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At-Risk Indicators: The Impact on School Success.

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At-Risk Indicators: The Impact on School Success

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ABSTRACT

At-Risk Indicators: The Impact on School Success

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The hope of educators is that children will obtain a strong educational foundation that will lead to life-long learning and a bright future. However, several factors may play a role in hindering a successful outcome. Addressing the at-risk indicators of excessive absences, discipline referrals, socioeconomic status, disability status, early grade retention, and family composition gives insight into struggles students face.

Looking at 6 research questions, an independent sample *t* test was used to determine the difference in students who had excessive absences and discipline referrals in relation to school success. A chi-square analysis was used to identify the relationship between socioeconomic status, disability status, family composition, early grade retention, and school success.

Results of the study suggested that there was a significant negative relationship between school success and poor attendance and with discipline referrals. Socioeconomic status was not significant when looking at school success. The study showed that students eligible for free and reduced price meals program had nearly the same chance for school success as students who were not eligible for free and reduced price meals program.

Disability status and grade retention were not significant factors in school success.

Students who lived in a nontraditional family were not at risk for school failure.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my family, a family that has given me strength, encouragement, and continuous love.

To my parents, Charles and Martha Wynn, you raised me in a loving Christian home that gave me the strong foundation on which to build my life. With every step I took, your support has always been there. My happiness and success is because of your love. Dad, thanks for teaching me the important things in life: how to be self-sufficient, how to work hard, and how to treat others. Mom, you loved me so much, you would have fought every battle in my life for me. One of the main goals in my life was for you to be proud of whom I am. I love you both dearly.

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My daughter, Laken, you are my conscience. A young lady I admire and respect. Your character is so exceptional; you keep me grounded in everything I do. Watching

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you play sports throughout high school and college has given me great pleasure. Your competiveness and dedication is amazing. You always give so much of yourself. There is nothing in life you cannot conquer.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1964, reauthorized as No Child
Left Behind legislation of 2001, stated that all children will graduate from high school
(United States Congress, 2002). Since the reauthorization researchers have looked more
closely at indicators that impede student success. Ninth grade is a pivotal period in the
education of students. When students enter the ninth grade, many are uncertain of any
future goals and already disengaged. School has no meaning or purpose in a student's
life (Bottoms, 2008). Waiting until the ninth grade year to begin a successful transition is
too late. Educators must be proactive and address at-risk students prior to the ninth
grade. Balfanz (2009) stated "It is during the middle grades that students either launch
toward achievement and attainment, or slide off track and placed on a path of frustration,
failure, and, ultimately, early exit from the only secure path to adult success" (p. 13).
Poor attendance, behavioral problems, grade retention, and academic failure during
middle school are linked to students dropping out of school.

> "This indicates that to close achievement gaps, students needed not only strong
> teachers, they also had to show up, behave in class, and try hard to learn.
> Research shows school actions can positively impact all of these behaviors. This
> reinforces the point that schools need to pay attention to shaping both learning
> opportunities and student motivations." (Balfanz, 2009, p. 7).

Kominski, Jamieson, and Martinez (2001) looked at personal and family factors as
indicators of undesirable outcomes. Family composition, low socioeconomic status,
grade retention, and disability status were identified as important indicators. According to

McFadyen-Ketchum (2003) research over the last 30 years has shown that weak performance in academics in elementary school leads to underachievement in later years; however, he further acknowledged that inappropriate social behavior in childhood may be the underlying cause of underachievement. Absense from school may be the beginning of a lifelong problem. Students with excessive absences fall behind in academics and often require special education services (Garry, 1996). Family and personal problems need to be addressed and interventions implemented. Addressing discipline referrals, excessive school absences, socioeconomic status, family composition, disability status, and early grade retention may perhaps make the difference in a successful future or a future of failure.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the research is to examine the impact of the at-risk indicators excessive absences, discipline referrals, socioeconomic status, disability status, early grade retention, and family composition on ninth grade school success as defined by earning six or more credits. With the belief that all children can learn and be successful in school, some children continue to fall behind and show little academic success. According to Vo-Vu (1999) children arrive at school ready to learn but with varying backgrounds, opportunities, and academic readiness. Providing all children with a quality education and meeting the needs of children at their individual level is essential to educational success. Educators must closely monitor children throughout their elementary years. During this pivotal time, a student's academic and emotional needs must be addressed. Home factors also play a role in determining success and need to be addressed. Reaching children as early as possible will promote a more successful future.

"All children are born learning, and schools are charged with the responsibility to nurture each child's learning potential and to provide opportunities for continued growth" (p. 2). In order for children to reach their highest potential, educators must encourage, support, intervene, and make learning meaningful throughout the education process.

Research Questions

This study investigated the following questions as they related to the effects of the at-risk indicators: early grade retention, socioeconomic status, children with disabilities, school absences, discipline referrals, and family composition.

1. Is there a difference in the mean number of days absent between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

2. Is there a difference in the mean number of discipline referrals between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

3. Is there a relationship between student's socioeconomic status as measured by the free and reduced priced meal program and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

4. Is there a relationship between students served by an Individual Education Plan and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

5. Is there a relationship between students and family composition (single parent, kinship care, foster placement, and traditional family) and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

6. Is there a relationship between students having been retained prior to the third grade and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

Significance of the Study

According to Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) when speaking to elementary and middle school students, most every student has plans to graduate from high school and many to attend college. Why are so many dreams shattered? "When a kid fails to graduate from high school, it sets in motion a downward spiral that few kids recover from" (Glass & Rose, 2008 p. 9). Students who drop out of school face difficulties such as unemployment, poverty, incarceration, and single parenting. Warning signs include poor academic performance, failing core subjects, grade retention, and excessive absences (Glass & Rose, 2008). Waiting until high school to acknowledge the warning signs is often too late. Elementary school is a pivotal time to identify possible at-risk indicators that lead to student disengagement and failure. Research indicated that drop-out prevention should target elementary students (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002).

Wimmer (2008) showed that a number of children refuse to attend school on a regular basis due to anxiety, depression, and physical complaints. They often experience test anxiety or anxiety related to a school or athletic performance. Some children experience separation anxiety while some simply prefer staying home to play games or watch television (Wimmer, 2008). Proactive intervention can help out-of-school, overwhelmed children complete missed work and achieve success. The willingness to bend a rule on make-up work, be patient, along with effective communication builds a

relationship between student and teacher who encourages attendance (Butts, 2009).

"Poverty can have profound effects on children, especially those who experience it early in life" (Vogel, 2008, p. 1). Low socioeconomic status interferes with the ability to obtain success on a daily basis. Children face poor nutrition, instability, homelessness, low quality schools, and family violence (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). The pros and cons of grade retention make the decision to retain a child or socially promote a child a difficult decision. This decision has possible lifelong consequences such as dropping out of school (David, 2008; Hong & Yu, 2008). When children are placed in foster care, kinship care, or residential placement, the chances increase for poor school performance and failure (Jacobsen, 2008). They often exhibit behavior problems that impede learning. Disruption in school placement prevents continuity and building of social relationships. Trout, Hagaman, Casey, Reid, and Epstein (2008) reported,

> Factors related to school functioning such as truancy, grade retentions, multiple placements, low IQ, and elevated rates of disability further suggest that children in out-of-home care face additional risks that likely have a negative impact on their educational programming and outcomes (p. 992).

Children also enter school carrying heavy burdens due to parental divorce or separation, many times blaming themselves for the turmoil at home. (Jump & Fecser, 2009). The percentage of students with disabilities who drop out of school is double that of the general education population. Educators have to cross numerous barriers to reach students with disabilities while building effective relationships (Thurlow et al., 2002). Educators must provide an environment conducive to learning. Behavior issues in the classroom have a negative effect on children's academic performance (Simon, 2007).

Educators often spend too much time in negative interactions with a child instead of concentrating on reaching the child academically. The importance of at risk indicators cannot be underestimated when a child's future is at stake.

Definitions of Terms

- Achievement Gap: The difference between the academic performance of students in various subgroups, particularly the subgroups of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability status *(Virginia Department of Education, 2009).*

- At-risk: Students who have a greater chance of dropping out or failing school *(Virginia Department of Education, 2009).*

- Differentiation: "To differentiate instruction is to recognize students varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, interests, and to react responsively. Differentiated instruction is a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is, and assisting in the learning processes" *(Center for Applied Special Technology, 2009)*

- Disability: "Child with a disability means a child evaluated in accordance with Sec. 300.304 through 300.311 as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment, a serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple

disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services" *(United States Department of Education, 2009).*

- Economically Disadvantaged: When a member of a household meets income eligibility guidelines for free or reduced-price school meals (less than or equal to 185% of Federal Poverty Guidelines) *(Virginia Department of Education, 2009).*

- Foster Placement: Children who are in an unsafe environment are given a temporary placement while the family is given direction on how to make changes in the environment that caused the removal *(Virginia Department of Social Services Code of Virginia §63.2-100, 2009, 2005).*

- Inclusion: The placement of special education students in a classroom with general education students with the necessary accommodations and services needed *(Understanding Special Education, 2009).*

- Individualized Education Plan (IEP): A written plan created for a student with disabilities by the student's teachers, parents or guardians, the school administrator, and other interested parties. The plan is tailored to the student's specific needs and abilities and outlines attainable goals (*Virginia Department of Education, 2009*).

- Kinship: Children placed in the care of a relative who is an approved foster parent. These children have been removed from their family and in the care of a local department of social services *(Virginia Department of Social Services, Code of Virginia §63.2-100, 2009).*

- Learning Disabilities: "A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that

may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia" *(United States Department of Education, 2009).*

- Least Restrictive Environment: The placement of children with disabilities in a setting promoting the greatest possible interaction with students in the regular classroom setting. Various placements are offered that include support services in the regular classroom, no support services in the regular classroom, special education classroom services, resource classrooms, and private programs for students with disabilities *(Understanding Special Education, 2009).*

- No Child Left Behind: A federal mandate that provides school choice, flexibility, and accountability in order to lessen the achievement gap so that no child will be left behind *(United States Department of Education Public Law Print of 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001).*

- Nontraditional family: For the purpose of this study, nontraditional is the make-up of the family unit as related to the care and or custody of a child. Nontraditional family composition may include a two-parent household, single-parent household, foster parent, or kinship provider.

- Out-of-Home Placement: It is felt that children function best being raised in a family setting. Both private welfare agencies and state welfare agencies provide various services so children can remain in their own home; however, if the risk of abuse and neglect makes it impossible for children to remain safely in their home, out-of-home placement is provided. The most frequently used out-of-home

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placement includes residential care, foster care, therapeutic foster care, residential placement, and group home (*Child Welfare League of America, n.d.*).

- Poverty: The condition of people who lack a specific or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions *(Merriam-Webster, 2009)*.

- Response to Intervention: A strategy used by educators to identify students experiencing learning problems such as learning disabilities while giving support to students not performing well in the regular education classroom setting *(Response to Intervention, Collaboration, and Co-teaching: A Logical Combination for Successful Systemic Change, 2009)*.

- Retention: Retention is the process of a child repeating an academic grade because of unacceptable school performance (*Encyclopedia of Children's Health, 2009*)

- Social Promotion: Social promotion differs from grade retention in the following aspect: children are promoted with their peers regardless of their academic standing (*Encyclopedia of Children's Health, 2009*).

- Socioeconomic Status: The measurement of a family's economic standing and social ranking within society (*National Center for Education Statistics, 2007*).

- Success in Ninth Grade: Students who earn six or more credits during the ninth grade year are considered successful according to the participating counties policy manual (*Lee County Public Schools Policy Manual, 2009*).

Delimitations and Limitations

The population of this quantitative study was comprised of students from a rural Southwest Virginia school district consisting of 14 schools and 3,440 students. The actual target population was 94 third grade students followed concurrently over a 7-year period; therefore, the number of participants and academic school years was limited. A limitation of this study was that descriptive statistics were used to gather data in grades three through eight and analysis was done only in grade nine. During the 2008-2009 October school year census, the socioeconomic status of the schools studied, based on federal free and reduced price meals program, ranged from a low of 39% to a high of 84%. This study may not be generalizable to other populations.

Overview of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction, the statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of terms, delimitations and limitations, and overview of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of related literature addressing six at-risk indicators. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology including the design, population, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of data and Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature addressed school success and weighted the benefits and disadvantages of at-risk indicators and the impact on student achievement. Literature on grade retention, socioeconomic status, disability status, school absences or truancy, behavior problems, and family composition plays fundamental roles in the academic success of students.

School Success

Achieving school success for all students is a difficult undertaking for educators. According to Ford (2008) relating prior knowledge and building on that knowledge will produce successful learning. Importantly, the belief that all students can achieve when given the needed support and that teachers can provide excellence in the classroom given the needed resources provides a format for success. Vanderkam (2009) related school success to the ability to control behavior, problem solve, and set goals. Allowing children to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes sharpens the mind. Instead of educators making all the decisions for students, students need to be challenged to act and think on their own. "A better way to reach students is to proactively cultivate "intentionally inviting" practices that welcome all students into the culture of learning" (Zapf 2008, p. 68).

