

Exploring Contributing Factors Leading to the Decision to Drop Out of School by Hispanic Males

Jennifer Kent, Early ISD

Don Jones, Texas A&M University -Kingsville

Carrie Isaacson, Hardin Simmons University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify factors leading Hispanic male students in a mid-sized community in South Texas to dropping out of school, and to determine which, if any, of the factors caused the participant to first consider leaving school at an early age. This quantitative study tested academic systems within Tinto's theory of institutional departure (1994) by identifying factors within the classrooms and school that ultimately lead to the decision to drop out of school by students. In looking at young Hispanic males who have already dropped out of school in a mid-sized South Texas community, this study investigated factors that significantly contribute to the decision to leave school in order to provide educators with areas in which to focus in order to retain students who may otherwise drop out of school.

The study focused on the following three variables: engagement in class, real-world connection to curriculum, and positive relationships with staff members and found that two of the three variables (engagement in class and real-world connection to the curriculum) contributed significantly to the decision to drop out of school by Hispanic males who first thought of leaving school at an early age.

INTRODUCTION

In the U.S., the dropout crisis has reached what some educational experts have deemed epidemic proportions. America's Promise Alliance (2015) reports that a student drops out of school every 26 seconds on its dropout counter. As the Hispanic population in the U.S., specifically in Texas, continues to grow at significant rates, an alarming trend of Hispanic male students dropping out of school will have profound implications on the state and country if not addressed and corrected. In a 2014 report by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics, it was reported that dropout rates by minority students is a factor that is the most alarming in its effect on the country's deficit and economic crisis (Kena, Aud, Johnson, Wang, Zhang, Rathbun, & Kristapovich, 2014). As a group, Hispanic males are the least likely to complete high school in the U.S. than any other group. In 2005, it was estimated that in Texas alone, 37,441 Hispanic males dropped out of school which is significantly higher than any other group (Gottlob, 2007). With 17.6% of Hispanic students dropping out nationwide educators struggle to understand the epidemic in a comprehensive way that empowers school officials to take corrective actions within the school to remedy the situation.

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) reports that Texas' attrition rate high school students for the 2011-2012 school year was 26%. Further, the racial-ethnic gap is dramatically higher than 27 years ago with Black and Hispanic students being two times more likely to drop out of high school than White students (IDRA, 2012). In terms of gender, 85% of males graduate as compared to 88% of females. As a group, Hispanic males are the least likely to earn a high school diploma in the U.S. than any other group. In 2005, it was estimated that in

Texas alone, 37,441 Hispanic males left high school without a diploma which is significantly higher than any other group (Gottlob, 2007). Despite recovery efforts and prevention measures, many male Hispanic students continue to drop out each year, which negatively impacts their earning potential as well as overloads state resources in providing services to those in poverty (Amos, 2008). In addition to the drain of national and state resources caused by dropouts, another concern exists that the country cannot meet the demands of a skilled workforce. National economists predict that more than 20 million new graduates from college will be required by 2020 to enter the workforce (Layton, 2012). At our current rate, it is anticipated the U.S. will miss the mark by millions of skilled and educated workers (The White House, 2014).

Based on literature and research on school dropouts, many variables could be used as predictors to determine which students are at the greatest risk of dropping out of school. Over the past 25 years, there has been little, if any, change to the known variables that predict school completion and dropout. Socioeconomic status has continued to surface through the literature as one of the top predictors of school completion. Quite simply, as a family's income increases, the potential to leave school without a diploma decreases (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). In addition to socioeconomic status, a significant predictor to dropping out of school is attendance. Many high school students who eventually dropped out showed years of truancy before leaving school for good, often as early as elementary school (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Such students are more likely to have disciplinary consequences such as suspension and show a pattern of leaving school, returning, and leaving school again.

