are not doing the work or they are not preparing students enough for the demands of high school. “Students are not held accountable for learning the prerequisite materials in the lower grades, but are advanced to the higher grades. Then they get to high school, and four years later do not graduate because of credit deficiency”. So though most of the staff felt they hold high expectations for their students they do not feel the lower grades hold the same expectations. The different school levels need to work together to set the same expectations to give students consistency.

Most of the information about dropout prevention in the literature fit in with strategies the school or teachers have or would like to try. In high schools with large student bodies, just as Hiram Johnson High School does, the literature said it was
important to separate the students into small learning communities. This gives the faculty the ability to get to know students better and for students to not feel so lost in a big school (Bemak et al., 2005; Feldman & Matjasko, 2006; Legault et al., 2006, Neild et al., Nowicki et al., 2004; 2008; Rycik, 2007; Van Dorn et al., 2006; Zvoch, 2006). For the last few years Hiram Johnson High School has had small learning communities, to give a smaller feeling to a large school. This year they made a Freshmen Academy, so the freshman could have time to form bonds with each other and teachers before being mixed in with the upper grades. "They have initiated a freshman orientation program that goes the first semester of their freshmen year to help them learn the characteristics they will need to be successful". The literature pointed out that the most critical time for dropout prevention is the transition from middle school to high school, so having a Freshman Academy is an important step in making the transition easier and giving students the support they need to stay in school (Cassel, 2003; Christle et al., 2007; Hayes et al., 2002; Lever et al., 2004; Neild et al., 2008; Suh & Suh, 2007; Zvoch, 2006). Most of the teachers mentioned these being good strategies but most did not feel the small learning communities had done much to reduce dropout rates. With Freshmen Academy the teachers were mixed on whether they thought it was going to reduce dropout rates.

Teachers also discussed the fact that some students have trouble going from middle school to high school. They felt the students were unprepared for the demands of high school and they have an uphill battle in trying to engage these students. The literature mentioned transitions need to involve students being prepared for what will happen in high school and visiting the school beforehand. The literature pointed out that freshman
have different needs than their older peers so it is important to first prepare them for high school but give them extra support throughout their freshman year (Lever et al., 2004; Neild et al., 2008; Zvoch, 2006). Some teachers mentioned there is freshman orientation but there was no information about the students learning what would be expected from them before entering high school. The literature would say the schools need to do a better job of working together at different grade levels to prepare students for the change.

The literature also focused on social support, which was the main thing the teachers felt was missing. Social support is an essential component of combating dropout rates and keeps students from falling through the cracks. Social support does not only come from peers, but teachers, parents, and other school staff. Students who are at risk for dropping out need to feel supported by family, friends, and school staff (Bemak et al., 2005; Janosz et al., 2008; Legault et al., 2006; Terry, 2008). The teachers stated they feel most students drop out because their parents are not involved in their education. The teachers discussed feeling if the students' parents do not value education it is hard to get the students to value education. Many of them felt they were giving as much support as they could.

We have increased interaction between teachers and students as part of our small learning communities. There are classes designed for credit recovery. We offer tutoring in various subjects areas both before and after school. We have an ongoing Saturday School program. We have a full time school and Healthy Start. We have instituted character development classes in our Freshmen Academy. There are many other programs that I have not named, it seems we have tried almost
The literature showed students are most likely to graduate if their parents are involved, caring, and supportive towards students throughout their high school years (Legault et al., 2006; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Strom & Boster, 2007; Terry, 2008). So the teachers have a point when they feel they cannot reduce dropout rates if parents are not involved in their children's education.

The literature suggested schools need to do more to get parents involved in their children's schools (Christle et al., 2007; Hayes et al., 2002; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Strom & Boster, 2007; Terry, 2008). Schools should not only be a place where parents hear bad news but where they get to go to socialize with other parents and get support they need. Murray and Naranjo (2008) found many parents did not feel schools reached out to them enough in a positive way, so they were not motivated to get involved. For this school teachers need to make sure they reach out to the parents in positive manner and they may be able to get more involvement. Schools service a community and the parents are part of the community this will bring together the various social supports in students lives. This study showed teachers agree students need support but most feel they have tried everything, including using food, to get parents to come to school events and it is not working. Though it is important to recognize not all teachers have given up on engaging parents and still take responsibility in trying to find ways to bring parents in. Other teachers also mentioned the peers in students lives may be influencing some to stray away from school and go down a different road.

The literature focused on there is no universal program that prevents dropout at
every school or with every student. Most of the literature stated there is no one risk factor for predicting if a student will dropout and thus there is no one dropout prevention program that will work and most schools will need more than one (Cassel, 2003; Feinstein & Peck, 2008; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Nowicki et al., 2004; Zvoch, 2006). The teachers did speak about how they try a variety of things to reach some students but admit because there are so many students some fall through the cracks. They did say it is important for all the students to be involved in school because that makes the school as a whole more supportive and less students fall through the cracks.