Achieving school success at the ninth grade level is challenging. Dedmond (2006) stated a rigorous academic curriculum alone is not the answer to school success. Providing an environment conducive to learning, support from educators, mentoring, peer interaction, and social programs promote success. The ability to adapt to different

learning environments and make a connection between school and future is necessary. Students must understand the decisions and actions in their present setting will affect their future. Kerr (2002) further addressed the success of students at the ninth grade level. While many students feel isolated, overwhelmed with the demands of academics and social order, educators must provide a support system that promotes a sense of belonging and incorporates learning communities. Cushman (2006) looked at school success through the eyes of students. Students feel it is important to connect with other students, to have responsibilities, and build relationships with adults. Students suggest to educators the need for small learning environments, sharing of physical space with students their own age, having mentors, and making connections with other students. Students have a need for extended class periods with class norms that are consistently adhered to and help in the classroom and outside the classroom. According to Christie (2008) high expectations and not accepting anything but a student's best promotes success. According to Lee County Public School Policy Manual (2009) students are considered as individuals and their academic progress should be monitored carefully in order to continue advancing from year to year. Success should always be emphasized. When looking at success in terms of grade promotion based on local policy, a ninth grade student must acquire six credits to successful advance from the ninth grade (Lee County Public School Policy Manual, 2009).

Grade Retention

Research on student retention gives mixed views on the benefits. With the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) high standards and accountability testing,

educators are taking a closer look at retention and social promotion. David (2008) suggested the requirements and policies for retention along with social promotion are being revisited by policymakers. If students are not on grade level and socially promoted, chances are they will continue to fall behind academically; however, it is not possible to retain every student who is not on grade level.   According to David the National Center for Education Statistics 2006 estimates that between 10% and 20% of students have been retained at least one time, with black students and boys twice as likely to be retained. The higher level of grade retention, the more likely a student is to be at-risk for dropping out of school. Research against retention argues that retained children are no stronger academically than at-risk students who were promoted. Early intervention and targeted remediation programs are likely to assist children academically whether retained or promoted. *NCLB* is likely to reduce social promotion and increase retention. Wu, West, and Hughes (2008) stated that retention is of no benefit to students and has an unconstructive impact on the emotional and social well-being of the child. When positive outcomes are noted, the outcomes are short lived. After completing the study they found that retention did benefit the academic achievement of students as compared to similar students who were promoted. It is important to realize that retention benefits vary based on the area measured such as grade, subject, or length of time (Wu et al., 2008.) Grade retention is often replaced with social promotion. Many school systems use social promotion as a common practice. In spite of failing grades, students are socially promoted. After a few years of social promotion, children fall further behind academically. The potential for dropping out of school or not graduating on time is a greater possibility (Berlin, 2008).

Regardless of the unpopularity of social promotion, grade retention may not be the answer to academic struggles. A rigorous academic curriculum in the day of high stakes testing and accountability is essential; however, many students are not mastering the skills necessary to be promoted to the next grade. Repeating a grade without modification in curriculum or teaching strategies is not likely to improve a child's chance of being successful the second time around (Hennick, 2008). Hennick affirmed retention had long lasting negative effects on children.   When a child is retained in the eighth grade, the chances of being a high school drop-out increases by 26%. As mentioned, drop-out rate increases with retention and behavior problems also increase. There is a greater chance of alcohol use and behavior problems in children who have been retained. Early intervention is a necessary component to prevent grade retention. Schnurr, Kundert, and Nickerson (2009) report that grade retention had a negative outcome for students. Retention is correlated with high school drop-outs, weak academic success, poor attitude, behavior problems, and disengagement from school.   Retention is a costly and ineffective intervention for students at risk. Academic deficits, emotional immaturity, and social immaturity are reasons to consider kindergarten retention. According to Hong and Yu (2008) early intervention through kindergarten retention prevents academic failure and emotional and social distress while promoting success in advanced grades. Opposing research suggests retention prevents age appropriate interaction and a lessening of academic interest that may cause further academic and social delays (Morrison, Griffith, & Alberts, 1997). Hong and Yu report that children retained in kindergarten show a higher level of interest and proficiency in academics along with fewer problems understanding personal behaviors. They seem to have a stronger self-assurance and

interest in academics as compared to at-risk students who were promoted. The at-risk students struggled academically and with internalizing emotional concerns. With the added year of maturity, children are more emotionally and socially ready for later academics. Retention allows children to gain skills commensurate with their peers in later years (Hong & Yu, 2008).

Reasons for retention are numerous and policies differ from school to school. Mantizicopoulos's (1997) research did not support kindergarten retention as an effective intervention. Spending an extra year in a grade does not improve behavior or adjustment to school. Academic growth is strengthened during the second year due to being exposed to the same material and being tested in the same manner. Academic growth was not consistent for retained children with attention problems. Willson and Hughes (2009) studied first grade students in a psychosocial perspective when looking at retention. Academic capabilities, sociodemographic variables, school environment, home environment along with social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment provide insight when addressing first grade retention through a psychosocial perspective. The findings suggest academic capabilities to be a high predictor of grade retention. A child's readiness during the pivotal early years is of greater importance than cognitive ability. The research further recognized socioeconomic status and age as a predictor for retention. A parent who sees the school as responsible for a child's complete education has a large impact along with a child's mobility. Once again, early intervention and parental support play an immense role in a child's success (Willson & Hughes, 2009). From an international perspective, Gadeyne, Onghena, and Ghesquiere (2008) studied characteristics connected to nonpromotion such as preacademics, psychosocial readiness,

family characteristics, demographics, and early intervention in Beligum. Academic and psychosocial levels were strong predictors of success and failure.   Consistent with research obtained from the United States, early intervention should be addressed prior to grade retention. Even with the use of a yearlong transitional special education program and a transitional first grade classroom, kindergarten retention is still widespread. Tanner and Galis (1997) reported that retention gives children a year of maturity, a year to master unlearned material, and a year to improve self-esteem. Children often put forth more effort when retention is threatened. Tracking retained and promoted children will give a clearer picture of the benefits or risks. "Retaining the child to do the same thing twice is a bad idea, but retaining the child with a focus and resources to correct well documented, individual problems is a better idea" (Tanner & Galis, 1997, p. 112).

Wu et al. (2008) expect that retention would benefit younger children versus older children in the areas of academics, language acquisition, and maturity. They looked at retention and academic gains on the Woodcock-Johnson broad math and reading scores. Results showed weaker math gains over a 2-year period without a significant change in reading; therefore, grade retention was of little benefit. It is reasoned that young children are more resilient to retention due to a lack of understanding the negative social consequences. When related to psychosocial factors, children with more acceptable behaviors adjust better to promotion versus retention. Retained children have a greater chance of dropping out of school. Stearns, Moller, Blau, and Potochnick (2007) address at-risk factors and different models that discuss behaviors related to unsuccessful school completion.   Retained children from low socioeconomic status who performed weakly in academics and exhibited discipline problems have a higher risk of dropping out of school.

Retention should be looked at as an early warning sign to untimely transition and the likely hood of dropping out of school.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status has adverse effects on student success due to lack of exposure and support. "Early childhood poverty can set students on negative achievement trajectories with few opportunities for deflection toward higher achievement" (Greggory & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008, p. 500). Children living in poverty are not provided with adequate means to supply their need for clothing, food, and shelter. Children have fewer opportunities and cultural exposure. They often face violent behavior in the home and exposure to unsafe neighborhoods. Parents living in poverty are normally single, unemployed, and have little formal education (Greggory & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008).

The duration of poverty, whether long-term or short-term, is of importance. Short-term poverty produces more behavioral problems than children in long-term poverty. Also noted, children living in low income neighborhoods have fewer learning experiences (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Children in poverty deal with adversity that hampers their ability to develop emotionally, socially, and academically. They face uncertainties at home, unsteady income, possible relocation, the potential for dropping out of school, and continuing a life of poverty. The National Center for Children in Poverty reported intense effects on children when poverty was experienced early in life. Poverty is not only income related but also creates unstable home life and parental stress (Vogel, 2008).

Low socioeconomic status did not originate in schools, and schools cannot solve the problem. Educators continue to see discrimination, lack of resources, and unstable housing in students living in poverty. The achievement gap between children of different socioeconomic conditions continues to widen. Children living in poverty often have teachers who are not highly qualified and do not challenge them academically (Levin, 2007). Maggi, Hertzman, Kohen, and D'Anguilli (2004) note that children living in a low socioeconomic household attending school in a low income neighborhood achieve less than students from middle class neighborhoods. The percentage of at-risk children with academic delays is higher in less affluent neighborhoods. With larger class size and achievement deficits, teachers are required to give additional attention to underachievers which may slow the learning pace. Often the highly qualified teachers prefer teaching in a higher socioeconomic neighborhood. Children with high competence in a low socioeconomic classroom setting are often limited academically. According to Maggi et al. (2004) the higher the grade, the stronger the correlation between weak academics and socioeconomic status. Children who live in a socioeconomic integrated neighborhood have a greater chance of academic success than those children living in a low socioeconomic neighborhood. Caldas and Bankston (1997) note several disadvantages of socioeconomic status on student achievement. Students bring inequalities to the classroom beyond their control including their parent's educational background. Such students are not seen by teachers as high achievers regardless of their potential. Lastly, children from low income families have a tendency to attend school with students from similar backgrounds. The study produced a significant finding. Children from low socioeconomic families who attend school with students from middle to high income

families tend to achieve greater academic success than low income students attending a low income school. Hardy (2006) looked at the importance of having a well rounded school with students from all economic backgrounds. He cites reasons such as higher qualified teachers, advance course offerings, effective discipline, and students who have been taught from an early age they are college bound students. Hardy refers to the 2002 report *Divided We Fail: Coming Together Through Public School Choice* in promoting school equality. "Indeed, eliminating the harmful effects of concentrated school poverty is the single most important step that can be taken for improving education in the United States" (p. 47). It is believed that schools with income equality will raise the academic achievement for low income children. Kahlenberg (2006) stated the socioeconomic status of a school is instrumental to student success. High levels of poverty in school hinder a child's education. Districts should implement socioeconomic equality to lessen the achievement gap. Kahlenberg further stated that research showed low income children perform better in a middle class setting. Middle class schools promote the importance of education, better behaviors in the classroom, and more parent involvement. Middle class schools tend to draw higher qualified teachers. The opportunity for low poverty children to attend middle class schools provides them with a more effective education. Kahlenberg refers to school segregation saying "separate schools for rich and poor are inherently unequal" (p. 52). Research suggests that socioeconomic conditions play a role in weak academic achievement. Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) reported children living in poverty acquire more special education services and score lower on IQ tests. In addition, the cognitive abilities of children are jeopardized by poverty at an early age due to lack of exposure to appropriate learning experiences.

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Poverty affects children in different ways. Erwin (1998) concurred with Caldas and Bankston on the effects of poverty on children. Poverty influences student behavior, academics, and relationships with teachers.   Erwin noted that children within a specific socioeconomic group have similar beliefs, knowledge, and feelings; therefore, children from a low socioeconomic status will obtain a comparable education if not placed in an integrated school with children from all incomes.

Davis-Kean (2005) reported income and parent education are linked to child achievement. Parents endorse education according to their level and belief in education. If parents do not promote education, children will not see the importance. Research supports the importance of family in a child's education.   Family background plays a large role in a student's academic success. Families with higher socioeconomic status tend to provide their children with more educational resources and in turn their children achieve greater success. There is inconsistent research regarding who plays the more important role in a child's academic success, school or family.

When looking at socioeconomic status and receptive language development, Hoff-Ginsberg (1998) found ample evidence supporting variances in learning based on socioeconomic status. Language acquisition in higher socioeconomic households provides more effective communication including questioning, enhanced vocabulary, and greater exposure to objects putting lower economic children at a disadvantage. Strong vocabulary relates to success in reading. Stronger language development flows over to the ability to use higher level thinking. Consequently, children from lower socioeconomic families may achieve less in school due to a weaker language acquisition. Socioeconomic inequalities are a concern in closing the achievement gap.

Looking at various countries, Chudgar and Luschei (2009) report that families play an integral role in education; however, they do not lessen the importance of school. The higher the income inequalities, the larger role school plays in academics, thus the need for governments to ensure that schools are equal and effective.

Disability Status

There is a large discrepancy between the achievement of regular education students and students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are more at-risk for school failure and not graduating from high school. Effective communication, appropriate Individualized Education Plans, transition programs, focus on learning styles, accumulation of data, incentive programs, mentors, inclusion, and remediation are a few interventions to close the achievement gap (Jones, Zirkel, & Barrack, 2008). Key to school success for students with disabilities, specifically learning and emotional difficulties, is early identification and research based strategic intervention. The earlier a disability is identified the greater chance of academic success.   In order to improve the learning opportunities of children with disabilities, educators must have knowledge and training on abnormal behaviors, differentiation of instruction, and how to monitor student progress (O'Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2003). The achievement gap of children with disabilities must be reduced to ensure children with disabilities are not at-risk for educational failure. Children with disabilities should receive a high quality education with appropriate support and intervention in the least restrictive environment.