A third predictor to dropping out is poor academic performance, including poor results on standardized tests and grade retention, has been widely connected as a significant variable in dropping out. In fact, many students who eventually leave school without a diploma may have struggled with low academic achievement as far back as the third grade (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1995). Students who drop out tend to demonstrate low reading ability, poor study skills, low grades, low standardized test scores, and, on average, are likely to have repeated a year of school compared with students who graduated (Battin-Pearson, Abbott, Hill, Catalano, Hawkins, & Newcomb, 2000). Gandara (2010) reported that many Hispanic students chose to drop out of school as a result of their grades falling below their peers.

While many researchers have addressed the dropout crisis, few have focused on research from the perspective of Hispanic males who left school without a diploma (Tavitian, 2013). There still remains a lack of studies on the dropout epidemic from the voice of those who have already left school without a diploma (Rodriguez, 2010). Frequently, studies identify factors outside of the school such as students' need for jobs, family obligations, or the need to relocate as reasons for their leaving school without a diploma. There are many possible external factors that lead to the decision to drop out such as the need to earn money to support the household, teenage parenthood, and lack of family importance placed on a diploma; however, little information exists to isolate contributing factors within the school leading to the decision to drop out that is specific to Hispanic males in South Texas. Over the years, researchers have identified high achieving schools and conducted extensive work to isolate specific variables that contribute to that success. For the purposes of this research, one can infer that in the absence of specific variables (positive relationships with staff members, real-world connection to the curriculum, and engagement in the classrooms), the opposite would hold true.

Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) interviewed 467 high school dropouts across the country in a sample that included diversity in race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, family make-up, size of community, and family education. One result was clear: a sole explanation of

what motivates students to leave school without a diploma does not exist. There are, however, patterns that emerged suggesting that students are bored, have no connection to school, are unmotivated, and are unchallenged academically. For example, 69% of those interviewed stated they simply were not encouraged or moved to work hard. Quite simply, school, for these students, was not an exciting place to be. Of the 467 interview participants, it was the feeling of being unencouraged and unmotivated to give maximum effort in class that served as a cause in the decision to leave school without a diploma. These former students found school to be boring places where they did not learn much that could be applied to their lives. Interestingly, many of the participants said they wanted motivation and a majority reported they felt confident they possessed the ability to earn a diploma.

As students become disengaged, they often begin missing school as they see no connection between their learning and the real world. Of the dropouts, 43% shared they had missed so many days there was simply no way they could catch up with their peers (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Despite falling behind, 62% of dropouts reported they had maintained C or better grades even as they left school permanently. Such results directly conflict with traditional thinking that students drop out because they fail classes, are suspended or expelled, or struggle with substance abuse or teenage pregnancy. The most frequent reason for leaving school without a diploma that was shared by 47% of participants is that school was boring. Of this same group of former students, 70% reported confidence they could have graduated from high school and 74% stated that if they had the opportunity to repeat history, they would have remained in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). In the following section, we present in detail the theoretical base and variables that were examined in this research study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that lead to dropping out of school by Hispanic male students in a mid-sized community in South Texas, and to determine which, if any, of the factors caused the participant to first consider leaving school at an early age. This quantitative study tested academic systems within Tinto's theory of institutional departure (1994) by identifying factors within the classrooms and school that ultimately lead to students deciding to drop out of school. In looking at young Hispanic males who have already dropped out of school in a mid-sized South Texas community, this study investigated the following three factors to determine which, if any, significantly contributing to the decision to leave school, in order to provide educators with areas in which to focus to retain students who may otherwise drop out of school: engagement in class, real-world connection to curriculum, and positive relationships with staff members.

RESEARCH QUESTION

In the perceptions of Hispanic male dropouts from a high school in South Texas, which of the following variables relate to the decision to drop out of school at an early age?

- Engagement in class
- Real-world connection to curriculum
- Positive relationships with staff members

H₁: There is a significant relationship between the criterion variable of the grade level Hispanic male dropouts first considered leaving school and the predictor variables of engagement in class, real-world connection to curriculum, and positive relationships with staff members.