Marquez-Zenkov (2007) stated students who are engaged in school, in and outside of the classroom, are the ones most likely to stay in school. The literature, also, said students who are engaged see graduating high school as an important step in their lives, so it is important to get students to see this so they will become engaged (Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Janosz et al., 2008; Peck et al., 2008). It also said school staff have to be willing to try to engage students who are engaged through things like rewards and positive support (Bemak et al., 2005; Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Kemp, 2008; Nowicki et al., 2008; Suh et al., 2007). The teachers did agree with the literature that the students do not only have to be engaged in their academics but their school as a whole; whether that is extracurricular activities or strong peer groups. The difference for the teachers is they feel they cannot engage students if students do not want to be engaged. One teacher talked about students’ attitudes toward education and how it hinders them from success.

Students attitude need to change and the need to have ownership to fellow students and school. This means engaging in school activities, do something, anything.
football, basketball, clubs, students government, etc. It is always the same twenty-five to forty students that do everything.

Some of the teachers did not feel every teacher tries to engage students and that most of the teachers did. The more evident issue was the frustration most of the teachers had with either the school or the parents. This came through in the fact that many teachers listed the many things they felt the school did to help struggling students, but when asked if they felt it was reducing dropout rate most did not see a change. As one teacher summed up their frustration:

The school tries various methods to get parents involved with the school and student. We have awards night, back to school, open house, serve dinner, etc. We also send letters and make phone calls to keep parents involved. Unfortunately, we generally have poor results in parents showing up for these functions.

Many teachers felt the only way to engage students was to completely change the school to offer more real world classes to the students. This idea fits with the literature, in that students who feel school is going to help them in their future and can see a connection between what they are learning to their real world are more likely to be engaged and stay in school (Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Janosz et al., 2008).

Another important thing mentioned by a few teachers is they feel their schools do so much to reach the at risk students they do not challenge the students who are succeeding in school enough. “It is difficult to reach the top students without leaving the low achieving students behind and vice versa”, stated one teacher. This is important because it could mean students who may normally do well in school may not be engaged
if they are not being challenged and may also be at risk for dropping out.

Most of the teachers said the same things that were written about in the literature on dropout prevention. The literature felt giving students options, support, and creating a small school environment within a large school will reduce dropout rates (Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Hayes et al., 2002; Janosz et al., 2008; Legault et al., 2006; Strom & Boster, 2007; Zvoch, 2006). Most of them believe their school does try to engage, give options, support, and transition the students but the difference is they do not always see the results in their school. This may be due to a lack of parental involvement, which seems to be the missing link. All the teachers interviewed recognized dropping out was a problem at their school, but many felt there was little more they could do, which may go against the literature which felt schools are the ones that need to engage the parents and the students.

School staff cannot do everything for a student, they cannot be the students only support system, but for schools in inner cities school staff need to recognize the families of their students may not only support in terms of education but everyday things (Christle et al., 2008; Hayes et al., 2002; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Strom & Boster, 2007; Terry, 2008). Schools need to be willing to reach out to families in a way that makes the families feel the school cares about their well being. Some of the teachers agree with this statement, one teacher suggested going to student's homes and helping parents with jobs around the house but other teachers felt they should not have to do these things to get parents involved in children's education. School staff need to find what works when it comes to involving parents because it is clear their involvement is important in keeping
Recommendations

This is a study could be utilized by school social workers who are trying to come up with ways to reduce dropout rates in their schools. This study shows teachers can get frustrated with trying to engage students when they feel there is no point until the parents become more involved. Often school social workers are a link between teachers and parents. This study can motivate them to find ways to help parents and teachers communicate in a way that can get both sides to help students graduate. This study is also evidence of teachers' feelings of frustration and anger toward parents of their students. School social workers need to be aware of this when trying to work with teachers.

Teachers may be reluctant to help a student if they do not feel the parent is doing their part. This study shows it may not matter how much school staff does to engage a student if their parents are not involved in their education. School social workers can use this as evidence of why home visits are needed and more events for parents to get involved. Some teachers do have ideas about how to get parents involved and school social workers can work with them to bring parents in.

This study could also be used to help find new ways to engage parents. Dropout rates are only going to lower if parents become involved. This study could show that though some teachers may feel they do enough to try to involve parents, other teachers recognize there may be new ways to involve parents. Schools need to look at different ideas; such as going to a home of a student and helping single moms around the house or having events that help families with legal issues. This could do a lot to show students' families that schools care about the whole families' well being.
For future studies there are a couple different things that could be done. One would be to interview parents about their child’s high school and see if they think the school is doing enough to engage their child. Another way to go would be to interview elementary and middle school teachers since many teachers in this study mentioned that students come into high school thinking they will pass even if they do not do their work because that is what happened before. It would be interesting to see if the lower grade teachers had strategies for engaging students at an early age so they are ready for high school. Also interviewing students would be another important path because at the end of the day they or their peers are the ones dropping out. They may be able to give a different picture of why they think some students do succeed in school and others do not. Future studies could help to bridge the gap between parents, students, and teachers to find ways to work together to keep students in school.
APPENDIX A

Consent Form for Teachers

You are being asked to participate in a study that will be conducted by Jamie Owen of the Graduate Social Work Department at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of this study is to investigate new strategies to reduce high school dropout rates. This information is important because of the high rate of students that drop out of high school every year. I am interested in teacher’s views on this subject and how they would change the schools they work at so less students drop out of high school.