The power of relevant, engaging instruction as a deterrent to antisocial behavior

has been repeatedly established and alternative setting that focus solely on

improving students' social emotional, and behavioral functioning are doing their

students a huge disservice that will have lifelong negative ramifications. (Hughes

& Adera, 2006, p. 28)

According to the National High School Center (2007) only 51% of children with

disabilities graduate with a standard diploma. Of those 37.6% who drop out, students

with emotional and behavior disabilities comprise 61.2% while 35.4% have learning

disabilities (p. 1). It is recommended that drop-out prevention for all students is a

necessary intervention. Failure, truancy, and detention are at-risk factors that must be

addressed to prevent students with disabilities from being unsuccessful in school. The

potential of dropping out of school is a critical education issue, especially for children

with learning disabilities or emotional and behavior disabilities. The National Joint

Committee on Learning Disabilities (2006) reported "It is not in the child's best interest

to 'wait and see' or hope that the child will 'grow out of' his or her problems" (p. 65).

Without early identification of learning problems, children may be at-risk. Studying at-

risk indicators can provide early quality intervention to enhance learning. It takes

effective planning and teaching to provide strategic opportunities for success. According

to Murawski and Hughes (2009) the use of *Response to Intervention* (RTI) to identify

students with disabilities provides a proactive approach to intervention. Putting thorough

instruction in place gives students a stronger chance of success. Through the use of RTI,

the educational curriculum is provided to all students. A marriage between special

education and RTI will provide a cohesive educational intervention for student success.

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Sinclair (1994) authored a research brief from the Center on Residential Services and Community Living College of Education and noted many students feel pushed out of school with no option of returning or getting back on track academically. Students with disabilities need stability. Educators cannot afford to wait until high school to intervene with at-risk students. Early intervention is necessary to prevent children with disabilities from dropping out of school. An article on special education from Education Week (2004) affirmed that students with disabilities experience achievement gaps. When special education students receive classroom instruction in a resource classroom and are not exposed to the general education curriculum, achievement gaps develop. It is encouraging to note that the movement toward inclusion is giving students with disabilities a more well-rounded education. Inclusion is requiring the general education teacher to gain more understanding and expertise in teaching students with disabilities as well as requiring the special education teacher to gain a stronger understanding of the general education curriculum and specific state standards.

Fitzpatrick and Knowlton (2009) acknowledged that students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) are most likely to be unsuccessful in a school environment. They are difficult to teach, hard to include in the regular classroom, and require specialized training. Because of EBD, academics suffer and progress is slow. Unsuccessful academics lead to inappropriate classroom behavior. The inability to incorporate research based strategies continues to cause EBD children to be at risk in the school setting. Regular classroom teachers often feel they are concentrating to much attention on a few special education students and neglecting the majority of the classroom. By identifying and implementing successful practices children with EBD

have a greater chance of school success. Also important is the need for mental health (MH) services for students with EBD (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2009). Pastor and Reuben (2009) reported students with disabilities are in need of MH services due to various disabilities and health complications. Assessments, behavior support, and referral to appropriate services are needed to effectively support students with disabilities. According to Niesyn (2009) students with emotional concerns are at risk for failure. Regular classroom teachers are often required to work with students who are beyond their realm of expertise. Teachers feel they don't have the needed instructional strategies and specialized support to be effective. Without appropriate training and classroom intervention, a child with disabilities is more at-risk for school failure.

Students with disabilities drop out of school at an alarming rate. Blackorby and Wagner (1996) report the drop-out rate of students with disabilities is twice as high as students in regular education. Special education students tend to score in a lower percentile on accountability testing. With *No Child Left Behind* legislation and accountability, school personnel often make little effort to keep low scoring children in school. Reaching high standards is easier obtained without the students with disabilities subcategory (Thurlow et al., 2002) Once students are disengaged from school and experience failure, the possibility of dropping out of school seems the best choice. Sinclair (1994) acknowledged dropping out of school for students with disabilities is a serious concern to educators. The southern and western regions of the United States, along with urban areas, have a particularly high concentration of at-risk students with disabilities. High school students frequently feel unwelcome in the school setting and pushed aside. By the teenage years, at-risk students are disengaged from school and

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difficult to reach. Waiting to implement interventions and strategies at this stage is too late. Intervention must begin at the elementary and middle school age (Sinclair, 1994).

Students with disabilities who do not successfully complete high school are at risk for unemployment and imprisonment. O'Shaughnessy et al. (2003) note "the longer children go without informed intervention, the more likely it is that their difficulties will increase in scope and severity" (p. 29). Children need parent involvement in the home to assist with developing needed academic skills and socially expected behavior. The school's intervention techniques must be monitored for integrity along with monitoring student progress. Educators must provide academic opportunities and support for students with disabilities. When students are in an environment conducive to learning, chances of success are much improved (O'Shaughnessy et al, 2003).

School Absences

Truancy, often overlooked by school systems, is a serious issue facing today's schools. Research suggested the importance of addressing truancy and students who may drop out of school. According to Capps (2003) truancy is no longer just a high school problem. Truancy is now an elementary school concern, occurring as early as second grade. McCray (2006) stated that truant children, often from an unstable home, see the world as unbalanced and perplexing. Truancy not only affects the truant child but also the families and surrounding community. Truancy is related to low academic performance, high percentage of drop-outs, and a future more likely to be supported by welfare, delinquency, and substance abuse. McCray reflected on a study that correlates truancy with low achievement and high drop-out rates. The causes of truancy are

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constantly changing as society changes. Three areas are identified that affect truant

behavior: school, home, and personal factors. In agreement with McCray, the National

Center for School Engagement (NCSE) (n.d.) described truancy as a stepping stone to

academic failure, dropping out of school, and delinquency. Students who become

disengaged from school are more involved in substance abuse and delinquent activities.

NCSE also reported truants as having low self esteem and experiencing greater rejection.

Family and community, personal characteristics, and school factors are important

indicators of truancy. Family and community factors include financial matters, abuse and

neglect, teenage pregnancy, unstable home, poor role models, and unconcerned parents.

Personal characteristics include poor academics, drug and alcohol abuse, lack of future

career plans, and mental health concerns. Lack of concern from teachers, use of out of

school suspension, poor identification of special education concerns, uninviting

atmosphere, and safety concerns are school factors that influence school truancy (NCSE,

n.d.). For children to be successful they must achieve academically, build relationships,

and attend school regularly. An international study by Reid (2005) gives further

significance to the student, family, and community indicators of truancy. Truancy starts

at an early age and continues throughout school. Warning signs likely occur prior to

absenteeism. Warning signs include children who have been abused, excluded, have

behavioral or social problems, have been retained, and come from dysfunctional homes.

Parents and students blame school related factors for truancy, while educators place the

majority of blame on home factors. Reid noted that truancy in elementary schools tends

to be condoned by parents. High school truancy involves school related issues. To

benefit truant students, professional development, appropriate curricula, and teaching

strategies must be updated and implemented. Students missing academic instruction are at a greater risk for dropping out of school.

According to NCLB schools are required to increase attendance rates and graduate all students (United States Congress, 2002). The interest in keeping students in school has become increasingly important to school systems. Stover (2005) reported that a rigorous curriculum and inventive teaching strategies cannot meet the needs of students if they are not present in the classroom. Identifying the underlying causes of truancy is necessary to incorporate effective programs. Truancy is more than a child missing school to play games or hang out with friends. Many of today's truants are experiencing academic failure, problems in the home, drug dependency, the need to work, and fear of being bullied.

> Stover quoted Villarreal as saying, "The reality is we're living in an environment where children have diverse needs, and the school system is trying to be creative and caring by providing the best services and education we possibly can. We need a more customized education system that can meet these students' needs" (p. 51).

When dealing with truancy parents, schools, and often law enforcement play an integral role in promoting school attendance. States are beginning to establish truancy guidelines and implement programs and counseling services for students. Parents are accountable and may be sanctioned under the law. Schools must ensure students feel welcome in school, establish relationships, and understand that attending school will prepare them for a successful future (Christie 2006). The prevention of truancy is a national concern.

According to Henry (2007) truancy has far reaching implications for students. Truant students are likely to perform below average in academics, drop out of school, become involved in substance abuse, or become pregnant. These factors have long lasting effects into adulthood. Family and school factors are associated with truancy. Truant students tend to have parents who have dropped out of school, do not work, or do not participate in religious services. Truant students typically have no vocational or post high school plans. Their academic performance is weak and they perceive a lack of safety at school (Henry, 2007).

Early intervention strategies that lead to improved school environment are capable of improving school attendance that leads to better academic scores and a sense of belonging. Anxiety, depression, and physical complaints are linked to truancy. Younger children frequently worry about being separated from parents and being accepted in school and school activities. Children become irritable and experience difficulty getting along with others. These factors often lead to physical complaints that allow them to be absent from school. School factors influence truant behavior when educators fail to build relationships, fail to establish a rich learning environment, and fail in consistent discipline. Children who are truant perceive school as a place to fall short. Diverse family factors prevent regular school attendance. Early intervention is instrumental in preventing truancy (Wimmer, 2008).

Antisocial behavior such as truancy starts in childhood. Truancy continues to be linked to school disengagement. Some school systems address truancy with disciplinary actions such as out of school suspension which adds to absences from school. Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, and Willson (2007) reported a student's family, school environment,

and economic status are variables associated with truancy. Kearney (2003) reported short-term consequences of truancy as follows: poor grades, family disengagement, anxiety, and confrontations with law enforcement. Truancy is one of the first signs of school problems and delinquent behavior. A long-term consequence of truancy is dropping out of school. Research suggests that school systems support a particular group of students while discounting others. The influence of peer groups plays a large part in the attitudes and academic presence in school. At an early age, students are identified by the peer groups they interact with and the behaviors and academic decisions they make. Students who seem disengaged in school are not involved in extra-curricular activities and do not see the purpose school has in their life. Educators and the school system make no effort to build relationships and a safe connection for students at risk. One defense of not being involved and accepted is to not attend. Until students feel connected and see the benefit of successful academics, truancy will continue to be a school problem (Hartnett, 2007).

Moving students from isolation and failure to the realization of goals is important to promote regular attendance in school. Rodriquez and Conchas (2009) identify truancy as an indicator of dropping out of school. Student diversity requires schools to more adequately serve at-risk students in order to deal with their needs, improve academics, and give them purpose. "…bridging the gap between the community and the school can be an effective approach to curbing truancy and dropout, thereby reengaging young people in school " (p. 243). Truancy should not be looked upon as deviant behavior but as a problem within the educational system. An alternative education such as home schooling could make a difference in truant behavior. Intervening in education through

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political involvement and not for the benefit and appropriate education of children shows that children's needs are not always considered (McIntyre-Bhatty, 2008). Students with continued absenteeism tend to fall further behind academically due to less time in the classroom and teacher interaction. Achieving academic success requires a student to be present at school (Stover, 2005).

Behavior Issues

Behavior problems occur at different levels and at different stages of childhood. If children are already exhibiting aggressive behaviors, opportunities have been missed. Preventing behavior problems by being involved in the school setting, being an active listener, having a practical view of a child's ability, and showing respect for authority figures will improve a child's chance of success in the classroom. Lastly, being proactive by determining what action occurred prior to and after inappropriate behaviors is necessary (Mauro, n.d.). The degree of aggression decreases as children grow and form appropriate social skills to handle day-to-day situations. When aggression continues upon entry in school, it is linked to negative outcomes such as lack of impulse control, poor academics, unstable behavior, dropping out of school, and poor peer relationships. Children identified with aggressive tendencies at school age are placed at risk for future failure due to their behavior. Aggressive children tend to experience weak academic performance, external and internal problems, along with symptoms of attention deficient hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and depression. Children were aware they had problems developing friendships and had feelings of depression. Even low levels of aggressive behavior in children may lead to emergent problems later in

school years (Campbell, Spieker, Burchinal, Poe, & The NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2006). "Children who exhibit high rates of aggressive-disruptive behavior during their initial years of elementary school are at increased risk for a range of personal and social difficulties and more enduring patterns of aggression" (Thomas, Bierman, Thompson, & Powers, 2008, p. 517).

Poor parenting, student teacher relationships, and student decisions promote maladaptive behaviors. Often children have developed maladaptive behavior prior to entering school, but the transition to school itself can lead to this behavior. An abusive home and disengaged parents promote inappropriate social skills. The lack of a close relationship with a kindergarten teacher leads to greater externalizing of behavior problems. The degree of relationship is capable of promoting or preventing maladaptive behavior (Silver, Measelle, Armstrong, & Essex, 2005). National and state guidelines require rigorous curriculum and high standards of achievement. Often forgotten are the intense need of incorporating strategies to improve and promote acceptable personal behavior, social skills, and building relationships (Petrides, Chamorro-Permuzic, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2005).

