Students Placed At-Risk of School Failure

In An Era of Educational Reform:

Implications for Staff Development

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(ABSTRACT)

The face of America's schools is changing. An increasingly diverse and challenging population of students blends assorted ethnic backgrounds, varied approaches to learning, and different socio-economic backgrounds into one student body. Faced with the realities of environmental and educational stressors, some students may find the educational milieu difficult. One particular group of students who may fit this category are those placed at-risk of school failure. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the latest government reform in education to affect our nation's schools, created additional pressures on educators and students alike. In this climate of increased testing and accountability, educators must be trained to work with today's students. Staff development is one method of assisting educators to become knowledgeable about the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure in the current reform era. Guiding issues for this study were the nature of staff development with regard to students placed at-risk of school failure in an era of educational reform as viewed through staff development. Guiding questions were how many staff development courses were aimed at meeting the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure and how much of this training was done relative to content-based staff development. Staff development offices were chosen because they are the conduits through which school district employees often gain substantial knowledge and training, and because of their importance in the field of training and professional development. The method used in this study was a content analysis of staff development course documents from the 100 largest school districts in the United States. The intent of this quantitative content analysis was to explore how school district staff development offices approach the task of educating their employees to work with a complex, diverse school population, often seen as at-risk of school failure. This study was important to the field of educational leadership because it provided essential and useful information, both for educators working with an increasingly diverse student population, especially students at-risk of school failure, and for district leaders whose task it is to provide staff development for those who teach our children. Quantitative analyses of the staff

development course documents showed no relationship between school district size and number of courses with coded words; the total number of courses a school district offered was, however, a predictor for the total number of targeted courses. All but one of the school districts sampled had at least one course with a coded word. A qualitative analysis of the coding of the categories and indicators revealed that the coded words were applied broadly to the themes and patterns that emerged. School district staff development offices continue to play a positive role in the training of educators striving to meet the needs of a diverse student body in the 21st century.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

Overview of the Study

Public education serves a diverse body of students in a variety of school settings. Students enter these educational environments influenced by both positive and negative circumstances within and outside of their control. The stressors placed on a student's ability to navigate the educational system include personal factors such as home life and psychological development, outside political pressures embodied in federal and state government guidelines for mandated student accountability through testing, and by impacts on personal safety caused by events such as violence in the community (Children's Defense Fund, 2002). Other factors such as poverty (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1997), poor academic skills (Montgomery & Rossi, 1993), speaking English as a second language (Druian & Butler, 2003), and homelessness (Yamaguchi, Strawser & Higgins, 1997), may also affect a student's ability to participate successfully in the current educational milieu.

Who are the students who may be most often at-risk of school failure? The first group of students are identified in the literature as having a traditional pattern of poor school performance: (a) children who are members of minority groups; (b) children who are poor; (c) children with disabilities; and (d) children who speak a language other than English (NCLB, 2001). The second group comprises students who, because of circumstances either internal or external, may "fall between the cracks" and be placed at-risk of school failure. These are the students who may not be part of a special, identified group, but who still need the support of knowledgeable educators. Although traditional faces of at-risk students are familiar, of additional concern are the changing faces of students at-risk from contemporary environmental, educational, psychological, and personal factors (Carnegie Council, 1989). These are the faces educators may not see, or seeing, may not know how to respond.

The numbers tell the story. The Children's Defense Fund (2004), reported the following key facts about American children: 1 child in 3 will be poor at some point in their childhood; 1 child in 3 is behind a year or more in school; 1 child in 4 lives with only one parent; 1 child in 24 lives with neither parent; 1 child in 5 is born to a mother who did not graduate from high school; 1 child in 7 never graduates from high school; 2 in 5 children who are eligible for Head Start do not participate; 1 child in 8 has no health insurance; 1 child in 12 has a disability; and 1 child in 1,339 will be killed by guns before age 20.

As the impact of society on young people becomes clear, educators are in a position to sway these students, either positively or negatively. Montgomery and Rossi (1993) suggested that although educators cannot "overlook the harm that may be caused by problems outside school" (p. 13), many at-risk behaviors may co-occur in school due to cause and effect. For example, students may skip classes, miss out on instruction, have a more difficult time passing tests and making good grades, which subsequently leads to further discouragement, and sets in motion "a downward spiral of absenteeism and poor achievement" (p. 36).

Among the forces impacting students in a global fashion is the environment provided by the family. The Condition of Education 2003 (Wirt, Choy, Provasnjik, Rooney, Sen, & Tobin, 2003) reported that a child's family environment affects many aspects of children's lives, including school achievement. One environmental factor of a familial nature is the economic level at which children live. In 2001, the poverty rate of school-aged children was 17%, an important statistic because "poverty poses a serious challenge to children's access to quality learning opportunities and their potential to succeed in school" (p. 20).

The influence of poverty starts when children begin their educational lives, as reflected by the number of children in pre-kindergarten who qualify for free and reduced lunch. The Condition of Education 2004 (Wirt et al., 2004) reported that in 2000-2001, 68% of pre-kindergarten children were 4 years old: of these pre-kindergarten children, 61% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Thirty-nine percent of these students were in high-poverty public schools although just 11% were in low-poverty schools. Growing up in poverty also has long-term implications for a child's future: "the percentage of youth neither enrolled nor working in 2003 was positively related to their poverty status" (Wirt et al., p. 53).

Educators may also be concerned about the number of non-English speaking students. At the same time that the population of 5-year-olds through 24-year-olds only increased by 6% from 1979-1999, "the percentage who spoke a language other than English at home increased by 118% during this period, and the percentage who spoke a language other than English at home and who spoke English with difficulty increased by 110%" (Wirt et al., 2003, p. 21). The Condition of Education 2004 reported that parallels also existed between non-English speaking students and poverty. Although White pre-kindergarten children made up 22% of students in high-poverty schools, 36% of the students were Black and 39% were Hispanic (Wirt et al., 2004). The risk of repeating a grade and not completing high school is often a consequence of

2

being a language minority student. When language minority students were compared with students who spoke only English at home, "they were less likely to have completed high school (10% vs. 31%)" (Klein, Bugarin, Beltranena, & McArthur, 2004, p. iii). By contrast, language minority young adults (18-24 year olds) who spoke English very well were more likely to have completed high school than those who spoke English with difficulty (51% vs. 18%) (Klein et al., 2004).

The Condition of Education 2003 (Wirt et al., 2003) report suggested that educators analyze these indicators because they provided additional insight into the makeup of the American student body, an important aspect of understanding the educational system and its early presence in the lives of children. As a federal government status report on elementary students at-risk (Legters & Slavin, 1992), noted, "students' experiences in the elementary grades have a profound impact on their futures" (p.1).

What is the cost of ignoring the educational problems of at-risk children and youth? Perry (as cited in McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter & McWhirter, 1998), estimated that it costs approximately

> $4200 a year to send a child to school, but it costs $4300 a year to support a
> family on welfare and high school dropouts had more than half of the families.
> Taxpayers spend close to $14,000 a year to keep one prisoner in jail and 62%
> of adult prison inmates are high school dropouts. (p. 62)

It is no mystery that a society that does not care about the needs of at-risk students will eventually be forced to care about the costs at a later time. "The key issue for at-risk students is not if additional costs will be necessary, but when they should be provided" (Slavin, Karweit & Wasik, 1992, p.17). Rossi and Stringfield (1995) reviewed the research on at-risk students from the past 30 years and then conducted case studies at 18 schools previously designated as effective in working with students at-risk. They suggested that one reason for better serving at-risk students is that the number of highly paid low-skill jobs in the U.S. had diminished, with the result that the average income of a young male high-school dropout fell by 49% from 1973 to 1992. These numbers are important with regard to the overall cost to society.

Statement of the Problem

Public education is projected to expand significantly in the next decade, and as the numbers increase, the issues facing educators will not disappear. Data from the Projections of

Educational Statistics to 2013 (Hussar & Gerald, 2004) report projected total public and private elementary and secondary school enrollment to increase at an overall rate of 4% from 2001 to 2013, with public and private elementary and secondary student enrollment increasing from 53.9 million in 2001-2002 to 55.9 million in 2013. "In the year 2005, enrollment in grades 9-12 is projected to reach an all-time record of 15.9 million surpassing the previous high of 15.7 million in the fall of 1976" (Gerald & Hussar, 2003, p. 3). Concurrent with a rise in the numbers of students is the multiplicity of personal and familial issues, background experiences, and academic and social abilities embodied in each child attending school.

Although American students attend school against the background of a myriad of personal and environmental issues, educational reforms continue to shape the way the nation's schools conduct their mission of educating these children. The latest reform movement, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), has considerable influence over children's lives, and the lives of their teachers, administrators, parents, and communities. States, mandated by the federal law, required school districts to implement broad based educational policies that affected local schools, teachers, and students. America's schools have changed and continue to evolve in an effort to meet the economic, educational, and legal requirements of serving the needs of an increasingly diverse and challenging student body. To meet these demands, educators need expanded pre-service and in-service training to assist in making sure that no child is left behind. As the number of students in the United States grows, so do the types and characteristics of risk factors (Manning & Baruth, 1995). The cumulative effect of these emerging trends calls for professional development that provides educators with the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of all students, especially those at-risk of school failure.

Theoretical Context and Framework

As at-risk students bring their special challenges to the educational arena, educators increasingly feel the pressure of working with students who may not benefit from today's educational policies and practices, often because they come to school with problems that cannot be addressed in a six to seven hour school day (Montgomery & Rossi, 1993). "In almost every school, regardless of students' race and class, teachers can identify children who underachieve because of problems beyond school walls" (p.4). Not all educators feel qualified to teach students with special needs, or those placed at-risk of school failure (NCES, 2000). Exploring the accessibility of training for educators to teach these students is the central focus of this inquiry.

In most school districts, one area of potential influence on educators' ability to develop professional skills is staff development. Appropriate staff development could help provide the training that is needed for educators to work better with at-risk students, allowing them to benefit from current educational reforms. The standards based reform model currently applied in America's public schools, with the added emphasis on testing in math and language arts, targets core content subjects, both for student accountability and for staff development purposes. "Professional development is considered an essential mechanism for deepening teachers' content knowledge and developing their teaching practices" (Smith & Desimone, 2003, ¶3). Today, in schools around the country, teachers participate in more subject matter content, as "opposed to methods, technology, student assessment, or discipline and management" (¶21). At the same time that educators work with more students placed at-risk, they are also under the mandate of increased content area testing of their students, resulting in more subject based professional development.

But knowledge about content is not all that is needed to address today's students. Educators also need strategies to deal with this challenging and diverse population of students. Many teachers, especially those who teach in less advantaged settings, do not have the necessary skills to meet the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure. Smith and Desimone (2003), analyzing Schools and Staffing Data (SASS) from 1993-94 and 1999-2000, found that teachers of low-achieving and high poverty students are more likely to be less experienced, work at schools with fewer resources and larger classes, confront behavior, safety and non-academic issues, and have more challenging students than those teachers who teach more advantaged students. Smith and Desimone concluded from the SASS data that teachers have increased their participation in professional development, but that the greatest increase was in content-focused professional development, a finding consistent with the "push of standards-based reform to increase teachers' knowledge and skills in more advanced content" (¶ 21).

In a symposium paper, Bernal and Torres (1990) noted that continued in-service training to help address the "unmet needs of the ever-increasing at-risk student population" (p. 5) was needed to ensure that all students gain an adequate level of basic skills. A National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1996) working paper on student learning, teaching quality and professional development noted that the appropriate content of professional development activities included not only subject matter content knowledge, but also instructional strategies

that "provides effective strategies for recognizing and responding to student diversity" (p. 38). The challenges facing at-risk students may not be met only by teachers broadening their knowledge of reading and mathematics, but may require professional development specifically targeted to meet the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure.

It seemed efficacious to use the platform of staff development to ensure that educators possess the necessary skills to teach a diverse and difficult population of students who function in the real world context of the reform movement of NCLB. Before proposing such interventions, it is imperative to know what school districts are already addressing, through staff development, the issues facing students placed at-risk of school failure. To ensure that educators working with these students are knowledgeable, the content of staff development training must speak to these issues.

Overview of the Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine staff development for K-12 educators in the United States that specifically addressed the academic and social well being of students at-risk of school failure. Through this study, the ways in which school districts approached the task of preparing educators to work with students at-risk was analyzed. NCLB requires school districts to provide assistance to schools with educationally disadvantaged and at-risk students by implementing professional development. Therefore, staff development programs in K-12 were investigated to provide an explanation of the training school districts provided to assist educators to deal more effectively with this student population. The goal of this inquiry was to explore issues related to at-risk students within the current educational reforms of high stakes testing and the NCLB Act, and to examine the implications of these reforms on staff development.

The overarching question for this study addressed the content of the training provided to educators to assist them in meeting the needs of students placed at-risk. Specifically, the following questions were addressed:

1. During the school year 2003-2004, how many staff development courses were aimed at meeting the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure were offered to educators?

2. How much of this specific training was done relative to content-based staff development? Subordinate questions were: Did the staff development content include identification of students at-risk, risk factors, at-risk behaviors, and social skills? What specific student populations were targeted through staff development courses?

Overview of the Study

The research questions in this study were addressed through a quantitative study using a content analysis approach. The work of Neuendorf (2002), and Riffe, Lacy and Fico (1998) guided this analysis. The content analysis reviewed and coded public school district staff development course documents obtained from the Internet and from staff development offices. Individual words and phrases in the titles and course description were coded and counted, as well as the total number of courses in which these words appeared (the number of courses offered that addressed the needs of students placed at-risk), and the total number of courses a district offered its educators.

School districts are the main conduit through which staff development is addressed. Although recent reform movements at the state and federal level have tended to bypass the district role, "districts remain the legal and fiscal agents that oversee and guide schools . . . structuring, providing, and controlling access to professional development, curriculum and instructional ideas, . . . What districts do influences how schools as organizations address the performance goals set by states" (Massell, 2000, p. 2). School districts design the courses that provided educators not only with content knowledge, but also with strategies that could be applied to working with an increasingly diverse and challenging population of students.

Significance of the Study

As the numbers of students placed at-risk of school failure increases, the consequences of their failing to function in today's educational milieu are clear. Students need trained teachers who are able to work with a diverse and growing student body. Although research studies have examined the factors that place students at-risk of school failure, and other studies have examined a changed view of staff development, little information is available on the school district's role, through staff development, to provide educators with the skills they need to teach this population of students. This study adds to the scholarly research and literature in the field of at-risk students and staff development by merging these two fields of study together.

Educational reforms such as increased testing and high accountability continue to gain ground in American education, contributing to the demands placed on educators. The findings and conclusions of this study provide information concerning the availability and type of staff development offered to educators through school district staff development. These findings offer insights concerning the staff development training that specifically targets this group of students,

and adds to the body of knowledge about staff development training designed to meet the needs of educators, thus helping to improve educational practices and policies.

Educators may find the study useful because it provides data about staff development training to meet an increasingly diverse group of students. The study also has important implications for school districts' staff development offices, which may find the study interesting because it assumed the importance of staff development at the district level, and evaluated the training offered by the 100 largest school districts in the U.S. Small staff development offices may use this information to define their work on training educators on the same topic. Other educators will discover an interesting portrait of students at-risk of school failure as addressed by school district staff development offices across the country.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions refer to terms used throughout this study:

Content-based course refers to training based in an academic field such as reading, math, language arts, science, social studies and writing. These courses encompassed the ages of kindergarten through 12th grades.

Course documents refers to the actual listing of courses, in-services or workshops offered through school district staff development offices. These documents were obtained either through the Internet, by mail, or by a personal contact.

Educational reform reflects movements that aim to change the educational system in existence at a particular period of time, either through public policy, governmental regulations and laws, and/or educational practice.

School failure of students is defined by low grades, poor academic achievement, poor test performance, retention in grade, absenteeism from school, and ultimately, dropout status.

Staff development has as its goal the improvement of skills and performance of educators in their present or future situations.

Staff development courses are courses designed by school district staff development or professional development offices that aspire to train educators (administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals). These courses come in a variety of delivery models and include in-services, workshops, individually guided staff development, teacher researchers, mentors, and coaches. For the purposes of this study, however, only courses offered in the in-service or workshop format were analyzed. Staff development is also called professional development.

Staff development offices are maintained by school districts for the purpose of providing professional development to their employees.

St*udents at-risk of school failure* refer to students who are affected in their educational performance by environmental, societal, economic, political, and educational factors.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations are boundaries that define the ability of the study to be generalized to other work. In order to understand the restrictions of this study, the limitations and delimitations of this study are outlined below.

Limitations

1. The research focused only on the 100 largest school districts in the U.S.
2. The researcher assumed these school districts would have staff development offices whose training would address the research questions.

Delimitations

1. Only information gathered from these staff development offices was used in the study. More information could be available from other offices within the school districts' jurisdiction.
2. Only words that applied to the content analysis were recorded. There could be other non-coded words that could have answered the research questions.

Other limitations and delimitations more specific to the content analysis method are described in Chapter III.

Summary

Chapter 1 of this dissertation included an introduction to the subject, a statement of the problem, the theoretical context and framework, purpose of the study and research questions, and overview of the methods used. Chapter II provides a review of the literature on school reform movements, students at-risk, and the relationship of staff development to this population. This chapter begins with a discussion of educational reform efforts as viewed through the lenses of students placed at-risk of school failure, and staff development as a conduit to teach educators strategies to work with this population of students The chapter presents an historical perspective of school reform movements and then reviews the research literature and studies related to at-risk students and staff development. Chapter III describes the methodology used in the study, and includes the theory and rationale for using content analysis. The conceptualization,

operationalization, coding scheme, sampling, training and pilot reliability, coding, final reliability, tabulation, and reporting of this study are described. Tables and figures used to explain the methodology are presented in this chapter. Chapter IV is a presentation of the data obtained through the content analysis methodology. The results of sampling the data sources are explained first, followed by an analysis of the data sources, with the themes and patterns revealed through the content analysis discussed. Chapter V presents a summary of the study, findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research and exploration.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

This chapter begins by examining current school reform efforts. This subject is important because it is the supporting framework on which the second area of examination, students at-risk, is explored. The school reform movement has implications for this population, especially as the reforms relate to the training of educators who work with these students. These two areas of interest, school reform and students at-risk, intersect where the third area of inquiry, staff development, forms. This intersection of interests allows the exploration of how staff development, within the framework of school reform, provides educators with an understanding of students at-risk.

Areas of Inquiry

The first area of inquiry, school reform, provides a conceptual framework for understanding the requirements and implications of current educational movements on a particular group of students. The second area of inquiry, students at-risk, reflected the impact of a school reform on students. To meet the specific needs of these students, educators must be aware of and have knowledge about the issues facing them. Therefore, the third area of review becomes staff development as it related to assisting educators to work with students at-risk. Staff development is the component that blends these three areas of inquiry together (Figure 1). The linkages among these areas of inquiry are illustrated in Figure 1.

A recent school reform initiative, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), included the requirement for more rigorous and universal educational standards and increased methods of assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Because students at-risk are affected by the emphasis on testing and accountability, the need for well-prepared educators to work with these students necessitated appropriate staff development. NCLB emphasized the hiring, training and retaining of qualified personnel for every student who has the potential to be left behind, including those at-risk from environmental factors and those who engage in risky behaviors. Staff development is one method of meeting the needs of educators who work with this student population.
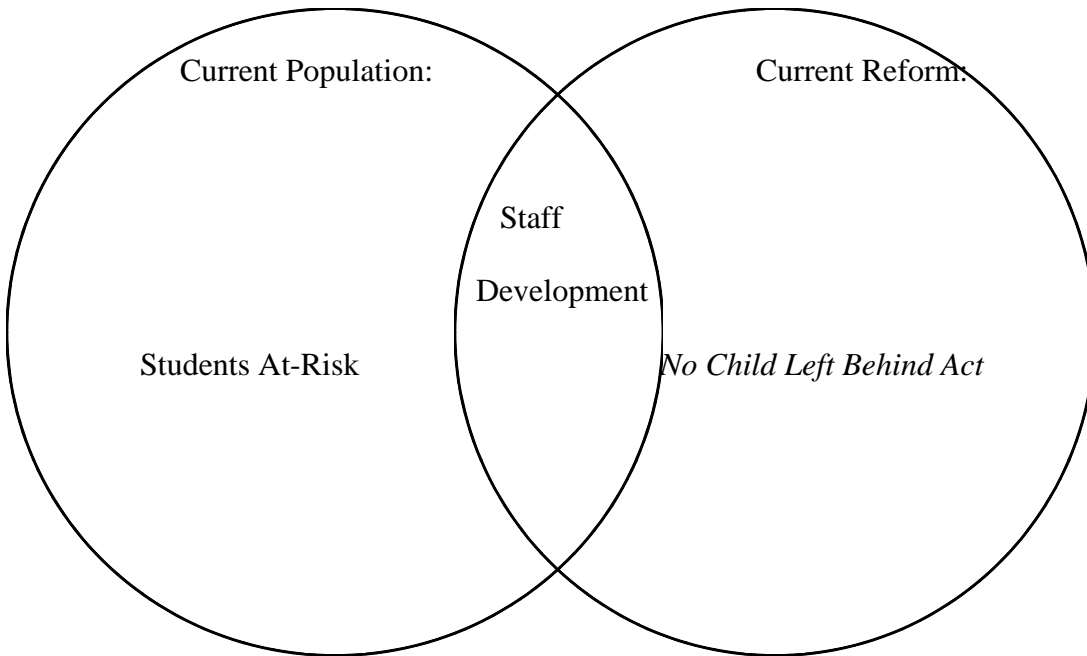
Figure 2.1 **Intersection of students at-risk and the reforms of the *No Child Left Behind Act***

with staff development.

