Pathways to Dropping Out

by

Sarah Cecelia Ferguson Taylor

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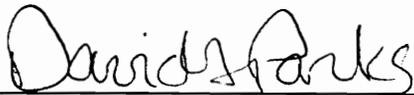
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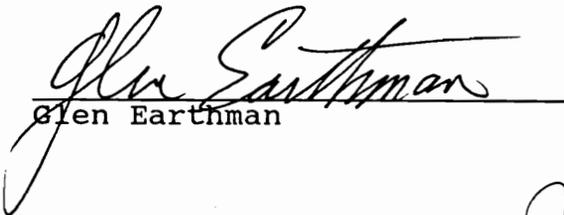
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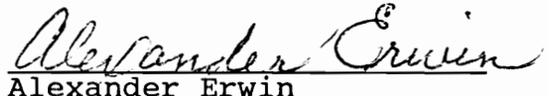
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Sarah Cecelia Ferguson Taylor

Committee Chairmen: David J. Parks and Jimmie C. Fortune
Educational Administration

(Abstract)

This study investigated the perceptions of a select
group of black males about their school experiences. The
purpose of the study was to compare the perceptions of
dropouts with the perceptions of in-school participants to
predict the likelihood of the in-school participants
becoming dropouts.

The participants were 20 black male dropouts, 10 black
male eighth-grade students, and 10 black male fifth-grade
students. Participants resided in a rural setting in two
southern states. Data for the study came from self-reports
of the participants. Predictors of dropouts were identified
from the literature, and interview questions were developed
from these predictors.

The findings of the study supported other recent
research. The black males studied reported being retained
in earlier grades, belonging to single-parent families,
being from lower-income families, and experiencing
behavioral problems in school. They were (1) not well-
adjusted to the school environment, (2) not aware of the
importance of school, (3) anxious to learn about the

contributions of black Americans, and (4) very critical of the black, male principal.

Interventions that may help include (1) early goal-setting experiences, (2) a curriculum that reflects current societal changes designed to fit the local community, and (3) connecting the school process to the career goals of black males.

I sent my child to school today
I watched him along his way
The smile on his round face
Made me sigh and feel,
There's an asset to his race.
Now no tears, no smile, no expression
Just no smile
What happened to that smile
On my child's face?
Somebody took my child's smile away.
A broad smile that could be seen for miles
Somebody took my child's smile away
No tears, no bruises and no scars,
No smile.
Somebody took my child's smile away.

                              Clara C. Fields

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Chapter 1

Introduction

American society and its school system are plagued by the mounting problems of school dropouts and the increasing percentage of children who live in poverty. Blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately represented among dropouts and the poor. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (1989), in October 1988 nearly 13% of all 16-24 year olds, approximately 4.2 million young adults, had not completed high school. The dropout rate is even higher for students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds and from single-parent families. The dropout rate for the lowest quartile of socioeconomic status was 22% as compared with 7% in the highest quartile. Single-parent families showed a dropout rate of 22% as compared with 12% for families with two parents present. Even though dropout rates have declined over the past ten years, the number of dropouts continues to be high.

In 1979 there were 10 million children who were poor. A breakdown of the percentages according to race shows that 11% of the white population, 37.8% of the African-American population, and 29.1% of the Hispanic population lived below the poverty level (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1992). By 1987, the number of children who lived below the poverty level was 12,435,000 or 20%. At that time, 9.5 million or

32.4% of the black population and 5.4 million or 28% of the
Hispanic population were living below the poverty level.
More than half the people in the youngest poverty
classification were under the age of 18 (Statistical
Abstract of the United States, 1989). "In 1990, one in
five, or 12.7 million children, was poor ..." (Annie E.
Casey Foundation, 1992, p.12).

The reality of poverty presents many challenges for the
poor in school and for the school personnel who work with
them. Low self-esteem, low expectations, and inadequate
preparation are characteristics of many of the poor who
enter school. Discipline problems, low achievement, and
dropout rates beset teachers and other school personnel.

Today's society demands a high school diploma as the
minimum educational attainment. "In 1989 4 million persons
in the United States ages 16 to 24 had not completed high
school and were not currently enrolled in school" (National
Center for Education Statistics, 1990, p. 29). These young
adults are referred to as dropouts. Finn (1987) declared
that dropouts are the main educational problem, second only
to the plague of drugs. George Munoa, Chicago's school
board president, reported at a U.S. House of Representatives
hearing in May 1986 that "The United States stands in danger
of developing a two-tiered society like some South American
countries with an elite strata of educated people and a

lower tier of people locked in poverty because of their lack of schooling" (Associated Press cited by Finn, 1987, p. 3).

Even though the overall dropout rate has declined since the early twentieth century, the social and economic costs of dropping out have risen. These costs have prompted educational leaders from every level of the American educational system to seek methods to reduce the number of students who drop out of school prior to obtaining a high school education. In North Carolina, a Dropout Prevention Program was a part of the Basic Education Program that was adopted in 1985. Local school systems in that state have placed more emphasis on retention for their dropout-proned youngsters (Speas, 1989). New York City expends millions of dollars for prevention programs. In addition, the federal government has spent monies in the form of grants to fund dropout prevention programs across the nation (Finn, 1987).

Education helps or hinders social mobility in the United States' status system. It is the role of education to assure that individuals born into any social class have the opportunity to achieve status as persons born into other social classes. Theoretically, we believe that each citizen has the right to educational opportunity. The Select Committee on Equal Opportunity (1974) declared,

It is a fundamental goal of our democratic system

that life's opportunities be distributed on the

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basis of each individual's capacity and choice and
that no individual be denied the chance to succeed
because of membership in a racial, religious,
social, economic, or other group in society. The
extent to which this goal is met is the test of
both equal opportunity in our society and equal
educational opportunity. (p. 3)

Of special concern is the plight of black males who
drop out of school. These young men usually occupy a very
low status both inside and outside of the school
environment. Gibbs (1977) contended that young black males
in America have been "miseducated by the educational system,
mishandled by the criminal justice system, mislabled by the
mental health system, and mistreated by the social welfare
system" (cited by Strickland, 1989, p. 51). The literature
reveals some alarming statistics regarding young black
males: "60 young black men compared to ten young white men
will more likely die violent, often self-inflicted, deaths.
Homicide and suicide kill more of our 15 to 24 year olds
[black males] than any other means" wrote Strickland (1989,
p. 51).

According to statistics reported by the United States
Department of Education, the dropout rate for black males
nationwide is approximately 20%. "50% of Black boys drop
out of school in some cities. Only 12% of those dropouts

ages 16 to 24 work full time year-round" (Dent, 1989, p. 55). Kunzufu (cited in Dent, 1989) predicted, "What happens to boys (black males) in school between the ages of 9 and 10 will determine whether they go to college or jail and how much income they will earn in years to come" (p. 55).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to examine how black male fifth and eighth-grade students perceive their school experience and (2) to compare their responses to those of black male dropouts to see if it is possible to identify variables that will predict dropping out of school.

Research Questions

In order to implement the purposes of this study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the background characteristics of a select group of black male school dropouts, and what are the parallels with black males in grades eight and five?

2. What are the perceptions of a select group of black male dropouts of their school experience?

3. What are the perceptions of a select group of black males in grades eight and five of their school experience?

4. What are the present and future goals of select groups of black male dropouts, black male eighth graders and

black male fifth graders?

    5. Do these black males see a relationship between the school process and their future goals?

Theoretical Base

    Vroom (1982) has set forth the idea that motivation is connected to what the individual perceives as an outcome or reward for his behavior. Based on their perception of the outcome, the individual may act to attain the desired outcome or reward or to avoid the undesired outcome.

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┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────────┐
│     Task     │ ▷   │ Achievement  │ ▷   │ Achievement  │
│  Completion  │     │ of School's  │     │ of Personal  │
│              │     │    Goals     │     │    Goals      │
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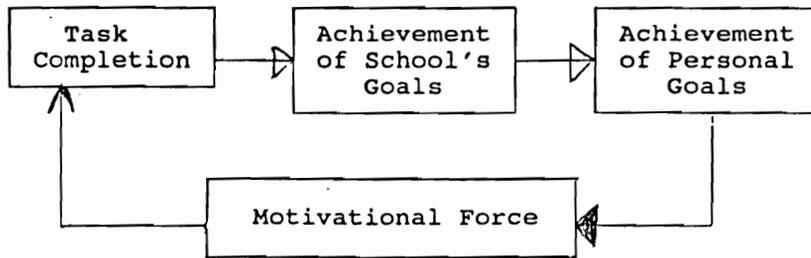
    The individual perceives a reward or a personal goal. He performs the task to achieve the organization's (school's) goals. By achieving the organization's goals, the individual is rewarded by receiving a personal return.

    When applied to the school situation, we find that students will endure the process of education to attain diplomas if they feel that by doing so they can meet present or future personal goals. They must perceive that the achievement of passing grades and the diploma will assure

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the attainment of a good job, self-respect, suitable care, or an improvement of status in society.

According to Vroom (1982), individuals can make intelligent and rational estimates about the consequences of particular choices and how such choices will affect their interests. Individuals can also estimate expectancies in regard to whether they can carry through a particular task and the likelihood their efforts will be rewarded.

Every individual has a preference for specific outcomes. "Preference refers to the relationship between the strength of a person's desire for, or attraction toward, outcomes" (Vroom, 1982, p. 15). These outcomes or "affective orientations," may have a negative, indifferent, or positive valence. A valence is termed negative when a person prefers not to reach a goal rather than reaching it. The valence is indifferent when the individual does not care one way or the other whether the goal is reached, and the valence is positive when the person prefers to reach a goal rather than not reaching it.

A preference for reaching certain goals may or may not be satisfying or valuable when the goal is attained. It may be that the person will have a positive valence for reaching the goal and then derive little satisfaction when the goal is reached. The person's actions may be based on anticipated satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

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When applied to the dropout, it may be that the person feels dropping out of school will lead to a job which will assist in buying a car that the person wants or it may be a chance to get away from the rules and regulations of the school environment. If this is the case, the person becomes positively valent toward dropping out, and his actions are guided toward that end.

Another explanation could be that when faced with the reality of persistent failure, the young adolescent decides that the outcome is not worth the struggle. He may assume the "don't care attitude" and decide that he does not care whether or not he completes high school. It may seem to him that he is programmed for failure based upon previous experiences, and that in all probability he will never be able to finish high school anyway. The expectancy of fulfilling the requirements of the school and achieving the goals of the school is low. When this is the case, the probability of receiving the desired reward (car) by staying in school is also low. When these are compounded by the unpleasantness of continuous failure, the result is predictable. Dropping out is more rewarding than staying in school.

This line of reasoning is based on the assumption that dropping out of school is a rational choice, an assumption which I accept. The student decides to continue education

or terminate it. Even in cases where the student is expelled, it is the student who decides to be guided by the school's rules and regulations or to disregard them. True, society does little to provide the kind of resources needed to help the individual make a more informed decision, but the student ultimately decides the course of action. The student does have a choice.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Researchers have taken a renewed interest in the
identification and characteristics of dropouts. Numerous
studies have been conducted in an effort to provide
information for school personnel so that they may ease the
problem. Studies range from cases for standardizing the
methods of determining what constitutes a dropout (Morrow,
1986; Hammock, 1986) to analyses of the factors which
identify dropouts (Barber & McClellan, 1987; Sewell, Palmo,
& Manni, 1981).

Much of the research has focused on the characteristics
of dropouts. By studying these characteristics, it is felt
that the problem can be alleviated through understanding and
action. Natriella, Pallas, and McDill (1986) stated, "It is
crucial to continue monitoring the characteristics of
dropouts if we are to understand the problem ..." (p. 432).
Sherman (1987) reported,

> The information on the characteristics of
> dropouts...is most important because it identifies
> some of the children at risk or have a propensity
> to leave school, and it may assist in the
> development of programs to meet these children's
> special needs and help them stay in school. (p.