Barth, Dunlap, Dane, Lochman, and Wells (2004) reported a relationship between a student's behavior, classroom characteristics, and the school setting. Classrooms with a large number of aggressive children have a propensity to promote further aggression years later. Aggressive children continue to develop antisocial behaviors. Children's behaviors frequently change from year to year. A child's behavior often reflects the environment in which the child resides. A school's classroom setting is no different. The classroom atmosphere and composition can promote aggressive behavior and poor

academic outcomes.   Classroom composition can promote or decrease behavior

problems based on expectations. Classroom composition is also affected by the attitude

and discipline style of the teacher. Positive environments encourage positive outcomes

(Barth et al., 2004).

Addressing school and home factors assist in identifying the predisposition of

aggression in children. Aggressive children have tendencies to be retained, be identified

as special education students, and display inappropriate behavior. Young students are

expected to comply with school rules and understand social rules even though many have

had no prior experience from which to model. Academic achievement suffers when

children are unable to focus on a task. They act out impulsively and become increasingly

frustrated. The inability to form social relationships and problem solve leads to

noncompliant behavior. Frustration hampers teacher-student relationships and academic

success. Classroom environments can agitate maladaptive behavior though inappropriate

comments and behavior management. Children experiencing behavior problems when

they enter school tend to be experiencing continued behavior problems 2 years in the

future (Thomas et al., 2008).   "Children who frequently engage in externalizing or

internalizing problem behaviors are at greater risk for a range of negative long-term

outcomes" (Morgan, Farkas, & Wu, 2009 p. 67). Risk factors such as weak reading

skills, inability to stay on task, and family factors contribute to long-range effects such as

dropping out of school, unemployment, and possible incarceration. Family factors

including divorce and financial instability lead to adult stress and an unstable home.

Ineffective discipline and communication often promote aggressive behavior in children.

Kindergarten children who enter school with internal problems, acting out behaviors, low

socioeconomic status, and attention problems are most at-risk for extended problems. Young children with poor reading skills externalize behavior problems, while children with attention problems are prone to internalize behaviors (Morgan et al., 2009).

Family violence has a strong effect on children's behavior. Girls who experience violence at home exhibit more delinquent behaviors. Dealing with violence puts girls in a vulnerable situation where stress abounds. Aggression puts girls at-risk for internalizing problems during their teenage years. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is linked to conduct disorders more so in boys than girls independent of family violence. Attention and conduct disorders persist into later years with boys and help to predict delinquent behavior (Becker & McCloskey, 2002).

As reported by Weber (2003), great equalities are prevalent among student groups. The Haves are good students with involved parents while the Needs crave attention and have limited parental involvement. The Don't Cares put forth little effort, disrupt class often, and insist on attention whether positive or negative. Home life is out of the norm and parent involvement is missing. In order to prevent failure, educators must reach the Don't Care students. Proactive interventions to prevent further behavior problems are essential. Students who are disengaged in the classroom tend to act out and experience behavior problems. Students who lose control of their behavior in a classroom setting are losing academic instruction time.

Family Composition

The traditional family in today's society is becoming a minority. Whether through death, divorce, or neglect and abuse, many children experience challenges

dealing with various forms of family composition. The potential for academic success is stifled by living in a dysfunctional home prior to foster placement, kinship placement, or a single-parent home. Life experiences faced by many foster children make them susceptible to unfortunate outcomes. Poverty, substance abuse, and family violence prevent acceptable behavior and academic growth. Dealing with abuse and neglect has long lasting effects on children's self-esteem and potential. Children in foster care have greater propensity of failure due to family situations endured prior to foster care (Miller, Pinderhughes, Young, & Ferguson, 2002).

Nurturing home environments are necessary to give children placed in foster care an equal chance of being successful in the school setting. Foster children are at high risk of exhibiting behavior and academic problems; therefore, early intervention is essential to prevent externalizing and internalizing individual concerns. Externalizing behaviors lead to placement disruptions that in turn exasperate behavioral problems (Chamberlain et al., 2006). Foster children show feelings of insecurity and the need for attachment. Behavior ranges from challenging to accommodating when dealing with foster parents or educators. Foster children deal with emotional struggles that most children never face, yet they are expected to attend school daily and perform to high standards (Nowak-Fabrykowski & Piver, 2008). The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning and Mental Health Advocacy Services Incorporated (2008) stated,

> A focus on school readiness and school success may not heal all the damage already inflicted early in the lives of foster children, but it can give these children and many of their peers the fighting chance they need and deserve to thrive as adults (p. 33).

Achievement gaps in foster children are prevalent. Emphasizing early intervention, starting with preschool children, fewer foster children will be placed in special education, retained in school, or drop out of school. Meeting the educational needs and promoting success of foster children will give them a chance of a prosperous life (Jacobson, 2008). Special education placement and grade retention are common characteristics found in foster children. Foster children with average or above average intelligence continued to have difficulties with reasoning and higher level skills. The same is true for children with average or above expressive language skills. Poor comprehension skills were noted. Deficits in cognitive ability and language development prevent children from dealing with the stress of being in out-of-home placements. Children in kinship care and foster care experience academic difficulties and are placed at- risk for future problems (Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994). Foster children who have experienced abuse and neglect tend to be lacking social and academic skills necessary for school success. Disruptive behavior and impulsivity in the classroom may hinder the foster child's ability to learn (Pears, Fisher, & Bronz, 2007).

The number of children in kinship care continues to grow. Grandparents shoulder a vast majority of kinship care. Cuddeback (2004) indicated children in kinship care with grandparents are more likely to repeat a grade and be placed in special education than children being raised in two-parent homes even though the children have similar academic potential. Kinship parents receive less training and support than foster parents allowing for the possibility of being overwhelmed. Children raised by grandparents experience fewer behavior problems than children in single-parent families; however, kinship children are not performing to the standard of children raised in two-parent

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homes. More behavior issues, problems completing home work assignments, and weaker

scores occur in kinship care than children in the traditional family (Cuddeback, 2004).

Single-parent fathers are a growing category of caregivers. Socioeconomic status and

employment are strengths for fathers, whereas academic stability is weaker. Children of

single-parent fathers display higher levels of behavior problems and potential for

substance abuse. Fathers are assumed to be strong disciplinarians but are often absent

from the home. Single fathers have different priorities in life than single mothers. Single

fathers spend more money on alcohol and tobacco, eat out more, and spend less on a

child's education. The need for intellectual stimulation and emotional stability to achieve

success in school is not prioritized by the single father (Ziol-Guest, 2009).

A study conducted by Dubowitz and Sawyer (1994) looked at behavior of

children in out-of-home placement. Classroom behaviors were average or above average;

however, poor study habits and the inability to attend interfered with academics.

Externalizing behaviors such as aggression and acting out were observed in foster and

kinship care children. Internalizing problems were considered problematic. Many

children put forth the appearance of normality when their previous home environment

was dysfunctional. For those children with behavior problems, "prior maltreatment,

removal from parents and generally difficult family and social conditions are likely to be

the major influences on children's functioning and behavior" (p. 905).   Persisting

problems for youth in foster care include behavior problems, academic problems,

truancy, and discipline referrals. Youth experience a wide range of behaviors from

aggression to withdrawal. They are at-risk for dropping out of high school. Youth need

stability and understanding. The potential for a disruption in placement and mobility

prevents teens from building relationships. The higher the risk factors the greater intensity for acting out behavior was noted. Achieving an education for foster youth increases their potential at a successful future (Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004).

According to Sum and Li (2009) experiencing divorce during childhood hinders a successful school experience. Children of divorced parents have lower test scores, lower percentage of high school graduation, and strained family and peer relationships. Instability in school and mobility of family caregivers place unwanted stress on children. "A persistently unstable family structure continuously impedes children's academic progress over time" (p. 1550).

Family violence is associated with conduct disorders in children. Abuse and callous parenting often lead to adjustment disorders. Antisocial behavior is more significant in girls due to the sensitivity to violence. Boys exhibit high levels of attention deficit disorder and conduct disorder when associated with family violence. Boys' extreme level of antisocial behavior often overshadows family violence. Boys become delinquent easier than girls (Becker & McCloskey, 2002).

Family structure is linked to behavior and academic problems in children. Stress indicators such as socioeconomic status, employment, and personal circumstances affect the home environment of single mothers. Higher education and gratifying employment promote a more stable environment for children (Lieras, 2008). With the destruction of the American family, children are at-risk for academic failure not only because of school factors but home factors.

Summary

Educators must look closely at risk factors that could possibly lead to a student's lack of academic success. All students merit a quality education that will open up unlimited opportunities. Addressing at-risk indicators, being proactive, and implementing appropriate interventions may allow for the success that all children deserve.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Family and social factors play a role in the academic success of children. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of the family factors of socioeconomic status and family composition and the school factors of discipline referrals, school absences, disability status, and early grade retention to success in the ninth grade. Included in Chapter 3 are sections on research design, population, data collection, and data analysis. Research design describes the statistical methods and the objectives to be studied. The population is the 94 cohort students on which the data were collected. Data collection and data analysis describe how data were prepared, the collection process, the presentation, and interpretation of data.

Research Design

A quantitative ex post facto study was used to explore the relationship between the following attributes: socioeconomic status, family composition, disability status, excessive school absences, early grade retention, and discipline referrals and successfully earning six or more credits in ninth grade. An ex post facto study is used in real life situations when researching precise reasons for differences in outcomes such as the impact of socioeconomic status and disability status. An ex post facto study does not use manipulation. The groups are intact.

Archived data from the academic year 1999-2000 through 2008-2009 were collected from the participating county's computer information system SASI and Power

School. SASI, School Administration Student Information System, is a centralized web based data system. SASI provides easy access to pertinent student information. Power School is also a web based information system. Data were tracked and retrieved on a school and district level.

Population

The participating county is located in western Virginia. The system consists of 14 schools: 2 high schools, 1 career-technical school, 2 middle schools, and 9 elementary schools. The 2008-2009 student population was 3,642. The population of this study consisted of 94 ninth grade students from the high school located in the eastern end of the participating county. The 2008-2009 demographics of the 5 participating elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 high school range from an enrollment low of 70 to a high of 747. The number of students on free and reduced priced meals varies by school from a low of 39% to a high of 84%. The schools are 99% White. The percentage of special education students not including speech and language impaired ranged from 10% to 19%. The study targeted 94 students over a 7-year period. Data were gathered on third grade students beginning with the academic year 2002-2003 following the same students through the ninth grade in 2008-2009.

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving approval from East Tennessee State University's Institutional Review board, data were collected. Permission to collect data was also received from the participating county's Superintendent of Schools. Archived data were obtained through the county's computer information systems, School Administration Student Information

System (SASI) and Power School. SASI and Power School contained personal and family demographics, absences, academic grades, discipline referrals, disability status, and socioeconomic status as indicated by the federal free and reduced priced meal program. The large database provided extensive school history for all children in the school system.

Data were collected from elementary schools aligned kindergarten through fifth grade and kindergarten through seventh grade. Middle school alignment consisted of fifth grade through eighth grade while the high school alignment consisted of grades 9 through 12. School success in ninth grade is defined by the participating county as acquiring six credits or more during the ninth grade year.

Data Analysis

This study was guided by six research questions and the null hypothesis associated with each question.

1. Is there a difference in the mean number of days absent between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

A *t* test for independent samples was used to test the null hypothesis:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in mean number of days absent between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

2. Is there a difference in the mean number of discipline referrals between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

A *t* test for independent samples was used to test the null hypothesis:

Ho2: There is no significant difference in mean number of discipline referrals between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

3. Is there a relationship between student's socioeconomic status as measured by the free and reduced priced meal program of students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

A chi-square test was used to test the null hypothesis:

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between student's socioeconomic status as measured by the free and reduced priced meal program of students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

4. Is there a relationship between students served by an Individual Education Plan and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

A chi-square test was used to test the null hypothesis:

Ho4: There is no significant relationship between students served by an Individual Education Plan and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

5. Is there a relationship between students and family composition (single-parent, kinship care, foster placement, and traditional family) and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

A chi-square test was used to test the null hypothesis:

Ho6: There is no relationship between students and family composition (single-

parent, kinship care, foster placement, and traditional family) and students who

earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

6. Is there a relationship between students having been retained prior to the third

grade and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students

who did not?

A chi-square test was used to test the null hypothesis:

Ho5: There is no relationship between students having been retained prior to the

third grade and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and

students who did not.

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).
Findings were based on the alpha level .05.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this quantitative ex post facto study was to examine the following at-risk indicators (socioeconomic status, family composition, disability status, excessive school absences, early grade retention, and discipline referrals) to determine if there is a relationship between these indicators and success in ninth grade as measured by students who earned six or more credits. Archival data were collected on the above indicators using the information systems SASI and Power School.