H₀: There is not a significant relationship between the criterion variable of the grade level Hispanic male dropouts first considered leaving school and the predictor variables of engagement in class, real-world connection to curriculum, and positive relationships with staff members.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative research design employing a survey methodology that targeted male Hispanic dropouts over the age of 18 from a mid-sized South Texas school district. Seventy-six Hispanic male dropouts were surveyed. Using a locally developed instrument, participants completed a survey that answered questions about experiences in high school in the following three areas: engagement in class, real-world connection to curriculum, and positive relationships with staff members.

With the school district superintendent's permission, names and addresses of dropouts at the time they left school were used to mail surveys along with a self-addressed stamped envelope for return. Participants received the survey at the last known home address. Reminder postcards were mailed after two weeks of nonresponse followed by another survey mailed after two more weeks for nonresponse. A multiple-linear regression was used to measure data from survey results to determine if any of the three variables are significant contributors to the decision to drop out of high school by Hispanic males in a mid-sized community in South Texas.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Quantitative research is defined as a way to test theory by exploring the relationships among variables, building a case against bias, offering explanations, and being able to generalize and reproduce the findings (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative method is one where information is collected measuring numeric data and is analyzed using statistical procedures and testing (Creswell, 2009). A quantitative approach was used for this study as it is the most conducive for analyzing the significance of the three tested variables in their relationship to dropping out of school. Creswell (2003) states that quantitative research uses deductive scientific method, and this approach collects numerical data based on exact measurement.

INSTRUMENTATION

The cross-sectional locally developed instrument was designed specifically for completion by high school dropouts who may struggle with a high level of readability as many of the dropouts from this particular school were serviced through special education. Prior to creating the survey, a construct validity chart was created and verified by a group of experts from the field of education to ensure reliability and validity. Questions related to each of the three variables were written with a 4-point Likert scale that did not include an option for a neutral answer. Quantitative data was recorded into data analysis software, SPSS, to run a multiple-linear regression analysis.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Participants from the research once attended a mid-size high school in South Texas composed of approximately 1,000 students before making the decision to drop out of school. This particular high school struggles academically with high student absenteeism. The attendance rate for the school was 90.2% when the state average was 95.5% as well as a high dropout rate of 4.9% (TEA, 2012). Like many high schools in the area, the school has experienced a 20-year steady decline in enrollment. The percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch is 71% and 82% of students are Hispanic. This particular high school also experiences high principal turnover with 26 principals in the past 34 years.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

Names and contact information of all dropouts from the particular school were used with permission from the superintendent of schools. This convenience sample included all respondents. Candidates were contacted through mail to solicit their participation. As the contact information for the dropouts was thought to be current in 2011, many addresses were no longer accurate. All known Hispanic male students who left school as dropouts, home school, or GED were contacted.

DATA COLLECTION

Potential participants were contacted through mail. One-hundred percent of known dropouts (including students who left for home school and GED) for a ten-year time period who are age 18 or older were selected as a potential participant. Special attention was taken to protect the names of the participants with the researcher being the only person to have access to data tied to former students' names or addresses.

RESULTS

This quantitative study tested academic systems within Tinto's theory of institutional departure (1994) by identifying factors within the classrooms and school that ultimately led to participants' decision to drop out of school. In looking at young Hispanic males who have already dropped out of school in a mid-sized South Texas community, this study investigated whether a lack in the following three factors significantly contributed to the decision to leave school in order to provide educators with areas in which to focus in order to retain students who may otherwise drop out of school: engagement in class, real-world connection to curriculum, and positive relationships with staff members.

DATA ANALYSIS- DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Demographics for Survey Participants

The current study involved 76 participants who qualified as male Hispanic dropouts from the selected mid-sized community in South Texas. A total of 473 surveys were mailed which equates to a 16% response rate. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 32 and had once attended

school in the selected community. Descriptive statistics for participants' age, grade last finished before dropping out of school, grade when first thought of dropping out, and special services received are detailed in Table 1. On the average, survey participants first thought of dropping out of school near the end of the seventh grade year, although the most common response for first thinking of dropping out was during the eighth grade.