Parameters of the Literature Review

This chapter presents the research on educational reform movements, especially as they converge with students at-risk. It also addresses the literature on students at-risk and investigates the literature on staff development and its relationship to preparing educators to work with these students. Queries to support this literature review were conducted using a variety of keywords including, but not limited to, school reform, educational reform movements, No Child Left Behind, students at-risk and at-risk populations, and staff development. The Online Union Catalog (OCLC), and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) databases were useful electronic tools. These prompts identified books, journals, research studies, and dissertations. Government resources, especially the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), were valuable in ascertaining the scope of the problem and in gathering statistical information used in the literature review as well as in the methodology.

Each of these areas of interest is broad in conceptualization. Reforms in education encompass an historical perspective dating from the last century. The topic of students at-risk included a number of sub-topics, such as early childhood intervention, specific instructional strategies, or alternative school programs. Similarly, staff development incorporated a number of aspects, including the method of delivery, the design, the context and the content. Each one of these areas constitute a body of knowledge whose roots are firmly grounded in an historical foundation and whose branches contain various elements of their development.

However, for purposes of this review, only areas of relevance to the overarching question are discussed. This process eliminated, for example, reviewing the literature on specific programs for students at-risk and focused, instead, on the risk factors associated with these students, the possible consequences for them of current school reforms, and district implemented staff development programs for educators working with this population of student. Using this model as a vehicle for the literature review ensured that the discussion would be focused and would ultimately lead to the research questions in Chapter Three.

School Reform Movements

An Historical Perspective

The review of the literature begins with a discussion of school reform and its implications for students at-risk and for staff development. Reform movements have been part of the educational landscape for at least the last two decades. "Schooling has become an institution that

dominates time and consciousness, affecting our assumptions about what is important. One response is to target those key institutions for inspection, concern, and responsibility for solving broader problems" (Dorn, 2000, ¶ 7). School reform initiatives mirror the social fabric of American life and promulgate the agendas of educators, social scientists, and politicians. Darling-Hammond (1997) noted that reforms come in "waves," each wave promoting a different educational focus.

Education past to present. An essay by Deschenes, Cuban and Tyack (2001) offered an historical retrospective of educational reforms in America, how these reforms affected "students who have not been able to do what educators wanted them to do" (p. 525), and the labels historically applied to them. This retrospective serves as a framework for the discussion on school reforms. According to these essayists, in the first half of the 19th century, exposing all children to education emphasized equality of opportunity. This exposure took place in an ungraded, usually rural, one-room schoolhouse where the three Rs were taught along with citizenship. The utopian hope for schools of this period was that by exposing poor students to school, they could achieve what the fortunate already possessed. However, children who did not function well in this setting were often labeled "dunce" or "loafer" and might be whipped for their failure to be responsible for their own learning (Deschenes, et al.).

In the latter half of the 19th century, reform movements introduced the graded school where all children were taught the same content at the same time, and academic failure was seen as coming from "deficits of character" (Deschenes, et al., 2001, p. 531). Students were labeled "shirker" or "depraved" and were "held back" if they failed to learn. In a similar manner to Deschenes, et al., Darling-Hammond (1997) referred to schools during this period as large, impersonal, factory model schools created to teach basic skills to poor children. These schools projected "the image of a moving conveyor belt on which students were placed while teachers performed a predetermined series of operations on them" (p. 38). Schools adopted the factory model as the basis for the education of children (Gainey, 1993).

Around the early 20th century, a new Progressive reform movement re-emphasized the need for equal opportunity for all students, including children of immigrants, but introduced testing that "differentiated" or "tracked" students into specific curricula or vocational programs. Students were either "normal" or "handicapped or retarded," and groups of students, like immigrants or Blacks, were unofficially segregated. This approach enabled teachers to "teach

different things in a different way in a different place" (Deschenes, et al., 2001, p. 532). Labels used during this period included "pupils of low I.Q.," "limited," "slow learner," or "occupational student" (Deschenes, et al.).

Schools that emphasized repetitive drills and harsh discipline alienated many children and pushed them to choose work over school (Montgomery & Rossi, 1993), yet vocational training emerged as imperative for the future of poor children. Beginning in the 1920s group intelligence testing supported the social theory that all children were not born equal and that genetics played a role in a student's ability to do well in school. Testing in schools tended to isolate students who did not test well (Deschenes et al., 2001).

By the 1940s and 1950s, schools focused on fundamentals and rote learning. Not until the Soviet Union challenged America in 1957 by launching Sputnik, were curricular reforms aimed at preparing students to think critically initiated by the National Science Foundation and the Department of Education (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Deschenes et al. (2001) noted that by the late 1950s, the civil rights movement forced equal access to education and demands were made to adapt schools to meet the needs of the child, including programs to equalize resources or compensate for past discrimination. Labels like "educationally deprived" or "culturally different," suggested that the blame for unequal access was with the school, but other terms, like "educationally difficult" and "unwilling learners," continued to focus the cause of the trouble on the students.

From the 1960s to the 1970s, much of "early compensatory education [continued to be based] on a concept of deprivation and cultural deficit" (Deschenes et al., 2001, p. 534). Reformers challenged the use of large-scale intelligence tests that resulted in tracking and asked why minority groups were over represented in classes for students with mental retardation. Such questioning brought attention to the linguistic and cultural differences of students and reformers called on federal and state government and local districts to improve schooling for all students including students with special needs (Deschenes, et al.).

Jennings (2002) pointed out that the main goal of federal aid during this time was to increase equity in education through assistance to help educate groups of children, such as poor, migrant, or limited English proficient students, and students with disabilities. President Johnson increased the federal role in education in 1964 with the passage of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which included Headstart and Title I programs, part of his

war on poverty. During the 1970s, states also began to rely on a minimum competency testing movement to reform schools, ensuring that students would earn at least minimum requirements to be productive citizens (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

In the 1980s, issues in education reform included educational accountability, lengthening the amount of time students spent in school, and the effects of increased expenditures on educational goals (O'Shea & O'Shea, 1997). In 1983, *A Nation at Risk, the Imperative for Educational Reform*, a report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, was published. This report imprinted the term "nation at-risk" into the public's consciousness by charging that America's schools were mediocre and could not produce a work force that could compete worldwide. Although the report has since been discredited, with Berliner and Biddle (1995) calling it a "manufactured crisis," the report altered the way Americans viewed education. The National Commission on Education called for more rigorous standards and accountability, along with a return to basics, harder work, more homework, more hours of school, and more days of school (U.S. Dept. Of Education, 1993). On its 20th anniversary, Goodlad (2003) noted that the report, although fanned to hysteria by the media, did "stimulate a surge of support from philanthropy for innovative improvement initiatives" (¶ 14). Unfortunately, the "media overkill turned attention away from its [the report's] substance" (¶ 7) but the charge to design an educational system that deals with 21st realities should have been assembled 20 years ago (Goodlad, 2003).

Cohen and Hill (2001) noted that the publication of A Nation At Risk "galvanized hundreds of other study groups, commission, and reports" (p. 14). Within three years, 35 states had enacted comprehensive reforms, which emphasized increased courses and test taking (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001). During this time, the back to basics educational reform took predominance and textbooks, lecture-recitation, and an emphasis on rote learning dominated the field (Darling-Hammond, 1997). A 1989 national education conference of state and local officials, educators, parents, and community business leaders, led to the adoption of The National Education Goals, which encouraged schools to work on improving student achievement (Goals 2000, 1998).

Reforms continued into the 1990s with instruction a primary focus for preparing students to compete in a global economy (Goals 2000,1998). Technology and the information age became a force for change. School improvement was the leading political issue in most states (Cohen &

Hill, 2001). McNeil (2000) noted that the locus of control over curriculum, teaching, and assessment that began in the 1980s placed the authority for educational decisions at the state level. Every state began the process of writing common standards for all students. President Clinton's major reform initiative, *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, passed in 1994, was based on fundamental principles of effective school change. This Act included an assumption that by the year 2000 all children in American would start school ready to learn, that the high school graduation rate would increase to at least 90%, and that America's teaching force would have access to programs that would improve its professional skills (Goals 2000,1998). However, in 2000, under a different administration, Goals 2000 was retired and the standards based reform movement, which produced the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), took center stage.

      Current educational reforms. The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 amended the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 1965. As the latest educational reform movement, it increased the federal government's participation in the lives of American students by requiring increased student academic achievement through testing and by setting up a system of rewards and consequences for students and schools that fail to achieve sufficient progress. The Act contained four basic educational reform principals: (a) stronger accountability for results, (b) increased flexibility and local control, (c) expanded opportunities for parents, and (d) an emphasis on using teaching methods with a record of success. NCLB also mandated annual testing for all students in reading and math by 2005-2006, and in science by 2007-2008 (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

      NCLB addressed children who are limited in English proficiency including immigrant children and youth and pledged to ensure that these children develop high levels of academic attainment in English (NCLB, 2001, Part A). NCLB also addressed preventive and intervention programs for children and youth who are neglected, delinquent, or at-risk, and proposed to improve educational programs that prevented these children from dropping out of school (NCLB, 2001, Part D). Of key importance were changes to Title I, which required that schools meet annual yearly progress goals. Schools that failed to make their target for two consecutive years would be identified as in need of improvement, opening the door to public school choice (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Deschanes et al. (2001) stated that the current standards based reforms focus on (a) requiring low-performing students to do more during both the school year and the summer, (b) assessing blame for the failure to achieve academically on the students, and (c) withholding promotion or graduation as a consequence for failing tests. These authors noted the striking comparison between current reforms, in which all students ideally receive the same curriculum, the 19th century, when students were judged on their character or ability, and the Progressive era, when reformers found a different niche or track for every student. According to Deschenes et al., the narrow focus of schools today does not allow for the variety of students and for the variety of areas in which they might excel. As a result, "students who do not excel in the age-graded, narrowly academic world may once again be subject to the same kinds of labeling and failure that their predecessors were" (p.539). Although Deschenes et al. outlined the historical perspectives associated with students at-risk, they focused less on the accountability aspect of the current standards based reform movement in which not only students but also schools and educators will be penalized for failure to perform well.

School reform movements in the past challenged and often changed the way schools conduct the business of educating students. Based on the political and social winds in the country at the time of their inception, these movements had the capacity to change the lives of public school students. In many instances, these reforms specifically targeted groups of students, or individual students who required additional assistance to function in the education milieu. In many cases, the federal government, state governors and legislatures, and school boards took over to "set things aright" for educators who they saw as being derelict in their duty (Ericson & Ellett, 2002, ¶ 3). However, in some cases, these reforms created more difficult situations for students who were already in a tenuous position. As Amrein and Berliner (2002) pointed out, because the newest legislation and associated reforms is heavily test based, there could be a profound impact on students considered "at-risk." The State Of America's Children 2004 (Children's Defense Fund, 2004) noted that there are educational policies associated with high rates of school failure, dropout, and delinquency, and that for "school reform to work for all children, the needs of youths at-risk who confront such policies also must be addressed" (p. 95).

Students At Risk

Definition

   The definition of the term at risk varies depending on who uses it and the context in which it is used. Some researchers suggested that the term applied to students who, by the eighth grade, failed "to achieve basic levels of proficiency in key subjects (mathematics and reading)" (Kaufman, Bradbury & Owings, 1992, p. 2). McWhirter et al., (1998) noted that the term at-risk identifies a situation that may not necessarily be current "but that can be anticipated in the absence of intervention" (p. 7). According to Barr and Parrett (2001), no matter what labels are attached to these students, they have always been identified by teachers as "disinterested, and disruptive, as those students who refused to learn" (p. 3). Health care workers used the term at-risk to identify those students engaging in high-risk health behaviors such as tobacco, alcohol and other drug use (Grunbaum et al., 2002). Whatever the context, the reality remains that some children, at different times in their lives, may be at-risk.

   Manning and Baruth (1995) defined at-risk learners as those in danger of failing to meet their potential. They believed that all children are at risk at some time, that at-risk conditions affect children and adolescents in different ways, and that some children and adolescents may not be affected at all. McWhirter et al. (1998), anchored the definition in the past and then linked it to the future by stating that the term at-risk denotes a set of presumed cause-and-effect dynamics that place the child or adolescent in danger of negative future events. They discussed being at-risk not as a discrete category, but as a series of steps along a continuum which range from minimal risk to remote and high risk. Engagement in risky behavior could escalate the category, and minimal risk could turn into a high level of risk based on negative situations and stressors.

   The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL, 2001) defined at-risk in the context of the educational environment. NCREL used Hixson's definition of the term at-risk and suggested that students "are placed at risk by adults . . . when they experience a significant mismatch between their circumstances and needs, and the capacity or willingness of the school to accept, accommodate and respond" (as cited in the At-Risk section, ¶5). Hixson noted that much of the responsibility should fall on schools, which lack the capacity or are unwilling to accept and accommodate these students in a manner that support their growth. Deschenes et al.

(2001) also used the term "mismatch" to designate the tension between schools and groups of students who did not meet the "standards of their day" (p. 526).

Montgomery and Rossi (1993) took a broader view of students at-risk and noted that neonatal conditions, health, family characteristics, peer influences, community climate and resources, and social status affect a student's readiness to learn. Frymier (1992) introduced his study of students at-risk by defining children at-risk as those who are likely to fail at school or at life. Johnson (1994) conceptualized educational risk within an ecological framework, in contrast to an epidemiological model, which assumed that the causes of children's school failure resided within the child's "inadequacies, limitations, incompetencies and deficiencies" (p. 37). Johnson proposed a new paradigm: children were at risk when they were placed in environments for which they were not prepared. Johnson's paradigm organized the child/environment interactions in four nested ecosystems that mirrored four levels of educational risk: microrisk (classroom interaction); (b) mesorisk (domestic interaction); (c) exorisk (community interaction); and (d) macrorisk (sociocultural interaction). Thus, according to Johnson, educational risk is a consequence of "discordant child environmental interactions" (p. 46).

Barr and Parrett (2001) described students at-risk as "disengaged" or "disconnected" youth. They suggested that any young person may become at-risk given the parameters of modern life, such as alcohol, drugs, sexually transmitted disease, and adolescent depression. According to this analysis, "it is obvious that at-risk students cut across all social classes and occur in every ethnic group" (p. 2).

Historically, the term at-risk was considered a deficit definition, and, similar to educational reforms of the past, placed much of the blame for being at-risk on the child and his or her family (Hixson & Tinzman, 2001). According to Barr and Parrett (2001), in the 1960s "responsibility for failure in school seemed to be assigned to the student and his or her tragic social situation" [in which] "everyone knew that something was wrong with them" (p. 3). Kominski, Jamieson and Martinez (2001) contended that at-risk conditions are characteristics of the individual or situations arising from the context of their lives, which might eventually lead to a higher likelihood of undesirable life outcomes. Being at-risk could lead to complicated results for many students.

Statistics

The National At-Risk Education Network (NAREN, 2003) reported the following facts: (a) over 1,000,000 of the 3,092,000 children reported for child abuse and neglect to Child Protective Services (CPS) agencies are verified in the U.S. each year; (b) 13,500,000 children are born into poverty--or about one in five (18.9%); (c) 512,000 babies are born to teen mothers each year; (d) 2,100,000 children are arrested each year; and (e) in 1999, 26% of twelfth graders, 26% of tenth graders, and 12% of eighth graders had used illicit drugs in the previous 30 days. For alcohol abuse, 31% of twelfth graders, 26% of tenth graders, and 15% of eighth graders reported having five or more alcoholic beverages in a row in the past two weeks.

Statistics from The Children's Defense Fund (2003) noted that in 1999, 9 children and teens under the age of 19 died every day from firearms: 1,078 committed suicide, 1,990 were murdered, and 214 were victims of accidental shootings. Dropout data (NCES, 2000) indicated that the highest dropout rate, 44.2%, was for Hispanic students born outside the U.S. The dropout rate was 13% for African Americans, 7% for Whites, and 4% for Asian Americans. In the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000 tenth-twelfth grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program. Numbers like these give weight to the definition of being at-risk.

Theoretical Basis for Risk Factors

Risk Factors and Risk Outcome

Factors that contribute to a student being at-risk have been extensively studied and documented in the last 30 years. Johnson (1994) discussed risk factors as attributes and circumstances that predispose students to experience risk outcomes. Bernard (1993) stated that being at-risk or engaging in risky behaviors does not necessarily guarantee the actualization of risk out121comes, but it does imply vulnerability. Barr and Parrett (1995) divided factors that place children at-risk into two primary areas: those related to the individual, family, and community, and those related to school. Johnson (2000) defined risk outcomes as school failure, high school dropout, suicidal behavior, adult dependency, substance abuse, incarceration, and unwanted sexual experiences such as pregnancy and disease. As reported in the professional literature, there are many factors that cause a student to be at-risk. Based on a careful review of the research, the main categories of risk factors are (a) environmental, (b) educational, (c) familial, and (d) internal. These categories are discussed in this section.

Three major studies emerged from a review of the research, the Phi Delta Kappa Study of Students At-Risk (Frymier, 1992), Characteristics of At-Risk Students in NELS:88 (Kaufman, et al., 1992), and an analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's October 1999 Current Population Survey (Kominski, et al, 2001). These three studies were chosen for their comprehensive nature and evaluation of students at-risk. The Phi Delta Kappa study identified at-risk factors and used multiple regression methods to determine their relationship to each other. The NELS:88 study examined the characteristics of middle school students in the 1988 cohort and analyzed their status in 1990. The final study, the 1999 population survey, was chosen because of its timeliness and size.

Five longitudinal studies are also discussed. Ensminger and Slusarick (1996) examined the developmental paths children took to reach high school graduation. Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey (1997) identified predictors of dropout students. Lloyd (1978) tracked third grade students who eventually dropped out of high school, and Barrington and Hendricks (1989) conducted a similar study to Lloyd's by following high school freshmen until they graduated from high school. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (West, 2004) followed a cohort of children from 1st to 5th grade. These studies demonstrated the developmental paths students often begin in elementary school that leads them towards becoming at-risk. This portion of the literature review closes with additional research that support the main aspects of being at-risk.

Identification of Risk Factors

A comprehensive study on identifying characteristics of at-risk children and youth was the Phi Delta Kappa national study of at-risk factors directed by Frymier (1992). In an effort to validate a scale for use in predicting risk among young people, members of Phi Delta Kappa collected data on more than 21,000 fourth, seventh, and tenth grade students in 275 schools in more than 80 U.S. communities. A protocol instrument was designed that defined each of 45 risk factors identified from 115 research studies. Eleven of the items were eliminated leaving a 34-item scale. These 34 items were subjected to factor analyses leaving five factors, which became five sub-scales. Scaled scores were developed for each student on each of the five factors. The five factors that emerged were (a) personal pain (10 items), (b) academic failure (eight items), (c) socioeconomic status of the family (six items), (d) family instability (four items), and (e) family tragedy (six items). Academic failure was considered a dependent variable and the other four factors were independent variables.

Over 9,652 teachers and 276 principals who knew the students best and had access to their school records, provided data on the factors. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the relationships that might contribute to or cause risk among students. Students at-risk on a particular item, compared to students not at-risk on that item, were more likely to be at-risk on each of the other 33 items, with 83% of these differences statistically significant (p<.001). Frymier (1992) stated, "Children who hurt, hurt all over. Children who fail, often fail in everything they do. Risk is pervasive. If a student is at risk in one area, that student is very likely to be at-risk in every other area" (p. 258).

This study provided detailed information on the risk factors that affected students. The eight items that comprised the academic failure factor were (a) low grades in school, (b) failed courses, (c) overage in grade, (d) retained in grade, (e) excessive absences. (f) low self-esteem, (g) referred to special education, and (h) low reading scores. As an example, a comparison of students with low grades in school with students whose grades were not low on various risk items produced the following statistics:

1. Twenty percent of students whose grades were low had been suspended from school, versus only 4% of students whose grades were not low had been suspended.

2. Ten percent of students whose grades were low used drugs, but only 2% of students whose grades were not low used drugs.

3. Thirty nine percent of students whose grades were low were overage in grade, but only 13% of students whose grades were not low were overage in grade.

4. Fathers of 26% of students whose grades were low were unemployed or held a low-level job, while fathers of 16% of students whose grades were not low were unemployed or held a low-level job.

The numbers supported Frymier's (1992) theory that students at-risk in one area were more than likely going to be at risk in another area. He concluded, "Growing up is risky business and schools are not to blame" (p. 32).

Another study exploring the identification of risk factors was the Characteristics of At-Risk Students in NELS:88 (Kaufman et al., 1992). This large-scale, national longitudinal study begun in the spring of 1988 with a cohort of 25,000 eighth grade public and private school students, who were re-surveyed in 1990. The study examined the characteristics of eighth grade students who were at risk of school failure, which was defined as low achievement test scores

and dropping out of school. Kaufman et al., noted that defining school failure solely on dropout status was too restrictive because "students who fail to achieve basic skills before leaving school may be at-risk of school failure" (p. 2).

The identification of at-risk factors for the Characteristics of At-Risk Students in NELS: 88 study (Kaufman et al., 1992), included (a) student and family background, (b) parental involvement, (c) student academic history, (d) student behavior, (e) teachers' perceptions of the students, and (f) school characteristics. Three basic demographic variables were examined, sex, race-ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The methodology used was univariate and multivariate odds ratios for each comparison listed. The variables were taken from the public data file for the NELS:88 Base Year Survey, except for the dropout indicator, which was taken from the NELS:88 First Follow Up Survey (1992).

Important findings included the following information: about 19% of the eighth graders in the class of 1988 performed below the basic level of proficiency in math and about 14% were below proficiency levels in reading. Approximately 6% of the eighth grade class of 1988 had dropped out of school by the tenth grade. A large percentage of Black, Hispanic, or Native American students of low socioeconomic status were deficient in basic skills and were also dropouts; when socioeconomic status and sex were held constant, in terms of adjusted odds ratios, Hispanics and whites dropped out at similar rates.