53)

For the decade preceding this study, a number of
characteristics of dropouts were identified in other
studies. See Table 1 for studies reviewed. Dropouts may
have one or more of the following characteristics. They
may--

1. come from homes with low socioeconomic status;

2. come from single-parent families mostly headed by
    females;

3. come from homes where the educational attainment
    of parents or older siblings is less than high
    school graduation;

4. have working mothers;

5. have low academic achievement;

6. have low test scores;

7. have been retained in earlier grades;

8. be married;

9. have children;

10. work for pay during their time in school;

11. have poor school attendance;

12. have changed schools often;

13. have been involved in juvenile crime;

14. be of minority status, namely black or Hispanic;

15. come from a large family;

16. be male;

Table 1

Summary of Studies on Dropouts

Study	Population Studied	Size of Sample	Analysis	Predictors[1]
Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen (1971)	High school boys	Over 2000	Multivariate	5,6,7,10, 11,12,23
Barber & McClellan (1987)	High school students	17 major districts	Content analysis	1-40
Bearden, Spencer, & Moracco (1989)	High school dropouts	440	Chi square	7, 16, 30, 32
Beck & Muia (1980)	N/A[2]	N/A	N/A	33,1,34,5,6,7, 25,11
Barro & Kolstad (1987)	Nationwide dropouts	30,030	Multivariate statistics	23,1,2,32,3, 27,5,6,28,9, 8,11,25
Borus & Carpenter (1983)	Total number of dropouts in Nashville Public Schools	1128	Least Squares Probit Analysis	1, 2, 3
Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock (1986)	National Study High School and Beyond	Approx. 30,000 high school sophomores	Path analysis	1,5,6,10,8, 11,27,2,28, 29
Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White (1988)	At-risk students	Not given	Qualitative	38, 39
Farrell (1990)	Young men and women 14-19 years old	73	Qualitative	36,5,6,1,28, 23,2

[1]A list of predictors concluded to be important in the literature is at the end of this table.

[2]N/A = not available

Table 1 Cont'd.

Study	Population Studied	Size of Sample	Analysis	Predictors
Fine (1985)	Students who dropped out, mostly blacks & Hispanics	395	Qualitative	1,16,20,36, 40,15
Fine (1986)	Mostly blacks & Hispanics	1121	Qualitative	11,8,20
Finn (1987)	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,5,10,12,27
Fortune, Bruce, Williams, & Jones (1991)	Dropout prevention problem	N/A	N/A	1,5,7,10
Hahn (1987)	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,2,5,8,9,11, 32,36
Hamilton (1986)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hammack (1986)	School systems in Boston, LA, Miami, NYC, San Diego, Chicago	N/A	N/A	7
Hewitt & Johnson (1979)	Dropouts	100	Percentage	33,5,36
Howell & Frese (1982)	Fifth & sixth graders & parents in six southern states	1,202	Ordinary Least squares	1,5
Joubert et al. (1986)	Students in grades 10-12 who dropped out	10,555	Percentage	9,8,7,28
Lerman (1972)	Negro & white youth	104,000	Regression	1,3,15,18,27, 37

Table 1 Cont'd.

Study	Population Studied	Size of Sample	Analysis	Predictors
Loughrey & Harris (1990)	Ninth & tenth grade students at an urban high school--GPA below 1.0, less than a D average	138	Qualitative Survey	5
Mann (1986)	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,2,7,9,11,36
Mare (1980)	U.S. males 20-65	33,500 civilians noninstitutional, ages 20-65 3000 vets, ages 18-34	Regression	1,3,23
Markey (1988)	Male and female dropouts	N/A	Percentage	9,5,36,1,23,3,6
Masters (1969)	Children 14-17 years old	1/1000 of 1960 Census	Regression	23,1,27,18
McDermott (1987)	Minorities	N/A	N/A	5
Murphy (1986)	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,23
Natriella, Pallas, McDill (1986)	High school dropouts	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ogbu (1987)	Minorities	N/A	N/A	5
Pittman (1986)	Rural dropouts	82	Qualitative	5,21,36,17
Ralph (1989)	N/A	N/A	N/A	5
Raywid (1987)	N/A	N/A	N/A	5,7,36
Richardson & Gerlach (1980)	Black dropouts	N/A	Multiple regression	1,5,12,20,31

Table 1 Cont'd.

Study	Population Studied	Size of Sample	Analysis	Predictors
Rumberger (1983)	Black, Hispanic, white--both male and female of each group	12,700	N/A	23, 20, 18
Rumberger (1987)	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,5,8,8,11,36
Sewell, Palmo, & Manni (1981)	Male & female high school dropouts	65	Multiple regression	31
Shaw (1982)	Females	433 white & 216 black	Probit Analysis	2,1
Sherman (1987)	Females & males	Sample nationwide, not given	N/A	1,2,3,4,5,6,7, 8,9
Smith & Shephard (1987)	N/A	N/A	N/A	7
Soderberg (1988)	Teachers-- regular & special education	160	Percentage	5,7,8,9,10,11, 17,28
Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan (1984)	Language minority youngsters	N/A	N/A	1,27,29,2,5,8, 25
Stephens (1990)	Male prisoners	220	Descriptive statistics, t-test, chi square	7,24,10,11,5
Stroup & Robins (1986)	Black males	223	Multivariate analysis	7,10,24,25,26
Svec (1987)	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,5
Thornburg (1985)	7th & 8th grade students	224	Analysis of variance	12

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Table 1 Cont'd.

Study	Population Studied	Size of Sample	Analysis	Predictors
Trueba & Spindler (1989)	Early adolescents	N/A	N/A	1,5,9
Vogt, Jordan, & Thorp (1987)	Minorities	N/A	N/A	5
Wehlage & Rutter (1986)	Hispanics, blacks, & whites	7,539	Discriminant analysis	1,5,6,9,10,11,12

Addendum to Table 1

Predictors of Dropping Out

1. Low socioeconomic status (24 studies)
2. Single-parent family mostly headed by females (9 studies)
3. Educational attainment of parents or siblings (6 studies)
4. Working mother (1 study)
5. Low academic achievement (27 studies)
6. Low test scores (8 studies)
7. Retention in earlier grades (13 studies)
8. Students who are married or who have children (8 studies)
9. Students who work for pay (9 studies)
10. Poor attendance (8 studies)
11. Disciplinary infractions (11 studies)
12. Low self-esteem (5 studies)
13. Thwarted ambition (1 study)
14. Personal failure (1 study)
15. Deteriorating neighborhood (2 studies)
16. Drugs (1 study)
17. Isolation (1 study)
18. Poor role models (3 studies)
19. Lack of confidence (1 study)
20. Low expectation (3 studies)
21. Lack of encouragement (1 study)
22. Motivation (lack of) (7 studies)
23. Family background (8 studies)
24. School changes (2 studies)
25. Juvenile crime (4 studies)
26. Sexual experience before age 15 (1 study)
27. Race (6 studies)
28. Curriculum (5 studies)
29. Coming from a large family (2 studies)
30. Gender (1 study)
31. Intellectual ability (2 studies)
32. Location (3 studies)
33. Indifferent parents (2 studies)
34. Social contacts (1 study)
35. Alienation (1 study)
36. Dissatisfaction with schools (9 studies)
37. Area employment and wage conditions (1 study)
38. Boredom (1 study)
39. Pressure (1 study)
40. School structure (2 studies)

17. live in large urban areas, the South, or a small rural school district;

18. have parents who are indifferent;

19. have been dissatisfied with school--didn't like it, have been bored, or felt pressured;

20. have been expelled, suspended or have committed many disciplinary infractions;

21. have low self-esteem;

22. not be motivated;

23. live in deteriorating neighborhoods;

24. have used or are using drugs;

25. feel isolated;

26. have poor role models;

27. have little confidence;

28. have low expectations;

29. be influenced to dropout or stay according to area employment and wage conditions.

The aforementioned list of characteristics of the dropout are not in rank order. However, Barber and McClellan (1987) uncovered some of the reasons students gave for dropping out. These reasons were those recorded by school districts and are reported here in rank order, with those given most often first.

Dropouts--

* had attendance problems,

*   lacked interest in school,

*   were bored with school,

*   had academic problems or poor grades,

*   had family problems or responsibilities,

*   had problems with their assigned school,

*   disliked a particular course,

*   had problems with school administrators,

*   disliked everything,

*   had problems with counselors,

*   had problems with other students,

*   had discipline problems and were suspended,

*   felt too old for school,

*   had financial problems,

*   were ill,

*   said school lacked desired program or course,

*   gave miscellaneous reasons,

*   were pregnant,

*   had conflicts with employment,

*   got married,

*   had enough education to work,

*   had illness in the family,

*   disliked discipline and rules,

*   had transportation problems,

*   entered military service,

*   moved and went to another school,

* had achieved educational goals,

* had parents who demanded they leave school,

* said they didn't know,

* couldn't speak English,

* disliked some physical feature of school.

The evidence reported in the Barber and McClellan (1987) report shows that dropouts give varied reasons for their actions. This conclusion is supported by Rumberger (1987) who concluded that not only do dropouts report a number of different reasons for leaving school, but these reasons differ according to the social group responding:

Almost one half of all dropouts and more than half of white and black males cite school-related reasons for leaving school, such as disliking school or being expelled or suspended. Twenty percent of all dropouts, but almost 40% of Hispanic males, cite economic reasons for leaving school. (p. 109)

With these studies in mind, the myriad reasons recorded in the literature for students dropping out are examined. For the purpose of this study, these reasons are discussed in the following classifications: academic, familial, social group, and geographic location.

Academic Reasons

The literature consistently documents evidence to support the thesis that academic achievement affects a student's decision to leave school prematurely. Raywid (1987) stated, "One major factor in dropping out is school failure. Most youngsters who leave school without finishing have experienced a lot of failure, and, in fact, the more failure, the higher the probability that they will drop out" (p. 226). The Institute for Educational Leadership (Finn, 1987) concluded, "Students drop out largely because of school-related problems..." (p. 16). "Low academic achievement, as indicated by low test scores and low grades, has been consistently associated with high school attrition" (p.14). Sherman (1987) concurred with this conclusion and added another dimension--retention. He stated, "Dropouts have a school history that is marked by low academic achievement, low test scores, and retention in earlier grades" (p. 4). Fine (1986) reported that a group of students in a New York City high school who left school had experienced failure in school and had been retained at least once. This was based on her finding that the second highest reported reason for males leaving school before completing their education was poor grades.

Several other studies were found which further document the effects of academic failure. Hahn (1987) reported, "The

most common reason for leaving school is poor academic achievement" (p. 258). Beck and Muia (1980) reported that studies have shown that two highly significant predictors of dropping out are retention and low grades. Mann (1986) found a correlation between being retained and dropping out of school: "Being retained one grade increases the risk of dropping out later from 40 to 50 percent; two grades by 90 percent" (p. 308). Soderberg (1988) summarized the relationship between academic performance and dropping out: "The three most important indicators of potential dropouts are that the student is over age for grade placement, reading below grade level, and has been retained in grade" (p. 110).

Familial Reasons

These reasons are perhaps the most talked about reasons for dropping out. They not only have been reported as predictors and causes of dropping out, but they have been related to poor academic achievement. This makes them not only primary causes of dropping out but secondary causes as well. Sherman (1987) found, "Dropouts come disproportionately from families that are low in socioeconomic status, single-parent, headed by females, and large in size. Parents and older siblings are also likely to be school dropouts" (p. 7).

Family conditions have long been advanced as a deterrent to school success, so it is not surprising that such reasons would be found in the research on drop outs.

There are six family-related predictors of dropping out.

1. low income status,

2. single parent homes,

3. low educational attainment on the part of the parents and older sisters or brothers,

4. unsatisfactory relationship with family members,

5. cultural differences between the school staff and the homes of these students,

6. lack of parental interest.

Students from low-income families always comprise an unusually high percentage of the dropout population. Low-income status is generally accompanied by a single parent family, a large family size, lower educational attainment of parents and a way of life that differs from that of "middle and upper class" families.

Fine (1985) in her study of a New York City public high school determined that most often the dropouts she studied left school to assist their families. It is well to note that her study included students who were from homes of lower income, of blue collar workers, or on public assistance. Masters (1969) not only included income but

extended this area to include the element of parents'
educational level. He found, "For children whose parents
have little education or income the probabilities [of
dropping out] are more than 20 times greater than for
children from well-to-do families where both parents have
graduated from high schools" (p. 2).