For the purposes of this survey, only individuals who dropped out of school during high school were used. Therefore, 100% of the 76 participants were promoted from the eighth grade to the ninth grade. Of the participants, 80% reported having finished ninth grade before dropping out. The average age of participant at the time the survey was completed was 23, which was also the most common age of those surveyed. The survey asked participants which, if any, special services were received at any time during school: gifted and talented, special education, bilingual education, English as a second language, or none. While Table 5 details individual program results, Table 1 indicates the most common response given by survey participants was "no program." Within Texas public school accounting purposes, a student finishes ninth grade when receiving enough credits to become a sophomore. In this survey, participants were not asked if they had enough credits to be classified as a sophomore. Of the 80% of participants who reported they finished their ninth-grade year before dropping out, they may have physically completed the year without successfully earning enough credits to become a sophomore.

Considering the average age of participants was 23, these individuals had been out of the public school system for anywhere from seven to nine years before completing the survey, giving them ample time to reflect on their experiences and, ultimately, how they felt about school. With the majority of participants claiming to have received no special services at any time during their schooling, one can infer academic inability to complete school did not factor into the decision to leave school as often reported by researchers.

Age of Participant

Descriptive statistics detailing the age of participants is shown in Table 2. The age group with the largest percentage of participants was the 21- to 23-year-old year old group (31.5%). While more than half of the 76 participants ranged in age from 18 to 23, a large number (33) were 24 years old or older, constituting 43.4% of the group. Eight individuals reported themselves to be 30 years or older. The implications of the data in Table 2 are that even the youngest participants had been out of school for at least a couple of years before being asked to participate in this survey. Occasionally this particular school district had students two years behind their same age peers, but generally, incoming freshmen were either on grade level (14 years old) or were one year behind (15 years old). This mid-sized school district in South Texas predominately exercised its right to promote students from the eighth grade to the ninth grade through the use of a grade-placement committee even if the students did not pass required state testing exams. Through the use of social promotion, this particular school district ensured incoming freshmen were usually not more than one grade behind, but definitely not more than two years behind

Grade Last Finished by Participant before Dropping Out of School

Descriptive statistics detailing the grade last finished before dropping out of high school are shown in Table 3. As seen below, four of 76 participants (5.3%) made it past the sophomore

year. A large majority of participants (80.3%) left school without a diploma after the ninth grade. Eleven participants (14.5%) completed the sophomore year before leaving. Based on this study, once students at the selected mid-sized high school in a South Texas community begin the 10th grade, they are more likely to graduate from high school.

Grade When Participant First Thought of Dropping Out

Descriptive statistics showing the grade when participants first thought of dropping out are highlighted in Table 4. Based on the responses of survey participants, 75% first considered dropping out of school prior to high school. Although 80.3% of students left school during or immediately following the freshman year (Table 3), they thought about it for as many as four years before actually leaving. Two participants (2.6%) actually first thought of dropping out of school during the fifth grade. None of the participants first thought of dropping out after successfully completing the ninth grade. Of the 20% of participants who finished their sophomore or junior years, all had originally first thought of leaving school in the ninth grade or earlier. The grade level in which students are the most likely to first think of dropping out is the eighth grade (39.5%).

The implications of Table 4 are far-reaching. Data from Table 4 verifies that of the survey participants, 75% percent first thought of dropping out of school while in grades fifth to eighth, possibly years before stepping foot onto the high school campus. Further, dropout prevention strategies implemented at a traditional junior high setting would not be early enough since 17.1% of the participants first thought of dropping out while at the intermediate school level (grades fifth to sixth).