This study also discussed patterns, associations, and relationships and noted an association between at-risk status and prior academic performance; that is, "A" students were about 60% less likely to perform below the basic proficiency levels, and mostly "D" students were about 50% more likely to perform below the basic proficiency levels. Learning and emotional problems, and participation in special education programs were all associated with an increased risk of performing below the basic math and reading proficiency levels. "Students in special education were about two and a half times as likely to drop out, students with learning problems were more than three times as likely, and students with emotional problems were almost six times as likely to drop out as were other students" (Kaufman et al., 1992, p. 24).

Similar to the Phi Delta Kappa Study (1992), the Kaufman et al. (1992) study of NELS:88 data found that students who were overage for their grade nearly tripled the likelihood of performing below the basic proficiency level in math and reading. Students from single-parent families were 55-65% more likely to perform below the basic level and more than three times as

likely to drop out. Family mobility had a significant association with poor school outcomes; changing school two to four times increased the likelihood of performing below the basic math level by about 20% or more.

In their summary, Kaufman et al. (1992) stated that risk factors may be associated with prior and continuing poor performance, but a statistical relationship between the risk factors is not given. They do, however, acknowledge that there may be an interaction among the risk factors; for example, coming from a single parent family may have more negative effects on educational outcomes for students of low socioeconomic status than for a student from a high socioeconomic status.

In a third analysis of identifying factors, the October 1999 Current Population Survey (Kominski et al., 2001), a monthly, nationally-representative survey of about 50,000 households conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, provided the data. To conduct the survey, about 50,000 households were contacted each month during 1999 and residents were interviewed on a variety of topics. As part of the survey, data on school enrollment was collected. The research looked at possible factors that could be used to define at-risk conditions for school-age children and reported on the identification and measurement of a series of risk factors for school-age children. Specifically, two questions were addressed: (a) How many children experienced at least one at-risk condition; and (b) How many experienced multiple at-risk conditions?

Using data generated from the survey, three personal characteristics and four familial characteristics were defined for the U.S. school age population ages 5 years to 17 years. The personal characteristics were (a) English-speaking ability; (b) the presence of a personal disability; and (c) whether the child had ever been retained in school. The four familial at-risk conditions established were (a) absence of either or both parents from the household in which the child resides; (b) at least one foreign-born parent of recent immigration; (c) low family income; and (d) the absence of any employed parent or guardian in the household.

The survey data suggested that 18% of all children have at least one personal risk factor and 46% of all children, or close to one half of the child population (over 24 million), have at least one of the seven familial at-risk factors. The percentage of children who had more than one risk factor was 18%, with the greatest variation falling in the race-ethnicity groups. Children who experienced a disability (26%) or had been retained (27%), were more likely to experience multiple risk factors than were those who spoke English less than very well (Kominski et al,

2001). Young children were as likely to have at least one risk factor as children nearly 10 years older on average (44% compared to 47%), and just as likely to have multiple risk factors (17% compared to 18%). The researchers noted that "the fact that the level of multiple risk exposure is just as great for very young as for older children represents a possible serious issue for child well being" (Kominski et al.,¶31).

Longitudinal Studies

A number of longitudinal studies also evaluated at-risk students on a long-term basis. Ensminger and Slusarick (1996) used logistic regression to examine developmental paths toward high school graduation using longitudinal data from 1,242 at-risk urban minority first grade students. Five domains were examined to determine the impact on eventual graduation or dropout of a student: (a) family background, (b) family educational experience and values, (c) parent-child interaction regarding school, (d) social integration of the family in terms of school, and (e) a child's behavior and cognitive performance. Based on school records, information from mothers, teachers, and the adolescents themselves, the researchers compared the remaining 917 students (some had moved or died), and found that over half of the cohort did not graduate. Results suggested that poor grades, maternal education, family poverty, and aggressive behavior in first grade led to later dropout behavior for males. "School performance as early as first grade identified those who were at risk of dropping out of school in this cohort" (Ensminger & Slusarick, p. 110).

Alexander, Entwisle, and Horsey (1997) used logistic regression analyses and data from the Beginning School Study (BSS) to identify predictors of dropouts involving family context measures (stressful family changes, parent's attitudes and socialization practices), children's personal resources (attitudes and behavior) and school experiences (test scores, marks and track placements). The study followed the educational progress of 790 Baltimore school students from 1982, when they were in first grade, to 1996. Dropout status was determined from self-reports from the students in the ninth grade and annually until the students were two years out of high school. Other data were obtained from school records (grades, retention, special education), interviews with pupils in the first and second grades and parent and teacher questionnaires from the first grade. The researchers noted, "a variety of considerations around the time of the beginning school transitions are apparently linked to later dropout and to the sociodemographic profile of dropouts" (pp. 97-98). Parents' attitudes and values, family stresses, children's

26

behavior and academic adjustments and school structures such as tracking were all found to be relevant in predicting later dropout status.

Lloyd (1978) conducted a similar study using background characteristics, school performance and achievement test data for 788 third grade boys and 774 third grade girls who later became high school dropouts. The variables examined were elementary school report cards, standardized test scores, educational levels of both parents, number of siblings, the marital status of parents, marks received in third grade, and absenteeism. The data suggested that as early as the third grade, dropouts differed significantly from graduates in a number of characteristics. "Regression equations predicting dropout or graduation produced multiple correlations of .51 for boys and .49 for girls" (p. 1197). Approximately 3 out of 4 students were correctly predicted either to drop out or to graduate, and "6 or 7 of every 10 later school failures were correctly classified by characteristics exhibited in the third grade" (p. 1197). Although Lloyd found the results promising from a research perspective as a means of identifying indicators of the failure process, her concern is evident. "It is distressing, however, to have to conclude that the paths to educational success and failure have become so divergent during the first three school grades" (p. 1199).

Barrington and Hendricks (1989) tracked 651 high school freshmen until they were expected to graduate to determine whether measures that differentiated potential dropouts from students who would graduate could be made in elementary school. Using IQ scores from the Otis-Lennon Test of Mental Ability and The Iowa Achievement Test, Nelson-Denny Reading Test Scores, days absent in grades 1, 3, 5, 7-12 and grade point average in grades 9-12, they determined that measures to differentiate dropouts could be identified by the third grade with 70% accuracy and that "by the ninth grade, dropouts can be identified with 90% accuracy" (p. 318).

The third grade is also an important grade for ascertaining reading achievement. McPartland and Slavin (1990) noted that third-graders reading a year or more below grade level, or those who have been retained one or more times, have almost zero possibility of graduating from high school, especially when the students come from low SES backgrounds and attend high-poverty schools.

Rush and Vitale (1994) developed a profile for determining at-risk elementary school students by using teacher surveys of 5, 250 students in grades 1-5 within a single school district.

Thirty-five percent of the subjects qualified for free or reduced lunch, and 13% were from homes where the head of household was unemployed. Background information was gathered to determine factors that correlated with elementary school students at risk of dropping out of school, and that would produce a method for identifying at-risk students. A checklist survey instrument was designed with the following six categories: (a) demographic information, (b) academic achievement, (c) attendance, (d) behavior and coping skills, (e) external influences, and (f) student health. Eight factors emerged from a factor analysis that accounted for 53% of the variance. The eight factors that formed the profile were: (a) academically at-risk, (b) behavior and coping skills, (c) socially withdrawn, (d) family income, (d) parenting, (e) language development, (f) retention, and (g) attendance. "The 'hit rate' for at-risk students was 70.81% . . . the odds for prediction of at-risk students were greater than the odds for predicting not-at-risk students" (p. 332).

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 (West, 2004),was a nationally representative sample of approximately 22,000 children enrolled in 1,000 kindergarten programs during the 1998-1999 school year. The cohort was followed from the fall of 1998 through the spring of 2004, when most of the children completed 5th grade. The goal of the study was to assess achievement in reading, math and general knowledge, from the fall of 1998 to the spring of 2002, when the children were in the third grade. During this time, students' average reading score increased 84 points, from 27 to 108, and increased in math from 22 to 85 points, a gain of 63 points. Family risk factors were negatively associated with achievement gains. According to the study, these factors included (a) living below the poverty level, (b) speaking a primary language other than English in the home, (c) mother's education, and (d) single parent households. Being a member of a minority also contributed to small achievement gains.

In a U.S. Department of Education publication on education and students at-risk, Legters, McDill and Partland (1993) maintained that risk factors were the variables that decreased the probability of academic progress, and conceptualized these as aspects of societal, home, or school dysfunction, rather than as qualities inherent in the student. Contrary to Frymier (1992) they stated "if an improvement in resources eliminates the risk factors that threaten academic progress, a student should no longer be considered or labeled "at-risk" (p.viii).

In summary, students are at-risk of school failure based on a number of variables substantiated by the research (see Table 2.1). Contributing to these factors are educational reforms that may also impact the lives of school age children. Because government reforms in education are a reality, the important issue becomes that of addressing educators' training to work with this population. NCLB requires that no child be left behind. Therefore, educators must be prepared to teach a wide range of learners. The final area for discussion in the literature review, staff development and district-implemented programs, addresses the need for trained educators to work with students placed at-risk. Staff development is viewed through the lenses of students at-risk and current educational reforms. District implemented training is analyzed as a method of addressing the needs of teachers and administrators working with this population of students.

Staff Development

The Impact of Educational Reforms

NCLB, the latest in a progression of educational reforms, is important for educators who work with students at-risk. Part A (Section 3102) directs that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency and develop high levels of academic attainment. Part D (Section 3102), the prevention and intervention program for children and youth who are neglected, delinquent, or at-risk, has as its purpose the improvement of services for youth in institutions, and preventing at-risk youth from dropping out of school (Section 1401). Part H (Section 1802), the Dropout Prevention Act, targets school dropout prevention reentry and higher academic achievement levels. Title I (Section 101) was intended to meet the educational needs of low-achieving children in high-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children and young children in need of reading assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Finally, Title II (Section 2101) ensured that each state education agency developed a plan

Table 2.1 Common Factors for Students Placed At-Risk of School Failure

At-Risk Factors	Barrington & Hendrick (1989)	Frymier (1992)	Kaufman et al. (1992)	Rush & Vitale (1994)	Ensminger & Slusarick (1996)	Alexander et al. (1997)	Lloyd (1998)	Kominski et al (2001)	Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (2004)
Low school achievement	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Poor grades	X	X	X		X	X	X		
Standardized test scores	X					X	X		
Absenteeism	X	X	X	X		X	X		
Referral to special education	X		X			X	X	X	
Socioeconomic status	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
English speaking ability								X	X
Minority			X						X
Mobility		X				X	X		
Behavior and coping skills			X	X	X	X			

to ensure that all teachers would be highly qualified no later than 2005-2006. States must also develop professional development activities in a collaborative fashion by seeking the input of teachers, principals, parents, administrators, paraprofessionals and other school personnel (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The responsibility to leave no child behind rests partially on the knowledge educators possess to teach all children. Based on this premise, the pieces of the puzzle have linked educational reforms, students at-risk, and staff development. As Hornbeck (2003) stated, "The heart of improving school performance is investing in teachers through professional development. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) places an even greater premium on ensuring that classroom teachers are highly qualified" (¶ 1).

Equity Issues and Staff Development

In writing about current reform efforts and their impact on students at-risk, Rossi (1994) unequivocally connected the need for staff development and the improvement of the labor force in schools, if education was to reach students at-risk. He concluded that

> Education equity for students who are at-risk of failure, and approaches to
> school reform is most often treated as separate issues. Unless the several
> components are viewed and treated conjointly as if they are all parts of a
> single problem, we continue this separateness at the risk of continued
> educational failure. (67)

Rossi succinctly merged students at-risk and educational reform, and noted the importance of not treating the two issues in isolation.

Little (1993) discussed the five streams of reform that presented complex challenges to educators. The five reforms included (a) reforms in subject matter teaching; (b) reforms centered on problems of equity among a diverse student population; (c) reforms in the nature, extent, and uses of student achievement; (d) reforms in the social organization of schooling; and (e) reforms in the professionalization of teaching. In discussing theses five streams of reform, she noted that the reforms that centered on problems of equity for diverse student populations presented complex challenges to teachers as members of a professional community. Carnine (1999) pointed out that some of the most visible problems in education today have to do with violence in schools and poor performance of at-risk populations.

Dilworth and Imig (1995) connected the reform climate with the professional development of teachers and noted its new prominence. "Without the continuous improvement

of teaching (and of professional teachers), the reforms will fail. Professional development must serve the purpose of promoting teachers' continuous learning . . . within the social contexts in which teaching takes place" (p. 4). Without directly attributing student progress in schools with low achieving students to staff development, Little (2001) stated that "it remains the case that we uncovered the most supportive learning environment for students in those schools, or more often, in pockets within schools, where teachers' development was also valued and supported" (p. 24). Little (1993) maintained that improvements in professional development focused on "assisting teachers to identify and alter classroom practices that contribute to student failure and that undermine equal opportunity to learn" (p. 131). Bredeson and Scribner (2000) maintained that the status of professional development had risen to become one of the principle mechanisms to achieve the 1990s reform agenda. Given the complexity of today's educational setting, educators do not necessarily come to the task of working with a diverse population with a clear understanding of what is needed (Williams, 1999). Guskey (2003) noted that for professional development to move toward its ultimate goal of improving student learning outcomes, the outcomes should be defined broadly to include, in addition to grades and scores from standardized exams, affective and behavioral outcomes like students' attitudes, attendance rates, dropout status, and participation in school activities.

Wenglinsky (2002) tested two hypotheses in an effort to connect classroom practices of teachers with student achievement. His study of 7,146 eighth grade students who took the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math assessment analyzed whether teacher quality is as strongly related to student achievement as is student background characteristics, and the implications of professional development the teacher received in support of classroom practices. Ten measures of professional development were assessed including whether teachers received any professional development in the last five years in the topics of (a) cooperative learning, (b) higher-order thinking skills, (c) classroom management, (d) portfolio assessment, (e) performance-based assessment, (f) cultural diversity, (g) teaching special-needs students, and (h) teaching limited-English proficient (LEP) students. Wenglinsky used multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) involving two components, factor models and path models, to evaluate whether professional development is related to student achievement. Only one-third of the eighth grade students had teachers who had received professional development in cultural diversity, only one-fourth had teachers who had received professional development in

teaching students with special needs, and only one-tenth had teachers who had received professional development in teaching LEP students.

Wenglinsky (2002) concluded that when class size and SES are taken into account, only two areas, addressing special populations of students and higher-order thinking skills had significant effects on student achievement, with standardized coefficients of .12 and .21. "Students whose teachers received professional development in learning how to teach different groups of students substantially outperformed other students" (Wenglinsky, ¶46), and that the more professional development teachers received in working with special student populations, the more they engaged in higher-order activities.

Changes in Staff Development Models

In the 1990s, staff development reforms focused on how to teach particular content rather than on procedures of how to teach it (Gersten, Chard & Baker, 2000). Co-developing reforms in special education were also conceptual in nature, but special education teachers were taught how to make accommodations for students with learning disabilities and other at-risk students with "explicit procedural guidelines that addressed day-to-day implementation ideas" (p. 451). Gersten et al. noted that an important result of professional staff development research in the 1990s was an awareness that teachers needed conceptual knowledge (content) as well as an understanding of implementation (procedures).

Models of staff development have changed since the 1990s based on the theory that a different kind of training may be more beneficial to educators. The current view of professional development is that multiple forms of learning are best. Guskey (1995) described "professional development as successful when it is seen as a process, not an event" (p. 123). Guskey (2003) stated that professional development has traditionally consisted of attending conferences or workshops on curriculum during teacher workdays. Such strategies were found to be inadequate for sustained professional development because the impact on teachers' instructional practices was limited.

However, Guskey (1995) called the critical elements of successful professional development programs the "optimal mix" because it is a combination of "professional development processes and technology that work best in a particular setting" (p. 117). Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) elucidated the characteristics of effective staff development: (a) programs conducted in school settings and linked to school wide efforts; (b) teachers taking an

active part in planning of staff development; (c) an emphasis on self-instruction, demonstration and feedback; and (d) training that is concrete and lasting over time with assistance and support when required. The five models of staff development associated with these characteristics were (a) individually guided staff development; (b) observation and assessment; (c) involvement in a developmental improvement process; (d) training, and (e) inquiry. Little (1993) suggested that the most promising focus of professional development was the ability to engage teachers in the process. She listed six design principles that professional development should follow: (a) engagement with ideas, (b) taking into account the context of teaching and the experience of teachers, (c) offering support for informed dissent, (d) placing classroom practices within the larger context of education, (e) strengthening teachers use of inquiry, and (f) ensuring a balance between the bureaucracy and the individual. Little asserted that the professional development field was dominated by marketed formal programs over which teachers had little influence, and that the training paradigm continued to be dominated with short-term skill training workshops even though the field of staff development promoted alternative methods.

Evaluation of Staff Development

Two major studies evaluated professional development. The first was a 1997 national sample of 1,027 teachers from 93% of all districts in the country receiving Eisenhower funding (Garet, Disimone, Porter, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). The teachers were surveyed on six key features of professional development: three structural features (form, duration, and collective participation), and three core features: (content, active learning and coherence). Results of the survey showed that most district-supported professional development activities did not have the six key features of professional development (form, duration, core-content, focus, active learning and coherence). The average time was less than a week and the average number of contact hours was 25. In spite of reform efforts to change staff development, only 23% of the teachers sampled were in reform types of staff development (study groups, teacher networks, mentoring relationships, committee or task forces, internships or individual research projects).

A second longitudinal study conducted in 1999 by the same group of researchers (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002) was designed to build on the 1997 study. Its purpose was to examine the effects of professional development on teacher's instruction in math and science over a three-year period from (1996-1999). The study was part of the evaluation of the Eisenhower Professional Development Program (Title II of ESEA). The sample included 207

teachers, in 30 schools, in 10 districts, in 5 states; 57% of the schools were high poverty. The schools offered reformed as well as traditional forms of professional development. The study again evaluated the six major dimensions of staff development. The results showed that 79% of the teachers participated in traditional forms of staff development and only 18.7% were actively involved in reform models. The mean contact time was 18.2 hours during a one-year period, and the mean for the number of days spent in professional development was 3.81, with 64% of teachers participating in activities lasting a week or less. The results of the study indicated that although either traditional or reform activities can provide constructive interaction, reform activities (study groups, teacher networks, mentoring, committee or task forces, internships, individual research projects, and teacher research) tended to have a longer duration, which allowed for more active learning.

A National Center for Education Statistics (1998) status report on teachers' perspectives of educational reform in public elementary and secondary schools sampled 1,288 teachers from 758 schools stratified by instructional level, poverty status, school size, and locale. When teachers were asked to report on the application of high standards to special needs students (limited English proficient and students with disabilities), 79% of teachers reported teaching students with disabilities and 56% reported teaching students with limited English proficiency. But 26% of "all teachers reported they very much needed information to help" (p.10) limited English students, and 31% needed information on helping students with disabilities achieve high standards.

Another report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) confirmed teachers' lack of participation in specific professional development that addressed students with diverse needs. Findings from a status report on the preparation and quality of public school teachers (NCES, 1999), which surveyed a nationally representative group of 3560 full time public school teachers from grades 1-12, revealed that less than half of American teachers at the time of the survey , completed in the spring of 1998, felt "well prepared" to meet the challenges of working with limited English proficient, culturally diverse, and students with disabilities. These teachers, whose main teaching was in one of the core academic fields of English/language arts, social studies, foreign language, social-sciences, math, or science, or a self-contained classroom, indicated that only 20% felt well prepared to meet the needs of these students. Their readiness was not related to their years of teaching experience. Only 40% spent more than 8

hours in learning about classroom management, only 42% spent more than 8 hours on addressing the needs of students with disabilities, and only 38% spent more than 8 hours learning about the needs of students who were LEP or from diverse backgrounds. In comparison, this same study reported that 80% of the teachers participated in professional development on state and district curriculum standards.

In 2000, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), conducted a second survey (Parsad et al., 2001) to analyze teacher preparation and qualifications including teacher professional development. Indicators of teacher qualifications addressed in the study were teacher education, teacher preparation in formal professional development, collaborative activities related to teaching and teachers feelings of preparedness for the classroom. The sample consisted of 5,252 full and part-time teachers at all instructional levels in 50 states and the District of Columbia. The public school sample was stratified by locale, school size, and percent minority. On average 2.8 teachers were selected from 511 elementary schools, 855 middle schools, and 843 high schools.

 Results from the survey indicated that in the 12 months prior to the survey, 80% of the teachers participated in professional development that focused on state or district curriculum, but only 49% participated in staff development related to disabled students, and only 41% participated in training that addressed the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Only 26% spent any time in professional development having to do with students with limited English proficiency.

The crucial aspect of these survey reports is obvious when teachers' feelings of preparedness were surveyed. "Among teachers who taught students with special needs, relatively few felt very well prepared to address those students' needs" (p. v). In fact, only 27% of teachers indicated they were prepared to address the needs of students with limited English proficiency and only 32% felt prepared to address needs of students with disabilities; 12% indicated they were not at all prepared to address the needs of these two groups of students.

In summary, the research showed that in spite of an understanding of the need for trained educators to work with special needs populations, and, in spite of staff development training, many teachers still did not feel prepared to work with special needs students.

Staff Development Standards

 In 1996, in recognition of the importance of qualified educators, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future challenged the nation to provide every child with a qualified teacher. One of the five recommendations made by the commission was to reinvent teacher preparation and professional development. The latest reform of the staff development field occurred in 2001, when the National Staff Development Council (NSCD) revised its standards, stating that the "most powerful form of staff development occurs in teams that meet several times a week . . . often called learning communities" (p. 1). NSDC's standards fall in three areas, context, process, and content. Addressing the issue of equity, the content standard states that staff development that improves the learning of all students "prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement" (¶ 3). As summarized by NSDC, staff development that prepares educators to work with a unique group of students, must help them understand the social/emotional characteristics of students, provide strategies, help teachers use knowledge of their students' interests and backgrounds, and equip them with ways to base their instruction on individual differences.