Students who experience poor relationships with their
families are prime candidates for dropping out. Beck and
Muia (1980) advanced this theory. They concluded from their
study that most dropouts seem to have a basic lack of trust
and acceptance of their family. In fact 33% of the dropouts
confided that there was no one in their home with whom they
could confide, enjoy their leisure time, or communicate.
Parents are portrayed as indifferent or negative toward the
importance of school.

The idea of a cultural clash between the student and
the school environment is also well documented. The
differences that exist may be viewed as a cause of dropping
out. This clash is brought about by the differences in
family background between the students and their teachers
and principals. Beck and Muia (1980) determined, "The
exceedingly high dropout rate among the 'lower' classes
(which often are composed largely of minorities) is
attributable to the cultural differences...between these
groups and the upper class" (p. 67). In their analysis of

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the High School and Beyond Study, Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollock, and Rock (1986) pointed out, "Dropouts tend to come from homes with a weak educational support system" (p. 358). These homes have fewer study aids, fewer opportunities to learn in the nonschool-related environment, a single parent, and mothers who have less formal schooling, lower expectations for their children, and less interest in monitoring both in-school and out-of-school activities.

It is interesting to note that the studies continually show dropouts come from homes of lower-income families and that minorities are disproportionately represented in these populations. The studies suggest that poverty and cultural differences increase the likelihood of dropping out. Factors such as low socioeconomic status and single-parent families generally result in less interest in school-related and out-of-school activity. Apathy on the part of parents is one of the most common reasons given for dropping out of school and for low achievement. Beck and Muia (1980), however, determined that the most important problem is a serious conflict with the school environment: "The heart of the problem is that the lower-class child is neither willing nor able to conform to the school's middle-class standards of obedience, docility, and scholarship; this creates a conflict with the school's middle-class teacher" (p. 67).

Nonacademic Reasons

There are a number of nonacademic school reasons that affect the decision of a student to leave school prior to graduation. These include dislike of school, boredom, lack of interest, and a conflict with the school environment. When compared with the excitement of a fast-paced environment filled with the thrills of nintendo, the terror sparked by community violence, and the massive technological changes that make counting a task to be done by machines, there is little wonder students lose interest in a school environment that has done little to complement the real world from which the student emanates. Farrell, Peguera, Lindsey, and White (1988) concluded, "If school offers no payoff and if the material to be learned has little bearing on students' lives, they become bored" (p. 498).

Dislike of school is a prime reason cited by students for early school withdrawal. Hewitt and Johnson (1979) asserted, "48% of the dropouts [in Muncie, Indiana] cited their dislike for school as the reason for withdrawing.... A rather surprising 100% [of the dropouts] cited their dislike of school as at least one of the factors affecting their decision to leave school" (p. 254). Hahn (1987), Ekstrom et al. (1986), and Mann (1986) concurred with this finding. Pittman (1986) found that the most frequently listed reason for dropping out of school was lack of

interest.

Farrell, et al. (1988) concluded that there is a
lessening of the value of studying now for a better life in
the future, and that may be caused by boredom in school.
They stated, "The classroom must appear a bland place to
this population far removed from the real life of the
streets and real concern for one's friends" (p. 496).
Pittman (1986) concluded that almost half of the students
investigated gave some reason for dropping out related to
their "...personal relationship with the components of the
school environment, i.e. lack of interest and
dissatisfaction with teachers or principals" (p. 9).

Adolescents are overwhelmed with social pressures that
affect their performance at school. At this point in life
they are struggling to find their niche. Farrell, Peguero,
Lindsey, and White (1988) wrote,

> What is happening is that realities or 'meaning
> systems' ... are constructed by teachers and
> administrators for the students.... They presume
> enough overlap in cultural perspectives for common
> values and understandings between the students and
> themselves. These meaning systems, however, have
> very little relationship to the meaning systems
> constructed by the students who have to function
> in their daily lives within a larger and, compared

with the teachers, less secure world context. (p. 500)

Nonacademic school reasons for dropping out all seem to point to a need for adapting the school environment to the needs of the student. Though this concept has been stressed for many years as a practice of the school, it appears from the research that it is not being effective as we seek to educate students who drop out. A look at the comments of the researchers reviewed in this section seems to point out a need for the school to actively motivate the student. To accomplish this end, it appears that the school must compete with the student's life outside of the school environment and seek to provide an atmosphere that is interesting, likable, and conducive to the kind of conformity that will encourage the students to learn the necessary curriculum.

Social Group Reasons

Differences were quite evident in the literature when race and gender were considered. Barro and Kolstad (1987) wrote, "There are important variations in dropout rates among race/ethnic groups, and between the sexes..." (p. 18).

Race

Fine (1985) stated, "In New York State, 23.9% of all students are black while 36.1% of expelled and 34.2% of suspended students are black" (p. 46). Mann (1986) found

that blacks are suspended from high school three times as often as whites. Masters (1969) stated, "If the rate of return on the investment is an important factor, ... the dropout rate might be higher for Negroes than for whites, since Negroes appear to have a lower rate of return on their educational investment" (p. 165). Kolstad and Owings (1986) found that blacks were more likely to drop out than whites. Barro and Kolstad (1987) stated, "The dropout rate...varies dramatically among racial groups. Blacks drop out at an almost 40 percent higher rate than whites..." (p. 18).

Of special interest are some of the findings regarding black students. While blacks comprise a disproportionate number of the dropout population, research findings suggest that contrary to popular notion this disproportionate representation may not be all related to the student's inability to learn. The reasons put forth by these students indicate that blacks have a low value for achievement, are more likely to have disciplinary problems, and are less likely to perceive that they will reap economic benefits by remaining in school. Wehlage and Rutter's (1986) findings indicated that black dropouts generally have a lower value for achievement than blacks who remain in school. They also found, "Dropouts do have greater disciplinary problems than other students, with blacks having the greatest likelihood of serious discipline problems in school" (p. 384).

Richardson and Gerlach's (1980) findings indicate that black dropouts have a higher intelligence, as measured by standardized I.Q. tests, than those blacks who remain in school. "...Many black dropouts felt that given their low socioeconomic status, discrimination by teachers, peer groups and lack of opportunity structures, dropping out of school is a realistic and intelligent decision" (p. 491).

Gender

All researchers who addressed the gender of those who drop out agree that males drop out more frequently than females (Bearden, Spencer, & Moracco, 1989; Hahn, 1987; Joubert, et al., 1986; Rumberger, 1987). Mann (1986) reported, "For boys (who constitute 54 percent of the dropout population)... 51 percent disappear because of things about the school; 21 percent for economic reasons; 5 percent for family reasons; and 23 percent for other reasons" (p. 308). Among the other reasons given for the large number of male dropouts is their inability to conform to the rules and regulations imposed by the school system. Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1986) determined that males are more than twice as likely as females to report leaving school because of behavior problems, including not being able to get along with teachers, being expelled, or being suspended.

Familial economics has often been associated with males' reasons for dropping out of school. Mann (1986) reported, "About 14 percent of the boys in the High School and Beyond data set gave this explanation, "being pushed out by family necessity" (p. 310). Other researchers have found that dropping out of school to help families economically is a common reason given for early withdrawal (Bearden, Spencer, & Moracco, 1989; Fine, 1985; Rumberger, 1987; Woodring, 1989).

Geographic Location

Rumberger (1983) found that for males geographic location was significant. Black and Hispanic males who lived in the South were not as likely to drop out when differences in family background were controlled. Black males living in large, urban, inner cities tended to have a much higher drop-out rate than those who lived in rural and suburban areas.

Barro and Kolstad (1987) examined location factors and their effects on dropping out. They reported that there is a substantial difference in U.S. dropout rates; the rates vary from one region to another and among high schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. They approximate that the dropout rate in the South and West is about one-third higher than in the Northeast and North Central regions. It is

about 40% higher in urban than suburban areas and lower in the suburbs as compared to rural areas. In areas that have high unemployment and low wage rates, young people list school as their primary activity.

The Black Male and Dropping Out of School

The focus of this study is the black male and dropping out of school. Though black males constitute an extremely high percentage of the dropout population, this researcher could find only two studies that placed emphasis on this specific group. Stroup and Robins (1972) examined a sample of 223 black, urban males who had IQs of 84 or higher. They studied their elementary school records, police records acquired before age 15, information from interviews, and family background during their elementary school years. They found that school failure, excessive absences in elementary school, broken homes, mother's educational attainment, frequent school changing, early recorded delinquency, early drinking, family lifestyle, and social status were all predictors of the school dropout for this population. Richardson and Gerlach (1980) found a significant correlation between the decision to drop out and the black male student's inability to perceive education as a vehicle to greater opportunity in the future.

Summary

The predictors associated with the dropout problem are connected to the social and economic problems of the larger society and as such require that the basic institutions of this larger society give more than lip service to the eradication of the root causes of this problem. Wells (1990) reinforced the idea of the larger community's role in the student's decision to leave school prematurely:

> Community factors present an equally complex set
> of characteristics leading to the decision of
> students eventually to drop out. Barriers include
> a lack of (1) responsive community support
> services; (2) linkages between school and
> community services; (3) preventive mental health
> programs to address drug and alcohol problems; (4)
> family counseling; (5) community support for
> schools; (6) 'neighborhood' schools'; (7) adequate
> transportation; and (8) ability to deal with the
> high incidence of criminal activity (Posternak,
> 1986; NASSW, 1985). (pp. 6-7)

The need for community involvement has been expressed by Mann (1986) and Natriella, Pallas, and McDill (1986).

All of the predictors are interwoven. Academic achievement is associated with family background characteristics and vice versa. School interest is not only

a factor which affects academic achievement but is also a result of family characteristics. Family characteristics are dependent upon geographic location and the economic opportunities available to the citizens in that location.

The problems created by the high school dropout must be eradicated. The fact that we have an increasing minority population and its members make up a disproportionate share of school dropouts dictates that we must study this segment of our society and devise and implement programs to prevent serious productivity loses.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The major objective of this study was to examine the perceptions of a group of black male students and a group of black male dropouts about their school experiences and to discover if there were similarities between the perceptions of these two groups. The researcher examined the participants' perceptions of self; perceptions of what happens or happened to them in school; present and future goals; and perceptions of the connections among the school process, getting a diploma, and future goals.

This chapter contains the limitations of the study, the procedure used in selecting the participants, the sources of data, a description of the interview questionnaire, and the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Limitations

This study was conducted using information gathered from personal interviews with students and dropouts in two rural school districts. The following limitations applied:

1. It is a description of the perceptions of a small group of black males and as such the reader must determine if the study can be generalized beyond the sample.

2. As always, subjectivity is a factor when interpreting narrative reports. This researcher made every

effort to systematically collect, organize, and analyze data using as much objectivity as possible. Observations and personal, informal interviewing were supplemented with personal, structured interviewing and document collection.

3. The degree to which the participants were honest in the expression of their thoughts and feelings regarding their school experience is another limitation. This researcher felt that the students were honest in their responses. Anonymity was guaranteed all participants.

4. All dropout participants had been out of school three years or less.

Selection of the Participants

Two school systems were used to obtain participants for the study. Two schools from one system were used to select fifth and eighth-grade participants, one intermediate school and one junior high school. Dropout participants were selected from both systems.

The school systems selected were chosen because (1) they were in proximity to the researcher, (2) some rapport existed between the researcher and the systems, and (3) their proximity made data collection using interviews economically feasible.

The individual schools were selected because (1) there was only one school in the system that served eighth

graders, and (2) the school which served fifth graders was in proximity to the former and also served as a feeder school to the school that served the eighth graders.

The second school system was contacted because of the need for additional drop-out participants. This system was in proximity of the researcher. After explaining the study to the superintendent of the latter system, he suggested that the researcher contact the school with the highest percentage of black students. He also made it clear that the study could only be done with the consent of the principal. He suggested that the principal be contacted for approval. The researcher spoke with the principal, and he agreed to cooperate. The principal then instructed the counselor to prepare a list of dropouts for the three-year period 1989-1991.

Twenty black, male participants in grades five and eight -- ten at each grade level -- were selected from those who scored below the 60th percentile on the California Achievement Test. Twenty black male dropouts were selected from those who had been out of school three or fewer years.

The researcher initially selected potential black, male participants from a pool of eighth-grade students she had previously taught. She approached those black, male students whom she felt would cooperate with her in the gathering of data for the study and asked them if they would

agree to assist her with the study. She explained that she wanted to talk with them about their feelings regarding school. Their responses were affirmative and interviews were scheduled.