Special Services Received by Participant

Descriptive statistics detailing specific programs of special services received by the survey participants are found in Table 5. Survey participants reported special services received at any time of the formal education, not necessarily at the time of departure. According to Table 5, 51.3% of participants received no special services at any time of the education, indicating no learning disabilities or language barriers. Special education services were received by 24% which accounts for 18 participants. Another 18 participants were served in the bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) program (24%). One participant reported being served within the gifted and talented program. Within the parameters of school programs, students may be served under more than one umbrella. Within the group of survey participants utilized, over half (51.3%) were not served in any special service program, suggesting they were not disabled in any way and should have been able to successfully complete the academic requirements of the courses. Further, for 76% of students, English was their first language. Although one participant was in the gifted and talented program, schools do not normally expect these students to leave school as dropouts.

Survey Statements Related to Real World Connection to the Curriculum

Descriptive statistics displaying the four survey questions used to measure participants' feelings toward a real-world connection to the curriculum are in Table 6. Three questions were reverse coded for analysis. Table 6 contains the four survey statements used to measure the importance of real-world connection to the curriculum for the participants. The statement, "I

dropped out of school because what we were learning had nothing to do with the real world,” was one of the three survey statements reverse coded to analyze results. Additionally, the statement, *“I wonder why I needed to learn what was being taught in class,”* was another one of the three survey statements reverse coded to analyze results. The survey statement, *“I wondered why I needed to learn what was being taught in class,”* earned a strong response by participants with a mean of 3.37 and a mode of 4.00 signifying that participants agreed they needed to be able to connect the curriculum to the real world. The statement, *“Classes taught things I needed in real life,”* did not receive a strong response with a mean of 2.27 and a mode of 2 indicating a slight disagreement by participants.

Participants disagreed with the statement, *“I understood how I could take what we were learning and apply it to the real world,”* with a mean of 1.99 and a mode of 2 which confirms the group’s disconnection between the class concepts and the real world. Although the survey results suggest a disconnection between the curriculum and real-world connection, participants did not report they dropped out of school because of the disconnection. The statement, *“I dropped out of school because what we were learning had nothing to do with the real world,”* received disagreement from participants with a median of 2.21 and a mode of 2. The four survey statements related to the variable of *real-world connection to the curriculum* shown in Table 6 indicate that survey participants felt disconnected from the curriculum and what they felt they needed to learn. While the participants did not leave school because of the disconnection, they strongly yearned for the curriculum to be connected to the real world.

Survey Statements Related to Engagement in the Classroom

Table 7 shows the responses of survey participants to the four statements tied to *engagement in the classroom*. Of the four statements, *“I felt passion for what we were learning in classes,”* earned the strongest disagreement from participants with a median of 2.07 and a mode of 2. The statement, *“The lessons taught in my classes held my attention,”* earned disagreement by participants with a mean of 2.16 and a mode of 2. Survey participants also disagreed with the statement, *“I thought what we were learning in my classes was interesting,”* with a mean of 2.13 and a mode of 2. The statement, *“Teachers gave us activities I wanted to participate in,”* also earned a negative response with a mean of 2.17 and a mode of 2. Overall, participants did not feel engaged in the classroom. With the responses shown in Table 7, the data suggests that the participants did not feel engaged in the classrooms.

Survey Statements Related to Positive Relationships with Staff Members

Table 8 contains data from six survey statements related to the participants’ responses toward *positive relationships with staff members*. As shown, the participants felt they had a teacher they could talk to if needed, with this statement having a mean of 2.64 and a mode of 3. Participants somewhat disagreed to the statement, *“I could ask my teachers for help if I did not understand,”* with a mean of 2.28 and a mode of 2. The statement, *“I felt teachers cared for me as a person and wanted me to do well,”* earned agreement by participants with a mean of 2.75 and a mode of 3 suggesting there were personal connections between students and teachers. The statement, *“Staff members cared if I did well in school,”* did not earn as positive responses with a mean of 2.41 and a mode of 2. For survey purposes, the term “staff members” includes administrators and counselors in addition to teachers.