I will personally be interviewing you about your ideas about reducing dropout rates and what strategies your school uses to combat this issue. The interview will take no more than thirty minutes and can be during your prep period, before school, or after school.

You may not personally benefit from participating in this research. However, you participation will help to identify if there are any strategies that are not being used to reduce the high dropout rates in high schools across the country.

The questions will only be concerned with what strategies are being used at your school and what other strategies could be used. None of the questions will concern your personal life. There will be no risk associated with this interview. Your participation will be kept confidential and results will be reported in a way that keeps your confidentiality. Once this study has been completed all data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions please contact Jamie Owen at (530)400-0521 or by email at jamiepowen@yahoo.com. You may, also, contact my advisor at California State University, Sacramento Professor Ronald Boltz at (916)278-7171 or by email at boltzrp@saclink.csus.edu.

You may decline to be a participant in this study without any consequences. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in this study. If at any time you want to drop from the study you may do so without penalty.

_____________________________  ________________
Signature of Participant        Date
APPENDIX B

Consent Form for Vice Principal

You are being asked to participate in a study that will be conducted by Jamie Owen of the Graduate Social Work Department at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of this study is to investigate new strategies to reduce high school dropout rates. This information is important because of the high rate of students that drop out of high school every year. I am interested in teacher’s views on this subject and how they would change the schools they work at so less students drop out of high school. You are being asked to give permission for the teachers at your school to be interviewed.

I will personally be interviewing teachers about their ideas about reducing dropout rates and what strategies their school uses to combat this issue. The interview will take no more than thirty minutes and can be done during their prep period, before school, or after school. You may not personally benefit from participating in this research. However, you participation will help to identify if there are any strategies that are not being used to reduce the high dropout rates in high schools across the country.

The questions will only be concerned with what strategies are being used at your school and what other strategies could be used. None of the questions will concern teachers’ personal lives. There will be a minimal risk associated with this interview. Your participation and teachers’ participation will be kept confidential and results will be reported in a way that keeps everyone’s confidentiality. Once this study has been completed all data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions please contact Jamie Owen at (530)400-0521 or by email at jamiepowen@yahoo.com. You may, also, contact my advisor at California State University, Sacramento Professor Ronald Boltz at (916)278-7171 or by email at boltzrp@saclink.csus.edu.

If you are willing to allow teachers at your school to participate in this study please sign below. If you do not wish to participate there will be no penalty. If at any time your or any teachers decided they no longer want to participate there will be consequences.

________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant               Date
APPENDIX C

Questionnaire

Please just type in your answers on the opened questions and on closed ended just highlight your answer. Thank you for your time!

1. What strategies does your school use to keep students engaged and connected to the school?

2. Does the school have a system for helping students who are unengaged become engaged? If so explain.

3. Explain how students are challenged in their schoolwork?

4. What ways could students be more challenged in their schoolwork?

5. Does the school faculty hold high expectations for students’ academic achievement? If so, how do they communicate these expectations to the students?

6. How would you rate the school’s climate regarding how supportive it is for students and staff? (Please highlight answer)

[ ] Very Good  [ ] Good  [ ] Satisfactory  [ ] Poor  [ ] Very Poor
7. Name three strategies you would use to make the school's climate more supportive.
   1.
   2.
   3.

8. How would you rate the school involvement of the student's families? (Please highlight answer).
   - Very Good
   - Good
   - Satisfactory
   - Poor
   - Very Poor

9. Name three strategies you think could be implemented to raise involvement of the students' families.
   1.
   2.
   3.

10. Do you consider dropout to be a problem at this school? (Please highlight answer)
    - Yes
    - No

11. In your opinion, what are the top three reasons students drop out of school?
    1.
    2.
    3.

12. What resources or strategies are in place at your school to reduce dropout rates?

13. Are these resources or strategies effective in reducing dropout?

14. What are some new strategies that your school should consider to reduce dropout rates?

15. Gender:
16. How many years have you been teaching? ______________
17. How many years have you been teaching at Hiram Johnson High School? __________
18. What subject(s) do you currently teach? __________
19. What grade are a majority of your students in? (Majority being defined as fifty percent or more)
REFERENCES


Strom, R. E., & Boster, F. J. (2007). Dropping out of high schools: A meta-analysis assessing the effect of messages in the home and school. *Communication*

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