To determine if the participants would meet the criteria for participation, the researcher consulted school records and confirmed that these potential black males in the eighth grade had scored below the 60th percentile on the California Achievement Test. After this initial process, permission letters were sent to the parents of the students (Appendix A). All parents of the eighth-grade group returned the letters and gave permission for them to participate in the study. The researcher then began the interview process.

To obtain fifth-grade students for the study, the principal was included in selecting potential participants. The criteria to be used in the selection of the participants was explained to the principal by the researcher. The principal then selected several black males from the pool of approximately 18 possible participants. She chose those black, male students whose parents she felt would allow their sons to participate and some students whom she felt may be "at risk." Next, the principal brought them into the office, explained the project, and requested their help. Lastly, she sent permission letters home via students.

To identify black male dropouts, the researcher consulted a principal, a guidance counselor, and former students she knew. The principal and guidance counselor from one school refused to assist in identifying black, male students who had dropped out of school. When that happened, the researcher requested the assistance of two former students (one black female and one black male). The female informant provided the researcher with a list of names and telephone numbers of black male dropouts she knew. The male informant introduced the researcher to several potential male participants by accompanying her to their homes and introducing her to the potential participants. Once the introductions were made, the researcher scheduled a time to return and interview the participants.

In addition the researcher contacted another high school. This particular high school was selected after the researcher contacted the superintendent of the second school system to obtain additional dropout participants. The superintendent suggested that the researcher contact this school's principal because the school served the highest number of black, high school students in the system. The principal and guidance counselor provided the researcher with a list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of all black males who had dropped out of school within the past three years, 1989 to 1991. Using the information from

the informants, the principal, and the guidance counselor, a list of 40 possible participants was compiled.

Once 23 willing participants were located, the interviewing process began. Two of the original participants dropped out, and the next two interviewees on the list were substituted. The list was compiled as prospective participants agreed to participate in the study.

Procedures for Data Collection

Personal interviews were used to collect data. The interview questions were developed from predictors found in the literature. The following procedures were used to identify the predictors and for forming initial interview questions:

1. Books and articles were read to identify predictors. Each predictor was listed and assigned a number.

2. After the list of predictors was compiled, each reference was then reread and a chart was drawn to indicate the referenced study, the population that was studied, the size of the population, the type of analysis used, and the predictors discussed in the study (Refer to Table 1).

3. The list of predictors was used to develop interview questions (Table 2).

Questions for interviews were structured so

Table 2

Predictors of Dropping Out of School with Related Interview Questions

PREDICTORS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Low SES	Do/Did you get free or reduced lunches?
Single-parent family	Do/Did you live with both parents?
Education attainment of both parents and siblings	Did your parents finish high school? Parents or other siblings? Did your brothers and sisters finish high school? What kind of work do your parents do?
Family size	How many brothers or sisters do you have?
Working mother	Does your mother work?
Low test scores	(Review Records)
Retention in earlier grades	Have you ever been retained?
Students who are married or who have children	Have you ever been married? Do you have any children?
Students who work for pay	Do/Did you have a job after school?
Poor attendance	Do/Did you attend school regularly?
Disciplinary infractions	Have you ever been to the office because of something you have done?
	Were you ever suspended?
Drugs	Have you ever tried alcohol or drugs?

Table 2 Cont'd.

PREDICTORS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
School changes	Have you ever been in a different school system?
Juvenile crime	Have you ever been in trouble with the law?
Sexual experience before age 15	Were you sexually active before age 15?
Curriculum	Do/Did you find your subjects hard or easy? What did/do you do in school to help meet your future goals?
Boredom	Are/Were you excited about going to school?
Pressure	Do/Did you feel pressured at school?
Dissatisfaction with school	Tell me, what did/do you think of school? What about your teachers, did/do you like them? Did/do they like you? Did/do they understand you? Who was/is your favorite teacher? What did/do your favorite teachers have that others didn't? Why? Did/do you talk with the guidance counselor? Was/is he/she nice? Did/do you like him/her? Why? Did/do you have difficulty in school? Did/do you ever go to the principal or his assistants? For what reason(s)? Did/do you like school? What did/do you like about school? What did/do you dislike about school? What could schools have done to make the experience more pleasant?

Table 2 Cont'd.

PREDICTORS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Low academic achievement	How were your grades? Was the school work hard or easy? What kinds of grades did/do you make?
Poor attendance	Did/do you come to school on time? Did/do you check out early or stay all day? Did you ever cut class?
Social contacts	Did/do you have a lot of friends at school? Tell me about them.

that there would be uniformity during interview sessions for both in-school and dropout participants.

After the development of the interview questions, a consultation was held with the doctoral committee to determine appropriateness of questions to be included in the initial interviews. Eight pilot interviews were conducted with black, male students in the seventh grade who met the same criteria as the in-school participants in the study, with the exception of grade level.

The final interview questions were developed after the responses from the pilot interviews were collected and the recommendations from the committee were reviewed. In addition, the literature was searched to determine desirable features and methods for developing interview questions. The pilot interviews were used to determine the clarity of the interview questions to determine the extent to which data could be obtained, and to strengthen and improve the researcher's skill in conducting the interviews.

Interviews were taped with the permission of the participants. Fifteen of the dropout participants agreed to be taped. Two fifth-grade participants were not taped because of a tape recorder malfunction. At all times, detailed notes were recorded. The data obtained provided the basis for the findings and conclusions of the study and were used to determine any follow-up information that was

needed to clarify or help the researcher to understand participants' perceptions.

Identified eighth graders were contacted first. Permission letters were returned, each participant was contacted, and a specific time was scheduled for the interview. All initial interviews were conducted at school, and two group sessions were held at the local McDonalds near the end of school as a treat for the ten who participated. All interviews were taped and detailed notes were recorded. Subsequent interviews were scheduled to clarify meanings, gain a greater understanding of the participants' cultural orientation, and to fill in "gaps" in the research; i.e., to gather information needed in order to answer questions which arose during the data analysis.

The fifth graders were then contacted using the same procedure. Scheduled interview sessions were arranged with the principal. The interviews were held at the school and were all individual interviews. These interviews were taped with the exception of two. The reason for that was a malfunction with the tape recorder.

In every case detailed notes were taken of participants' responses. Follow-up questions were used to clarify meanings and ideas expressed both during the initial and subsequent interviews.

The dropout participants were the last to be

interviewed. All interviews were individually conducted.
Dropouts were contacted by phone to schedule a time for the
interview. Approximately one-fourth of the dropouts
identified by the school no longer had the same phone
numbers. However, from conversations with those dropouts
who could be reached by telephone, the researcher was able
to locate some of those who had relocated or changed their
phone numbers. Arrangements were made to conduct
interviews. Some interviews were scheduled for the local
school while others were scheduled at the dropouts' home or
at a local fast-food chain. One interview was conducted at
the researcher's home. Initial interviews went very
smoothly; however, some of the follow-up interviews met with
resistance. Two of the dropout participants refused to
cooperate with the follow-up interviews and were dropped
from the study. The reason given in each case was that they
no longer wanted to talk about it (leaving school). These
two participants were replaced by two others who appeared on
the participant list.

Procedures for Analysis of Data

The data collected for this study were transcribed from
those interviews that were taped and from notes made at the
interview sessions. Once studied and organized, the
responses were tallied, categorized, and placed in table

form. Results are reported in number form with narrative explanations preceding each table.

This researcher chose to collect and analyze data alternately. This means the researcher began data analysis during the data collection process. By doing this, the researcher was able to test and verify conclusions, clarify meanings, and identify patterns and regularities.

Initial field notes were taken and then converted into summary form. By reviewing the field notes and summaries, this researcher noticed certain relationships among the responses of the participants. A content analysis of the responses was made through the identification and graphing of like responses. Tables were then devised.

Summary

In this chapter, the limitations, selection of participants, and the procedures employed in the collection and analysis of data for this study have been outlined.

The limitations were the small number of participants, subjectivity involved when one interprets narrative reports, honesty on the part of the participants, and the requirement that dropouts could only have been out of school for three years or less.

Only black males were included in the study. The participants were selected because of the researcher's

geographic area, the economic feasibility of the study, and the fact that there was some rapport between the researcher and the school system.

Data collection was done with interviews based on the predictors found in the literature. Content analysis and descriptive statistics were used to organize and interpret the data.

Chapter 4

Findings

A Description of the Setting

A prerequisite for understanding the findings of this study is an understanding of the schools and community from which the participants were selected. A general description of the school and community setting will set the stage for a more enlightened interpretation of the findings.

This study was conducted in an area which spanned two counties in two southern states. The counties bordered each other, and the segments of the counties studied were in contiguous areas. The combined population of the two counties was roughly 143,000. Approximately 112,000 of the people were white and 31,000 were black, according to the 1980 census. Most of the working population was employed in the textile, furniture, or beer industries. Residents crossed county and state lines to work and for recreation. The student participants were selected from a small rural city in the area. The population of that city included 12,312 whites, 2,833 blacks, and 93 persons of other ethnic backgrounds.

The school system from which the students were drawn had an enrollment of 4,280 during the year that this study was conducted. The school dropout rate, as reported by the school's central office staff, was 5.76% for the previous

year--1989.

The student participants in grade eight were selected from a junior high school. The school had a black, male principal. The two assistant principals were a black female and a white male. The total school enrollment was 957 students, which was 68 students below the enrollment from the previous year. The racial composition of this school's population was 77% white, 22% black, and 1% other ethnic groups. Teachers for these eighth graders during the course of the study were all white. Each participant had at least four core curricula teachers and at least three other teachers in physical education, music, and vocations.

Tables 3 and 4 indicate the reading and mathematics levels for all students in the school. A breakdown of the percentages is reported for both boys and girls at each grade level. The California Achievement Tests were administered during the spring of 1989.

The fifth-grade participants were selected from the same city as were the eighth graders. The school's principal was a black female with one white, male, assistant principal. The total school enrollment for the year during the study was approximately 500. Only fifth and sixth graders attended the school.

Table 3

Reading Scores from California Achievement Test, Junior High School, 1989

READING ACHIEVEMENT	GRADE 7 PERCENT		GRADE 8 PERCENT		GRADE 9 PERCENT		SCHOOL PERCENT	
	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
4 OR MORE YEARS ABOVE	12	14	12	35	23	43	16	31
3 YEARS ABOVE	7	6	3	6	6	0	5	4
2 YEARS ABOVE	14	12	12	10	2	4	9	8
1 YEAR ABOVE	12	11	20	15	16	1	16	9
AT GRADE LEVEL	16	17	16	8	14	20	15	15
1 YEAR BELOW	21	22	13	5	13	14	16	14
2 YEARS BELOW	7	7	11	12	11	6	10	8
3 YEARS BELOW	6	6	7	2	6	4	6	4
4 OR MORE YEARS BELOW	5	5	6	7	9	8	7	7

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Table 4

Mathematics Scores from California Achievement Test, Junior High School, 1989

MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT	GRADE 7 PERCENT		GRADE 8 PERCENT		GRADE 9 PERCENT		SCHOOL PERCENT	
	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
4 OR MORE YEARS ABOVE	12	14	20	35	26	47	19	31
3 YEARS ABOVE	7	6	0	4	3	5	3	5
2 YEARS ABOVE	14	12	7	10	1	4	7	9
1 YEAR ABOVE	12	11	13	12	7	7	11	10
AT GRADE LEVEL	16	17	18	10	20	10	19	13
1 YEAR BELOW	21	22	11	3	20	14	18	13
2 YEARS BELOW	7	7	13	13	11	5	10	8
3 YEARS BELOW	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	6
4 OR MORE YEARS BELOW	5	5	9	7	6	2	7	5

The composition of the population of this school was 81.5% white, 18% black, and .5% other ethnic groups. These figures were obtained from the principal. A breakdown of the California Achievement Test scores for all students in this school was not readily available. Students at the school had one main core curricula teacher with special teachers for music, physical education, media, Spanish, learning disabilities, and reading. All of the fifth-grade teachers were white female.

Report of Findings

The researcher investigated the perceptions of three groups of black males regarding their school experiences--10 fifth graders, 10 eighth graders, and 20 dropouts. Participants in the study were interviewed using questions based on predictors found in the literature. These questions guided further exploration of the characteristics of the dropout and his perceptions.