The survey statement, “*My teachers knew me as a person and how I learned best,*” received fairly neutral reactions with a mean of 2.5 and a mode of 2. The final survey statement connected to positive relationships with staff members was, “*I dropped out of school because no one at school cared if I finished school or not.*” This statement earned the strongest response with a mean of 1.74 and a mode of 1 suggesting again that participants had personal relationships at school with staff members. The data contained in Table 8 suggests that participants had personal relationships with teachers that were fairly positive but the relationship with the participants as learners was weaker. The participants did not feel their decision to leave school without a diploma was caused by a lack of relationships with staff members.

INFERENCE STATISTICS

Table 9 consists of data analyzed by conducting a multiple regression analysis for positive relationships with staff members, real-world connection to the curriculum, and engagement in the classroom to predict dropouts among Hispanic males who first thought of leaving school at an early age. H_0 : There is not a significant relationship between the criterion variable of the grade level Hispanic male dropouts first considered leaving school and the predictor variables of engagement in class, real-world connection to curriculum, and positive relationships with staff members. Multiple regression was conducted to determine the best linear combination of positive relationships with staff members, real-world connection to the curriculum, and engagement in the classrooms among Hispanic male dropouts who first thought of leaving school at an early age as contributors to the decision to leave school without a diploma. (Assumptions of linearity, normally distributed errors, and uncorrelated errors were checked and met.) This combination of variables significantly predicted dropping out of school, $F(3,12) = 3.74, p = .015$ with two variables significantly contributing to the prediction. The adjusted R squared value was .10. This indicates that 10% of the variance in dropouts was explained by the model. According to Cohen (1988), this is a medium effect. The beta weights, presented in Table 4.9 suggest that real-world connection to the curriculum and engagement in the classroom contributes most to predicting dropping out among Hispanic males who first thought of leaving school at an early age, $-F(3,12) = 3.74, p = .015$ Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

RESULTS SUMMARY

The epidemic of Hispanic males leaving school as dropouts across the country has led educators on a search to determine what, specifically, led to the decision to drop out. Within this study, three variables were identified as possible causes: a lack of positive relationships with staff members, real-world connection to the curriculum, and engagement in the classroom. Of the 76 survey participants, it was discovered that many first thought of leaving school at an early age. Of these particular students, two variables significantly contributed to the decision to ultimately leave school without a diploma: a lack of real-world connection to the curriculum and engagement to the curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings in the study support that factors internal to schools play a part in Hispanic males' decisions to leave school before receiving a diploma. It was found that of the participants, there is a significant relationship between the dropouts' decision to leave school and the need for real-world connection to the curriculum and engagement in the classroom. Of the survey participants, many first thought of leaving school years before actually entering high school. For these highest risk students, the findings in the study clearly connect the need for real-world connection to the curriculum and engagement in the classroom.

Within Tinto's theory of institutional departure (1994), each of the three variables (engagement in class, real-world connection to curriculum, and positive relationships with staff members) were tested in this quantitative study and were situated within academic systems of Tinto's theory in an effort to provide data to suggest which, if any, of the factors significantly contributes to Hispanic males' decision to drop out of school in a mid-sized community in South Texas. Tinto identifies three major factors to explain dropouts: the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, academic difficulties, and students' failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Further, in order to persist, Tinto's theory suggests that students must have integration into formal academic systems, such as academic performance and informal academic systems such as faculty and staff interactions. Additionally, students must have integration into formal social systems such as extracurricular activities and informal social systems such as peer-group interactions. Through this quantitative study, Tinto's theory of institutional departure has been validated within the academic systems through the two variables of the study that proved to be significant: real-world connection to the curriculum and engagement to the classroom.

Educators across the country are looking for ways to stop the dropout epidemic, specifically among Hispanic males. Prevention measures at this point have not shown the power to curb the problem. Significant funds have been utilized on efforts such as after-school programs, parent involvement, and even smaller learning community initiatives, without much success. Perhaps the way to stop the dropout epidemic is not by adding to the school day; perhaps the answer lies within the actual classroom walls. The recommendation based on the results of the study is a systemic focus on teaching and learning within all classrooms from kindergarten to 12th grade. Through an emphasis on all portions of the curriculum, students most at risk of dropping out will have improved engagement in the classroom as well as a high level of real-world connection to the curriculum.