Descriptive Statistics

Data were collected from third grade students in the 2002-2003 school year concurrently through the ninth grade year 2008-2009. The cohort consisted of 94 students who were in the third grade in 2002-2003 and remained in the county school system through 2008-2009 as ninth graders. Baseline data were gathered on students in grades 3 through 8 to observe any significant pattern within the ranges of at-risk indicators. Baseline data were also gathered on the cohort prior to third grade as kindergarten students in the 1999-2000 school year concurrently through the second grade year 2001-2002 to address early retention of the 94 students. Statistical data were then analyzed on ninth grade students only to determine school success based on credits earned during the ninth grade.

About 5% of third grade students in 2002-2003 had 7 or more unexcused absences. Absences ranged in number from 0 to 32 with a median of 6 and a mean of 6. Students identified as having discipline referrals were 3%. Discipline referrals ranged in

number from 0 to 2 with a median of 0. Students who qualified for free and reduced

price meals were 67%. Students served by an Individual Education Plan were 11%,

while 29% lived in a single-parent household, with a foster parent, or in kinship care.

About 15% of fourth grade students in 2003-2004 had 7 or more unexcused

absences. Absences ranged in number from 0 to 33 with a median of 4 and a mean of 5.

Students identified as having discipline referrals were 7%. Discipline referrals ranged in

number from 0 to 2 with a median of 0. Students who qualified for free and reduced

price meals were 68%. Students served by an Individual Education Plan were 11%,

while 28% lived in a single-parent household, with a foster parent, or in kinship care.

Absences between the third and fourth grade dropped slightly but unexcused

absences tripled. Data showed that third grade students had a large number of doctor's

excuses that accounted for the lower percentage of children who had seven or more

unexcused absences.

About 15% of fifth grade students in 2004-2005 had 7 or more unexcused

absences. Absences ranged in number from 0 to 17 with a median of 5 and a mean of 4.

Students identified as having discipline referrals were 13%. Discipline referrals ranged

in number from 0 to 12 with a median of 0. Students who qualified for free and reduced

price meals were 68%. Students served by an Individual Education Plan were 13%,

while 34% lived in a single-parent household, with a foster parent, or in kinship care.

About 8% of sixth grade students in 2005-2006 had 7 or more unexcused

absences. Absences ranged in number from 0 to 22 with a median of 8 and a mean of 6.

Students identified as having discipline referrals were 25%. Discipline referrals ranged

in number from 0 to 12 with a median of 0. Students who qualified for free and reduced

price meals were 65%. Students served by an Individual Education Plan were 16%, while 31% lived in a single-parent household, with a foster parent, or in kinship care.

About 7% of seventh grade students in 2006-2007 had 7 or more unexcused absences. Absences ranged in number from 0 to 53 with a median of 9 and a mean of 7. Students identified as having discipline referrals were 30%. Discipline referrals ranged in number from 0 to 14 with a median of 1. Students who qualified for free and reduced price meals were 64%. Students served by an Individual Education Plan were 16% , while 28% lived in a single-parent household, with a foster parent, or in kinship care.

About 15% of eighth grade students in 2007-2008 had 7 or more absences. Absences ranged in number from 0 to 51 with a median of 10 and a mean of 4. Students identified as having discipline referrals were 22%. Discipline referrals ranged in number from 0 to 6 with a median of 0. Students who qualified for free and reduced price meals were 60%. Students served by an Individual Education Plan were 18%, while 30% lived in a single-parent household, with a foster parent, or kinship care.

About 9% of the 94 student cohort were retained prior to the third grade year. Figure 1 shows the percentage of students in grades three through eight who had excessive absences. Figure 2 shows the percentage of students in grade three through eight who had discipline referrals. Figure 3 shows the percentage of students in grades three through eight who were eligible for free and reduced priced meals. Figure 4 shows the percentage of students in grade three through eight who were served by an Individual Educational Plan while Figure 5 shows the percentage of students in grades three through eight who lived in a nontraditional family. Figure 6 shows the percentage of students in grade three through eight who were retained prior to the third grade.
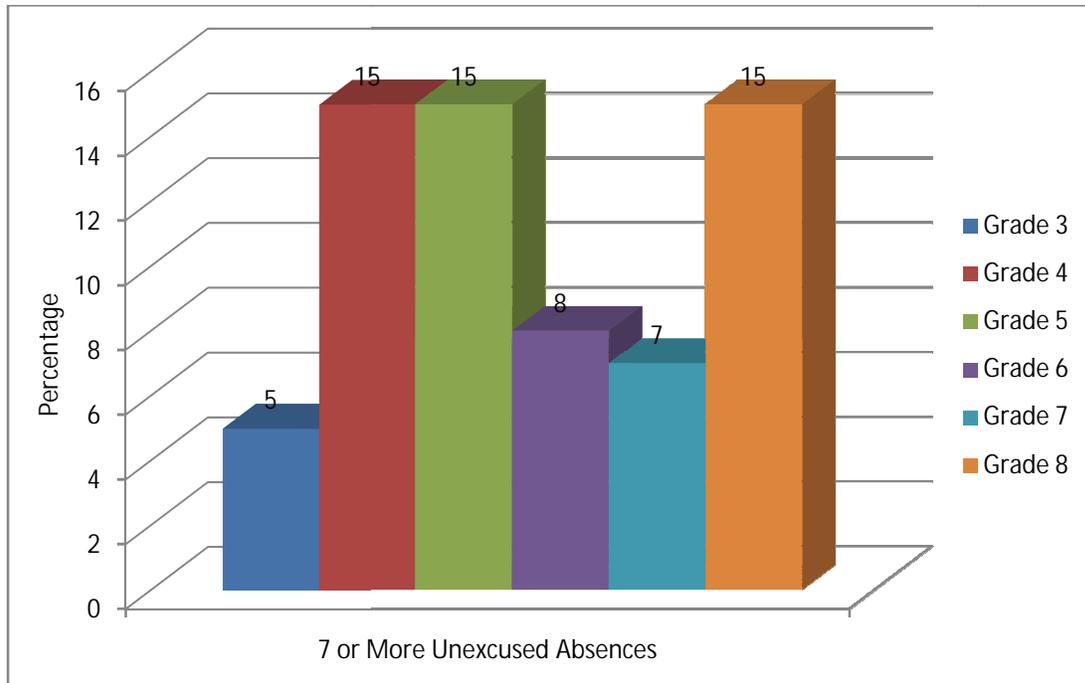
Figure 1. Percentage of Students in Grades Three Through Eight Who Were Truant.
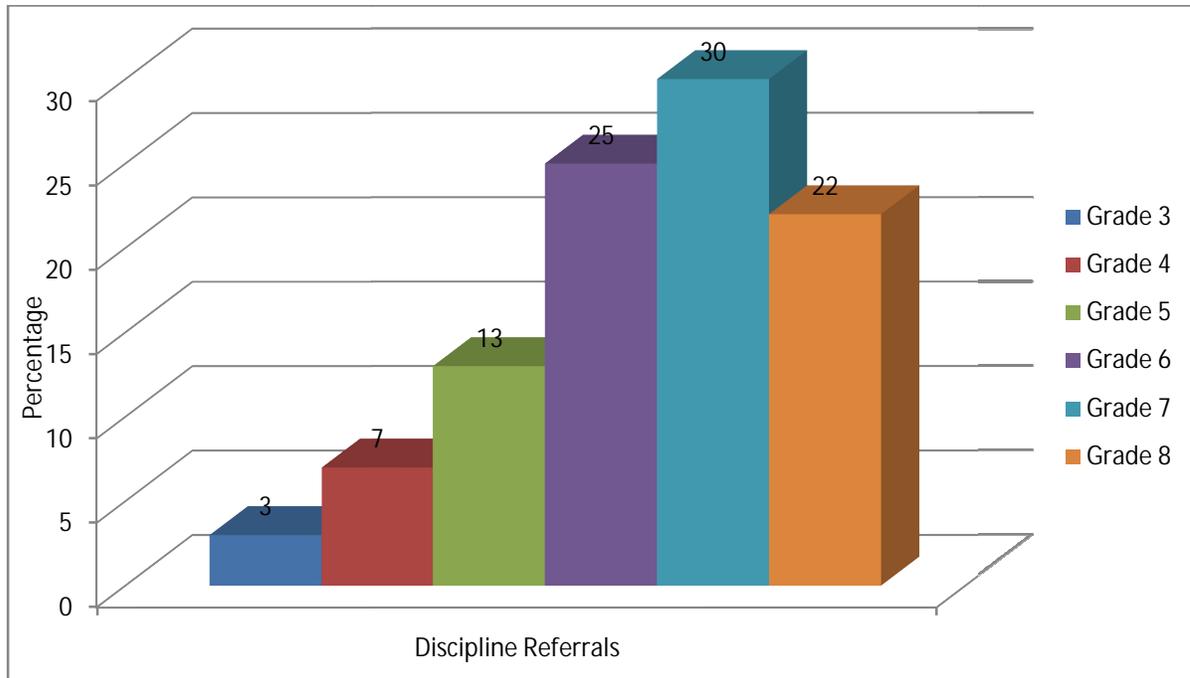
Figure 2. Percentage of Students in Grades Three Through Eight with Discipline

Referrals
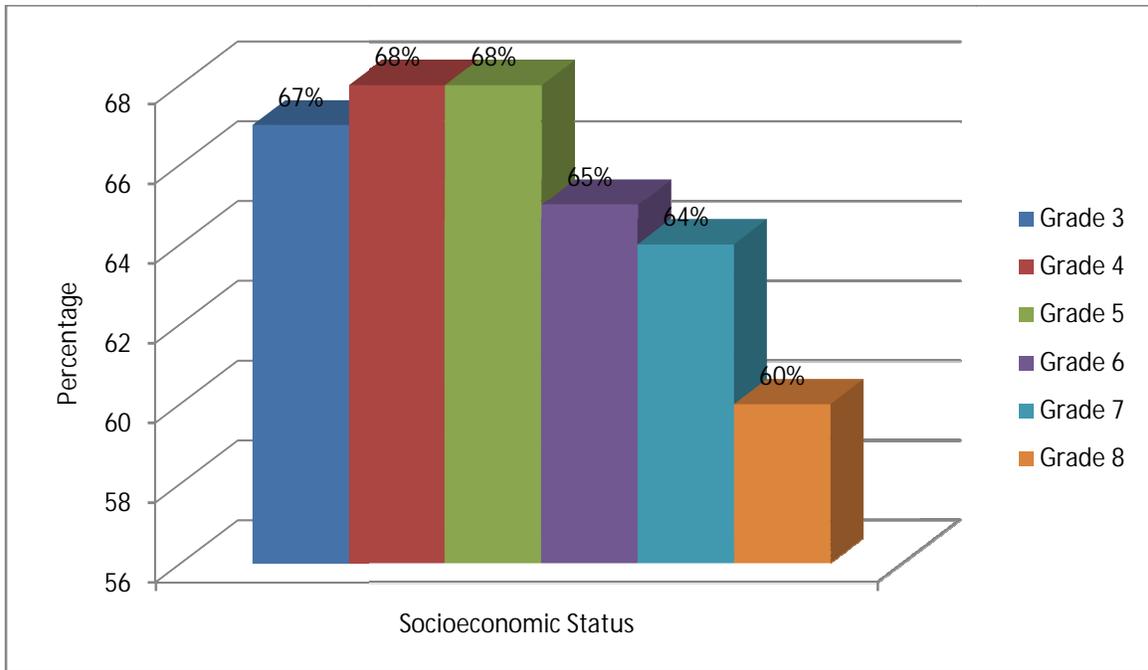
Figure 3. Percentage of Students in Grades Three Through Eight Eligible for Free and

Reduced Priced Meals.
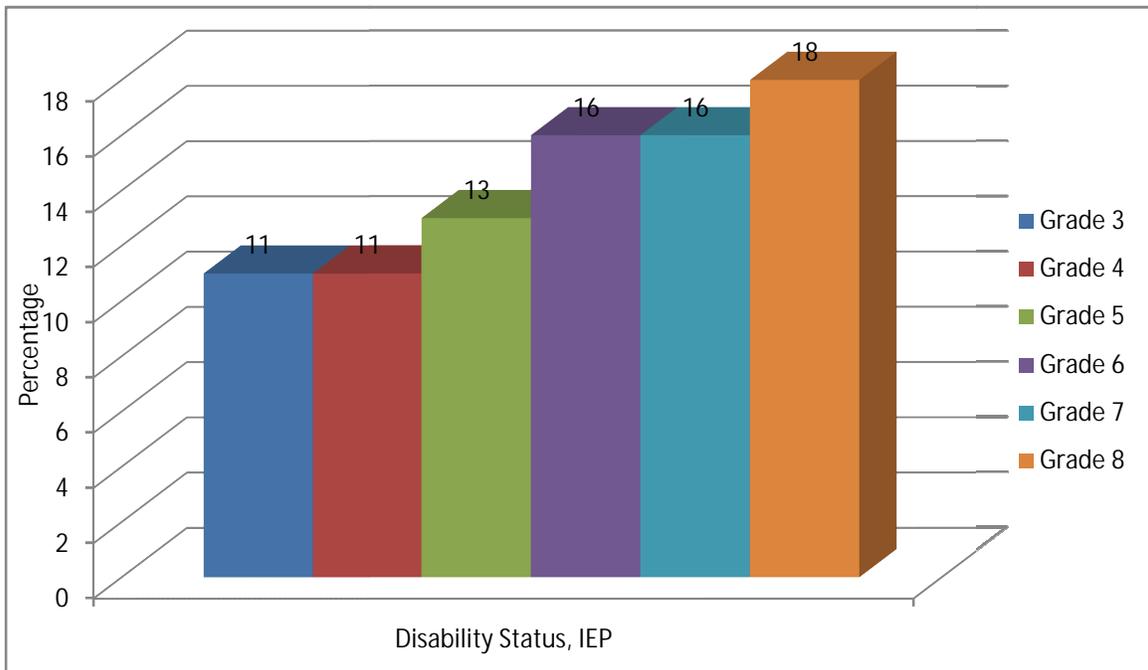
Figure 4. Percentage of Students in Grades Three Through Eight Served by an