An account of the demographics and responses of the three groups is presented followed by a comparison of their responses in an effort to determine if one can identify potential dropouts at two decision points: fifth and eighth grades.

The study was based on self-reports. Participants were interviewed individually. They were asked a series of

questions about their school experience, family background, and present and future goals. Specifically, results presented are based on the data collected from these self-reports.

The Dropouts

Tables 5, 6, and 7 contain the grade, the age the participants left school, and the reason they reported for leaving. Three-fifths (60%) of the participants were in the 11th grade when they left school. The mean age of those leaving was 17.8 years. Fifty percent of the 20 dropouts did so at age 17.

Why They Dropped Out of School

The participants gave varied reasons for dropping out of school. Those nine who stated that they were expelled made it very clear that they did not drop out; they said they were "kicked" out or "put out." Of the nine students, all but one was expelled for fighting and had a history of "getting into trouble." The remaining one was expelled for smoking marijuana at school. Nine participants just quit. Two said they were tired of school. One said he was depressed because of not being able to go to college, three said they were constantly in trouble, and two said they

Table 5

Student Grade at the Time of Dropping Out, N=20

Grade	N	%
10	3	15
11	12	60
12	5	25

Table 6

Student Age at the Time of Dropping Out, N=20

Age	N	%
17	10	50
18	6	30
19	3	15
20	1	5

Table 7

Participants' Reported Reason for Leaving School, N=20

Reason	N	%
Expelled	9	45
Just quit	9	45
Quit for health reasons	1	5
Quit for economic reasons	1	5

missed too many days. Of the two, one cited personal and social problems; the other got into trouble, was in love with an older female, and missed too many days; subsequently, he failed his grade and dropped out. The remaining one did not like the teachers.

Over half of the participants who quit school did so as a part of the "normal" process of growing up for these adolescents when they are struggling for independence. It was a chance for them to pull away from those who represent authority. This idea was best put forth by one participant who declared, "I thought I was grown and could do as I wanted to."

Eight of those who were expelled said that trouble just seemed to follow them, or they were in the wrong crowd. They were the ones who viewed school as a social setting. For these students it would have been especially important for them to have someone with whom they could relate and who could perhaps guide them.

Table 7 shows that 45% (9 out of 20) of the participants said they just quit and 45% (9 out of 20) reported they were expelled. One of the 20 stated he requested to reenter and was denied. Further investigation revealed that he had missed the beginning of school and would have to remain in the same grade for another year. He refused to reenter because of this. The reason for late

reentry was that he chose to work at the beginning of the
school year. The remaining 5% (1 of the 20) did not return
for health reasons.

The age of the dropout participants ranged from 17 to
22. Eighteen of the 20 participants had been retained in
earlier grades. Thirteen participants lived in single-
parent families. Eleven lived in homes headed by a female--
nine with their mothers and two with their grandmothers.
Two lived with their fathers and seven lived with both
parents.

The Dropouts' School Experience

The dropouts were asked, "How did you feel about
school?" Five themes emerged from the data: (1) feelings
about school, (2) feelings about the principal, (3) feelings
about the teachers, (4) self-reports of grades, and (5)
self-reports of disciplinary problems.

Feelings about school. The dropouts reported different
feelings about school (Table 8). Nineteen of the
participants reported that they regretted not being there
anymore. Only one reported that he had no regrets about
leaving school. One important note is that he had been out
of school for only seven months. The others had been out of
school for a longer period of time. Four of 20 dropouts

Table 8

Dropouts' Reports of Their Feelings About School,

N=20

Feelings	N
Like	4
Ambivalent	9
Disliked	7

said they liked school; however, one of the four said he got too involved with people who did not like school, and he started disliking it also. Seven did not like school, and one of the seven stated emphatically that he did not like high school. One found school boring, and one got tired of school. Nine were ambivalent. They reported that school was all right or okay. (See Appendix B for respondents' data.)

These findings show that most students either disliked school or had some uncertainty of their feelings about school. The negative and ambivalent responses are a clear indication that there is something inherent in the school process that definitely alienates them. All expressed parental interest in their school progress.

Feelings about teachers. In response to their feelings about the teachers, seven liked the teachers, nine expressed ambivalent feelings about their teachers, and four didn't like their teachers (Table 9). Ten had favorite teachers. Favorite teachers were those who had a sense of humor, taught using jokes, and gave them chances to master the task. One participant said his favorite teacher was one he had in elementary school. He had not had a favorite teacher since then. Another said his favorite teacher "looked good." (See Appendix D for respondents' data.)

Feelings about the principal. Nine of the participants

Table 9

Dropouts' Feelings About Teachers, N=20

Feelings	Favorite	No Favorite	N
Liked teachers	2*	5, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14	7
Ambivalent toward teachers	3, 4, 8, 11, 17, 18	1, 7, 20	9
Disliked teachers	6, 16**,19	15	4

* Student identification number
** No favorite high school teacher

did not like the principal (Table 10). A breakdown of
respondents' perceptions of their treatment by the principal
(Table 11) shows that respondents did not feel they were
treated fairly when sent to the office for disciplinary
infractions. Two of the 10 said they were not treated
fairly sometimes. Nine of the 20 said they were treated
fairly. The other participant felt that the principal was
an "Uncle Tom" and looked down on blacks, but did not
respond as to whether the principal treated students fairly.
This participant had not been sent to the principal for any
disciplinary infractions. Dropouts who expressed negative
feelings regarding the principal accused him of being
racist--not liking blacks. The principal to whom they
referred was white. (See Appendix C for respondents' data.)

Most dropouts have definite likes or dislikes regarding
the principal. Participant feelings about the principal
follow a pattern. Those who were suspended
frequently by the principal felt that they were treated
unfairly. These feelings of unfair treatment suggested
disciplinary infractions were not perceived as serious by
the dropout as they were by those in authority. Half of the
participants felt that their side was not heard.

While interviewing the participants, the researcher
detected a hint of racism in responses. The question then

Table 10

Dropouts' Feelings About the Principal, N=20

Feelings	N
Liked principal	7
Ambivalent toward principal	4
Disliked principal	9

Table 11

Dropouts' Perceptions of Treatment by Principal, N=20

Feelings	N
Treated fairly by principal	9
Treated unfairly by principal	10
No opinion	1

becomes: To what extent does racism affect the dropouts'
feelings of alienation toward the school? This researcher
concluded that it does little to encourage a person to
remain in an environment that he genuinely dislikes or to
which he has no strong attachment.

Disciplinary problems. Disciplinary infractions have
long played a part in the student dropout problem. It is
one of the most frequently reported predictors found in the
literature. Nineteen of the dropout participants in this
study had been sent to the principal's office. As Table 12
indicates, fourteen participants were sent to the office for
fighting; 11 for skipping class, leaving school early
without permission, or for tardiness; four for arguing with
the teacher; one for class disruption; and one for a
confrontation with the principal. One reported he had not
been sent to the principal's office. These figures total
more than 20 because some of the participants were guilty of
more than one infraction (See Appendix F).

The data support other researchers (Beck & Muia, 1980;
Ekstrom et al., 1986) who contended that many of the black
males who drop out have disciplinary difficulty in school.
Could this be that this is somehow tied to the aggressive
behavior previously found in the literature regarding
dropouts, not only in school but also in the larger society?
The evidence suggests that the negative responses made about

Table 12

Dropouts' Reports of Disciplinary Problems, N=20

Problem	N*
Trouble with teachers, principal	5
Fighting	14
Tardiness	6
Skipping class	3
Leaving school early	2
Disruptive in class	1

*Total equals more than 20 because some had more than one
 infraction.

school may have resulted from the students' less than positive interactions with teachers and principals.

Academic achievement. The grades reported by these respondents were A's, B's, C's, D's, and some F's. Eleven reported they made failing grades, 10 stated school was easy, eight reported school work as both easy and hard, and one reported it was hard. One did not respond to the difficulty question. Twelve participants felt they could have done better in school if they had tried. Five described opportunities given them for academic success, but many did not take advantage of these opportunities. (Appendix E contains this information).

Dropouts' present and future goals. All students look forward to the time when they will "grow up," decide their own life, and move as they please. To achieve these ends, students must set goals based upon the lifestyle they wish to live. This lifestyle must be based upon their needs, wants, resources, and the choices available to them. The purpose of this next section is to examine the goals reported by the participants and to determine how the participants related these goals to the school process.

A review of the responses given for present goals (Table 13) reinforces the previous assessment by this researcher that many dropouts tend to regret their earlier decision to leave school. The responses might also suggest

Table 13

Dropouts' Present and Future Goals, N=20

Goals	Present	Future*
Go back to school	8	
Go to armed services		1
Get house/car	1	5
Find or get a job	6	4
Become an artist		1
Own a car lot		1
Go to college		1
Get married		2
Be somebody		1
Drive trucks		2
Don't know		2
No response	5	1
Do shows		1

*One response for future goals included job, marriage,
and a house; another included job and house.

that dropouts whose goals are "employment" oriented do not recognize the parallel between attaining an education and reaching their future goals. Their future aspirations include the age old "thirst for the American dream" -- a good job and a house. (See Appendix G for respondents' data.)

Eighth-Grade Students

To determine whether or not there are similarities between the perceptions of dropouts and current eighth and fifth graders, the researcher used the same basic questions to interview students at these pivotal points. These data are reported in the next section of this chapter.

The eighth-grade students ranged from 13 to 15 years old. All but one had repeated a grade. The California Achievement Test revealed that all ranked at or below the 55th percentile. Table 14 shows the participants' percentile ranks on the California Achievement Test. All were from single-parent families and none had a male role model who completed school beyond high school. Eight lived in homes that were headed by a female, while two lived with their fathers as the single parent.

Feelings About School

Three of the ten participants reported that they liked school; one of the three described school as fun. Four said it was "all right" (ambivalent responses). Two said it was

Table 14

Eighth-Graders' California Achievement Test Scores:
Percentile Ranks, N=10

Percentile	N
55	1
32	2
28	2
22	1
20	1
9	1
6	2

a place to learn and get an education, and one stated it means a whole lot of different things but could not expand further (Table 15).

The information given by the eighth graders regarding their feelings about school showed that like the dropout seven of these students harbored a significant amount of uncertainy about school. (See Appendix H for respondents' data.)

Feelings About Teachers

Seven eighth graders expressed a positive feeling about their teachers (Table 16). One reported he liked all teachers except one. Another reported that he liked some teachers, and one reported that he liked teachers sometimes. All of the eighth-grade participants had a favorite teacher. (See Appendix I for respondents' data.)

Feelings About the Principal

Nine of the 10 eighth grade males in this study expressed dislike for the principal of their school (Table 17). The remaining respondent was ambivalent. Further discussion with them revealed that they perceived the principal as one who was not on their side, but rather one who sided with "whites" and did not like them. There appeared to be a "cultural" clash between the black, male principal and the black, male students. Comments made by the students were: "He don't act normal," "...act like he's

Table 15

Eighth-Graders' Feelings About School, N=10

Feelings	N
Like	3
Ambivalent	4
Dislike	0
Didn't give direct answer	3

Table 16

Eighth-Graders' Feelings About Teachers, N=10

Feelings	Favorite	No Favorite	N
Like	1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10	0	7
Ambivalent	2, 3, 7	0	3
Dislike	0	0	0

Table 17

Eighth-Graders' Feelings About the Principal, N=10

Feelings	N
Like	0
Ambivalent	1
Didn't like	9

too good," "He don't like black people," and "He be changing." These same students felt that they were treated unfairly and the principal would not listen to what they had to say. (See Appendix J for respondents' data.)

Disciplinary Problems

In regard to disciplinary problems (Table 18), all of the eighth graders had been sent to the principal's office at least once. One was sent for shooting rubber bands; seven for disrupting class; three for fighting; two for improper dress, more specifically, sagging pants; and one for "touching a girl on her butt."

In comparison with the dropouts, where 19 of the 20 were sent to the principal's office, all of the eighth graders in this study have had the experience of being sent to the principal's office. In most instances, the eighth graders felt that they had been treated unfairly and that their voices were not heard. This feeling of unfair treatment was reported by one half (10) of the dropouts. (See Appendix K for respondents' data.)