 As the number of challenging students increased in the 1990s, interest in professional communities grew as a way of sustaining effective practices (Gersten et al., 2000). Research on incorporating peer coaching into professional development showed an increase in implementation on the content of training (Joyce & Showers, 1988). Fullen and Steigelbauer (1991) expressed a concern that formal professional development did not link what teachers learned and what happened in the classroom. Klingner (2004) stated that common barriers to implementing new practices were a lack of time to implement programs and inadequate support from administrators.

 Issues in staff development. In 1997, 29 national organizations, with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education, formed the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT). This group reported on a working conference held in 1999 that focused on effective professional development, best practices, and related policies (NPEAT, 2000). The group identified three sets of organizational and political conditions that appeared to facilitate the introduction and improvement of professional development: (a) supportive school wide culture and structure; (b)

systematic district level support; and (c) external policies aligned with influences on teachers and student learning.

Another issue of concern was that of "linkage" within professional development activities. In the same study that analyzed teacher preparation and professional development, The Teacher Preparation and Professional Development: 2000 (Parsad et al., 2001) study also addressed the issue of "linkages and continuity in professional development activities" (p.5). The survey produced a national profile on (1) teacher education; (2) teacher participation in formal professional development and collaborative activities related to teachers; and (3) teachers' feelings of preparedness of various classroom demands. The findings showed that 15% of teachers indicated their professional development was not linked to other programs in the school, while 38% reported it was linked to a moderate degree. In terms of follow-up sessions or additional training, 32% reported receiving neither, and 24% indicated that their professional development in applying what they had learned was not supported by school administrators.

In spite of broad staff development generalizations, lists, recommendations, and principles, the research linking reform methods of staff development did not seem to be sizable. After analyzing 13 different lists of the characteristics of effective professional development published in the last 10 years, Guskey (2003) raised concerns about the methodologies used, citing opinion surveys of researchers and educators. Among the organizations that developed the lists were American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, (ASCD), Educational Research Service, (ETS), Educational Testing Service (ETS), Eisenhower Professional Development Program, National Staff Development Council (NSDC), and National Institute for Science Education. Guskey concluded that most of the lists specified that they were "research-based," but that the research involved surveys of the opinion of researchers and educators. "In other words, researchers and practitioners generally favor these characteristics and believe they are important, despite the lack of verifying evidence" (¶ 3). The most frequently cited characteristics were enhancement of content and amount of time, but in the only two actual research based studies, time was unrelated to achievement.

Focus on content. As links were established between staff development and student achievement, the content of the staff development became important. Reitzeig (2003), surveyed professional development and school reform proposals and noted, "the relationship between professional development and student achievement is a function of both the quality of the

professional development processes and activities, and the efficacy of the substance of the professional development (i.e., the content skills or attitudes that the professional development is attempting to influence (¶ 21).

Smith and Desimone (2003) used data from the 1993-1994 and 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) to examine teachers' participation in higher quality professional development, policy supports (or incentives) for such participation, and whether professional development has become targeted more to teachers most in need according to school poverty and achievement, subject taught, and years of experience. SASS was a survey of public and private schools, school districts, principals, and teachers. First administered in 1987-88, it was repeated in 1993-94 and 1999-2000. Based on the survey data, Smith and Desimone indicated that teachers increased their participation in all areas of professional development, but that the greatest push was in content-focused development. Smith and Desimone noted that the question of whether professional development is truly improving teaching and learning cannot be answered, but that professional development has the potential to remain a positive reform tool.

District Involvement in Staff Development

Given the reform model of NCLB, the involvement of school districts in professional development was substantial. Spillane (1996) suggested that the role of school districts was to shape the opportunities that school practitioners have to learn about instruction in general and state policies in particular. Using a field study approach, Spillane focused on researching two school districts in Michigan. Data were collected through interviews with state policymakers, district office administrators, and school personnel. Spillane maintained that school districts had been ignored in current school reforms that focused on the state and federal government. He noted that local school districts matter because they can influence state policymakers' efforts to institute instructional reform by serving as proactive policymakers within their own districts on key instructional issues, such as staff development, curriculum guidelines, curricular materials, teacher supervision and student assessment.

Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet and Yoon (2002) examined the mechanics and processes districts used to provide high-quality in-service professional development for teachers based on a national probability study of district professional development coordinators in districts that received federal funding from the Eisenhower Professional Development Program, the U.S. government funding for a variety of professional development activities. The district

management techniques examined were (a) the alignment of professional development activities with state and district standards; (b) coordination among multiple professional development programs; (c) improvement efforts based on needs assessments, evaluation, and guidance; and (d) the amount of involvement of teachers in the planning of professional development efforts. The authors noted the critical role of school districts in setting the context for professional development activities. They referred to research that focused on professional development embedded in the daily lives of teachers, and noted that "districts often play a central role in its planning and implementation" (¶ 5).

According to Desimone et al., (2002) most of the literature about the district role in professional development was based on case studies of a few districts. Their study extended the case-study research by focusing on a national sample to examine which strategies were successful in fostering high quality professional development. They reviewed the literature on district roles and identified six features of best practices: three structural (type, duration, and collective participation), and three core features (content focus, active learning, and coherence).The study targeted 400 districts across the country, allowing for variation on poverty level. The response rate was 88% (363 Eisenhower coordinators) and was representative of 93% of the nation's school districts. The specific measures of the quality of district activities, were (a) the percent of the districts' participation in reform professional development activities; (b) the average time span of the districts' professional development activities, both reform and tradition; (c) the extent to which district workshops are characterized by collective participation; (d) the number of opportunities for active learning offered in in-district workshops and (e) the amount of emphasis the district places on targeting professional development activities to teachers of special populations of students (i.e., Title I teachers, high-poverty schools, low-achievement schools, special education teachers, and teachers of limited English proficiency students). The descriptive data showed that continuous improvement (establishing indicators and conducting needs assessments and evaluation) was "significantly related to increased opportunities for active learning and increased targeting of teachers of special populations of students (e/g., at-risk students)" (Desimone, et al., ¶ 80).

Massell (2000) suggested that districts acted as gatekeepers for federal and state policy by translating, interpreting, supporting or blocking actions that would affect their schools. Massell listed four major capacity-building strategies: (a) interpreting and using data; (b)

building teacher knowledge and skills; (c) aligning curriculum and instruction; and (d) targeting interventions on low-performing students and/or schools. Massell noted that although federal and state policy initiatives in the past tended to bypass or ignore the role of districts, "what districts do influences how schools as organizations address the performance goals set by states, and whether or not they have the necessary capacity to do so" (p. 6).

At the same time that districts act as gatekeepers, teachers surveyed in the NCES 1998 study reported that "increased time spent in professional development and collaborative activity was associated with the perception of significant improvement in teaching" (§18, 1999). Districts have the potential for providing in-depth professional development in crucial areas of teacher training, thus meeting teacher training needs, while concurrently satisfying current professional development models which call for more long-term and relevant staff development.

District Spending on Staff Development

Given the requirements of NCLB and the emphasis placed on improving teacher performance, what are district spending levels on staff development? Killeen, Monk and Plecki (2002) compared school district staff improvements expenditures across states and across time. They found that on average, districts direct 3% of their annual budget to professional staff development, which equate to approximately $200 per pupil. In addition, the amount spent on staff development has remained relatively stable through the 1990s. Obvious differences exist such as higher spending among larger and more urban school districts.

Odden, Archibald, Fermanich and Gallagher (2002) developed a methodology for organizing the costs of professional development. They reviewed the research and cost analyses on professional development expenditures and suggested that their cost-framework structure would help districts categorize professional development costs according to (a) teacher time; (b) training and coaching; (c) administration, materials, equipment and facilities; (d) travel and would help districts categorize professional development costs according to (1) teacher time; (2) training and coaching; (3) administration, materials, equipment and facilities; (4) travel and transportation; and (5) university tuition and conference fees. They noted that providing effective professional development is crucial for teachers, but that few researchers have studied the costs of providing such professional development.

Conclusion

The literature provided material for the theoretical framework of educational reform and its current application in the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. Within this theoretical context are those students placed at-risk of school failure. This latest movement in educational reforms heavily impacts these students. Juxtaposed next to these students are the educators who need to be fully trained to teach this challenging population. The link that tied these areas of concern together was staff development, which existed as a venue through which to train educators. The model presented in Figure 2.2 illustrates the impact of educational reforms on students placed at-risk of school failure, and the necessity of training educators to work with this body of students. This model was used to develop the research questions that guided this study.

The *No Child Left Behind Act*, growing out of the historical context of educational reform, has clearly formulated the policies but not the practices needed to meet the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure. At-risk students require trained educators who are aware of and able to handle the issues that accompany a diverse body of students. The educational impact of the NCLB Act, with increased testing and accountability, demanded more of educators than in the past. Professional staff development, mandated for schools that use Title I funds, and increasingly necessary for all schools, must seek to improve educators' understanding of how to teach students with disabilities, with special learning needs, and those with limited English proficiency (Cohen & Hill, 2001), as well as those who, although not identified with specific labels or categories, embody risk factors that affected their ability to succeed in school. With the increased role of federal, state and school districts in the policies impacting our most vulnerable students, the use of staff development at the district level is an important tool in student change and teacher growth. The content of such training needed to meet the educational reforms of a curricular nature that required increased testing, but should not neglect educational strategies to meet the needs of at-risk students.
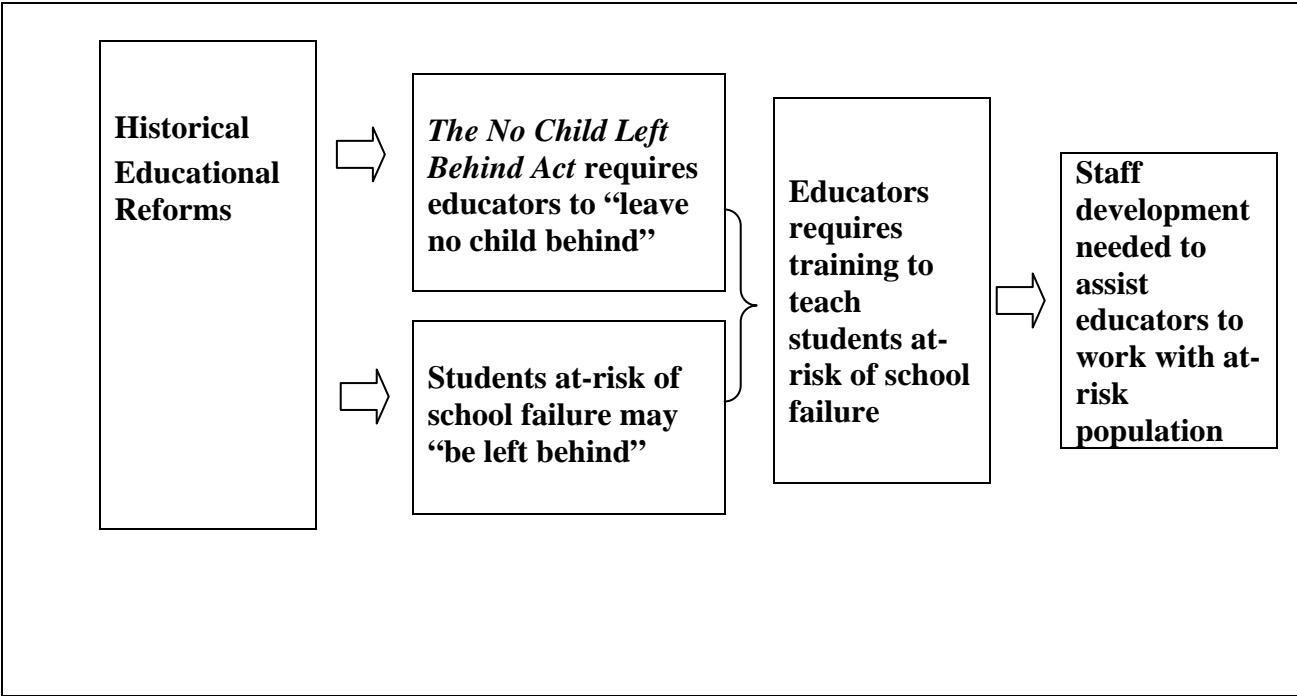
Figure 2.2 **Educational reforms impacted students at-risk of school failure and supported**

the need for district level staff development.

Although research exists on at-risk students and on staff development practices, a new inquiry into the content of staff development with regard to this particular group of students was needed. An understanding of the content of school district staff development courses would contribute to identifying areas of possible need for staff development to assist educators in understanding students placed at-risk of school failure. Information gathered through this research could inform school district personnel about the training in this area. Also, information gained is useful in analyzing if current practices match perceived needs of educators, or if the increased emphasis on accountability and testing has subsumed other areas of need for educator training. The method used to obtain the information required to answer these questions is found in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

Overview of the Method

The objective of this research was to analyze the staff development programs utilized by school districts to determine the extent to which the content of these programs was related to the needs of at-risk students. This research goal was accomplished via a content analysis of staff development course documents. As stated in Chapter I, the research questions that guided this inquiry were:

1. During the school year 2003-2004, how many staff development courses aimed at meeting the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure were offered to educators?

2. How much of this specific training was done relative to content-based staff development?

This chapter contains information about the content analysis method of research used to gather data to answer these research questions. Information about the content analysis research method is included along with information about the population of documents and sample selection. The nine basic steps in completing content analysis as described by Neuendorf (2002) are included, with their application to this particular research.

Overview of Content Analysis

Trochim (2001) defined content analysis as the analysis of text documents used to analyze a variety of written data such as textbooks, magazines, newspapers, letters, and books, as well as non-paper media such TV. Fraenkel & Wallen (2000) noted that content analysis requires the synthesizing and quantifying of information, a methodology often used in conjunction with other methods. Content analysis involves the "systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods" (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998, p. 2). Content analysis assumes that the content itself holds answers to important questions generated from previous events. This use of content analysis infers that the "content is itself the consequence of antecedents, conditions or process that have shaped its construction" (p. 7). An example of this would be a suicide note, which is often recognized as a link to and consequences of a person's emotional and psychological state (Riffe et al.).

In content analysis, not only are categories analyzed, but the symbols or themes in the content are also seen as "consequences of the dominant culture, communication messages that reflect the images, ideas, or themes, of the culture or its leader" (Riffe et al. 1998, p. 8). Researchers who use content analysis desire to do more than just describe. They seek "to answer theoretically significant questions by inferring the meaning or consequences of exposure to content or inferring what might have contributed to the content's form and meaning" (Riffe et al., p. 28). This method

> is the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, in order to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context. (p. 20)

However, a simple description of the content is not enough. What is desired in the use of content analysis, besides answering basic research questions, is to infer meaning and themes, both about antecedent conditions, and about the consequences of the content. Content analysis has been used extensively in the fields of communication, journalism, sociology, psychology and business (Neuendorf, 2002). Although print and visual communication media most often use content analysis to study messages, the "study of any type of message pool may be deemed a content analysis" (Neuendorf, p. 17).

Even though its application in education appears to be limited, a review of the literature uncovered a sample of the use of content analysis in education. It has been used to analyze the views of teachers and administrators about the inclusion of students with disabilities in educational settings (Nelson, 2000), and to analyze selected books used in the teaching of African literature in American colleges and universities (Ifeanyi, 1990). Using a content analysis of data sets of standardized testing, Genovese (2002) investigated changes in the importance society placed on different types of cognitive skills, while Duhaney (1999) examined the content and characteristics of state education agencies' policy/position statements on inclusion.

Quantitative content analysis is a method by which counts of key categories can be produced and used to analyze characteristics of symbols, themes, or messages. Neuendorf (2002) stated that "content analysis has as its goal a numerically based summary of a chosen message

set" (p. 114). Assigning numeric values to the words, phrases and titles, allows the researcher to count and then analyze the characteristics of the underlying message.

In this study, the guiding research questions relating to staff development were analyzed within one media, school district staff development course documents. Content analysis allowed the research questions to be answered directly from the course documents.

Data Sources

Out of 16,992 school districts nationwide, the 100 largest school districts in the United States were targeted as the data sources. One rationale for using this group of school districts as the data sources was that, given their student population, they have characteristics that mirror the factors identified in the literature review as contributing to placing students at-risk of school failure. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2002), which compiled the listing, these school districts served more students per school (708 compared to 504 in an average school) and they had a higher mean pupil/teacher ratio (17.2 to 1 compared to 16.0 to 1 for the average school district). Fewer students in these schools completed high school as a percentage of all students (4.5 percent compared to 5.5 percent), the participation in Title I programs was 90%, and these schools served a high percentage of minority students. Following are additional descriptors of the 100 largest school districts as defined by NCES:

1. Almost one in four public school students was served in one of these districts; about 11,050,902 students;
2. These schools served 23% of the total number of public school students and employed 21% of all teachers;
3. Twenty-five of the school districts had over 100,000 students;
4. Thirty-three states and jurisdictions had at least one of these districts;
5. Fifty-three percent of the students were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch participation;
6. These school districts served 39% of the 19.2 million minority public school students; Thirty-five of the districts had a dropout rate between 3% and 10%;

7. Twelve and one-half percent of the students had individualized education programs (IEPs).

According to Riffe et al. (1998), purposive samples "require specific research justification other than lack of money and availability" (p. 86). The specific justification for this

purposive sample was that the 100 largest school districts in the U.S. reflected the factors identified in the research that placed students at-risk of school failure. It was hypothesized that the staff development course documents from these school districts contained the content that answered the research questions. Therefore, the targeted data sources were the staff development course catalogs from the 100 largest school districts in the United States. The data sources for this study were obtained from the staff development offices of these 100 largest school districts, and were the staff development documents that listed the courses that specifically targeted students placed at-risk of school failure.

Procedures

As described by Neuendorf (2002) there are nine basic ordered steps that are typically involved in the process of content analysis: (a) theory and rationale,(b) conceptualization, (c) operationalization, (e) coding scheme, (f) sampling, (f) training and pilot reliability, (g) coding, (h) final reliability, and (i) tabulation and reporting. An explanation of these steps follows, with their applicability to this research.

Theory and Rationale

In developing a theory and rationale, Neuendorf (2002) suggested asking what content will be examined and why. Because they are the gateway to professional training for a substantial number of educators, the content for this analysis were school district staff development course documents. Analyzing this particular form of content allowed the content analysis approach to be built on the theoretical basis defined in Chapter Two. This theoretical basis suggested that because the latest school reform movement of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) emphasized student testing and accountability, staff development courses would be focused primarily on curriculum and subject matter content rather than on strategies that assisted teachers who work with the challenging population of the at-risk student.

Conceptualization

In this study, the concept to be measured was the staff development training offered to educators in the academic year 2003-2004 by school districts. The research objective was to analyze staff development course catalogs to determine the extent to which educators of students placed at-risk of school failure could learn, through staff development, effective strategies for working with this diverse and challenging group of students. As noted in the literature review, staff development is one method of ensuring that educators are provided with appropriate

training. Analyzing staff development course catalogs provided data on staff development activities offered to educators and therefore answered the research questions regarding the quality and character of staff development courses (relative to other courses) offered to educators working with students placed at-risk.

Operationalization

Operationalization is the process of developing measures; in order to develop measures, content must be reduced to units that can be measured. In content analysis these are known as study units. According to Riffe et al. (1998), a study unit is the content that is selected and defined by the content analyst. The types of study units in content analysis are the (a) sampling units (the physical units selected from a study of the entire content of interest), (b) the recording units ("elements of content that will be classified in the coding process" (p. 59), (c) the context units (those elements that cue researchers to the context that should be examined in assigning the content to categories), and (d) the analysis units (how the units are analyzed statistically to test the hypothesis and answer the research questions).

For this research, the study units emerged from the literature review and were based on (a) the factors that place students at-risk of school failure, and (b) the role of staff development to train educators. The sampling units were the staff development course documents (catalogs), the recording units were the individual course descriptions, the context units were the course titles and topics used in the descriptions, and the analysis units were the words and phrases. Table 3.1 presents an example of study units from three school districts' staff development course catalogs.

The next step in the process of operationalization was to define the categories. Holsti (1969) suggested the following principles of category construction. Categories should (a) reflect the purposes of the researcher, (b) be exhaustive, (c) be mutually exclusive, (d) be independent, and (e) be derived from a single classification principle.

Holsti (1969) considered the first principle as "the most important requirement of categories" (p. 95). This principle required the researcher to define the variables (conceptual definition) and to specify the indicators that determine if a given "content datum" (p. 95) fell within the category (operational definition).

The second principle defined by Holsti required that all categories be exhaustive, and specified that "all relevant items in the sample of documents under study must be capable of

Table 3.1: Sample Study Units for Staff Development Course Documents (catalogs)

Sampling Units	Recording Units	Context Units	Analysis Units
School District	*Individual Course Descriptions*	*Course Titles and Topics*	*Words and Phrases*
School District #1	This in-service provides elementary self-contained *ESOL* classroom teachers with strategies and techniques to use with *LEP students*	Methods of teaching English to speakers of other languages	*ESOL* *LEP students*
School District #2	Participants will explore current brain-based strategies for managing student *behavior*. Likewise, we will explore the connections between effective instruction and student *behavior*. This session will be a hands- on, energetic exploration of the human brain and learning and how such knowledge impacts *behavior* in positive ways.	*Classroom management* with the brain in mind	*Classroom management behavior*
School District # 3	This session is about understanding and encouraging *social and emotional* growth among gifted, talented and creative youth. Practical ideas and research, as well as support and advice from other educators will be the focus for this group session.	Meeting the *Social Emotional Needs* of Gifted Students	*Social/Emotional*

Italicized words are coded words.

being placed in a category" (p.99). This requirement proved to be a challenge for this research because words or phrases often appeared in two categories. This difficulty with the exhaustive category is more fully explained in the limitations section of Chapter III.