Through a focus on improved teaching and learning, campus leaders must ensure classroom teachers have clear expectations on the types of learning opportunities that shall occur. As many dropouts report feeling "bored" in class, even at an early age, special efforts must be taken to implement innovative lessons rich in project-based learning experiences. Through such projects, students will be able to better conceptualize abstract ideas in meaningful ways. Educators must find effective ways to deliver lessons so that students learn required content while also learning new life skills. Skills known as "soft skills" would include professional communication, public speaking, and the ability to work in collaborative groups. When incorporated into classroom activities, students will see the value of the material and be more likely to succeed academically. Further, relevancy in schools and classrooms must be present to ensure engagement with students, especially for those at risk of leaving school without a diploma. The way to ensure such classrooms exist is to embed planning time within the school

day so that the learning focus leads the planning process. With the opportunity to monitor and facilitate teaching practices, school leaders can help to ensure an increase in student learning.

In order to increase engagement in the classroom, class size must be smaller than often found in large, urban schools so that students can be treated as individuals and get the specific attention they need. Implementing a smaller learning model would require districts to commit budget funds to highly qualified personnel. The smaller the class size, the more time teachers would have to work with each student at the appropriate level and style needed. Not only will the students be more engaged in learning, they will also have the opportunity to develop appropriate relationships with teachers. As a result of increased engagement, academic achievement will increase. Educators must pay careful attention to the needs of each student, especially at crucial transition periods such as the transition from elementary to middle school or middle to high school in order to keep them connected and engaged to the lesson. School district officials must work with campus administrators to ensure a quality transition plan is developed and implemented in order to reduce the problems created as younger students transition to unfamiliar campuses, teachers, and expectations. Teachers working in planning groups will have time to study data, create common, formative assessments, study the curriculum, plan engaging, real-world lessons, and communicate with parents, thus increasing the likelihood of student engagement and, ultimately, student completion of school.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Dauber, S. L. (1995). *On the success of failure: A reassessment of the effects of retention in the primary grades*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Amos, J. (2008). *Dropouts, diplomas, and dollars: U.S. high schools and the nation's economy*. (Alliance for Excellent Education Report). <http://www.all4ed.org/files/Econ2008.pdf>
- America's Promise Alliance. (2015). *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic, 2015 Annual Update*. Civic Enterprises, Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University & America's Promise Alliance.
- Battin-Pearson, S., Abbott, R., Hill, K., Catalano, R., Hawkins, J., & Newcomb, M. (2000). Predictors of early high school dropout: A test of five theories. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 92*, (3), 568-582.
- Bridgeland, J., DiIulio, J., & Morison, K. (2006). Gates Foundation Report: The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts. <http://docs.gatesfoundation.org/united-states/documents/thesilentepidemic3-06final.pdf>.
- Christenson, S. & Thurlow, M. (2004). School dropouts: Prevention considerations, interventions, and challenges. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 13*(1), 36-39.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Gandara, P. (2010). *The Latino education crisis: Meeting students where they are*. 2010, 67(5), 24–30. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educationalleadership/feb/10/vol67/num05/The-Latino-Education-Crisis.aspx>
- Gottlob, B. (2007). The high cost of failing to reform public education in Texas. *Milton and Rose*