The eighth-graders' disciplinary problems are primarily disruptive behavior in the classroom. The data indicate that seven of the 10 participants have difficulty adjusting to the classroom process.

Table 18

Eighth-Graders' Reports of Disciplinary
Problems, N=10

Problem*	N
Fighting	3
Dress code infractions	2
Sexual harassment	1
Disruptive in class	7

*Some disciplinary problems were encountered
 by more than one participant.

Academic Achievement

The eighth graders reported a range of grades from high achievement to failing. Most of the eighth graders were making C's or better (see Appendix L). They tend to view their schoolwork as sometimes easy and sometimes hard. Not one participant reported that schoolwork was always hard, yet two reported that it was easy. It would follow that for most of these students (8 out of 10), academic achievement is not perceived as a problem, and at this time in their academic lives may not be a good predictor of dropping out. The accuracy of the students' perceptions of their academic proficiency however is doubtful. Judging from the scores on the California Achievement Test, it is not strong. Nine of the ten ranked at or below the 32nd percentile.

Eighth-Graders' Present and Long-Range Goals

Eighth graders were able to articulate goals. However, when questioned about their present goals, some gave goals that could be considered long range (Table 19). These goals included finishing high school (a response given by two participants) and getting a job (one participant's response). Others tended to give responses that included making better grades (two participants) and playing on the school football or basketball team.

Those goals that were considered by the participants as

Table 19

Eighth-Graders' Present and Long-Range Goals, N=10

Goal	N
Finish high school	2
Get a good job	1
Make better grades	2
Play sports	5

future goals consisted of going to college, joining the armed forces, becoming a legal assistant, owning a car, and becoming a government agent.

Fifth-Grade Students

Demographics

The age of fifth-grade participants ranged from 10-12. Seven of the 10 participants had been retained one or two years. Table 20 contains their California Achievement Test percentile ranks. All scored below the 59th percentile. Half of the participants were members of a single-parent family headed by a female. Two of the 10 lived in homes with a stepmother, and three were from homes where both parents resided.

Feelings About School

One-half of the fifth graders thought of school in very positive terms (Table 21). Those five participants characterized school as fun. One of these five participants thought it was fun, but hastened to say that there was a lot of pressure to do well. Three of the 10 participants responded that school was okay, one said it was a little bit of fun, and another said it was boring. (See Appendix N for respondents' data.)

Table 20

Fifth-Graders' California Achievement Test Scores:

Percentile Ranks, N=10

Percentile	N
59	1
50	2
36	3
21	2
3	1
2	1

Table 21

Fifth Graders' Feelings About School, N=10

Feelings	N
Fun	5
Ambivalent	4
Boring	1

Feelings About Teachers

Five of the 10 fifth-grade participants reported positive feelings toward their teachers (Table 22). Two of these reported they had a favorite teacher. The remaining five expressed ambivalent feelings toward their teachers. Six of the students had no favorite teacher. Of the six, one felt younger teachers were more understanding. No one expressed dislike of teachers. (See Appendix P for respondents' data.)

Feelings About the Principal

More than half of the students expressed positive thoughts about the principal (Table 23); six of the 10 liked or thought the principal was nice or good. Three expressed ambivalent thoughts about the principal, and one student said he did not know what he thought of the principal. (See Appendix O for respondents' data.)

Disciplinary Problems

The fifth graders who had disciplinary problems (Table 24) reported some of the same problems reported by the dropouts, particularly fighting. Of the six fifth graders who reported disciplinary infractions, four reported fighting, and the other two reported that they were running in the hall or playing in class. (See Appendix Q for respondents' data.)

Table 22

Fifth-Graders' Feelings About Teachers, N=10

Feelings	Favorite	No Favorite	N
Like the teachers	1, 4	6, 8, 9	5
Ambivalent about teachers	2, 10	3, 5, 7	5
Dislike teachers			0

Table 23

Fifth-Graders' Feelings About the Principal,

N=10

Feelings	N
Likes	6
Ambivalent	3
Do not know	1

Table 24

Fifth-Graders' Disciplinary Infractions, N=10

Problem	N
Fighting and playing around	4
Running in hall	1
Playing in class	1
None	4

Academic Achievement

Four out of 10 fifth graders reported that schoolwork was hard, two out of 10 reported schoolwork was easy, and four out of 10 said schoolwork was sometimes easy and sometimes hard. Five of the 10 reported failing grades. (See Appendix R for respondents' data.)

Fifth-Graders' Present and Long-Range Goals

Three fifth graders aspired to go to college and one expressed his desire to get a good job. Four others wanted to play professional ball, one wanted to become a policeman, another a chef, and three did not know what they wanted to do (Table 25). (See Appendix S for respondents' data.)

Summary

The purpose of this section has been to provide data that would reveal the participants' perceptions of their school experiences as reported by them during individual interview sessions. The perceptions reported by participants were similar in some detail. Most of the dropouts left school during the eleventh grade and most were about age 17. Many dropped out of high school because they were either expelled, tired of school, or dissatisfied with school in some way. When asked their thoughts about school, many disliked it, while an even larger group viewed school ambivalently. Teachers were thought of favorably in some

Table 25

Fifth-Graders' Goals for the Future

Goal*	N
Go to college	3
Play professional ball	4
Get a good job	1
I do not know	2
Nothing much, might go to Germany	1
Be a policeman	1
Be a chef	1

*Some students named more than one goal (see Appendix S).

form by 16 of the 20 participants. Half of them had a favorite teacher. Dropouts tended to foster some dislike for the principal. In some instances there appeared to be a clash between the principal and the black male dropout. This was evident as participants discussed their dislike of the principal. Racism surfaced as participants talked about interaction with principals of a different racial background. Disciplinary problems were experienced by all but one of the participants.

Fifth and eighth-grade participants showed similar percentile ranks on the California Achievement Test. The combined percentile scores ranged from the 2nd to the 59th percentile. Unlike the eighth graders who all came from single-parent families, only 50% (5) of the fifth-grade participants came from single-parent families. Most of these fifth and eighth graders, 13 out of 20, had been retained in previous grades. Of those retained, all expressed unhappiness about being retained.

Eighth and fifth graders felt that school was a place to see their friends, and because of this they viewed school positively. When queried about teachers, both groups expressed some positive feelings. However, eighth graders were more pleased than fifth graders. One reason for this difference in feelings about teachers could be that the eighth graders were exposed to more teachers than fifth

graders because of the departmental organization of the
junior high school. Fifth graders, though they had more
than one teacher, were not exposed to as many teachers on a
daily basis.

Feelings expressed by the eighth-grade participants
about their principals were close to the feelings expressed
by the dropouts. Both of these groups had negative feelings
about the black principals encountered and felt that white
principals were prejudiced. This, perhaps, is due in part
to resistance to authority but is also a product of our
racist society and cultural clash. In contrast fifth
graders expressed very positive feelings about the
principal. This researcher wondered if the difference in
feelings could be attributed to the fact that the principal
for the fifth graders was a black female, someone in
authority who reminded them of the authority figure at home.

Some disciplinary problems were experienced by the
three groups, and all three groups -- dropouts, eighth
graders, and fifth graders -- reported a range of grades
from high achievement to failing.

Table 26 contains a comparative display of the
responses of all participants. Based on a comparative
analysis of the responses, dropout participants came from
the largest number of single-parent homes, while the eighth
graders shared the highest percentage (100%). Fifth and

eighth-grade participants did not dislike their teachers.

Table 26

Number of Black Male Respondents with Selected Attributes:
Grade 5, Grade 8, and Dropouts

	Grade 5 N=10	Grade 8 N=10	Dropouts N=20
Single Parent	5	10	13
Teachers			
Liked teachers	5	7	7
Ambivalent about teachers	5	3	9
Disliked teachers	0	0	4
Principal			
Liked	6	0	7
Amivalent	3	1	4
Disliked	0	9	9
Do not know	1	0	0
School			
Liked	5	3	4
Ambivalent	4	4	9
Disliked	0	0	7
Boring	1	0	0
Didn't give direct answer	0	3	0
Retained	7	9	18
Sent to the office for infractions	6	10	19

Only four dropouts reported a dislike of teachers.   In fact fifth graders and dropouts are mostly ambivalent about their regard for teachers.   When comparing the responses of participants regarding the principal, it is evident that the dropout population and the eighth graders harbor a more negative attitude toward the principal than do the fifth graders.   The majority of participants (29 out of 40) report negative or ambivalent feelings about school, and 34 of the 40 have been retained in earlier grades.   Most notable is that 35 of the 40 had been sent to the office for disciplinary infractions.

Using the variables and the responses recorded in this table, we can predict that because of dissatisfaction with school, earlier grade retention, and single-parent families, slightly less than half of the fifth graders and half of the eighth graders will probably drop out of school.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications for Practice

Summary

The problem of this study was to determine how 20 black male dropouts perceived their school experience and how these perceptions compare or contrast with the perceptions of 10 black male eighth graders and 10 black male fifth graders. Using these comparisons and contrasts, the researcher hoped to predict the likelihood of the eighth and fifth graders to drop out of school before they receive the high school diploma.

The review of the literature was conducted to provide general knowledge on the dropout problem, to identify predictors of dropping out, and to develop basic interview questions. Materials used in the review of the literature were studies and books published within the last decade.

The basic interview questions were developed with the advice of the doctoral committee. Initially developed questions were formulated following a review of the literature relative to societal conditions, with special emphasis on those conditions as they affect the black population.

Data for a description of the school systems and communities of the participants were obtained from the

latest reports found at the Chamber of Commerce, the local library, and records kept by the central office staff in the participating school districts.

A total of 40 black males were studied. The sample contained 20 dropouts, 10 students presently enrolled in eighth grade, and 10 students presently in the fifth grade. The 20 dropouts were identified with the assistance of school personnel and referrals by dropouts and two key informants who lived in the community and knew the dropouts. The eighth-grade students were selected by the researcher, and fifth-grade students were identified with the help of the school principal.

Major findings in this study tend to support the findings of previous dropout studies; that is, dropouts tended to come from mostly single-parent families, had been retained in earlier grades, found it difficult to adjust to the school environment, had poor attendance, and were generally dissatisfied with school.

Eighth and fifth graders who were still in school also shared similar characteristics and sentiments. Five of the fifth graders came from single-parent families headed by a female as compared with 10 of the eighth graders and 13 of the dropouts. Seven fifth graders had been retained as were eight eighth graders and 18 dropouts. Almost all of the participants found it difficult to adjust to the school

environment as evidenced by the reported disciplinary infractions.

In contrast, eighth and fifth-grade students reported that they attended school regularly while dropouts reported that they skipped classes, skipped school, and had poor school attendance records. Nine of the fifth graders thought school was fun or expressed positive or ambivalent feelings about going to school. Seven of the eighth graders either liked school or felt positive feelings, and only half of the dropouts expressed positive feelings about school. It appears that positive feelings about school decline as the grade levels of participants increase. In every instance, those students who expressed positive feelings did so because it was a place to see their friends.

The black male dropouts in this study left school at a mean age of 17.8, and most left during the eleventh grade. There were two primary reasons for their departure: school dissatisfaction and disciplinary infractions (particularly fighting) resulting in expulsion. Dropouts expressed varied feelings about school. These feelings ranged on a continuum from like to dislike with most dropout participants expressing ambivalent feelings about school. Fourteen of the 20 dropouts expressed positive feelings about teachers and 12 had favorite teachers. Thirteen dropouts disliked or expressed ambivalent feelings about the principal. Half of

them felt they were treated unfairly by the principal.
Nineteen of the 20 reported 20 disciplinary infractions
which caused them to be sent to the principal's office. The
grades reported by the dropouts ranged from exceptional to
failing. Most reported some failing grades, and all had
been retained at some point prior to leaving school
prematurely.

Seven eighth-grade participants reported positive or
ambivalent feelings about school. Of the three who did not
give a direct answer, they expressed an intellectualized
feeling that school is important. The eighth-grade
participants also expressed positive feelings about their
teachers. No one reported dislike for teachers, and all had
a favorite teacher. In contrast, all fostered dislike for
the principal. Although all of the eighth graders had been
referred to the office for disciplinary action, four
reported grades of C or better in one or more subjects
during the 1990-91 school year. Nine of the 10 had been
retained in earlier grades.