Individual Education Plan (IEP).
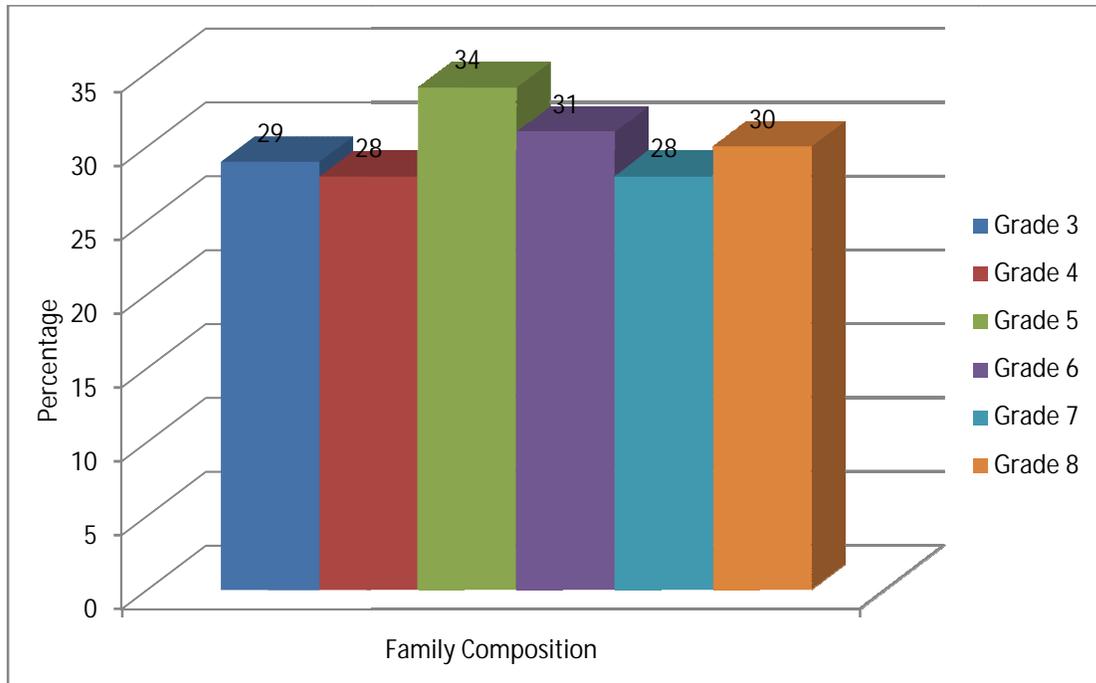
Figure 5. Percentage of Students in Grade Three Through Eight Who Lived in a

Nontraditional Family (Single-Parent Household, Foster Home, or Kinship Care)
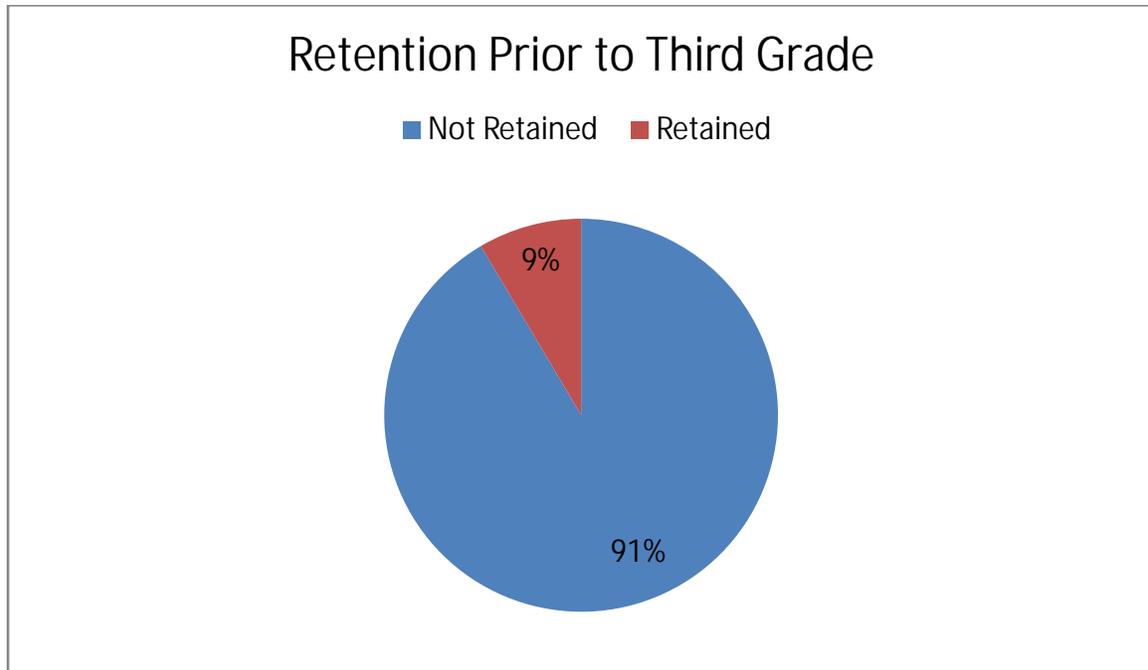
Figure 6. Percentage of Students in Grade Three Through Eight Who Were Retained Prior to the Third Grade

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1

Is there a difference in the mean number of days absent during the ninth grade year only between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in mean number of days absent during the ninth grade year only between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate the mean values of absences between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students

who did not. Absences was the test variable and the grouping variable was students who earned six or more credits and students who did not. The test was significant, $t(92) =$ 6.89, $p < .01$. The effect size as measured by $\eta^2 = .034$. Students who obtained six or more credits (M = 9.50, SD = 7.08) had significantly fewer number of absences than student who obtained fewer than six credits (M = 30.69, SD = 22.66). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from -27.30 to -15.1. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of only ninth grade absences for students who earned six or more credits and students who earned fewer than six credits in ninth grade. Figure 7 shows the distributions for the two groups.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Absences During the Ninth Grade Only Based on Students Who Earned Six or More Credits in Ninth Grade and Students Who Did Not

Credits	N	M	SD
Six or More Credits Earned	78	9.50	7.08
Fewer Than Six Credits Earned	16	30.69	22.66
Total	94		

o = an observation between 1.5 to 3.0 times the interquartile range

Figure 7. Distribution of Absences

Research Question 2

Is there a difference in the mean number of discipline referrals during the ninth grade year only between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

Ho2: There is no significant difference in mean number of discipline referrals during the ninth grade year only between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.
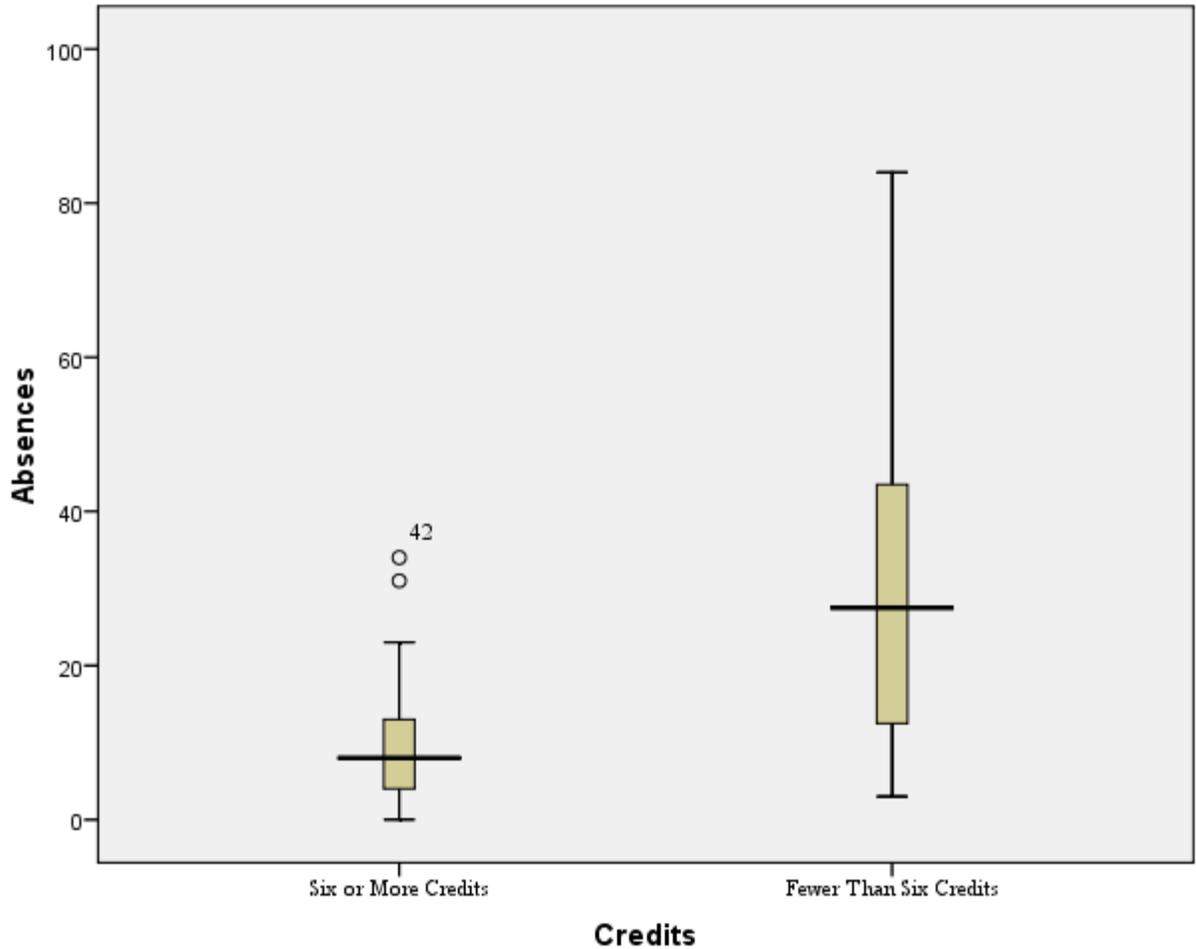
An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate the mean number of discipline referrals between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not. Discipline referrals was the test variable and the grouping variable was students who earned six or more credits and students who did not. The test was significant, t (92) = 7.21, p < .01. The effect size as measured by η^2 = .36. Students who obtained six or more credits (M = 1.73, SD = 3.41) had a significantly lower number of discipline referrals than student who obtained fewer than six credits (M = 8.94, SD = 6.51). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from -9.43 to -4.99. Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of only ninth grade discipline referrals for students who earned six or more credits and students who earned fewer than six credits during the ninth grade. Figure 8 shows the distributions for the two groups.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Discipline Referrals During the Ninth Grade Only Based on Students Who Earned Six or More Credits in Ninth Grade and Students Who Did Not