- D. Friedman Foundation.* (Research Brief).
- Intercultural Development Research Association. (2012). *Attrition and dropout rates in Texas.* <http://www.idra.org/Research/Attrition/>
- Kaufman, P., Alt, M. N., & Chapman, C. D. (2001). Dropout rates in the United States: 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics 2002-114). U.S. Department of Education.
- Kena, G., Aud, S., Johnson, F., Wang, X., Zhang, J., Rathbun, A., & Kristapovich, P. (2014). *The condition of education 2014* (NCES 2014-083). Washington, DC: US Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>
- Layton, L. (2012). High school graduation rate rises in U.S. *The Washington Post.* http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/high-school-graduation-rate-rises-in-us/2012/03/16/gIQAxZ9rLS_story.html
- Rodriguez, J. (2010). *What schools can do about the dropout crisis: Leadership.* <http://https://www.linkedin.com/pub>.
- Tavitian, M.(2013). *Latino dropouts perceptions of their school experiences in Southern California.* (Doctoral dissertation) (UMI NO.1356694361).
- Texas Education Agency. (2012) Academic excellence indicator system: State report (Data report). <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2012/state.html>
- The White House. (2014). Ready to work: Job-driven training and American opportunity. http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/skills_report.pdf
- Tinto, V. (1994) *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* State University of Chicago Press.

APPENDIX

Table 1

Demographics for Survey Participants

Demographics	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Age of participant	23.75	23.00	23.00	4.070
Grade last finished by participant before dropping out of school	9.25	9.00	9.00	.545
Grade when first thought of dropping out	7.70	8.00	8.00	1.083
Special services received	3.25	4.00	4.00	.866

*N = 76

Table 2

Age of Participant

<u>Ages</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
18-20	19	25
21-23	24	31.5
24-26	14	18.4
27-29	11	14.5
30+	8	10.5

Table 3

Grade Last Finished by Participant before Dropping Out of School

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
9	61	80.3
10	11	14.5
11	4	5.3
Total	76	100

Table 4

Grade When Participant First Thought of Dropping Out

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
5	2	2.6
6	11	14.5
7	14	18.4
8	30	39.5
9	19	25.0
Total	76	100.0

Table 5

Special Services Received by Participant

<u>Program</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Gifted & Talented	1	1.3
Special Education	18	23.7
Bilingual ESL	18	23.7
No Special Services	39	51.3
Total	76	100.0

Table 6

Survey Statements Related to Real World Connection to the Curriculum

<u>Statements</u>	<u>Valid Number</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>
Classes taught things I needed in real life	76	2.27	2.25	2	.64
I wondered why I needed to learn what was being taught	76	3.37	4.00	4	.81
I understood how I could take what we were learning and apply it to the real world	76	1.99	2.00	2	.72
I dropped out of school because what we were learning had nothing to do with the real world	76	2.21	2.00	2	.75

Range: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

Table 7

Survey Statements Related to Engagement in the Classroom

<u>Statements</u>	<u>Valid Number</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>
The lessons taught in my classes held my attention	76	2.16	2.00	2	.66
I felt passion for what we were learning in my classes	76	2.07	2.00	2	.65
I thought what we were learning in my classes was interesting	76	2.13	2.00	2	.67
Teachers gave us activities I wanted to participate in	76	2.17	2.00	2	.72

Range: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

Table 8

Survey Statements Related to Positive Relationships with Staff Members

<u>Statements</u>	<u>Valid Number</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Std. Deviation</u>
I could talk to my teachers when I had a problem	76	2.64	3.00	3	.76
I could ask my teachers for help if I did not understand	76	2.28	2.00	2	.83
I felt teachers cared for me as a person and wanted me to do well	76	2.75	3.00	3	.75

Staff members cared if I did well in school	76	2.41	2.00	2	.80
My teachers knew me as a person and how I learned best	76	2.50	2.00	2	.72
I dropped out of school because no one at school cared if I finished school or not	76	1.74	2.00	1	.79

Range: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Somewhat Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree

Table 9

Simultaneous Multiple-Regression Analysis for Positive Relationship with Staff Members, Real-World Connection to the Curriculum, and Engagement in the Classroom, Predicting Dropout Among Hispanic Males who First Thought of Leaving School Early. (N = 72)

<u>Variable</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SEB</u>	<u>β</u>
Positive relationship with staff members	-.015	.055	-.030
Real-world connection to the curriculum	.207	.070	.335
Engagement in the classroom	-.098	.047	-.233
Constant			

Note. $R^2 = .10$; $F(3,72) = 3.74$, $p = .015$