Ten fifth-grade participants liked or expressed
ambivalent feelings about school and teachers. All but one
expressed these same feelings about the principal. Only six
of the 10 fifth-grade participants reported disciplinary
problems. Of these, four stated that aggression towards
another peer was the cause of his disciplinary problems.

One-half of the fifth graders (5) reported failing grades and had been previously retained.

Summative Findings

1. The black males studied were not well adjusted to the school environment as evidenced by the high rate of being sent to the office for disciplinary infractions. A significant number of fifth and eighth graders reported this inability to adjust. Four of the eighth graders had been suspended, and all of the fifth graders had been to the office for disciplinary infractions. Nineteen of the 20 dropouts were involved in disciplinary infractions which required office attention, and nine of the 20 were expelled.

2. Nineteen dropout participants did not realize the importance of school until after they had left. Fifth-grade and eighth-grade participants said that school was important for the attainment of their goals, yet their behavior problems suggested that school was not as important as they said it was. Sixteen of the 20 in-school participants reported behavior problems that required office attention.

3. The black male dropouts (at the time of their departure) did not consider completing high school important to their attainment of future goals. Fifteen felt if they could read, write, and do math they would be able to compete in the job market and ultimately reach their goals. Goals

identified by the dropouts were often unrealistic. Most of
the goals reported required a high school diploma. Eighth
and fifth graders did not appear to make realistic goals.
School achievement and test scores were not consistent with
their stated goals in at least half of the responses in both
groups. This is based on the fact that those who reported
their desire to go to college were not academically endowed
for this venture when academic achievement in school and
standardized test scores are taken into account. In cases
where the goal was to play professional ball, many were not
even on the school team and did not belong to an after-
school team.

4. The dropout participants in this study had a
preference for removing themselves from the school
environment which was greater than their preference for
receiving a high school diploma. With both groups (in-
school and dropout) of participants, a desire to protect
their honor, using force, was a strong motivator. For
dropouts it was a stronger motivator, even more than
attaining the high school diploma. As a result, eight
dropouts were expelled from school for fighting and did not
return. Three of the eighth graders had been suspended for
fighting. Students were apprised that fighting is automatic
suspension; repeated fighting causes expulsion. The black
males studied perceived that the ability and exhibition of

physical force in the aforementioned situations were very important in asserting their manhood and their intolerance of anyone who would dare challenge their turf or defame those who are dear to them. They expected that their action of physical force would result in the establishment of their power status and thus they would be "looked up to."

5. A thirst for knowledge about their own culture was an expressed need. Twenty-five participants reported a desire for the inclusion of the history of black people and their contributions to society. Social studies was considered very distasteful, unnecessary, and irrelevant. Criticism of the subject was prevalent in interviews conducted with the dropouts and the eighth-grade and fifth-grade students. Social interaction was a high priority, and the participants were highly concerned with their feelings about interactions with students, teachers, and administrators. However, they did not relate this interaction to the content of social studies.

6. Data collected from the participants in grades eight and five led the researcher to conclude that they placed a high priority on social interaction in the school. Almost all students stated they liked school because it was a place to see their friends.

7. Black, male principals were viewed negatively by most of the participants who had experiences with them in

school. These young men felt that the black, male principals did not "act black," were "Uncle Toms," or did not like blacks.

Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from the data are:

1. There is evidence in early grades that helps predict the potential of black males dropping out of school. The best predictors appear to be poor academic achievement, retention, and maladaption to the school environment as evidenced by being sent to the principal's office for disciplinary infractions.

2. Black males in this study did not fit the mold that teachers and principals are accustomed to working with; therefore, the school experiences for these black males were not positive.

3. There is limited information on black culture in schools. Schools are too culture free to deal with the needs of minorities.

4. Black males in this study made many of their decisions based on their knowledge and feelings of the moment. They seemed not to consider the future.

Discussion

Dropping out of school has an enormous impact on students. It affects all areas of their lives--personal, social, and economic. When black males do not complete high school, they compound the problems that already exist and may very well set the stage for a lifetime of failure.

The social and economic costs associated with the dropout problem have long been a topic of study and concern. Nowhere are these costs more evident than in the lives of young, black males today. These young men have a higher percentage of unemployment, a higher percentage of crime, and, even more devastating, a tendency to kill one another more frequently.

If effective programs are to be devised to reduce or eradicate the black male's dropout problem, there must be a concerted effort by the parents, the schools, and the larger community because the roots of the problem lie in the parents' lack of control over finances, the school's inability to convey its importance to the attainment of the students' future goals, and the larger community's environment which fosters an overall sense of racism, hate, and lack of support and tolerance. All contribute to and must band together to solve the problem.

This problem requires a serious assessment of the situation, its causes and ramifications, to prevent the loss

of an important segment of our society. Hopefully, this study will add significantly to that assessment.

All but two of the 40 participants were from homes where there was no male with formal education beyond high school. Twenty-four of the 40 were from homes headed by a single, female parent who had not achieved beyond the twelfth grade. Given these conditions and the fact that the participants came from neighborhoods that did not include black professionals, it is not surprising that their expectations regarding school principals may have been distorted. The black, male principal's behavior at school would not be congruent with the black male role model in the student's home or neighborhood. This may be due to the difference between the black male principal's behavior and that of the black male's behavior in the participant's home and community environment. This creates a cultural clash that can only be eliminated through exposure and interaction between the two groups. Perhaps a task for the larger community may be to devise and implement programs which promote interaction between the two groups.

Kunjufu (1985) suggested that exposure to black male role models should begin in the primary grades. At these grade levels, he felt that many of the disciplinary problems experienced by black male students in later grades could be prevented. This researcher contends that the role models

should include African-Americans from businesses and other community agencies.

This study has revealed that family background characteristics and perceptions formed by black males about school detract from high school completion. This is true even though parents and students verbalize the importance of attaining this goal. Everyday experiences both in and out of school tend to condition the participants in a direction that leads to high school attrition. Many of these forces are beyond the participants' control. For example, mixed messages sent by the larger society suggest that the establishment cannot be trusted -- school is necessary but principals don't like us. Participants, like some other young people of today, are exposed to undesirable role models -- the drug pushers who represent power, control, and money; the cousins, uncles, or grandfathers who encourage them to engage in early sexual experiences to prove their manhood without regard for disease or early fatherhood; the experiences and coercions that encourage them at an early age to be combative, to look for immediate reward. These things combined with a school system that has not been designed to accommodate the changes brought about by recent technological and social changes only compound the problem.

The participants in this study viewed black, male principals negatively. Those dropouts who had white, male

principals also expressed negative feelings toward them.
Interestingly enough, the participants who had black, male
principals felt that the principal was not on their 'side.'
Looking at this evidence, the researcher concluded that some
of the negative feelings expressed toward principals could
be attributed to rebellion against authority; however, the
negative feelings expressed about the black, male principal
seemingly went beyond this rebellion to indicate a cultural
clash between the black, male principal and the black, male
role models present in the participants' everyday
surroundings.

Implications for Practice

The findings reported and the conclusions drawn in this
study imply changes in practice. Schools can be saved.
They can make a difference in the lives of young, black
males.

First, the results of this study seem to provide a
realistic basis for school personnel to incorporate in their
programs, grades K-12, goal-setting exercises designed to
improve students' abilities to set realistic career goals
and the means for achieving them. Schools, in conjunction
with businesses, parents, and community agencies, can set up
frequent career goal-setting programs based on student
interest and abilities.

Second, it appears that it is necessary to relate the

school process and its connection to the students' future goals in terms that they (the student) can understand. Special curricular provisions may be used to capitalize on the positive feelings that these students seemingly have for the school and the teachers. These curricular provisions should include a means by which students can discover the connection between school processes and "real life."

Third, a coalition of parents, school personnel, and members of the community at large should be formed to expose students to nonthreatening interactions with professionally educated, black males from different disciplines in order to help students form realistic expectations of this group of professionals. These interactions could serve as a vehicle for helping the students get a broader view of their potential future roles in society.

Fourth, textbooks emphasizing the role of blacks should be written to satisfy the students' need to know the contributions of blacks before, during, and since slavery. These textbooks should integrate black studies in all curriculum areas.

The use of these texts would assure that teachers would incorporate black contributions into the curriculum. A separate course called "Our Cultural Heritage" may be used for each grade level. Teachers-in-training should be required to take a course in black studies to prepare them

for this challenge.

Fifth, school personnel should be sensitized to the special needs and behaviors of black males through continued required staff development activities during the early grades, the middle grades, and high school. This staff development should help teachers integrate black studies into a curriculum based upon student needs.

Sixth, the basic curriculum and organization of the school should be revamped to reflect technological and societal changes and the environment peculiar to the needs and strengths of the local school community. This would perhaps eliminate many of the adjustment problems experienced by the student.

Seventh, self-discipline must be stressed at every level of the student's school career. It must be demonstrated and taught from the earliest entry into school. This would assist students in actively working toward tasks that provide delayed satisfaction.

Eighth, the goals expressed by the participants were those generally considered as the "American Dream," namely, a house, a car, and a financially rewarding job. Though these are not unattainable goals, to reach them in our highly technological society, there are prerequisites that one must have, namely, skill in some area and at a minimum a high school education. Relevant and meaningful career

exploration should begin with the child's entrance into the school setting. Preferably, it should begin at home. Students should have the opportunity to explore careers as their interests and skills develop. Avenues should be paved to expose students to a wide range of careers so that they will have a rich pool from which to choose.

NInth, schools should promote parental involvement and support by developing and implementing activities that include parents. Flexible hours for such activities should be arranged to meet the schedules of those parents who are working. Much research supports the relationship between parental involvement and pupil success in school.

Parents should be encouraged to take an active part in their children's education. Schools should be open during hours when parents are available--evenings and Saturdays. Principals and teachers should acquaint parents with the on-going programs of the school, share with them what the school is doing, and let them know how they can help.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Parental Approval Request

Dear _____:

    I am conducting a study which will hopefully improve your child's willingness to complete high school and obtain a high school diploma. A copy of my questions are enclosed.

    To complete this study I would like to obtain your permission to interview him extensively.

    You may give me permission to do this by completing the form at the bottom of this letter.

    Your cooperation will be appreciated.

                  Sincerely,

                  Sara Taylor

You have my permission to interview my son, _____,
for your study.   child's name

            _____
            Parent's signature

Appendix B

Dropouts: Feelings About School

<u>What do you think of school?</u>

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Responses</u>
1	Don't think nothing of school, liked it to a certain point.
2	It's all right
3	It's okay, did not really like high school.
4	It's all right
5	It was okay
6	Boring, nothing exciting
7	Don't really know
8	Got tired of it
9	Wish I had stayed in, it hurt me in the long run.
10	I like it, wish I could go back.
11	Liked school, got too involved with people who did not like school, so I started disliking it.
12	It was all right
13	Liked school
14	Did not like it
15	I don't know

Appendix B Cont'd.

16	Did not like it
17	Nothing, did not like school
18	It's all right
19	Did not like school
20	Liked it

Appendix C

Dropouts: Feelings About the Principal

What do you think of the principal?

Participants	Responses
1	Didn't like principal -- not treated fairly
2	Principal okay -- treated fairly for what I have done
3	Did not like principal -- treated unfairly
4	Did not like principal -- everything that happened, he comes to blacks first; not treated fairly
5	Did not really like him -- he was all right I guess. He seemed like an Uncle Tom; he looks down on blacks.
6	Did not like principal -- treated unfairly
7	Didn't like principal -- was treated unfairly
8	Liked principal, he knew where I was coming from -- treated fairly
9	He was all right -- not treated fairly, he would not give me chance to explain
10	Liked principal -- sometimes treated fairly
11	Liked principal, did not like assistant; he was white, tried to be funny. Treated fairly by principal
12	Principal alright, lenient, pretty cool, treated fairly
13	Did not like principal -- got it in for blacks; "a red neck" -- not treated fairly
14	Did not like principal -- not treated fairly all the time

Appendix C - Cont'd.

15	Did not like principal -- not treated fairly
16	Liked principals, they were cool with me -- treated fairly -- vice principal not nice
17	He was cool -- treated fairly
18	Liked principal -- treated fairly
19	Liked principal -- treated fairly
20	All right -- treated fairly

Appendix D

Dropouts: Feelings About Teachers

What do you think of teachers?