Categories should also be exclusive. An example from Riffe, et al. (1998), is that of magazine articles about environmental issues being classified as pro-environment or anti-environment. Logically, the same articles cannot be part of both classification systems.

The principle of independence required that "placing a recoding unit in one category does not influence the placing of other units" (Riffe et al. 1998, p. 76). Holsti (1969) suggested that this rule is hard to satisfy when units are scaled along a dimension such as intensity.

The final principle is that each category is derived from a single classification principle that "separates different levels of analysis" (Riffe et al. 1985, p. 77). The example offered by Riffe is that of a system for classifying news stories with emphasis on two dimensions, geographic locality (local, national, international), and topic (economic, political, cultural, social). To satisfy the principle of independence, each of these two dimensions required a separate rule for classifying units.

The six categories used for this content analysis were derived from the literature on students placed at-risk of school failure. These categories reflected the principles of category construction as defined by Holsti (1969).

In two categories, the words and phrases were divided into subcategories. The Diversity subcategories were diversity, ethnicity and multicultural. The Challenging Students category contained the subcategories of behavior and discipline. These two categories were subdivided to cluster similar words and phrases. All categories with their words and phrases, hereinafter referred to as indicators are shown in Table 3.2. Additional lines were added on the coding sheet for the coding of data that was important to this study, but that was not defined by an indicator.

Coding Scheme

Once the units of data collection were defined, the information was converted into a coding scheme that became the protocol for the research. The coding scheme required two parts: (a) a codebook that explained each variable to be measured; and (b) a single case coding form

Table 3.2: Categories and Indicators

At-Risk Students	Diversity	ESOL Students
All students and especially those at risk	*Diversity (subcategory)*	Second language learners
High-risk behavior	Bilingual	LEP Students
Educationally disadvantaged	Diversity	Limited English students
Causal factors of school failure	Diverse students with educational challenges	Diverse learners
Students identified by race, gender, and/or socio/economic status	Culturally diverse students	
Title I	Cultural diversity	
	Ethnicity (subcategory)	
	Issues of ethnicity	
	Ethnic groups	
	Ethnically diverse schools	
	Multicultural (subcategory)	
	Multicultural education	
	Multicultural growth	
	Multiculturally infused lesson	

Special Needs Students	Challenging Students	Social/Emotional Areas
Students with special needs	*Behavior (subcategory)*	Social skills
Educational needs of students	Challenging situations	Anger management
Educationally disadvantaged	Disruption	Impulse control
	Behavior problems	Empathy
	Behavior management	Resiliency
	Behavior strategies	Self-worth
	Behavior interventions	Self-discipline
	Student misbehavior	Social competence
	Classroom behavior	Social/emotional needs
	Behavior plan	Intervention
	Discipline (subcategory)	Prevention
	Discipline	
	Discipline techniques	
	Effective discipline	
	Classroom disruption	
	Classroom management	
	Emotional and behavior problems of students	

identified with a letter and number, with spaces for numeric information. The information in the codebook and the coding form corresponded.

Riffe et al. (1998) suggested the following approach for protocol organization in the codebook: (a) introduction of specific goals of the study and major concepts, (b) specification of the procedures governing how the content is to be processed, (c) specifying how each category is used in the content analysis, and (d) listing the instructions to be used by the coders to assign values to particular categories. The protocol for this study can be found in Appendix A, Staff Development Course Catalog Content Analysis Codebook. The parts of this codebook were the Introduction, Method/Procedure, Definition of Terms, Demographics, Staff Development Courses, and Courses with Coded Words.

The second part of the coding scheme was the single case coding form, which identified the variables explained in the codebook. The Coding Form for Staff Development Course Document Content Analysis provided space for one coder to enter the information. The school district information was identified with a letter and a number that corresponded to the definition of terms and the directions as outlined in the codebook. The protocol for the coding form is found in Appendix B.

Sampling

The process of sampling the data sources for this research follows:

(1) An Internet search of the 100 largest school districts was conducted. The search determined which districts had online retrievable staff development course documents for 2003-2004. This group of retrievable staff development course documents was downloaded and printed and served as the first step in document retrieval. In all cases, these documents were the school districts' course catalogs for the school year 2003-2004.

(2) School districts without retrievable online staff development course documents were contacted by letter or e-mail. The contact person for each school district was found by visiting the districts' websites, or by using the *Directory of Public Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies 2000-2001* (NCES, 2002). The letter or e-mail provided a brief description of the study with a request for course catalogs to be returned via e-mail or mail. The letter format included a self-addressed large mailing envelope for school districts to mail back the requested documents. A copy of the letter and e-mail request are available in Appendix C and Appendix D.

(3) School districts that failed to respond to the letter or e-mail request within a three-week period were sent a second request by e-mail or letter.

(4) As the final step in the data retrieval process, school districts that failed to respond with hard copies sent by mail, or by an e-mail attachment that contained the requested course documents, were contacted by phone.

Chapter IV contains a complete analysis of the results of sampling the data sources.

Training and Pilot Reliability

The collection of objective information from staff development course documents was the purpose of this content analysis. To ensure that the procedure was consistently applied, reliability had to be achieved. "The core notion of reliability is simple: the measurement instrument applied to observations must be highly consistent over time, place, and circumstance" (Riffe et al., 1998, p. 105).

To determine reliability for this study, I coded a subset of course documents, by applying the coding rules from the codebook to a pilot group of staff development course catalogs from three separate school districts. The 100 largest U.S. school districts were divided into approximately three sections: the largest one-third (33 school districts), the middle third (33 school districts), and the smallest third (34 school districts).

For the pilot test of reliability, one available staff development course document was chosen from each of these sections. These documents were coded once, and then coded again one week later. Comparing the results of the two codings assessed pilot reliability and determined if revisions were needed to the codebook. A 90 to 95% accuracy across the documents was expected. The results of the reliability tests are discussed in Chapter IV.

The pilot test also determined that minor revisions were needed to the codebook. These additions included noting which coded words or phrases were outside the parameters of the research, and noting Title I in the information for "Words/Phrases in At-Risk Category".

Coding

Once the documents were obtained, and pilot reliability had been verified, the data collection coding process involved the following steps:

1. A list of the total number of courses offered by each school district's staff development department was compiled;

2. Each available school district's staff development course catalog was read;

3. Appropriate variables (the words or phrases which had been coded on the coding form) were highlighted;

4. Variables were coded onto the coding form.

The coding instructions listed 13 variables. Variables l through 7 were informational items: (1) school district identification number; (2) month of document retrieval; (3) number of students in the school district; (4) total number of staff development courses; (5) total number of staff development courses with coded words; (6) level of education, PreK-12; and (7) number of full time equivalent teachers in the school district. Variables 8 through 13 were the coded words and phrases.

Delimitations. As coding proceeded, the following parameters of coding became apparent, and although I resolved the issues, they are still considered delimitations to the research study.

(1) Some school districts listed the course description and the targeted audiences in two separate entries. When "targeted audience" was a separate entry, and was not part of the course description , it was not coded. Coding words or phrases from a separate list of participants would have, in some cases, added substantially to the number of words and phrases that were counted; because this information was not part of the course description and was not available for all school districts, it was not coded.

(2) Although referral to special education was a factor listed in the research as placing students at-risk, (Alexander et al., 1997; Barrington & Hendrick, 1989; Kaufman et al. 1992; and Kominski et al. 2001), for this content analysis research, the term "special education" was not coded, because students being served under IDEA'97 have already been identified for intervention and support based on their disability. Nevertheless, as the research implies, participation in special education is a factor, which puts students at-risk, and therefore behaviors associated with students who receive special education services were coded. As an example, social skills for students with Autism were coded under Social/Emotional Areas.

(3) When words or phrases were found as indicators, but were outside the parameter of the research questions, they were not coded. For example, if the coded word diversity appeared in "diversity in plant life", I noted that it did not specifically relate to the

subject of the research questions. In all cases, non-coded words were added to the coding sheet, and are discussed in Chapter IV.

(4) On-line courses and courses attached to or offered in connection with universities, for university credit, were not counted.

(5) Courses listed for classified personnel (bookkeeper, secretary, bus driver, etc) were not included in the total count of courses. However, courses for instructional assistants or paraprofessionals working in a classroom setting were included.

(6) The same course offered for different grade levels was counted by each occurrence. Because the courses targeted a specific grade level, it was assumed that the content would be different for each grade level.

(7) Additions to the indicators were added on the coding sheet if they consistently appeared and fit into the parameters of the coding. These additions include poverty (Students At-Risk category); diverse, diverse needs, cultures, cultural, culture, and ethnic identify (Diversity category); ESOL, minority, ELL, speakers of other languages, ESL, limited and non-English speaking families and students, linguistically diverse, and immigrant students (ESOL category); challenging behaviors, disruptive student, behavior support, Functional Behavioral Assessment, FBA, Behavior Intervention Plan, BIP, difficult students, and behavior assessment (Challenging Students category); and emotional well-being, social emotional development, social emotional performance, self-esteem, and self-control (Social/Emotional category)

(8) Coded words or phrases often appeared in more than one category, causing a decision to be made about placement of the word in a particular category. For example, the title "Cultural Diversity" also contained the word "behavior" in the course description. When this occurred, the coded words were placed in the category where the title appeared. In another district, one course, *Individual Education Program of Students With Special Needs* had indicators in five categories: pre-referral intervention; behavioral intervention plan; behavioral objectives; diverse learner; and students with special needs. Because the indicator special needs also appeared in the title of the course, the words were coded under that indicator.

(9) Following the recommendations of the National Staff Development Council (2001), most school districts offered a variety of staff development activities, which included workshops, study groups, independent and individual study, individual and group action research, conferences, seminars, educational travel, professional training, classroom visitation, and college coursework. For the purposes of answering the research questions for this study, only staff development course documents were coded, even though many school districts consider this form of staff development to be only one part of their on-going professional training.

These judgments were made to preserve the integrity of the research.

Limitations. As coding proceeded, several limitations to the research study were evident. They were:

(1) Only available staff development course documents were coded. School districts often offered additional courses, but they were not considered as part of this study. Only in-services and workshops specifically offered by the professional or staff development offices were coded, even though other staff development may have been offered by other district departments or individual schools. Even so, the possibility exists that some staff development courses that originated from staff development offices may have been missed, because they were not part of the documents that were analyzed.

(2) Staff development courses were counted if they appeared in the staff development course documents: courses may have been cancelled after the documents were retrieved, but because the content analysis only counted offered courses, not courses held, cancelled courses may have been counted. In some cases the staff development catalog listed a course with the notation "cancelled"; these courses were not counted.

(3) School districts approached the task of describing staff development courses, workshops and in-services in different formats. Some school districts limited descriptions of their courses to 1-2 sentences; others had paragraphs or pages of descriptions, including goals and objectives for the courses. In all cases, the retrieved course descriptions served as the documentation for the coding which meant that some course descriptions had more coded words based on the length of the course description. For those staff development documents with extensive course

descriptions, only the description used in the "general objectives" were used in the coding.

(4) Following the recommendations of the National Staff Development Council (2001), most school districts offered a variety of staff development activities, which included workshops, study groups, independent and individual study, individual and group action research, conferences, seminars, educational travel, professional training, classroom visitation, and college coursework. For the purposes of answering the research questions for this study, only staff development course documents were coded, even though many school districts consider this form of staff development to be only one part of their on-going professional training.

Final Reliability

After the remaining available district documents were coded, the first three were recoded and compared to the initial results. This provided a final reliability check to ensure that the coding process had not changed due to experience or fatigue. The results of the final reliability check were assessed and are discussed in Chapter IV.

Tabulation and Reporting

The first step in the tabulation and reporting of the results consisted of counting the total number of courses that each school district offered during the 2003-2004 school year. In some cases, especially for those districts with a large number of courses, a list of compiled courses was verified to make sure that each course, even if held more than one time, was only counted once (some school districts offered the same course during the fall and again during the spring). School districts with a limited number of courses did not require this step. The number of courses offered by school districts ranged from 35 to 555.

Next, a word count in the course titles and course descriptions was tabulated. Tabulation was made on the frequency of occurrence for each word or phrase, whether in the title of the course, in a topic heading, or in the course description. This counting was undertaken because, as Weber (1985) noted, "counting is based on the assumption that higher relative counts . . . reflect higher concern with the category" (p.56).

This word count was entered onto the coding form. Once the coding was complete, the information from the coding form was entered into an Excel spreadsheet from which it was imported into the MegaStats 2.0 software program for data analyses.

Summary

Chapter III provided an overview of the methodology used in the research, described how the coding scheme and coding form for the content analysis were developed, and included how both the pilot and the final reliability was achieved. This chapter provided information about the data sources for this study, and described how the course documents were collected from the data sources.

Coding of the staff development documents proceeded concurrently with retrieval of the course documents. After each document was coded, the results were entered onto the coding form. Each coding form was then entered into an Excel spreadsheet, which organized the data by school district. Mega Stats was used to merge the content analysis coding into data for analysis. Chapter IV contains a summary of the results of the document retrieval process, and an analysis of the coding of the staff development course documents.

CHAPTER IV

Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the staff development training for K-12 educators in the U.S. that specifically addressed the academic and social well being of students at-risk of school failure. The two research questions that defined this study were (a) During the school year 2003-2004, what specific staff development courses aimed at meeting the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure were offered to educators; and (b) How much of this training was done relative to content-based staff development? A quantitative content analysis approach was used to conduct the research. Question number one was answered through this study. The second question was not answerable: an explanation can be found in the conclusion of this chapter.

In this chapter, a profile of the data sources is presented followed by an explanation of the content analysis of the staff development documents. First, details of the retrieval rates are discussed, with a description of some of the verbal or written responses encountered during the process. Next, the distribution of staff development documents by school district size is described. An account of the reliability of the coding includes a discussion of the changes made to the coding form, followed by an analysis of categories and indicators. Throughout this discussion, the staff development courses that answered question one above are discussed. Finally, the themes and patterns that emerged from the content analysis are discussed.

Profile of Data Sources

The 100 largest school districts in the U.S. were targeted as the data sources for this study. Information on these school districts was available through the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2004). As explained in Chapter III, the task of retrieving the data sources was a multi-step process involving retrieval of documents from the Internet, by a request for documents via a letter or e-mail, and through phone calls to school district staff development offices.

Method and Rates of Retrieval

Some school districts had online course documents, which made retrieval from those school districts relatively easy. However, other school districts with retrievable documents only posted documents for the first half of the school year: obtaining the rest of the course documents required a letter, an e-mail, or a telephone call, and in some cases, were not available.

For school districts that did not have online retrievable documents, a letter or e-mail was sent, eliciting variable response rates. Some school districts responded immediately to the e-mail or letter request for documents, while other school districts required multiple inquiries. In some cases, all four methods of retrieving the data sources were necessary; e.g., one school district's staff development office may have received an e-mail, a letter, a second e-mail or letter, and a telephone call. Table 4.1 provides a description of the process with the final results, by method, of retrieving the data sources.

Of the 100 potential data sources, staff development course documents were retrieved from 40 sources. Twenty-four percent were retrieved on-line from the school district's staff development website, 11% were retrieved via e-mail or mail, 3% were retrieved personally, and 2% were sent after a final phone call (following a second e-mail or letter request), for an overall 40% return rate.

School District Responses

School district responses fell into two groups: those which acquiesced with the request and provided the documents or who already had them on-line, and those who did not provide documents. A summary of each of these two groups follows.

Providers of documents. A number of school district staff development directors were particularly receptive and quickly answered the request for course catalogs. At least nine e-mailed the catalogs as PDF files, which, in some cases contained a substantial number of documents, and thus required the directors to expend considerable time in satisfying the request. Frequently, staff development directors expressed an interest in the topic, and offered suggestions or advice.

In some cases, school district respondents, usually the Director of Staff Development, provided the requested materials, but with a caution that the district followed the guidelines of the National Staff Development Council in their delivery of professional development for the educators in their districts. Consequently, the provided staff development course documents could not be construed as the only method of professional training.

For example, one respondent, after agreeing to send the documents, stated,

> However, I must tell you that in keeping with what we know about professional
> development standards, our best efforts and successes are not in the form of after
> school classes. These are offered as a way for teachers to advance on the pay

Table 4.1 Results by Method of Retrieval from 100 Potential Data Sources

Method	N=(100)
Retrieved from school district web site	24
Sent e-mail and received correct document by e-mail attachment	6
Sent e-mail and received correct document by mail	2
Sent letter and received correct document by e-mail attachment	3
Personally retrieved hard copy of correct document	3
Total Number of Retrieved Documents	40

scale while fulfilling licensure requirements. Most of our professional

development is job embedded and takes place at the school site. These efforts

include reading strategies for at risk readers, math instruction, ESL strategies,

differentiation, cooperative learning, etc. Our models include observations in

model classrooms, explicit teaching of the strategies, modeling strategies,

providing feedback and coaching (S,D., personal communication, July 20,2004).

Non-providers of documents. Some districts that did not comply with the request sent a letter or e-mail to explain their district's position. Some statements noted that their district's professional development opportunities were not yet finalized, or that documents were not available outside the district. Some cited budget constraints, and others replied that they did not consider it effective to maintain a course catalog. One staff development director wrote, "We offer a host of courses in reading, math and other content areas for teachers in all our schools, many of which are at-risk schools" (M.E.B., personal communication, July 20, 2004).

 A number of staff development offices sent incorrect catalogs (e.g., for the summer of 2004). Some school districts stated that staff development took place within the schools and there was no access to a central professional development catalog, and noted that NDSC best practices suggested that this request for course documents for staff development of an in-service or workshop nature was not in keeping with the current philosophy of professional development. This interpretation suggests a belief that only staff development activities of a reform nature are in keeping with best practices in the field of professional development, and that in-services or workshop traditional activities are incompatible with current views.

When contacted by telephone, a number of school district staff development departments provided explanations about their inability to produce course documents One district stated that they did not maintain a paper catalog, and that the course listings were accessible solely through a secure e-mail address, only available to teachers and administrators inside the district. As one staff development director stated, the documents "are historical records and access is limited to administrative status" (L.M., personal communication, June 10, 2004). Another staff development director explained that even for employees with e-mail accessibility, the document is a "moving target" which must be searched daily by topic and dates (T.C., personal communication, August 10, 2004). Other districts relied on individual district departments to conduct their own training and therefore did not have a central location for tracking district level

professional development. One district described access to the online catalog system as available only by teacher name, which meant it could "not be shopped by any person who is not an employee" (P.J.M., personal communication, July 19, 2004).

A number of school districts stated that they no longer published a comprehensive, paper catalog. One staff director wrote "we do not have a staff development department; rather our curriculum coordinators conduct the training for their content areas. Therefore, we do not spend unnecessary time creating comprehensive catalogs" (B.L.M., personal communication, June 3, 2004). Some school districts attempted to comply with the request for documents, but encountered trouble with their PDF files, or had already deleted the 2003 file to download new files. Some school districts only trained their staff in the summer. One school district replied to a telephone inquiry by stating that their "staff development department was disbanded last year. We have nothing. We can't even go online to sign up for classes" (Anonymous, personal communication, July 20, 2004). One staff development office required a research application, which was completed and submitted. However, the school district subsequently informed the researcher that there would be a significant charge for the documents. The offer was declined.

Distribution of Sample Documents

As noted in Chapter III, for ease of analysis, the largest 100 school districts were divided into approximately three sections based on size: the top third (33 school districts), the middle third (33 school districts) and the bottom third (34 school districts). Of the documents retrieved, 17 were from the largest third, 17 were from the middle third, and six were from the smallest third (Table 4.2). Taking into consideration the size of the school district, number of students and number of full time equivalent teachers, retrieval of the documents were evenly spread across the largest two-thirds of the school districts.

Analysis of Course Distribution by School District Size

As shown in Table 4.3, 5,915 total courses were offered by 40 of the 100 largest school districts through their staff development offices in the 2003-2004 school year. Of these, there were a total of 792 courses that fit the criteria for being counted as a course with relevant words based on the coding system. This was 13.4% of the total number of courses offered. This proportion was fairly consistent across each third of the school districts (15.5%, 11.8% and 11.5%). Of the 40 school districts sampled, only one of them offered zero targeted courses, and

Table 4.2 Number of School District Staff Development Documents, Students, and Full Time Equivalent Teachers from Top, Middle, and Bottom Thirds of 100 Largest School Districts

Strata	N of Documents	Number of Students	Number of Full Time Equivalent Teachers
Top one-third	17	87,703-435-261	4,548-23,945
Middle one-third	17	58,401-79,417	3,066-5,478
Bottom one-third	6	45,721-58,230	3,471-3,950

Table 4.3 Number of Targeted Courses by School District Size

District Size	Total Courses Offered	Courses With Targeted Words		
		N	%	Average per District
Top Third (n=17)	2592	403	15.5%	24
Middle Third (n=17)	2255	266	11.8%	16
Bottom third (n=7)	1068	123	11.5%	21
Total	5915	792	13.4%	

one school district had only one course. Both of these school districts were located in sparsely populated western states.