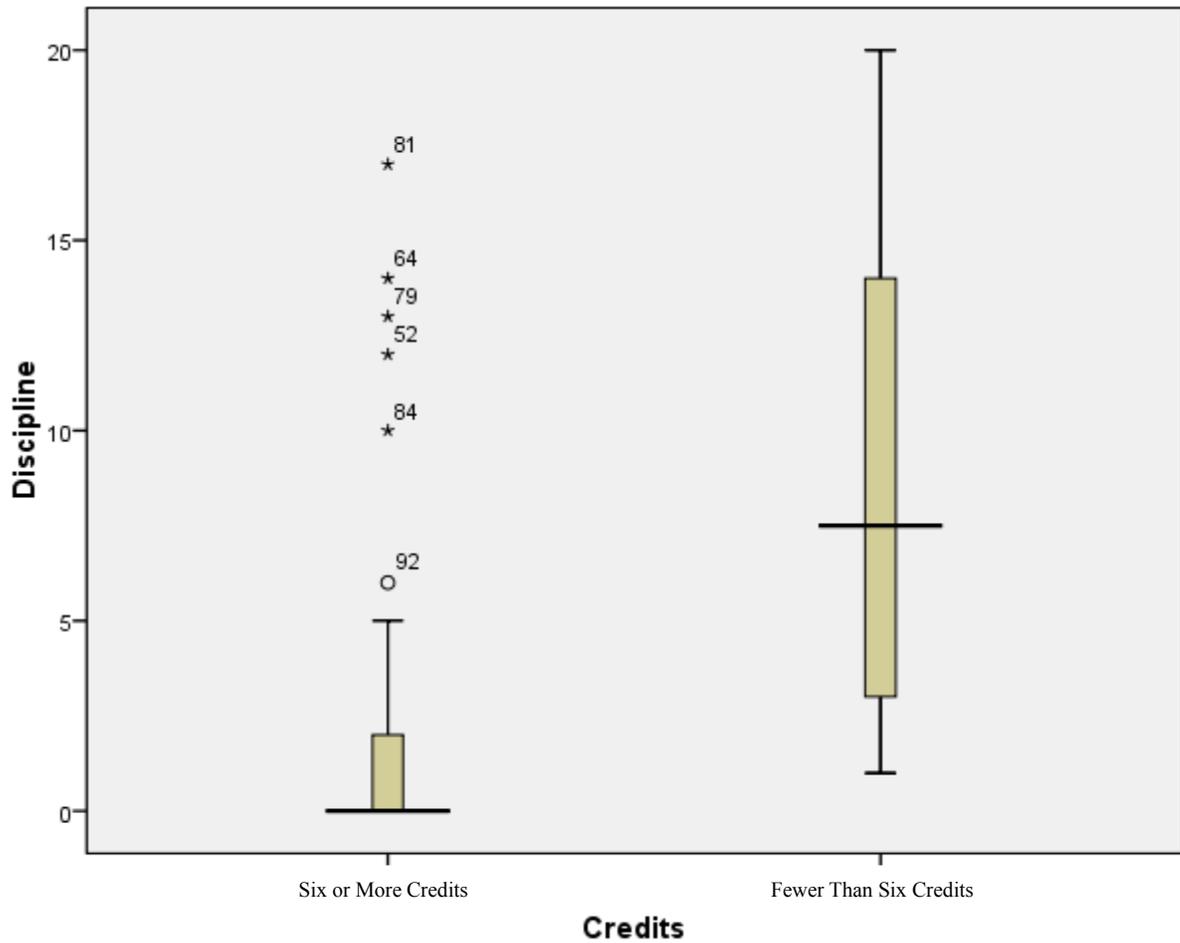| Credits	N	M	SD
Six or More Credits Earned	78	1.73	3.41
Fewer Than Six Credits Earned	16	8.94	6.51
Total	94		

* = an observation which is more than 3.0 times the interquartile range

o = an observation between 1.5 times to 3.0 times the interquartile range

Figure 8. Distribution of Discipline Referrals

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between student's socioeconomic status as measured by the free and reduced priced meal program during the ninth grade year only and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between student's socioeconomic status as measured by the free and reduced priced meal program during the ninth grade year only and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether socioeconomic status has a relationship with students earning six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not. The two variables were socioeconomic status as measured by the free and reduced meal program, with two levels (free or paid) and credits with two levels (six or more credits and fewer than six credits). Socioeconomic status and credits earned were not significantly related, Pearson χ^2 (1, $N = 94$) = .67, $p =$ .41, Cramér's V = .09. Table 3 shows the percentages of students who earned six or more credits and students who earned fewer than six credits based on socioeconomic status as identified by the free and reduced meal program during the ninth grade only. Figure 9 shows the relationship between socioeconomic status and credits earned.

Table 3

Percentages for Socioeconomic Status During the Ninth Grade Only Based on Students Who Earned Six or More Credits in Ninth Grade and Students Who Did Not

Credits	Free or Reduced Price		Paid	
	N	%	N	%
Six or More Credits Earned	45	47.9	33	35.1
Fewer than Six Credits Earned	11	11.7	5	5.3
Total	56	59.6	38	40.4
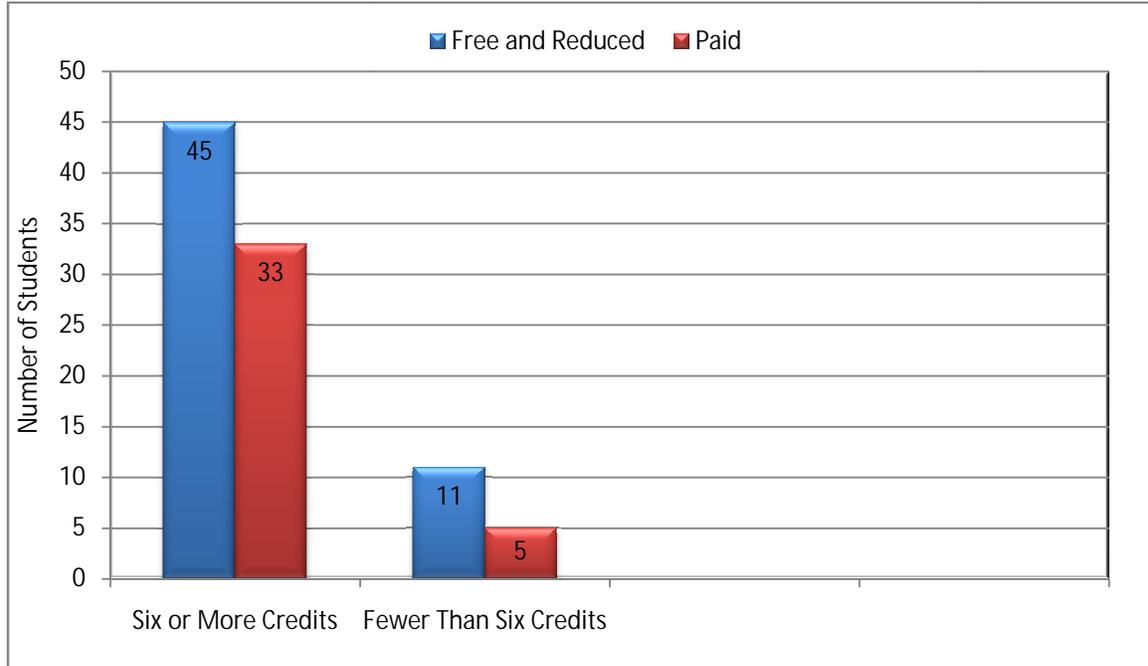
Figure 9. Socioeconomic Status and Credits Earned

Research Question 4

Is there a relationship between students served by an Individual Education Plan during the ninth grade year only and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

Ho4: There is no significant relationship between students served by an Individual Education Plan during the ninth grade year only and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether disability status has a relationship with students earning six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not. The two variables were disability status as identified by an Individual Education Plan, with two levels (identified disability and no disability) and

credits with two levels (six or more credits and fewer than six credits). Disability status

and credits earned were not significantly related, Pearson χ^2 (1, $N = 94$) = .11, $p = .74$,

Cramér's V = .04. Table 4 shows the percentages of students who earned six or more

credits and student who did not according to disability status as identified by an

Individual Education Plan during the ninth grade only. Figure 10 shows the relationship

between disability status and credits earned.

Table 4

Percentages for Disability Status (IEP) During the Ninth Grade Only Based on Students

Who Earned Six or More Credits in Ninth Grade and Students Who Did Not

Credits	IEP		No IEP	
	N	%	N	%
Six or More Credits Earned	12	12.8	66	70.2
Fewer than Six Credits Earned	3	3.2	13	13.8
Total	15	16.0	79	84.0
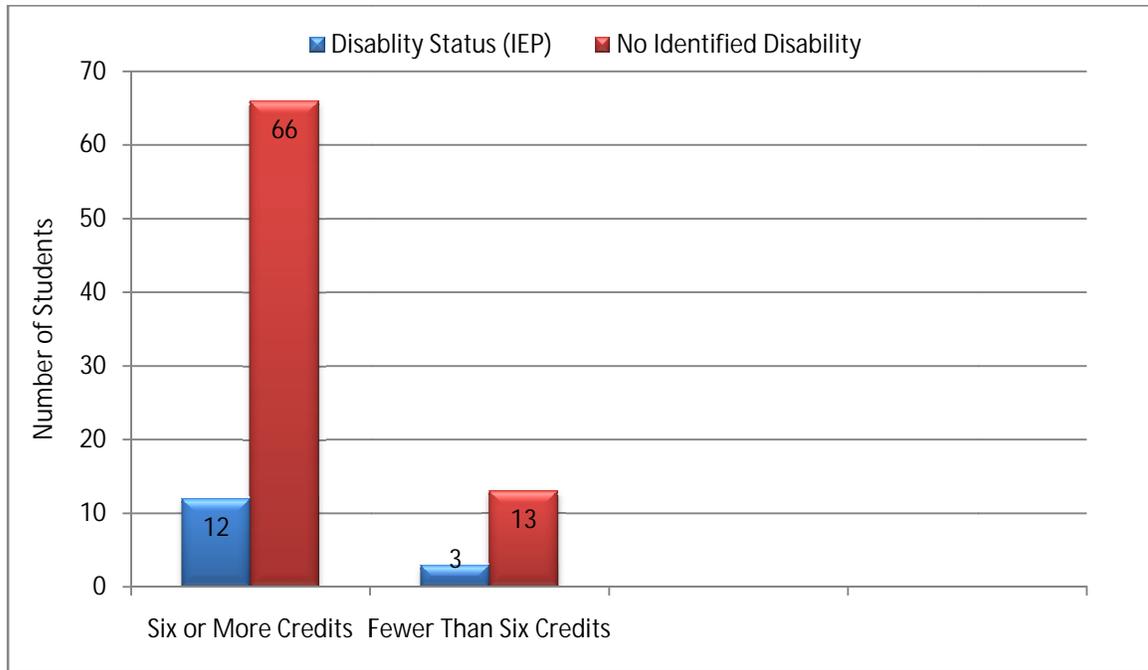
Figure 10. Individual Education Plan and Credits

Research Question 5

Is there a relationship between students and family composition (single-parent, kinship care, foster placement, and traditional family) during the ninth grade year only and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not? Ho6: There is no relationship between students and family composition (single-parent, kinship care, foster placement, and traditional family) during the ninth grade year only and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether family composition has a relationship with students earning six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not. The two variables were family composition with two levels (traditional family and nontraditional family) and credits with two levels (six or more credits and fewer than six credits). Family composition and credits earned in the ninth

grade were not significantly related, Pearson χ^2 (1, $N = 94$) = .10, p = .75, Cramér's V = .03. Table 5 shows the percentages of students who earned six or more credits and students who did not according to early family composition during the ninth grade only. Figure 11 shows the relationship between family composition and credits earned.

Table 5

Percentages for Family Composition During the Ninth Grade Only Based on Students Who Earned Six or More Credits in Ninth Grade and Students Who Did Not

Credits	Traditional		Nontraditional	
	N	%	N	%
Six or More Credits Earned	52	55.3	26	27.7
Fewer than Six Credits Earned	10	10.6	6	6.4
Total	62	65.9	32	34.1
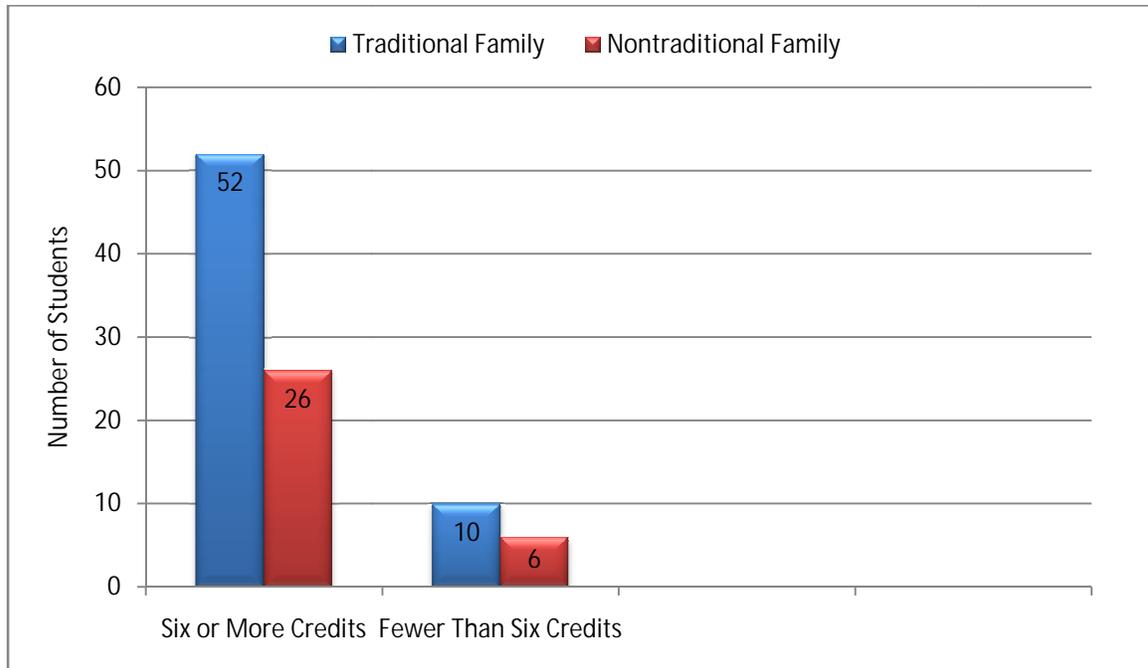
Figure 11. Family Composition and Credits Earned

Research Question 6

Is there a relationship between students having been retained prior to the third grade and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

Ho5: There is no relationship between students having been retained prior to the third grade and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not.