Participants	Responses
1	Liked certain teachers -- didn't have a favorite one
2	Liked teachers -- had favorite one -- she help you out when you needed help.
3	Teachers all right -- favorite teacher -- she was real good to me.
4	Some I got along with, some I didn't. Favorite teacher --just liked the class, she was nice, had fun in class.
5	Liked teachers -- no favorite
6	Didn't like teachers -- 1 favorite -- just good at what he was doing. It was the class put it like that art, I was good at art.
7	One I didn't like -- no favorite
8	Liked teachers except one that hassled me all the time favorite teacher -- she was kind and she really looked out for you.
9	Liked teachers -- no favorite
10	Liked teachers -- no favorite
11	Liked some teachers; favorite teachers made you want to learn.

Appendix D Cont'd.

12	Liked teachers, they did not give me no problems. I guess they did not have anything against me. No favorite teacher
13	I liked them, no favorite
14	Liked teachers -- favorite teacher? Not really
15	Didn't like teachers -- some get smart with you all the time. No favorite teacher.
16	Did not like teachers -- favorite teacher in elementary school, not really in high school
17	All right, I liked them -- favorite teacher helped you do your work
18	Liked some of them -- favorite teachers were just fun.
19	Didn't like any of them -- favorite teacher looked good.
20	All right -- favorite teacher? Not really

Appendix E

Dropouts: Academic Achievement

What kind of grades did you make? Was school work hard or easy?

Participants	Responses
1	Grades -- C average
2	Grades -- B's, C's; school work sometimes difficult, some work hard
3	Grades -- A's, B's, & F's in history; school work easy and hard
4	Grades -- A's, B's, C's, D's, & F's; school work easy and hard
5	Grades mostly C's and some B's; D's and F's in history; school work easy
6	Grades -- C's, D's & F's. Sometimes A's & B's in art; schoolwork easy and hard
7	I was lazy; school work easy
8	Grades -- A's, B's, & C's; school work easy
9	Grades -- B's, C's, & D's; Easy, didn't want to do it
10	School work easy
11	Grades -- C & D average; subjects, school work easy
12	Grades -- C's and D's; school work sometimes hard and sometimes easy
13	Grades -- A's, B's, C's; school work was easy

14	Grades -- B's, C's, D's when I wanted; F's; school work easy
15	Grades -- C's, B's, D's; F's in English; school work easy
16	Grades fair -- C's, D's, F's; school work sometimes easy, sometimes hard
17	Grades -- D's, F's; school work easy, didn't try until exam
18	Grades -- C's, D's, F's; school work sometimes easy, sometimes hard
19	Grades -- had 0, school work easy and hard
20	Grades -- B's, C's, F's in science; classwork sometimes easy, sometimes hard

Appendix F

Dropouts: Disciplinary Problems

Were you ever sent to the office because of something you had done?

Participants	Responses
1	Arguing with teacher, tardiness
2	Tardiness
3	Yes, fighting
4	Fighting
5	No
6	Fighting, joking around, clowning around
7	Fighting, trouble getting along with teacher
8	Fighting
9	Disruptive in class; tardiness
10	Skipping, fighting, arguing with teachers
11	Tardiness and fighting
12	Fighting and tardiness
13	Disorderly conduct, cussed principal out
14	Fighting
15	Fighting
16	Fussing and not doing what teachers tell me

Appendix F Cont'd.

17	Fights
18	Fighting, skipping, and tardiness
19	Gang fights
20	Missing too many days (skipping)

Appendix G

Dropouts: Present and Future Goals

<u>What are your present plans? future plans</u>?

Participants	Responses
1	Present goal -- to back to school; future goal -- get into the Army
2	Present goal -- go back to school; future goal -- get car and house
3	Present goal -- get a car; future goal -- working a good job, get me a house
4	Present goal -- find a job; future goal -- don't know
5	Present goal -- get my GED
6	Present goal -- plan to get GED; future goal -- hope to become artist
7	Present goal -- get good job; future goal -- get a house
8	Present goal -- get GED; future goal -- get a good job
9	Present goal -- not given; future goal -- own a car lot
10	Present goal -- get a good job; future goal -- have a nice house and car
11	Present goal -- get GED; future goal -- hopefully working, have own house, maybe married
12	Present goal -- go back to school; future goal -- go to college

Appendix G Cont'd.

13	Future goal -- get married
14	Future goal -- better job making more money
15	Present goal -- get a job; Future goal -- none
16	Present goal -- get GED; Future goal -- be somebody
17	Future goal -- driving truck
18	Present goal -- Get a job; Future goal -- do not know
19	Future goal -- do shows
20	Present goal -- get a job; Future goal -- driving big trucks

Appendix H

Eighth Graders: Feelings About School

<u>What do you think of school?</u>

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Responses</u>
1	School is all right
2	A place to learn and get an education
3	School is all right sometimes
4	School is all right sometimes
5	School means a lot of different things
6	I like school
7	I like school
8	Good place to get an education
9	Like school, its fun
10	Its all right unless you go to bed late and get up, it makes you mad

Appendix I

Eighth Graders: Feelings About Teachers

What do you think of teachers?

Participants	Responses
1	Likes teachers; favorite teacher helps him
2	Likes all teachers except one, favorite teacher
3	Likes some teachers, favorite teacher knows how to talk to you
4	Likes teachers; favorite teacher is nice all the time
5	Likes his teachers; favorite teachers make class fun, "amuses us."
6	Likes all his teachers; favorite teacher makes him laugh, he jokes, other teachers do not
7	Sometimes likes his teachers. Favorite teacher helps after school.
8	Likes teachers; favorite teacher tells jokes and teaches at the same time.
9	Likes teachers; favorite teacher math teacher because he likes math.
10	Likes teachers; favorite teacher acts like a kid but is still serious

Appendix J

Eighth Graders: Feelings About the Principal

<u>What do you think of the principal?</u>

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Responses</u>
1	Do not like him
2	Do not like him
3	Don't like him
4	He's all right sometimes; sometimes he tries to be funny.
5	Don't like him
6	I hate him
7	I don't like him. He hates black people.
8	Sometimes he be trying to be with white people all the time, like he's too good sometimes. I don't like him.
9	Don't like him, he don't like black people.
10	Don't like him

Appendix K

Eighth Graders: Disciplinary Problems

<u>Have you ever been sent to the office because of something you did? Why?</u>

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Responses</u>
1	Shooting rubber bands
2	Disrupting class; clowning around
3	Cutting up; talking during class
4	Fighting
5	Fighting; clowning around in class
6	Sent to office for sagging pants
7	Clowning around; disrupting class
8	Touching girls on butt; arguing with teachers
9	Clowning in class; playing with other students during class; pants sagging
10	Fighting

Appendix L

Eighth Graders: Academic Achievement

What kind of grades do you make? Is school work hard or easy?

Participants	Responses
1	C's or better -- school work, some of it is easy
2	A's, B's, C's -- school work is easy
3	D's, B's, C's -- school work is easy
4	A's, B's, C's, D's, E's -- sometimes school work is hard
5	A's, B's, C's -- schoolwork is sometimes easy
6	B's, C's, D's -- school work is hard
7	A's, B's, C's, & D's -- school work is sometimes easy and sometimes hard
8	A's, B's, C's, sometimes D -- school work is sometimes easy
9	B's, C's -- school work is sometimes easy and sometimes hard
10	C's, D's, E's -- school work half easy, half hard

Appendix M

Eighth Graders: Present and Future Goals

What would you like to do in the next few months?
What would you like to do after high school?

Participants	Responses
1	Present goal: Make better grades Future goal: Go to college and become a doctor
2	Present goal: Make school football team Future goal: Join the Navy
3	Present goal: Get a job Future goal: Join the Marines
4	Present goal: Make school football team Future goal: Go to college
5	Present goal: Make good grades Future goal: Become legal assistant
6	Present goal: Finish high school Future goal: Play college basketball and then play in the NBA
7	Present goal: Make the basketball team Future goal: Own a house
8	Present goal: Finish high school Future goal: Own a house and a nice car

9   Present goal: Play on football team
           Future goal: Own a house and a Mustang,
                        be a government agent

10   Present goal: Play basketball
           Future goal: Go to college

Appendix N

Fifth Graders: Feelings About School

What do you think of school?

Participants	Responses
1	Its fun
2	It is a little bit of fun, got to do a lot of work
3	It is okay
4	I like school, its fun
5	It is boring
6	It is okay
7	I love it
8	It is fun
9	It is fun, but it is a lot of pressure to do well
10	It is okay

Appendix O

Fifth Graders: Feelings About the Principal

What do you think of the principal?

Participants	Responses
1	Thinks principal is nice
2	Likes principal
3	Likes principal
4	Thinks principal is all right
5	Thinks principal is okay
6	Doesn't know what he thinks of principal
7	Thinks principal is all right
8	Likes principal
9	Likes principal
10	He is good

Appendix P

Fifth Graders: Feelings About Teachers

<u>What do you think of teachers</u>?

Participants	Responses
1	I like them, favorite teacher, does not give a lot of homework and lets him do fun things
2	They are all right, favorite teacher but does not know why
3	They are all right, no favorite
4	Likes teachers, favorite teacher is nice, does not give homework on weekends
5	They are okay, no favorite teacher
6	Likes teachers, no favorite
7	They are okay, no favorite teacher
8	Likes teachers
9	She is nice
10	They are okay, younger teachers

Appendix Q

Fifth Graders: Disciplinary Problems

Have you ever been sent to the office because of something you did? Why?

Participants	Responses
1	No
2	No
3	Fighting
4	No
5	Fighting, playing around
6	Running in hall
7	Playing in class
8	No
9	Fighting
10	Fighting

Appendix R

Fifth Graders: Academic Achievement

<u>What kind of grades do you make? Is school work hard or easy?</u>

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Responses</u>
1	A's, B's, C's, D's, and E's -- school work is sometimes hard
2	Bad grades, D's & E's -- school work is hard
3	A's, B's, C's -- school work is easy
4	E's in spelling; C's in reading, social studies and sciences; A's in math -- school work is not easy
5	A's, B's, D's -- school work sometimes easy; sometimes hard
6	A's & B's -- school work pretty easy
7	C's, D's, E's -- schoolwork is sometimes hard, sometimes easy
8	C's, D's, E's -- schoolwork sometimes easy, most times hard
9	C's, D's, E's -- schoolwork sometimes easy, most times hard
10	C's, D's -- schoolwork both easy and hard

Appendix S

Fifth Graders: Present and Future Goals

What do you plan to do very soon?   In the future?

Participants	Responses
1	Go to college
2	Play basketball
3	Play professional football
4	I don't know
5	Try to make it to college and get a good job
6	I don't know
7	Nothing much, might go to Germany
8	Go to college and professional basketball
9	I do not know -- be a policeman
10	Do the best I can to make honor roll, start on basketball team, and be a chef

VITA

S. Cecelia Ferguson Taylor

EDUCATION

- Currently Doctoral Candidate at Virginia Polytechnic
  Institute and State University, Educational
  Administration, Blacksburg, VA

- Received Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in
  Educational Administration at Virginia Polytechnic
  Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA, 1989

- Received Master of Arts in Education in Counseling and
  Guidance, Howard University, Washington, DC, 1973

- Received Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education,
  Bennett College, Greensboro, NC, 1963

WORK EXPERIENCE

- 7th Grade Math Teacher, Holmes Jr. High School, Eden,
  NC, 1989-1991

- Job Readiness Teacher, Morehead High School, JTPA
  Program, Eden, NC, 1987-1989

- Classroom Teacher, Henry County, Virginia, 1985-1987

- District Representative, Congressman Eugene Johnston
  Sixth District, NC, 1981-1983

- Classroom Teacher, Greensboro City Schools, 1963-1975

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY AFFILIATIONS

- Member, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority
- Member, Las Amigas, Inc.
- Khalif Court #90, Daughters of Isis
- North Carolina Board of Registered Practicing
  Counselors
- Presbyterian Church
- North Carolina Educators Association
- National Education Association

FORMER MEMBERSHIPS

- North Carolina Employment and Training Association, Inc.
- Rockingham County Job Development Council
- Virginia Education Association
- Board of Trustees -- University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Sarah F. Taylor
Sarah Cecelia Ferguson Taylor