The number of targeted courses with coded words, or indicators, per school district size (divided into thirds), is also shown in Table 4.3. The bottom third of the districts had an average of 21 targeted courses, not far behind the top third of the districts with 24 targeted courses. Figure 4.1 shows the average number of courses with coded words by size of school district. The average number of courses for the top third was 24, while the bottom third had an average of 21 courses, not a notable difference based on size of school district. The middle third had an average of 16 coded courses, less than the number in the bottom third.
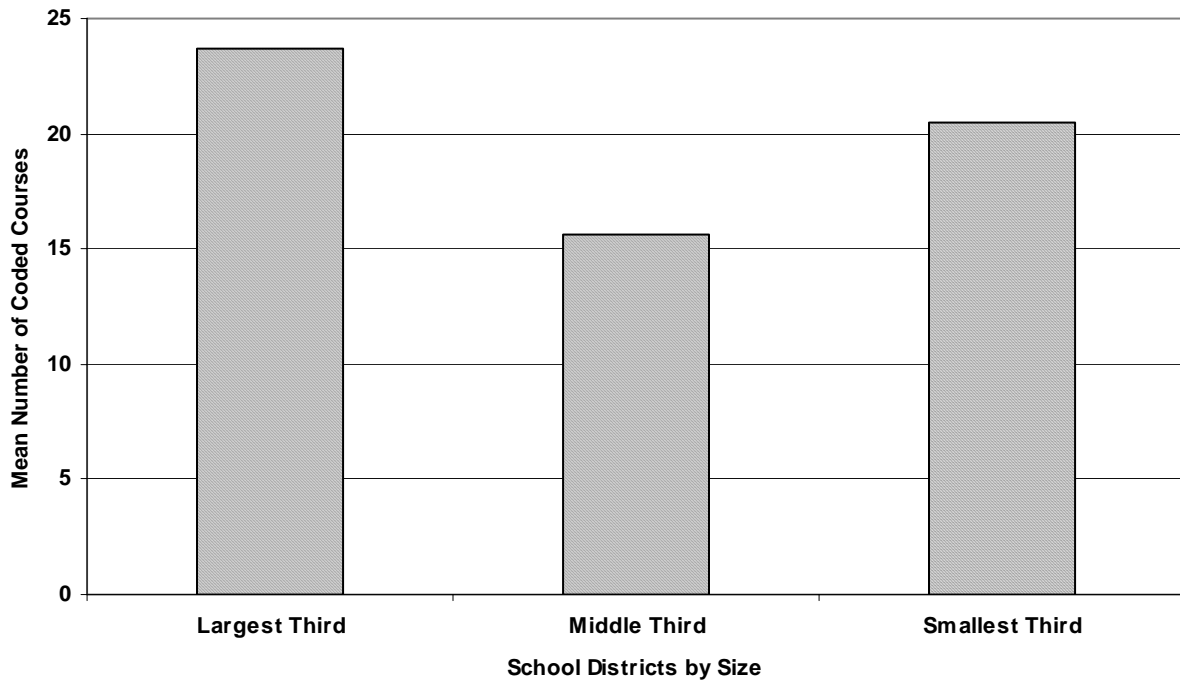
Figure 4.1: Average number of courses with coded words by size of school district

66

Table 4.4 shows the breakdown of the 40 school districts between size of district and number of coded courses in a comparison using school district size, number of full time equivalent teachers, and total number of courses. This table also shows the frequency of courses; looking at the number of courses over 500, there were 505 total courses offered by school district #6, 555 total courses for school district #21, and 454 total courses for school district #36. Therefore, each of the three sections of school districts contained at least one school district with one of the largest number of courses offered. However, in terms of the most courses with indicators, these were found in school district #1 (62 courses), school district #30 (40 courses), and school district #37 (53 courses). Some of the smaller school districts had almost the same amount of courses with coded words when compared with the largest one third.

A bivariate regression analysis was completed for three cases. The relationships are shown in the scatter plots (Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4). Although there was no relationship between district size and number of courses with coded words (r=.049, p=.766) (Figure 4.2), it is interesting to note that the two largest districts (outliers in terms of size) had relatively few targeted courses. Likewise, a bivariate regression analysis between the number of courses a district offered and district size produced identical results, (r=.049, p=.766) (Figure 4.3).

However, the bivariate regression analysis shown in Figure 4.4 showed that there was a fairly strong statistically significant relationship between the total number of courses and the number of courses with coded words. (r=.768, p=6.83) In general, school districts with more courses also had more courses with coded words (representing courses that were aimed at meeting the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure). The correlation coefficient for this relationship was .57.

Table 4.4 Breakdown of 40 School Districts from the 100 Largest Districts

School District	Number of Students	Total Courses	Courses with Indicators	Full Time Equivalent Teachers
1	435261	115	21	23935
2	368625	91	22	18608
3	231655	40	2	11769
4	208462	73	9	11197
5	184360	60	4	10927
6	161548	505	80	10637
7	156412	147	30	11574
8	153871	178	24	8804
9	150681	104	11	8410
10	134180	41	7	8561
11	133723	296	49	7648
12	113730	303	25	7486
13	113207	269	62	6389
14	106898	55	3	6834
15	97985	140	15	6039
16	93094	110	39	4466
17	87703	65	0	4548
18	85276	74	3	5478
19	79417	128	3	4779
20	79001	77	3	3867
21	76586	555	26	5175
22	74491	38	7	4325
23	73158	131	9	3093
24	71328	67	4	3367
25	70597	154	28	3785
26	68925	106	12	5044
27	68583	63	5	4415
28	67669	51	6	4820
29	64976	268	17	4102
30	63739	238	40	4269
31	63417	63	23	3957
32	61517	130	38	3356
33	59578	112	21	2642
34	58401	35	7	3065
35	58230	63	8	3950
36	54646	454	50	3158
37	52520	311	53	3497
38	50850	102	6	3047
39	47117	20	1	2015
40	45721	83	5	3471
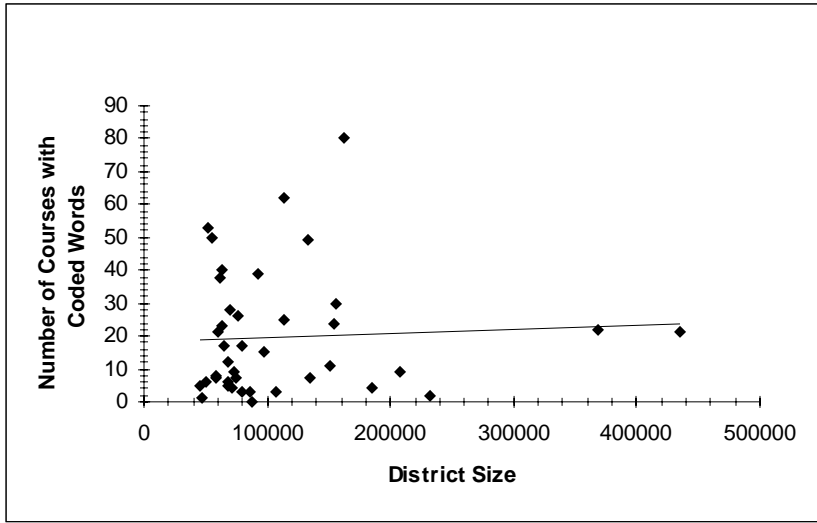
Figure 4.2 **Scatter plot of number of courses with coded words by district size**
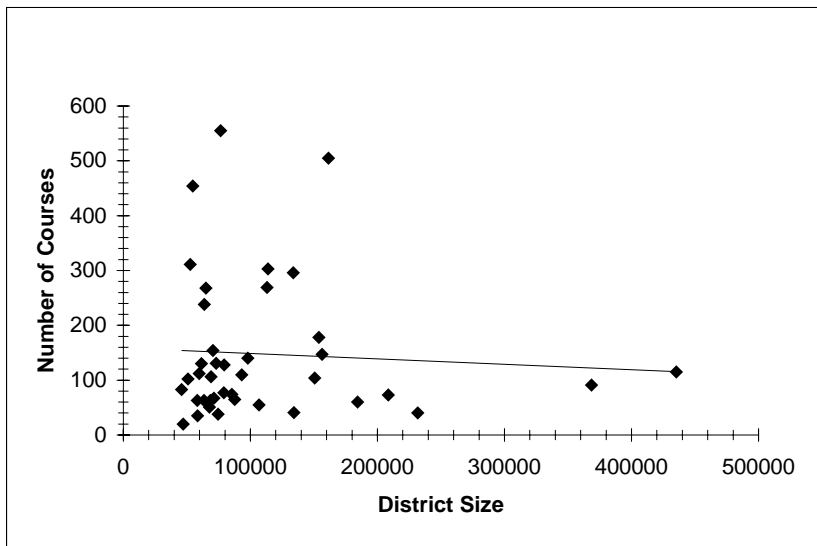
Figure 4.3 **Scatter plot of total number of courses with district size**
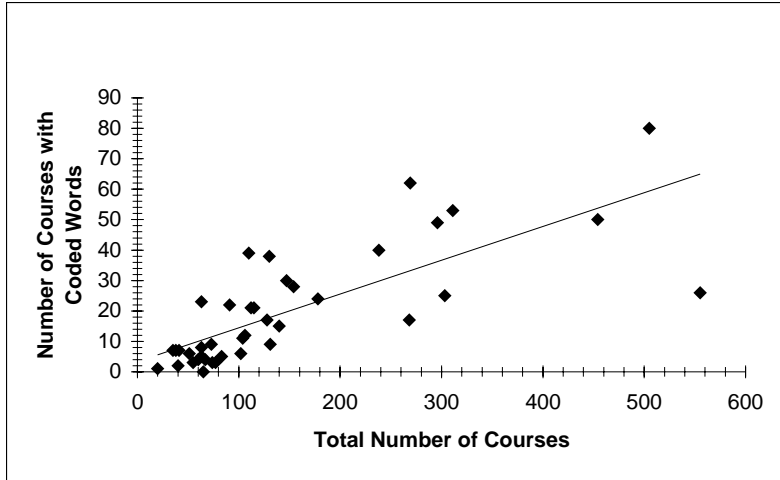
Figure 4.4: **Scatter plot of total number of courses with number of courses with coded words**

Reliability of Coding

Before coding of all documents began, reliability of the coding process was evaluated by coding pilot documents. As outlined in Chapter III, pilot and final reliability of the coding was achieved by coding three staff development course documents, with one document chosen from each of the three sections of school districts (divided by size). Pilot #1 (district #22, in the largest third) informed the coding process. The initial coding process elicited substantial mismatches for the pilot district. The mismatches occurred when it was noted that coded words in certain categories and courses appeared that were irrelevant to the study and the analysis of data. For example, the coded word "diversity" appeared in "landscape diversity", and the coded word "behavior" appeared in reference to teacher behavior. Because the use of these words was not germane to the study's discussion, the decision was made to note the irrelevant words, but not to count them as part of the total number of coded words or courses. Counting these words would have made the tracking of data inconsistent with the end results.

Table 4.5 contains a list of courses and indicators that were deemed irrelevant to the study. After the process was refined, Pilot #1 was recoded. Pilot #2 (district #53, representing documents from the middle third of school districts) was coded three times for similar reasons. A third pilot (district #93) was coded twice with 100% reliability each time (there was only one course and three coded words in one category, making coding relatively easy). Overall final pilot reliability for all three districts was achieved at 97.5%.

With these coding parameters established, the rest of the remaining 37 documents were coded. When coding was totally completed, the initial three pilot documents were re-coded to check for any changes due to experience or fatigue. The final reliability was achieved at 100%. Based on the reliability, there is no likely reason to suspect bias in the coding of the documents.

Description of Courses By Categories and Indicators

Distribution of Categories

After reliability was achieved, the categories were analyzed to determine which category had the largest number of total courses with coded words. As shown in Figure 4.5, the most used category, containing almost one-third of the courses, was Challenging Students (32%). This was followed by ESOL (28%), Diversity (17%), Social/Emotional (14%), At-Risk (5%) and Special Needs (4%). The number of total courses in each category ranged from a low of 29 in the Special Needs category, to a high of 254 in the Challenging Students category. The ESOL category had 219 total courses followed by the Diversity category, with 135 courses, the Social/Emotional category, with 113 courses, and the At-Risk category with 42 courses. The category with the smallest number of courses was Special Needs (Table 4.6).

Distribution of Indicators

An analysis of the coded words, or indicators, was undertaken to ascertain if a pattern existed in the use of these coded words. The category with the largest total indicator word count (535) was Challenging Students. In this category, the subcategory, Behavior, received 459 word counts, with 175 specifically for "behavior", and 128 for "classroom management". The indicator "behavior management" received 28. The other subcategory, Discipline, received a

Table 4.5 Examples of Indicators Used in Ways Irrelevant to Data Analysis

School District Number	Mismatched Indicators	Course Titles
3	animal *behavior*	*Behavior* Environment in Captivity
3	*cultural* uses of plants	*Cultural* Uses of Plants
7	landscape *diversity*	Landscape *Diversity*
8	administrative *behavior*	Teacher *Behavior*
13	academic *disciplines*	G/T Differentiated Curriculum
	across the *disciplines*	G/T Creative Strategies
22	*diversity*	Sexual Harassment
32	*behavior*	7 Habits of Highly Effective People
44	energy *behavior*	Energy *Behavior*
	energy conservation in *behavior*	Energy *Behavior* in Conservation
53	*multicultural* jewelry	*Multicultural* Jewelry
	discipline specific	Fine Arts Focus
	disciplined approach	Building Community and Character in the Elementary Classroom

Italicized words are indicators.
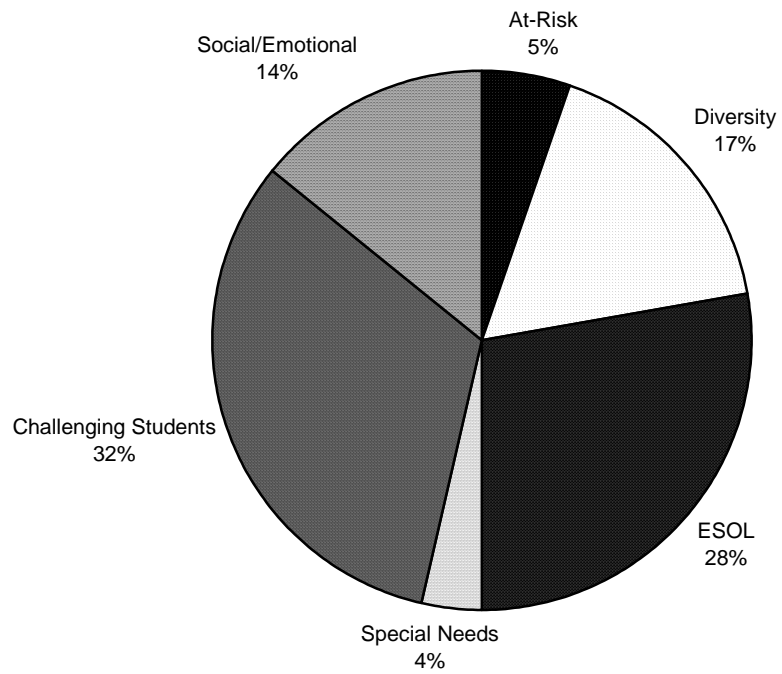
Figure 4.5 **Percent of courses in relevant category (n=792)**

Table 4.6 Total Number of Courses with Indicators and Total Number of Indicators By Category

Category	Total Courses with Indicators		Total Indicators in Each Category	
	N	%	N	%
Challenging Students	254	32	533	33
ESOL	219	28	487	30
Diversity	135	17	281	17
Social/Emotional	113	14	216	13
At-Risk	42	5	61	4
Special Needs	29	4	45	3
Total	792	100	1623	100

total indicator word count of 74. The category that received the second largest total indicator word count was ESOL, with a count of 487. Four categories received counts over 200. The categories receiving the lowest indicator word count were At-Risk Students (61), and Special Needs Students (45).

Total word counts for each indicator revealed that in the At-Risk category, "Title I" appeared 18 times and "poverty" appeared 16 times. Because poverty is a requisite for Title I participation, it is understandable why these two coded words appeared at almost the same rate. The indicator "at-risk" occurred 17 times. The indicator "all students and especially those at-risk" was only counted eight times.

In the Diversity category, the indicator "cultural" was coded 62 times, with a derivative of cultural, "culture" coded 38 times, and "cultures" coded 18 times. In addition, "multicultural" appeared 38 times. The word "cultural" could have been coded under the subcategory "diversity," or "multicultural". Because it frequently appeared with "diversity," it was decided to code it under that subcategory. Words pertaining to Diversity also appeared with regularity: "diversity" was counted 46 times and "diverse learners" 36 times. A combination of the two words, "cultural diversity" was counted 12 times.

In the ESOL category, the indicator "ESOL' appeared 156 times, followed by "ESL" (English as a Second Language), 82 times, and "ELL" (English Language Learners), 32 times. All of these indicators are acronyms for English for Speakers of Other Language Students. Also in the ESOL category was the indicator "bilingual", which appeared 72 times. "LEP (limited English proficient) students" and "Limited English Students" received a combined total count of 46.

In the Special Needs Category, the indicator "Students with Special Needs" appeared 30 times, with a comparable indicator, "special needs students" appearing 12 times. In the Social/Emotional category, the indicator "intervention" appeared 96 times, followed by a similar indicator, "prevention", which appeared 41 times. The indicator "social skills" received a word count of 40.

As coding progressed, it became apparent that additional indicators were needed. For example, the ESOL category (as previously discussed), contained similar words or acronyms for ESOL. Likewise, in the Social/Emotional category, words like "self-esteem" and "self-

confident" were felt to be appropriate for the category and akin to the original coded indicators based on the coding form. Tables 4.7 a-f shows indicators by category and frequency. The original indicators are bolded: added indicators are not. Some of the original indicators were not observed in the coding, while other similar, added indicators, appeared frequently.

A Qualitative Analysis of the Data: A Summary
of Themes and Patterns

In order to expand the understanding and implications of the quantitative content analysis of staff development course documents from 40 of the 100 largest U.S. school districts, the themes and patterns that occurred in the data were examined. This qualitative approach enabled the data to assume a different aspect, which emerged by extracting ideas from the content analysis. Although not a true qualitative content analysis method, "Classic content analysis techniques may be used to find dominant patterns and co-occurrences, followed by the use of qualitative retrievals" (Bazeley, 2002, p. 405). This is used to complete the analysis of frequent and rare responses in a more detailed manner, while analyzing the information contained in the quantitative content analysis. Counts generated from quantitative sources can be used to summarize patterns, rather than for "statistical inference" (p. 406). Trochim (2001) noted that all quantitative data is based on qualitative judgment, and that, "Numbers in and of themselves can't be interpreted without understanding the assumptions that underlie them" (p. 157). The themes and patterns that were generated as a result of the quantitative analysis are discussed by the order of categories based on rankings of total number of targeted courses.

Themes

Tables 4.7 a-f also show the themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis for each category. Indicators are ranked by frequency of occurrence. Below each table is a description of the themes for that category.

Table 4.7a Indicators of At-Risk Category by Frequency

Category	Indicator[a]	Frequency
At-Risk		
	Title I	18
	at-risk	17
	poverty	16
	all students and especially those at-risk	8
	student identified by race, gender and/or socioeconomic status	2
	high risk behavior	0
	educational disadvantage	0
	causal factors of school failure	0

[a] Bold indicators reflect original indicators based on literature.

Non-bold indicators reflect new indicators based on content analysis.

At-Risk. In this category, strategies for motivating at-risk students were frequently noted, as well as assessing and making accommodations for these students. One course description indicated that working with at-risk students was part of educational leadership training for the 21st century. Another course explored the home school connection and referenced training that would equip parents to work with students at-risk of future school failures. Methods of counseling these students were also addressed.

Poverty often appeared in relation to at-risk students. Courses with these indicators were general in nature, introducing effective teaching strategies for children who come from cultures of poverty. Title I workshops used these words to "help ensure that all children have the opportunity to obtain a high quality education" (Albuquerque Staff Development Office, 2003), by addressing reform and funding issues that lead to poverty.

Table 4.7b Indicators of Diversity Category by Frequency

Category	Indicator[a]	Frequency
Diversity		
• diversity		
	cultural	62
	diversity	46
	culture	38
	diverse learners	36
	cultures	18
	cultural diversity	12
	diverse students with educational challenges	5
• ethnicity		
	ethnic groups	4
	issues of ethnicity	1
	ethnically diverse schools	1
	ethnic identity	1
	ethnic	1
• multicultural		
	multicultural	38
	multicultural education	4
	multicultural growth	0

[a] Bold indicators reflect original indicators based on literature.

Non-bold indicators reflect new indicators based on content analysis.

Diversity. This category was the broad category that most closely reflected the idea of culture, cultural diversity and multicultural themes. Multicultural ideas were explored through poetry, through literature (e.g., cultural conflicts in Othello), and through music. An in-service offered through the District of Columbia's Office of Staff Development (2003) addressed the "Cultural and Academic Orientation for the Newcomer Immigrant Secondary Student", training which addressed the impact of relocation and culture shock for the newly arrived immigrant students.

Different regions of the world were addressed, (The Middle East), along with different regions of the United States (Native American culture). The importance of technology for diverse learners was emphasized as well as the content areas of math and reading. Other courses addressed "Ethnic Groups in American Society" (Montgomery County Public Schools, MD, 2004), a course that provided participants with an awareness of communication and relationship in ethnically diverse schools, while promoting educational practices to support academic achievement in various ethnic groups.

An expanded worldview was also a theme, as noted by courses such as teaching world cultures, or world language field day. Content area courses aligned with diversity included multicultural literature, and teaching reading. Another course taught participants diversity and anti-bias strategies. "Education that is Multicultural" (Prince George's County Public Schools, MD, 2003), was a course that helped participants to "increase their efficacy in teaching culturally diverse students who live and grow in an urban/suburban environment" (p. 7), in an effort to close the achievement gap.

Table 4.7c Indicators of ESOL Category by Frequency

Category	Indicator[a]	Frequency
ESOL		
	ESOL	156
	ESL	82
	bilingual	72
	English language learners	56
	LEP students	39
	ELL	32
	English as a second language	16
	second language learners	8
	limited English students	7
	minority	6
	speakers of other language	4
	changing demographics	3
	linguistically diverse students	2
	limited and non-English speaking families	1
	non-English speaking students	1
	immigrant students	1
	English speakers of other language	1

[a] Bold indicators reflect original indicators based on literature.