A two-way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether early retention prior to third grade has a relationship with students earning six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not. The two variables were early retention with two levels (retained and not retained) and credits with two levels (six or more credits and

fewer than six credits). Early retention prior to the third grade and credits earned were

not significantly related, Pearson χ^2 (1, $N = 94$) = .13, $p = $ .72, Cramér's V = .04. Table 6

shows the percentages of students who earned six or more credits and student who did

not according to early retention. The retained children were identified in kindergarten,

first, and second grade. Figure 12 shows the relationship between early retention prior to

third grade and credits earned.

Table 6

Percentages for Early Retention Prior to Third Grade Based on Students Who Earned Six

or More Credits in Ninth Grade and Students Who Did Not

Credits	Early Retention		No Retention	
	N	%	N	%
Six or More Credits Earned	7	7.4	71	75.5
Fewer than Six Credits Earned	1	1.1	15	16.0
Total	8	8.5	86	91.5
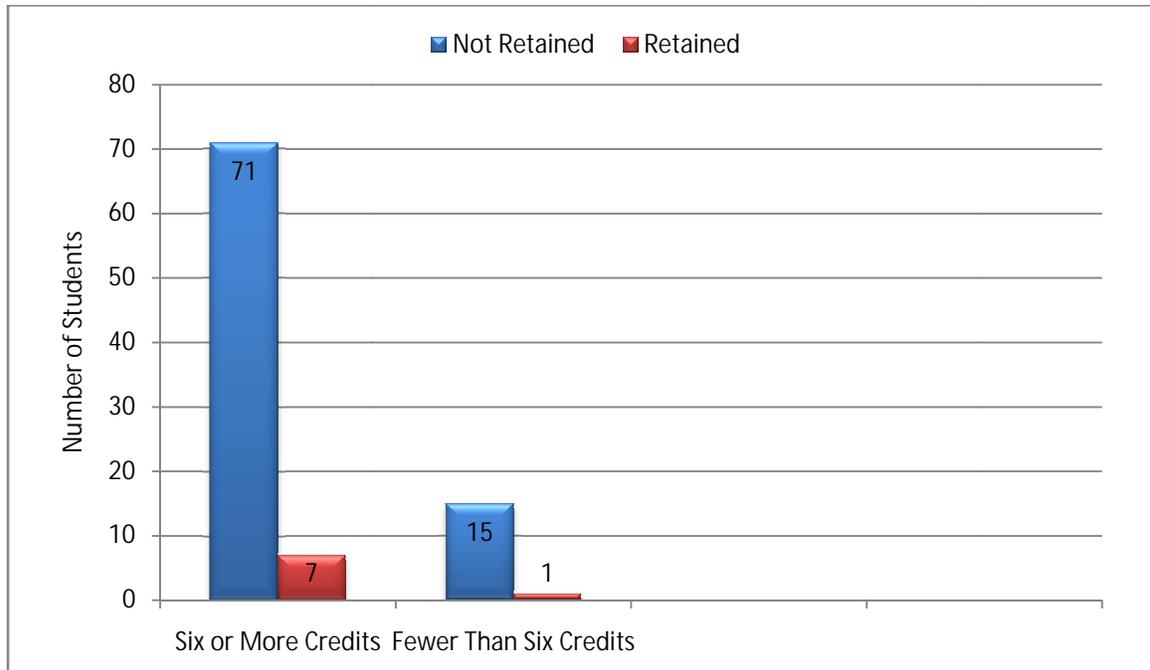
Figure 12. Early Retention and Credits

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION

The purpose of this study was to determine if excessive absences, behavior issues, socioeconomic status, disability status, early grade retention, and family composition had an impact on student success. Student success in this study was defined as successful completion of six or more credits at the completion of the ninth grade year. Data were analyzed on third grade students beginning with the 2002-2003 school year and following those same students throughout their ninth grade year 2008-2009. Descriptive data were gathered on students in grades 3 through 8 to provide a baseline for any significant patterns of at-risk indicators. Baseline data were also gathered on the cohort prior to third grade as kindergarten students in the 1999-2000 school year concurrently through the second grade year 2001-2002 to address early retention of the 94 students. Statistical data were analyzed on ninth grade students to determine school success based on credits earned during the ninth grade.   Data were collected from the information system SASI and Power School.

Summary of the Study

The relationship of home factors (socioeconomic status and family composition) along with school factors (excessive absences, discipline referrals, early grade retention, and disability status) and student success was examined. The analysis was based on six research questions. An independent samples *t* test was used to identify the difference in excessive absences and discipline referrals when looking at students who earned six or more credits in the ninth grade only and students who did not. A two-way contingency

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table analysis and chi-square was conducted to determine if there was a relationship between socioeconomic status, disability status, early retention, and family composition and students who earned six or more credits in the ninth grade only and students who did not.

Summary of the Findings

The statistical analysis focused on six research questions. Those six question and the findings are discussed.

Research Question 1

Is there a difference in the mean number of days absent during the ninth grade year only between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not? An independent-samples t test was conducted for mean number of absences and credits earned. There was a significant relationship between mean number of absences during the ninth grade only and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not. The mean number of absences for students with six or more credits was 9.50 compared to 30.69 for students with fewer than six credits.

Research Question 2

Is there a difference in the mean number of discipline referrals during the ninth grade year only between students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

An independent-samples t test was conducted for mean number of discipline referrals and credits earned. There was a significant relationship between mean number of discipline referrals during the ninth grade year only and students who earned six or

more credits in ninth grade and students who did not. The mean number of discipline referrals for students with six or more credits was 1.73 compared to 8.94 for students with fewer than six credits.

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between student's socioeconomic status as measured by the free and reduced price meal program during the ninth grade year only and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

A two-way contingency table analysis and chi-square was conducted to evaluate whether socioeconomic status as measured by the free and reduced priced meal program during the ninth grade year only has an impact on students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not. There was not a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and credits earned. Students who earned six or more credits totaled 78. Of those 78 students, 45 were eligible for free and reduced meal program while 33 were not eligible. Students who earned fewer than six credits totaled 16. Eleven of those students were eligible for free and reduced meal program and 5 students were not eligible.

Research Question 4

Is there a relationship between students served by an Individual Education Plan during the ninth grade year only and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

A two-way contingency table analysis and chi-square was conducted to evaluate whether disability status as measured by an Individual Education Plan during the ninth grade year only has an impact on students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade

and students who did not. There was not a significant relationship between disability

status and credits earned. Students who earned six or more credits totaled 78. Of those 78

students, 12 students were served by an IEP while 66 students were not served by an IEP.

Student who earned fewer than six credits totaled 16. Three students were served by an

IEP while 13 were not served by and IEP.

Research Question 5

Is there a relationship between students and family composition (single-parent,

kinship care, foster placement, and traditional family) during the ninth grade year only

and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not?

A two-way contingency table analysis and chi-square was conducted to evaluate

whether family composition during the ninth grade year only has an impact on students

who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did not. There was not a

significant relationship between family composition (traditional family, single-parent

household, foster parent, and kinship care) and credits earned. Students who earned six or

more credits totaled 78. Of those 78 students, 52 lived in a traditional family while 26

lived in a nontraditional family. Students who earned six or more credits totaled 16. Ten

of those students lived in a traditional family and 6 lived in a nontraditional family.

Research Question 6

Is there a relationship between students having been retained prior to the third

grade and students who earned six or more credits in ninth grade and students who did

not?

A two-way contingency table analysis and chi-square was conducted to evaluate

whether early retention has an impact on students who earned six or more credits prior to

the third grade and students who did not. There was not a significant relationship between early retention and credits earned. Students who earned six or more credits totaled 78. Of those 78 students, 71 were not retained prior to third grade while 7 students were retained. Student who earned fewer than six credits totaled 16. Fifteen students who earned fewer than six credits were not retained while 1 students was retained.

Conclusions

Providing an environment for students conducive to learning and showing students the value of education is a daunting task for educators. Encouraging students to become the best person they can be, have high expectations for success, set far reaching goals, and develop strong character will lay the foundation to be a productive member of society; however, with the many pressures students face, keeping their minds on education is not always their top priority.

Students live in diverse environments, many of which do not place a strong emphasis on academics, regular school attendance, or appropriate behavior. They face challenges and must make difficult decisions on their own. It is a difficult task to experience school success if a student is not in school on a regular basis.   Some parents do not see the importance of education or give their child the encouragement needed to have success in school. The study showed a significant relationship between excessive school absences and school success. The results were in agreement with Henry (2007) who reported students with excessive absences as being more likely to drop out of school. Average days absent for successful students were 9.50 compared to 30.69 for unsuccessful students. Regular attendance has a positive impact on student achievement.

Students may act out in school due to academic frustration, unstable home life, or being bullied or mistreated by classmates. Pinpointing circumstances prior to a behavior problem is one way of understanding and helping children deal with their actions. The results of the study showed a significant relationship between discipline referrals and school success. Successful students averaged 1.73 discipline referrals compared to 8.94 discipline referrals for unsuccessful students.

Family composition has changed over the years. Many children are living in a nontraditional household with single parents or foster parents or in kinship care. The results of the study reported from 28% to 34% of students lived in a nontraditional home, but those students were attaining success. There was not a significant relationship between family composition and school success. It would appear that the composition of a family is not as important as the importance placed on education. Research has shown socioeconomic status to have adverse effects on children and school success. Based on the free and reduced meals program, the schools in this study ranged from a low of 39 % to a high of 84 %. The study did not show a significant relationship between socioeconomic status and school success. Students have been taught that regardless of income they can achieve success. This finding contrasted with Levin (2007) who reported a widening achievement gap of children living in poverty. Research has mixed findings on the benefit of grade retention. Some research supported retention to give students a year to mature and gain academic skills, while other research relates grade retention to behavior problems and future high school drop-outs. Wu et al. (2008) acknowledged grade retention had a negative impact on student success. This study showed only 8 students out of 94 retained prior to third grade. Seven of those students earned 6 or more

credits in ninth grade while 1 earned fewer than six credits. There was not a relationship between grade retention and school success. Blackorby and Wagner (1996) reported the drop-out rate of students identified with a disability as being twice as high as regular education students. This study was in contrast with Blackorby and Wagner. There was not a relationship between students identified with a disability and school success. Special education students are held to the same standard as regular education students on Virginia's Standard of Learning tests and therefore pushed to succeed.

Recommendations for Practice

This study found a significant relationship between the at-risk indicators excessive absences and discipline referrals. To ensure students are successful in school, educators need to look closely at school attendance and discipline referrals. Schools need consistent school-wide behavior plans to support and encourage appropriate behavior. Students with behavior problems need a mentor who provides support and a connection between school and home. Establishing mandatory parent involvement programs would be an asset. Counseling services need to be provided for students who experience behavior problems. Anger management and peer mediation should be incorporated into the school curriculum. Looking at the effectiveness of the present attendance policy and its enforcement would be beneficial. Attendance policies need to be incorporated that hold parents accountable when students are not in school. When looking at attendance, educators need professional development opportunities on the early warning signs of excessive absence behavior. Educators or appropriate personnel need to make daily contact with parents of children with excessive absences. Remediation programs to assist

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students in making up missed work would be of benefit. Educators need specific reward

programs for good attendance and behavior.   Additional resources such as a school

social worker may be needed to establish thorough follow through and support to parents

and students who experience attendance issues and behavior problems. By establishing

additional programs and added resources in the area of school attendance and discipline,

educators will promote school success for students struggling in these areas. Programs

and resources must be ongoing and adapt to specific student needs.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research should be conducted on school-wide behavior programs that

implement proactive strategies that address the needs of students exhibiting behavior

problems in the school setting.   Further research should be conducted on school-wide

behavior programs that reinforce and reward acceptable behavior in all students.

Additional research is needed to investigate the outcome of behavior programs in place at

an early age and the impact on students as they continue throughout school

State truancy programs designed to address excessive absences and interaction with

court services should be researched for effectiveness. Additional research is needed on

family involvement and the effect on school attendance.

Unless children are in school and focused on the task at hand, school success could

be limited. These recommendations would provide important information to educators

and parents to give all students a chance at school success.

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