Non-bold indicators reflect new indicators based on content analysis.

ESOL. An interesting theme that emerged from this category was the large variety of titles employed by school districts that paralleled ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). These included minority, language minority, speakers of other languages, English language learner (ELL), bilingual, ESL (English as a Second Language), limited English proficient (LIP), non-English speaking students and families, and linguistically diverse students.

ESOL training, strategies, testing, and methods were also reoccurring themes. The academic needs of ESOL students in a bilingual classroom, or second language learners in middle or high school who were placed in self-contained or teamed settings were often addressed

through core content areas such as reading or science. These courses provided ESOL strategies to be delivered through content instruction. More general workshops examined different aspects of teaching limited English students and ways to overcome the difficulties faced by LEP students. Some courses added the component of parent training.

Table 4.7d Indicators of Special Needs Students Category by Frequency

Category	Indicator[a]	Frequency
Special Needs Students		
	students with special needs	30
	special needs students	12
	educational needs of students	3
	educationally disadvantaged	0

[a] Bold indicators reflect original indicators based on literature.

Non-bold indicators reflect new indicators based on content analysis.

Special Needs Students. This category was often used as the pseudonym for special education students. The title of the course may have used the coded words Special Needs Students, but the course description referred to special education or students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). One course addressed the diverse learning needs for special education students, and referred to the science behind accommodations.

Content areas were a focus for special needs students, with courses designed to enable them to succeed in math, algebra, or in art. Several courses integrated technology into the reading and writing curriculum. Strategies for identifying and assessing these students, while incorporating techniques and approaches to use in their instruction were a theme. One reference to this category of students called them "slow learners"

Table 4.7e Indicators of Challenging Students Category by Frequency

Category	Indicator[a]	Frequency
Challenging Students		
• Behavior	**behavior**	175
	classroom management	128
	behavior management	28
	disruptive behavior	12
	behavior interventions	12
	student misbehavior	12
	behavior supports	12
	behavior problems	11
	behavior intervention plan	11
	challenging behaviors	9
	emotional and behavior problems of students	9
	FBA	8
	disruption	7
	behavior strategies	6
	difficult students	4
	challenging situations	3
	disruptive students	3
	behavior plan	3
	behavior assessment	2
	classroom behavior	1
	Functional Behavior Analysis	1
• Discipline	**discipline**	72
	discipline referrals	1
	discipline techniques	1
	effective discipline	0

[a] Bold indicators reflect original indicators based on literature.

Non-bold indicators reflect new indicators based on content analysis.

Challenging Students. A number of themes emerged from this category:

1. Classroom management was applied in content areas such as music, theatre and science, as well as in core subjects such as language arts (writing, literature, and guided reading).

2. Behavior management in early childhood was a theme. Courses referenced early childhood or preschool, but often noted that the behavior strategies could work for grades Pre-K through the 12th grade.

3. Classroom management was referred to in courses that involved setting up a classroom at the beginning of the year by establishing routines and procedures.

4. Training for substitute teachers' practices also incorporated the topic of classroom management.

5. Effective teaching practices that would affect the management of the classroom and improve students' performance were described as course content. Courses promoting the use of positive behavior methods referred to the need to understand group motivation and behavior to create a positive learning environment.

6. In a few instances, training was offered for places or situations outside the regular classroom, such as the library, or the music class.

7. Training for working with challenging students included the issue of data management and methods of record keeping, through such data management systems as Student Administrative Student Information (SASI).

8. Functional behavior assessments, and the corresponding topic of behavior intervention plans were noted as a method of improving the challenging behavior of students. Some courses taught the process of observing and recording behavior.

9. Several school districts paired the idea of "adopting a caring environment" at the same time they provided assistance on classroom management of behavior. Classroom management was also paired with cooperative learning.

10. Improving student achievement through classroom management techniques was a theme. Professional development emphasized that fewer discipline problems could lead to positive achievement in academic subjects.

Table 4.7f Indicators of Social/Emotional Category by Frequency

Category	Indicator[a]	Frequency
Social/Emotional	**intervention**	96
	prevention	41
	social skills	40
	social/emotional needs	14
	self-esteem	8
	social/emotional	6
	anger management	3
	social/emotional development	2
	emotional	2
	self-worth	1
	emotional well-being	1
	social/emotional performance	1
	self-control	1
	impulse control	0
	emotional problems	0
	emotional intelligences	0
	empathy	0
	resiliency	0
	self-discipline	0
	social competence	0

[a] Bold indicators reflect original indicators based on literature.

Non-bold indicators reflect new indicators based on content analysis.

Social/Emotional. Some of the courses that fell in the social/emotional arena reflected students who were gifted and talented, such as the social/emotional needs of the gifted, while several courses approached the task of teaching social skills to students with Autism.

Under interventions, some of the same topics emerged. Drugs, substance abuse, behaviors, and suicide were similar to the topics found under the prevention indicator. Crisis intervention was a course offered frequently across the school districts. Also listed under intervention were coded words relating to content areas such as reading and math, e.g.,

"intervention in special reading instruction for struggling readers" (Mobile County Public School System, AL, 2003).

Several themes emerged in this category that were related to the prevention of different issues. The prevention of violence and substance abuse received the highest word count in this indicator. In addition, the subjects of drugs, suicide, dropout, bullying, and discipline were also noted. Violence prevention was introduced in the elementary grades, with a course on violence prevention.

Patterns

Several patterns emerged through a qualitative analysis of the coded categories and indicators:

1. Personal names of consultants or trainers were used in reference to specific courses. For example, Ruby Payne's course, "A Framework for Understanding Poverty" was repeatedly listed, as was the "Kagan Win-Win Method of Discipline."

2. Several geographic areas promoted region driven courses that reflected the local geography or cultural influences. Some states explored local history, culture, or geography. Other courses used local museums as venues for learning the local culture.

3. If a school district were located in an area with a highly diverse population, several courses would reflect that content area of diversity. As an example, courses such as dealing with diversity, multicultural awareness, managing diversity in the 21st century, and celebrating diversity, were all offered by the same school district.

4. Courses were often duplicated in several school districts, showing up under the same name (Managing Anti-Social Behavior was listed in two school districts). This was also true for methods, programs, or specific techniques such as Discipline with Dignity and Love and Logic, which appeared in many school districts.

5. School districts used the term "research-based," or "scientifically based" to promote decision making in reading and reading fluency, in best practices, and in programs for classroom management. There was no reference to the

data that would qualify a particular program, or strategy, to be identified as "research or scientifically based."

6. Many courses for students at-risk promoted the support of academic achievement for diverse groups by focusing on strategies to meet the needs of these students in content-based subjects.

7. Across the course offerings, an effort was made to address the needs of a variety of educators who work with these students. Nurses, paraprofessionals, administrators, and teachers were invited to participate in these programs.

8. Prevention and intervention were often linked in course descriptions. For example, "Professional Crisis Management (Palm Beach, FL, 2003 merged a crisis management system that could ensure "successful prevention and intervention of crisis behavior" (p. 27). These courses emphasized complete crisis management systems that would prevent behavior issues and maximize safety issues.

Summary

The first research question (During the school year 2003-2004, what specific staff development courses aimed at meeting the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure were offered to educators?) was answered through the content analysis. The results showed no relationship between a school district's size and the number of staff development courses nor with the number of courses with targeted coded words. There was a statistically significant relationship between the total number of courses in a school district and the number of targeted courses.

The second research question, (How much of this training was done relative to content-based staff development?), could not be answered because it was difficult to ascertain which school district staff development courses were only content–based, and which were not. Chapter V contains a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations based on the research findings.

CHAPTER V

Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine staff development training for K-12 educators in the United States that specifically addressed the academic and social well being of students at-risk of school failure in an era of educational reform. Research questions related to staff development courses offered to educators that targeted at-risk students were derived from the theoretical framework of the most recent educational reform movement, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The role of staff development offices serving as conduits to provide training for educators working with these students was explored.

Results of this study added to the knowledge base reported in the literature review. The information gained from this study can be used to serve as a foundation for future research concerning the role of staff development in educating those who teach this population of student.

The objective of this chapter is to (a) summarize the research limitations, (b) discuss the findings of the content analysis, (c) present the conclusions drawn from the study, (d) discuss the implications, and (e) present recommendations for further research.

Limitations

The limitations of using the results of this study to extend beyond the sample group of 40 out of the 100 largest school districts in the United States were considered. The 100 largest school districts were purposely chosen to serve as a representative sample of school districts whose students mirror the factors, identified in the literature, that place students at-risk of school failure. The sample included school districts from across a large geographic and socioeconomic strata of the United States, and ranged in size from school districts with over 435,000 students, to school districts with approximately 45,000 students (NCES, 2002).

However, while the 100 largest school districts were targeted, data from only 40 of those school districts were analyzed. Therefore, results of this study only refer to the 40 respondents from a particular segment of United States school districts.

A second limitation was the assumption, not proven, that all staff development courses not coded were in fact content based, and not related to strategies or methods for working with the at-risk population. Many of the targeted courses were also content based, e.g., reading for at-risk students, thereby restricting the implication that all courses not coded were content based, and all targeted courses were strategy based.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this research are based on the analysis of current staff development as it was implemented in 40 of the 100 largest U.S. school districts during the school year 2003-2004. Using these specific school districts as the data sources provided a platform from which to assess staff development directed at certain populations of students. As previously discussed, there was no relationship between school district size and the number of targeted courses: a school district's size did not directly relate to the number of staff development courses pertaining to students at-risk of school failure. In fact, some of the smaller school districts offered almost the same number of targeted courses as some of the larger school districts. In general, the strongest predictor of the number of targeted courses related to students at-risk of school failure was the total number of courses offered by a school district, rather than by the school district size. Based on these findings, educators working in school districts that offered a large number of staff development courses would appear to have had a better chance of accessing courses related to students placed at-risk of school failure.

Following is a discussion of the research findings of this study as they correlate to the theoretical framework set out in Chapter II regarding students placed at-risk of school failure, school reform, and staff development. Using the literature review and the research in this study as the basis for discussion, five major findings are summarized and analyzed within the parameters of this study: (a) the role of staff development for specific student populations, (b) the definition of at-risk students, (c) reform vs. traditional staff development activities, (d) the application of National Staff Development Council standards in this study, and (e) the role of school districts in professional development.

Staff Development Offers Assistance in Working with Diverse Students

The literature review was based on an historical perspective of educational reforms as they related to, and defined, students placed at-risk of school failure. The inclusion of staff development was a method of merging three streams of inquiry: (a) students placed at-risk of school failure, (b) educational reforms, and (c) the ability of staff development to answer the need educators expressed for training in working with diverse students. The data from the research showed that staff development offered educators some courses that could address the strategies they require. The research answered the first subordinate question of whether or not staff development included courses with information on identification of students at-risk, at-risk

behaviors, and social skills. As noted in the research, the course documents did not detail the identification of specific risk factors, although attention to at-risk behaviors and social skills was evident.

The second subordinate question, which asked if specific student populations were addressed, was answered through the content analysis of the categories. In the 40 school districts used as the data sources, 13.4% of the total staff development courses met the criteria established in the content analysis for a course targeting students placed at-risk of school failure. School districts appeared to acknowledge the existence of these specific student populations through their course offerings, but given the critical need expressed by teachers for assistance in dealing with these students, the question remains whether 13.4% of the total courses offered in these 40 school districts are enough to meet the needs of educators working with this population of student.

Defining Students Placed At-Risk of School Failure

The literature review of longitudinal studies (Alexander et al., 1997; Barrington & Hendrick, 1989; Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, 2004; Ensminger & Slusarick, 1996; Frymier, 1992; Kaufman et al.,1992; Kominski et al., 2001; Lloyd, 1998; and Rush & Vitale, 1994), produced several common factors that place students at-risk, including (a) low school achievement, (b) poor grades, (c) retention in grade, (d) absenteeism, (e) socioeconomic status, (f) English speaking ability, (g) mobility, (h) minority status, (i) being referred to special education, and (j) evidence of behavior issues or lack of coping skills. These common factors presented a broad view of the characteristics of being at-risk.

By comparison, the content analysis of staff development documents revealed a much more restrictive use of words that communicated student risk and the need for intervention. The analysis suggested a rather narrow focus for the term "at-risk," with most of the courses offered for educators primarily related to students' socio-economic background (Title I students). Although none of the courses with the indicator "at-risk" placed blame on students, adhering to Johnson's (1994) definition of risk occurring within an ecological, environmental framework, the limited applicability of the term contrasts with Barr and Parrett's (2001) assertion that young people may become at-risk given the parameters of modern life. In addition, Frymier's (1992) study suggested that being at-risk is not simply predicated solely on a student's socio-economic status, but is the result of a number of factors, the combination of which places a student at-risk.

In contrast to the literature, the data from this content analysis revealed that the focus of being at-risk appeared to be economically based (as derived from indicators such as "Title I" and "poverty"). Viewed this way, the use of a more global approach to the issues surrounding students at-risk may decrease, and perhaps lessen awareness by educators of a variety of at-risk factors that could affect a wide range of students.

In addition, the content analysis did not reveal any suggestion from the course documents that the current educational reform movement, based on the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* emphasizing increased testing and accountability, is contributing to placing students at-risk. Although the additional factor of increased testing could be contributing to student stress, staff development courses did not make a connection between current educational policies and students becoming at-risk of school failure. Many staff development content courses offered focused on strategies for improving student achievement, rather than on helping students cope with the increased accountability brought on by current educational reforms.

Reform Models of Staff Development

The literature review suggested that staff development has evolved in its method of delivery to make available more professional development at a school based level, rather than at a district level, thereby eliminating more traditional staff development presentation models such as in-services or workshops. Reitzieg (2003), in an essay in which he cited the professional development research of Little, Sparks, and Cohen and Hill, noted eight professional development principles that have the capacity to change the practices of educators to improve student achievement. These included professional development that (a) focused on instruction and student learning, (b) extended over a period of time, (c) promoted training decisions at the school level, (4) included activities that model effective pedagogy, (e) supported workshops by modeling and coaching, (f) focused on a community rather than an individual teacher approach, (g) promoted inquiry embedded in the daily life of the school, and (h) was supported by educational leaders. Reitzieg acknowledged that the still dominant forms of professional development training include "workshops, presentations and other types of in-service activities" (¶12), models of the traditional type of staff development that were the basis for this research.

Although this content analysis was concerned with particular populations of at-risk students, and the availability of training offered to educators, the boundaries dictated by the content analysis approach did not allow for a comprehensive review of the staff development

courses in light of the principles of positive and effective staff development as defined by Reitzieg and other professional development researchers. Most of the staff development course documents contained descriptions of the training, but did not provide information about the follow-up support or continuous learning that could take place in the schools (Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet & Yoon, 2003; Sparks, 2004), whether or not the training was sustainable (Klingner, 2004), whether administrators supported the training (Parsad, et al., 2001), and if the training impacted student achievement (Reitzeig, 2003). What was not evident in this analysis were whether school districts have the capacity to affect educators in their daily practice working with students placed at-risk of school failure, e.g., do educators practice what is learned in staff development. Such an evaluation was beyond the scope of this research.

However, it was possible to ascertain that a number of the 40 school districts from which documents were retrieved did incorporate current staff development practices as standards for developing their own professional staff development training, as verified by practices written and included as part of the introductions to their course catalogs. For instance, Davis School District, UT (2003) adapted the domain concept of Danielson and McGreal, (2000) on which they modeled a comprehensive staff development plan. Their four domains included (a) planning and preparation, (b) the classroom environment, (c) instruction, and (d) professional responsibilities. This plan was aligned with the organizational and educational goals of the district, and informed those participating in the training that it was an integral part of a more wide-ranging district plan for professional development.

Sparks and Hirsch (1997) discussed the shift in the nature of staff development, from fragmented efforts to a more cohesive plan, and noted

> An orientation to outcomes and systems thinking has led to strategic planning at the district, school, and department levels. Clear, compelling mission statements and measurable objectives expressed in terms of student outcomes guide the type of staff development that would best serve district and school needs (p. 13).

This shift is apparent in the mission statement and beliefs listed on the website of another district (Volusia School District, FL, 2003)."The mission . . . is to support on-going professional development that results in increased learning for students" (§1). The introduction to this system's professional development catalog also stated that the main purpose of any in-service activity was to increase the "employee's knowledge, skills, or attitude" (§2). The explanation

noted that, according to new state standards, reviews for possible in-services were based not only on the staff development provided, but also on the "implementation and outcome" (§5), e.g., based on the National Staff Development Council's research, the following questions would be asked. Was the training useful, was follow-up offered to ensure implementation, and did it increase student achievement? The district's description of the models included a comprehensive list of reform models of professional development. These were (a) individually-guided staff development, (b) observation/assessment, (c) involvement in a development or improvement process, (d) training, (e) inquiry, (f) district independent study modules, (g) conferences and seminars, (h) out of district professional training, (i) classroom visitation, (j) individual study, (k) individual action research, (l) educational travel, (m) National Board Portfolio Completion (n) National Board Assessor Training, and (o) college coursework. Such an approach is notable for its adherence to the reform models of staff development.

Still another district wrote measurable goals and objectives for each of their 154 district wide staff development courses, which included the general objectives of the courses, the specific objectives that a participant would be able to achieve upon completion, the activities planned for the course, and the participant evaluation (e.g., demonstrated competency on at least 80% of the objectives). Some of the course descriptions were 4-5 pages in length and gave detailed explanations of the course goals, objectives and results.

Even though a thorough analysis of the scope of the professional development offered by these districts was not available, at least one of the six design principles for professional development, as outlined by Little (1993), was found in this research. This design principle, the placement of classroom practices within the larger context of education, was evident by the staff development courses that incorporated the real-world context of diverse students, students with challenging behaviors, and the special needs population. As Englert and Rozendal (2004) reflected, "professional development activities must be related to the everyday experiences of teachers and students rather than removed from the contextual settings in which they are to be applied" (§3). This content analysis was not able to evaluate whether Little's additional design principles (informed dissent, the use of inquiry, and achieving a balance between the individual and bureaucracy) were, in fact, being addressed.

On the other hand, when viewed in the context of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1999) study that revealed that only 20% of core academic teachers felt well

prepared to meet the needs of a population of diverse students, school districts seemed to have responded to this appeal for assistance by offering professional development activities related to the needs of particular groups of students. Even though only 13.4% of the total courses were targeted courses, at least 28% of these total targeted courses were provided to educators working with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students, and 32% of the total targeted courses related to students with challenging behaviors.

The focus of this research, the traditional workshop or in-service staff development approach, is often at odds with the reform models and current best practices of professional staff developers. Nevertheless, Sparks (2004) acknowledged that "there is a place in the staff development toolbox" (p. 305) for highly structured approaches, especially for educators working with poor and minority students, or for inexperienced teachers. Based on this research, a case can be made that a variety of both traditional and reform approaches to staff development have merit, are being implemented in the educational world, and are continuing to develop educators' skills.

The Research's Relationship to NSDC Standards

The National Staff Development Council changed their standards in 2001 to incorporate a revised and expanded view of staff development in reaction to reforms impacting their field. Through this research, it became apparent that, at the very least, the staff development in the data sources, aimed to help educators "convey, through various means, the value and potential that is inherent in each student" (NSDC, 2001, p. 10), in addition to helping them understand their own personal attitudes regarding race, social class, and culture. This is evident in the categories with the highest percent of courses (Challenging Students and ESOL), which appeared to prepare educators to work with diverse and difficult groups of students. In addition, a close look at the indicators demonstrated that, in particular, the issue of student safety was acknowledged by the number and variety of coded words that related to prevention and intervention of drug use, bullying, suicide, and violence.

Of 12 NSDC (2001) standards, one content standard that aimed to improve the learning of all students, focused on equity. Its purpose was to help teachers to

> understand the general cognitive and social/emotional characteristics of students in order to provide developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction. It provides strategies for taping the unique learning strengths of each student. In addition, it helps teachers to

use knowledge of their student's interests and backgrounds to assist the in planning

meaningful, relevant lessons. (p10)

This standard was addressed by the attention in some staff development courses to the

social/emotional needs of a variety of students, from those with Autism, to those considered

Gifted and Talented. As explained in the discussion on indicators, many staff development

courses reflected school districts' desires to speak to the issues of equity and diversity by

addressing the social and emotional needs of students, and by offering content courses aimed at

helping students close the achievement gap.

District Level Influence on Staff Development

Spillane (1996) stated that districts matter in their ability to be "proactive policymakers,

[that] mobilize and shape a number of key instructional guidance instruments" (p. 84). One of

these key policies is staff development. Although the influence of districts could not be measured

solely by this content analysis, there was some evidence that school districts still have the ability

to provide extensive and needed training for their educators. For example, a number of the

school districts used as the data sources provided training in areas related to at-risk students.

Eighteen districts offered a total of 41 courses with the indicator "at-risk" in the course title or

description. As the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2002) study on teacher

preparation and development noted, this area historically has been of interest to teachers, who

indicated the need to address "special student populations (i.e., students with disabilities, those

from diverse cultural backgrounds, and those with limited English proficiency)" (p. 4). Although

the number of such courses may not be large, the existence of such courses denotes an awareness

in some school districts that the needs of at-risk students are important and should be addressed.

Perhaps in response to the *No Child Left Behind Act*, districts are also assessing factors

leading to success for students placed at-risk by offering courses that teach strategies for

promoting student achievement. This movement in staff development correlates with

Wenglinsky's (2000) study, which provided evidence that professional development of educators

is one of the variables positively associated with student achievement. His research noted that

teachers who have been trained to work with special populations, and who know how to

implement higher-order thinking skills, have students who outperform their peers in

achievement. Hopefully, school district attempts to address this need through professional

development may result in increased student outcomes through the use of strategies that improve student achievement.

Massell (2000), in her work on school districts' potential to influence educators stated "there has been a strong tendency in recent federal and state policy initiatives to bypass or ignore the role of districts in the change process" (p. 6). The results from this content analysis confirm that school districts continue to influence their constituents through their ability to provide the type of traditional staff development activities that were the basis for this research. As Hirsch and Sparks (1997) explained, district staff development offices have conceptualized a different role for themselves "as service agencies for schools . . . with the district's staff development department providing technical assistance and functioning as a service center to support the work of the schools" (p. 13).

Conclusions

This study was a content analysis of school district staff development course documents, or course catalogs. As noted in Neuendorf (2002), "a content analysis summarizes rather than reports all details concerning a message set" (p. 15), an approach that seeks to "generate generalizable conclusions" (p. 15), rather than drawing a particular conclusion about a particular group of documents. This study is summarized and conclusions are drawn from the content analysis of the coded words (indicators) found in specific courses that related to the research. As Riffe (1998) suggested, social scientists "seek to answer theoretically significant questions by inferring the meaning or consequences of exposure to content or inferring what might have contributed to the content's form and meaning" (p. 28). Using content analysis allowed this research to not only produce quantifiable results (courses with coded words by district size, frequency of targeted courses, frequency of indicators, coded words by category, and analysis of relationships between district size and courses, etc.), but also allowed qualitative meaning supported by the data to be extracted. This approach provided valuable information of both a quantitative and qualitative nature regarding staff development and its applicability to the topic of at-risk students. Seven conclusions were generated as a result of this research. Conclusion 1:Staff development approaches varied.

As noted in the limitations and delimitation sections in Chapter III, school districts' approaches to staff development varied in both course descriptions, applicability of goals, targeted audiences, objective definitions, and format of presentation. Some school districts

embraced technology to such an extent that they used only computer-generated information about course content. In some instances, the ability to retrieve the documents was hindered because staff development offices deleted files quickly to stay current with their course calendar. Other school districts published paper copies of staff development catalogs, but did not always have copies available for public request. Some school districts were impacted by financial restraints which either limited the staff development courses, or, in one instance, closed the staff development office altogether.

Conclusion 2: Content analysis approach to staff development documents has value.

Use of the content analysis of school district staff development course documents to produce implications for future training is a viable analytic method, in spite of the limitations and delimitations already described. Content analysis permitted a look into the content of training delivered by school district staff development offices. This method of research provided an analysis of data reflected by the coding technique, and allowed an examination of certain categories and indicators related to a particular student population.

Conclusion 3: The definition for at-risk students was narrow.

Although the definition used in this study for "at-risk students" was broadly defined and supported by the literature, the use of the term in the staff development course content had a narrower definition, more specifically related to socioeconomic status, poverty, and students in Title I programs. Concurrently, "students with special needs," a conceptually broad term in the coding that implied difficulties for students across a range of issues, was narrowed in the staff development course documents to reflect mostly special education students. In addition, the needs of gifted and talented students were frequently addressed through such courses as the social and emotional needs of the gifted, leading to the conclusion that this group of students could comprise a portion of the group usually identified as students placed at-risk of school failure.

Conclusion 4: Early intervention of students is targeted by staff development.

The young child, Pre-K age, was also a focus for some staff development, training, emphasizing positive beginnings for pre-kindergarten students, and the need for "Getting Off To A Good Start" (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2004). This emphasis on early childhood intervention implied that training could help circumvent the cycle of being "at-risk for future school failure" (Brevard County School District, 2004).

Conclusion 5: Staff development training recognizes diversity in education.

As the demographics of the 100 largest school districts revealed, student diversity in public school systems is a reality, a challenge being met by many school districts through the professional development of their workforce. The two related categories of Diversity and ESOL students had 354 total courses with a total of 766 coded words. The range of courses and the variety of titles indicated a response by staff development trainers to the increased needs of a diverse society.

Conclusion 6: The challenging behavior of students is a concern for educators.

Staff development courses targeted behavior issues at a higher rate than other indicators of school failure. The most frequently used category was "Challenging Students": a substantial amount of staff development training was directed at meeting the needs of educators working with students exhibiting difficult behaviors.

Perhaps in recognition of the struggle educators face in dealing with students with challenging behaviors, staff development training offered a range of in-services or workshops that provided classroom management strategies for educators at all grade levels and length of experience, from the newcomer to the veteran. Differentiated training for educators with different amount of experience, such as classroom and advanced classroom management, or initial and follow-up training, permitted educators to participate based on their knowledge and years of service, but suggested that behavior management is an on-going issue for many educators.

Conclusion 7: School districts take a serious approach to prevention and intervention.

School districts are responding to at-risk students with a choice of prevention and intervention techniques, across a wide range of needs. This suggests an awareness of and/or a reaction to incidents that have occurred and may continue to arise in the future. School districts, through the training offered by their staff development offices, appear to be proactive in providing intervention techniques in content areas (reading and math), and in non-instructional areas (suicide, drugs, and bullying).

Implications and Recommendations

Content Analysis

Content analysis provided a useful method with which to analyze training delivered to educators working with an increasingly diverse body of students. Analyzing course documents

through a content analysis approach provided a way to manage a large amount of material while at the same time framing a message derived from the content. More analysis using this type of approach is needed, however, that could determine if the staff development is effective in providing training related to specific groups of students. For example, does the training provide appropriate strategies that will benefit these students and increase their academic achievement and/or social and emotional well-being? The content analysis method could analyze other staff development course materials such as books, handouts, multi-media presentations, and/or workbooks, in an effort to help our understanding of effective staff development that focuses on particular groups of students.

Content analysis is a beneficial quantitative method (in conjunction with a qualitative analysis of themes and patterns) of educational research that could be used to continue to generate useful data in this area, as well as in other areas of interest to educators. A content analysis could also be conducted in other forms of educational communication, such as journals, media accounts, and school board policies related to this population of students.

Staff Development

School district staff development offices remain a vital organizational tool through which to inform their educators. The method of producing this professional training is highly dependent on local structure and district policy, an aspect that could limit discussion of needed and requested information about students placed at-risk. Staff development offices base their educational training practices on current and best practices in staff development as promoted by NSDC (2001). These include less traditional approaches than the in-service or workshop format, and include more contemporary reform methods such as increased planning time, collaborative practices, examinations of student work, and teacher-leader groups.

However, even though criticized by staff development research, based on the number of in-services or workshops counted by this study, this model continues to provide a means of ensuring educators' access to specific training not otherwise available to them through less structured methods of staff development delivery. Sparks and Hirsch (1997), maintained that "the use of newer processes does not necessarily exclude the application of more traditional approaches" (p. 13). Given their importance, school district staff development offices continue to be at the forefront of the task of training educators to work with challenging groups of students,

both through the workshop and in-service approaches and through the use of other types of training coordinated by staff development offices.

Richardson (2003), noted that routinely including follow-up from staff development activities could promote the use of what is learned into meaningful transfer of material once an educator is back in their educational milieu. A logical assumption from this study is that staff development offices remain an important link to educator training, especially if supplemented with appropriate follow-up activities to encourage sustainability and thus increase student achievement.

Risk in Early Childhood

The roots of school failure often begin in early childhood (Ensminger and Slysarick, 1996; Entwisle and Horsey, 1996, Lloyd, 1978). School districts' interventions in breaking the impact of risk factors, including parent training and educator awareness, could help to mitigate the cycle of early risk, which often leads to future school failure. Federal government and state guidelines and policies recognize the importance of such prevention and mandate programs for early childhood students: staff development should continue to offer training to both educators and parents that strengthen the home-school relationship, and lessen the impact of negative circumstances that could lead to later school failure.

Classroom Management

As documented by the content analysis, challenging behaviors remain an issue for both the novice and the experienced educator. These behaviors do not appear only in core content subjects, but also exist in art, music, physical education and other elective classrooms, as well as for educators outside the classroom, such as counselors, specialists, and administrators. This suggests that challenging behaviors do not appear only during highly structured academic times, but are a facet of a student's life that extend beyond core content and subject specific classroom boundaries.

The need for increased educator training is being addressed by many school districts, as evidenced by the high counts in the content analysis in areas related to challenging behaviors, but this may need to be periodically assessed in the future to reflect the changing requirements of the student population. Students appear in the educational arena with a variety of background information, family support, and socioeconomic status, making public education a challenging task. "Each student . . . brings a certain amount of social capital to the school, that is, parents'

educational level, the value the family places on education, the students' socioeconomic environment, the effects of peer groups, and similar assets and liabilities" (Mathis, 2004). Public schools can continue to meet the needs of all students by assisting educators in becoming competent and knowledgeable in areas such as classroom management.

Social/Emotional Needs

The bulk of the courses and indicators in this arena referred to the social/emotional needs of the gifted and talented student. This emphasis on the social and emotional needs of the gifted student leads to this question: Are these the new at-risk students of the 21st century? A study using NELS:88 data, (Renzulli & Park, 2000), examined dropout behavior of gifted students. The study confirmed that many gifted dropout students were from low socio-economic status families, were minorities, and had parents with low levels of education. These factors are identical to other at-risk factors identified in the research literature. To develop an increased awareness among educators of the issues facing gifted and talented students, school districts need to continue to offer courses that focus educators' attention on this particular group of students.

Crisis Management

More prevention and intervention courses would allow a wider range of educators to learn intervention strategies for at-risk students, and methods of preventing the occurrence of risk behaviors. Many current courses are delivered to educators who may be the decision-makers with regard to managing a crisis, such as counselors and administrators, but it is often classroom teachers who are the first to notice and react to crisis situations. More prevention and crisis management courses could be offered to classroom teachers to raise their consciousness about students in crisis, and provide them with skills to respond to these students.

School districts are also targeting academic areas such as reading and math with prevention and intervention strategies, signaling an awareness that effective instructional practices are essential methods of preventing school failure, an emphasis on educational pedagogy that is correctly placed.

Future Research

Students placed at-risk of school failure may not diminish in the future, given socio-economic changes, educational realities, and increased global challenges. This study grew out of a recognition that historical educational reforms have typically impacted the status of at-risk students, and, while current reforms continue to influence educational policies, the risk remains.

Staff development continues to be a method of promoting educational and cultural awareness in those responsible for our students placed at-risk of school failure. As an educational tool for change, staff development has the ability to influence educators who work with this population. The following recommendations for future research are offered.

The first area for future research is an explanation of the specific factors students bring to school that prevent them from accessing the curriculum, and ways educators can motivate, challenge, and assist these students while delivering academic content. Being conscious of and alert to these factors could mitigate their impact in the educational environment. Strategies and methods could be delivered through on going staff development that incorporates appropriate follow-up activities to enhance linkage and increase student achievement.

Additionally, future inquiry could embrace the growing awareness of the gifted and talented student as being at-risk of educational failure. Although this content analysis did not include risk factors for the gifted and talented student (unless identified in the literature review), the importance of their social and emotional needs as reflected in the course offerings requires further research, which may reveal that being gifted is also an at-risk indicator that needs to be added to the array of factors currently defined in the literature.

A third area open for future research is the use of terms such as "scientifically-based" or "research-based", especially as these terms are used in promoting particular staff development programs. As Guskey (2003) noted, although *No Child Left Behind* requires that only proven and scientifically based strategies should be included in school reform, "few of the programs and strategies attracting the attention of staff development leaders today can meet these stringent criteria" (p. 28). Evidence of the basis in research and the ability of particular approaches and programs to affect instruction and student learning is often "scant or non-existent" (p. 28). This area for research could establish which strategies and methods are truly research-based, improve student learning, and decrease at-risk behavior among students; participants could then look for evidence in course listings that offer these approaches.

A fourth area for future research is related to staff development and the models used in training educators. As evident from this study, the much maligned in-service or workshop approach continues to be used by many school district staff development offices. Perhaps this approach could be seen as a positive method for providing information to large numbers of

educators, while serving as a supplement to the reform models that are suggested by staff development researchers as best practices.

A final area open for future research is a focused investigation on the actual attendance in the targeted courses. This content analysis provided evidence that school districts are attuned to the needs of students placed at-risk of school failure, but additional information on the level of participation in this training could help define the type of training that is most appropriate to enhance skills of educators and contribute in a meaningful way to the pedagogy of educators working with this diverse and challenging group of students.

Summary

"Historically, children of color and poor youth have been disproportionately at-risk in our schools. Yet they are not the only children at-risk. Any child who lacks sufficient support may fail to develop adequate academic and social skills" (Legters, McDill & McPartland, 1993, p.2). It is ultimately the task and the responsibility of educators guiding these students to be the gatekeepers, not only of the curriculum-based knowledge they require, but also of their ability to become productive citizens. One of the keys to working with a student population at-risk is staff development, with its ability to provide educators with solid strategies for working with a diverse and sometimes challenging population. Within the current educational reform model of the *No Child Left Behind Act,* staff development is one method of ensuring that educators are prepared to meet the needs of these students while helping to resolve some of the issues affecting students placed at-risk of school failure.

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Appendix A

Appendix A is the Course Catalog Content Analysis Codebook that provides a detailed

description of the coding rules.

	Staff Development Course Catalog Content Analysis Codebook

Introduction: The purpose of the content analysis of staff development course documents (the course catalog) will be to determine staff development courses that target students placed at-risk of school failure.

Method/Procedure: The following steps should be taken in the content analysis coding described below (v stands for variable): (a) relevant staff development course documents are read to identify categories; (b) all coded phrases, words and titles are marked by one coder, the researcher; (c) three staff development course documents are re-read by the coder/researcher to determine reliability.

Definition of Terms: Phrases or words: These words or phrases relating to students placed at risk of school failure are in the body of the text (the course descriptions).

Categories: The categories are the general topics under which the words and phrases appear.

Title: This indicates whether the coded phrase appears in the title of the course.

Unit of Data Collection: Each specific word or phrase that appears the text of the staff development course document

Demographics: V1: Identification number: Each school district will be assigned a one to three digit identification number.

V2: The month when the staff development course document was retrieved will be numbered:
November=11/03; December=12/03; January =1/04; February=2/04; March=3/04; April=4/04; May=5/04; June=6/04; July=7/04; August=8/04

V3: The number of students in each school district.

Staff Development Courses: V4: The total number of staff development courses offered in each school district as noted in the professional development catalog for each district, or as counted.

Courses with Coded Words:

V5: The total number of staff development courses that contain the coded words.

V6: The school district levels: K-8; K-12; PK-12

V7: The number of FTE (Full Time Equivalent) teachers.

V8: Highlight each coded word and phrase in the At-risk category. Tabulate the total number for each word and phrase in this category.

V9: Highlight each coded word and phrase in the Diversity category. Tabulate the total number for each word and phrase in the three subcategories of Diversity, Ethnicity, and Multicultural. Tabulate the total number for each word and phrase in this category.

V10: Highlight each coded word and phrase in the ESOL category. Tabulate the total number for each word and phrase in this category.

V11: Highlight each coded word and phrase in the Special Needs Students category. Tabulate the total number for each word and phrase in this category.

V12: Highlight each coded word and phrase in the Challenging Students category. Tabulate the total number for each word and phrase in the two subcategories of Behavior and Discipline. Tabulate the total number for each word and phrase in this category.

V13: Highlight each coded phrase in the Social/Emotional Areas category. Tabulate the total number for each word and phrase in this category.

Appendix B

Appendix B is the coding form that will be used to code each school district's staff

development course catalog.

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                                                                       │
│        Coding Form for Staff Development Course Document Content       │
│                              Analysis                                 │
│                                                                       │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

V1:   School District Identification Number   _____
V2:   Month documents retrieved   _____
V3:   Number of students in school district   _____
V4:   Total number of staff development courses _____
V5:   Total number of courses with coded words _____
V6:   Level (PreK-8 or Secondary)   _____
V7:   Number of FTE Teachers   _____

	Category Totals	**# of Courses**

V8:   Words/phrases in <u>at-risk</u> category   _____   _____
       1=all students and especially those at-risk_____
       2=high risk behavior_____
       3=educational disadvantage_____
       4=causal factors of school failure_____
       5=student identified by race, gender and/or
            socioeconomic status_____
Comments:_____

_____

	Subcategory Totals	**Category Totals**	**# of Courses**

V9:   Words/phrases in <u>diversity</u> category   _____   _____
       Diversity: _____
       1=diversity_____
       2=diverse students with educational
            challenges _____
       3=diverse learners_____
       4=culturally diverse students _____
       5=cultural diversity_____
       Ethnicity: _____
       6=issues of ethnicity_____
       7=ethnic groups_____
       8=ethnically diverse schools_____
       Multicultural: _____
       9=multicultural_____
       10=multicultural education_____
       11=multicultural growth_____
Comments:_____

120

	Category Total	# of Courses

V10: Words/Phrases in <u>ESOL</u> category   _____   _____
       1=second language learners_____
       2=LEP students_____
       3=Limited English students_____
       4=Changing demographics_____
       5=English as a second language_____
       6=bilingual_____

Comments:_____

_____

	Category Totals	# of Courses

V11: Words/phrases in <u>special needs</u> students' category   _____   _____
       1=students with special needs_____
       2=educational needs of students_____
       3=educationally disadvantaged_____
       4=special needs students_____

Comments:_____

_____

	Subcategory Totals	Category Totals	# of Courses

V12: Words/phrases in <u>Challenging</u> Students   _____   _____
Behavior: _____
       1=challenging situations_____
       2=disruption_____
       3=disruptive behavior_____
       4=behavior_____
       5=behavior problems_____
       6=problem behaviors_____
       7=behavior management_____
       8=behavior strategies _____
       9=behavior interventions_____
       10=student misbehavior_____
       11=classroom behavior_____
       12=behavior plan_____
       13=classroom disruption_____
       14=classroom management_____
       15=emotional and behavior problems of students_____

	Subcategory Totals	**# of Courses**

Discipline: _____   _____
13=discipline_____
14=discipline referrals_____
15=discipline techniques_____
16=effective discipline_____

Comments:_____
_____

	Category Totals	**# of Courses**

V13:   Number of phrases in Social/Emotional Areas   _____   _____
1=social skill_____
2=anger management_____
3=impulse control_____
4=emotional problems_____
5=emotional intelligences_____
6=empathy_____
7=resiliency_____
8=self-worth_____
9=self-discipline_____
10=social competence_____
11=social/emotional needs_____
12=prevention_____
13=intervention_____

Comments:_____
_____

Appendix C

Appendix C is the letter requesting Staff Development Course Documents.

5152 Linette Lane
Annandale, VA 22003

School District Name
Staff Development Office

Dear:

      I am a VA Tech doctoral student conducting a content analysis of professional development courses of the 100 largest U.S. school districts. In particular, I am interested in determining what professional development courses are offered to assist educators working with students placed at-risk of school failure.

      Although I accessed your school district's website, I was not able to download your **Staff Development Course Catalog for the school year 20032004**. I would greatly appreciate it if you could send me an e-mail attachment with this information (badbre@msn.com). Or, if you prefer sending this information through the mail, I have enclosed a large, self-addressed envelope.

      Thank you in advance for your assistance. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about my research.

      Sincerely,

      Barbara E. Baditoi, M.Ed.

Encl.

Appendix D

Appendix D is the e-mail requesting Staff Development Course Documents.

I am a VA Tech doctoral student conducting a content analysis of professional development courses of the 100 largest U.S. school districts to determine what courses they offer to educators working with students placed at-risk of school failure.

Through your school district's web site, I obtained the Professional Development Catalog for

I would greatly appreciate it if you could e-mail me an attachment with
this information.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about my research.

Barbara E. Baditoi, M.Ed.

VITA

BARBARA E. BADITOI

5152 Linette Lane
Annandale, VA 22003
703-248-5630
e-mail:bbaditoi@fccps.k12.va.us

EDUCATION

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, (September, 2000-Present)
      Major: Education Administration
                      Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
      Degree: Ed.D., May, 2005

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA (1972)
      Major: Education of Exceptional Children
      Degree: Master of Education

Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL (1969)
      Major: Sociology
      Degree: Bachelor of Arts

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Director of Special Education and Student Services (September 2004-present)
      Falls Church City Public Schools
      Falls Church, VA

Assistant Principal (1997-2002)
      Fairfax County Public Schools, Fairfax, VA
      Woodlawn Elementary School

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Learning Disabilities Teacher (2002-2004)
      Fairfax County Public Schools – Fairfax, VA
      Falls Church High School

Emotional Disabilities Teacher (1973-1997)
      Fairfax County Public Schools – Fairfax, VA
      Area II Autism Resource Teacher/Behavior Specialist (1995-1997)
      Woodson Center for Emotionally Disabled Students

Department Chair (1990-1995)
Woodson Center, Cedar Lane Center, N. Springfield Center (1973-1980,1986-1990)
Special Education Teacher

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION

Virginia State Postgraduate Professional Certification in Administration and Supervision:
Secondary
Middle
Elementary
Virginia State Postgraduate Professional Certificate in Special Education
Emotionally Disabled Students, NK-12

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Adjunct Professor, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA (2001- present)
Mentor Teacher Trainer (1999-2002)
Superintendent's School Accountability Task Force (1999-2000)
Instructor and Developer: Leadership Seminar and Academy Course (1999-2003)

PUBLICATIONS

Baditoi, B. (1999). *Changing Student Behavior: A Systematic Approach to Developing and Implementing Successful Behavior Plans.* Annandale, VA.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE and ASSOCIATIONS

Board of Directors, Phi Delta Kappa, (PDK)
2003-2005 Newsletter Editor
Honored in 2004 *Who's Who of American Women*
Newsletter Editor, Fairfax Association of Elementary School Principals (FAESP), 2001-2002
Member, Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)
Member, Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
Member, American Association of University Women (AAUW)
Member, Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
Member, Fairfax Association of Elementary School Principals (FAESP)