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Peers as an Academic Resource: An Investigation of an Afterschool Program to Socialize At-risk Students with Disabilities into Greater Academic Engagement

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PEERS AS AN ACADEMIC RESOURCE: AN INVESTIGATION OF AN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM TO SOCIALIZE AT-RISK STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES INTO GREATER ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

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To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

This dissertation, written by Cynthia Pellegrini-Lafont, and entitled Peers as an Academic Resource: An Investigation of an Afterschool Program to Socialize At-Risk Students with Disabilities into Greater Academic Engagement, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Vice President for Research and Economic Development
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Florida International University, 2016

DEDICATION

To my Mom and Dad. As I was growing up you always showed such pride in my accomplishments. I wish you were here to share this one with me.

To my husband, Ozzie. You have stood by me, you have encouraged me, and you have never questioned this journey that I embarked upon. Most of all you have given me unconditional love. Grazie Amore Mio.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

PEERS AS AN ACADEMIC RESOURCE: AN INVESTIGATION OF AN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM TO SOCIALIZE AT-RISK STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES INTO GREATER ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

by

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One of the most evident signs that a child is on the path to dropping out of school is disengagement from school (Kortering & Christenson, 2009). Given the amount of time that young people spend with their peers and the influence that peers have (Monahan, Steinberg, & Caufman, 2009), there is a need to better understand the role that peers play in the decision to drop out of school (Farmer, Estell, Leug, Trott, Bishop, & Caims, 2003). Using Ericson's stages of psychosocial development (1956), social identity theory, and self-categorization theory as a framework, an afterschool program in the form of a social club was designed and implemented. The goal was to foster friendships between academically engaged students and disengaged students, using a short-term, cost effective intervention. It was hypothesized that the new friends would act as role models giving the disengaged students a more accurate perception of positive academic behaviors and the related benefits, thus leading to a positive change in academic engagement.

This study used a mixed-methods design: a quantitative phase consisting of pretest-posttest surveys administered to teachers and students in order to assess possible changes in student academic engagement and a second pretest-posttest survey administered to students in order to determine if any new friendships between academically engaged and at-risk students had formed. A second, qualitative phase used focus groups to gain insight into the students' perceptions of their academic experience.

The findings of this study contribute to the current literature on dropout by providing insight into the possibility of utilizing peers as a catalyst to academic engagement in students who are at risk for school failure and high school drop out, in particular those with disabilities. In addition, the findings reiterate the importance of positive student-teacher relations and the importance of ongoing attempts to create those relations. The results of this study remind us that there is no single approach to solving the problem of high school dropout. However, by providing diverse opportunities for at-risk students to develop positive perceptions of the academic experience it is possible to ultimately increase academic engagement and reduce dropout.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

TABLES PAGE

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES PAGE

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The high school graduation rate in the United States is higher than ever. For the 2013-2014 school year (the most recent year for which federal data are available) it was 82.3% (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners (ELLs) did not reach these rates. As evidence, the graduation rate for Hispanic students was 76.3%, for Black students it was 72.5%, for low-income students it was 74.6%, for students with disabilities it was 63.1%, and for ELLs it was 62.6% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). For these last two groups of students the drop out rate is almost 20 percentage points below the national average.

Dropping out of school affects the quality of life of the individual as well as the family. It also potentially places a burden on society. In today's market, employment opportunities that offer living wages and benefits are difficult to find for those who have no high school education and have not acquired any type of basic skills. People who drop out of school are more likely to experience unemployment and underemployment (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009). In 2013, 29% of high school dropouts nationally, ages 20-24, were unemployed while 18% of high school graduates were unemployed. If we take into consideration individuals who had at least some college education, only 12% were unemployed and that rate dropped to 7% for individuals who had at least a bachelor's degree (Kena et al., 2014). It is estimated that over the typical 40

years of employment, school dropouts will earn about $400,000 less than high school graduates and this amount exceeds $500,000 in many large states (Sum et al., 2009). In Miami-Dade County 33% of the individuals without a high school diploma live in poverty. For those with a high school diploma that rate drops to 22% (Miami-Dade County Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources, 2015).

People who drop out of school are more likely to be incarcerated at least once in their lives when compared to high school graduates (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2012). Male dropouts are 6.3 times more likely to be incarcerated than are male high school graduates and 63 times more likely to be institutionalized than an individual who has a bachelor's degree or higher (Sum et al., 2009). Within the context of school attrition, individuals with disabilities suffer an even worse plight than individuals without disabilities. At least one third of students with disabilities who drop out of school will be arrested during their lifetime (National High School Center, 2007). At any given time, from 40% to 70% of youth in prison or in a related facility, are youth who have a disability status (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Individuals with disabilities are also more likely to be repeat offenders in the criminal justice system (Unruh, Gau, & Waintrup, 2008). A single extra year of schooling can decrease the odds of incarceration by 10% for White youth and by up to 14% for Black youth. Moreover, increasing high school graduation by 1% for men ages 20-60 will potentially save $1.4 billion a year in reduced crime costs (Moretti, 2005).

There are immense financial implications associated with school attrition. Dropouts cost taxpayers in lost fiscal contributions. They are often unemployed therefore, they typically pay fewer federal and state income taxes than someone who is employed. They are also less likely to own property and thus less likely to pay property taxes than is someone who is employed. However, dropouts receive money from welfare and in-kind transfers (e.g., food stamps, rental subsidies, Medicaid, etc; Sum et al., 2009).

Because of limited earning potential high school dropouts may not have the economic resources needed to successfully establish and support a family. Higher than average unemployment rates lead to reduced marriage rates. When compared to high school graduates, dropouts are more likely to reside in their parents' home or in the home of a relative. Nearly 37% of high school dropouts live in families that are at the poverty or near poverty level (Sum et al., 2009). There is also a correlation between dropping out of school and unplanned pregnancies. More specifically, female high school dropouts are nine times more likely than women holding a bachelor's degree to be single mothers (Sum et al., 2009).

There are many reasons as to why individuals choose to drop out of school (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Accordingly, there is no single program or intervention that in isolation can resolve the issue of high school dropout. The decision to drop out of school is one that develops over time and can begin as early as first grade (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Kemp, 2006), however,

it is during the middle school grades that the process of disengagement that leads to school attrition begins for most dropouts (Balfanz et al., 2010).

The American Psychological Association (2012) has identified four broad and highly researched categories of factors that often contribute to the decision to drop out of school. These factors pertain to the individual (e.g., lack of academic engagement, behavioral issues, and disability), the family (e.g., low socioeconomic standing, high family mobility, and immigrant status), the community (e.g., high crime rates, drug trafficking, and high unemployment) and the school the individual attends (e.g., staff that lacks understanding of cultural diversity, schools that are inadequately funded and overcrowded).

The positive correlation between parental involvement and academic outcomes for children is well documented in the literature (e.g., Cunningham & Swanson, 2010; Murray & Naranjo, 2009; Werner, 1987), as is the importance of positive student/teacher relations and interactions (e.g., Balfanz et al., 2010; Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2008; Zvoch, 2006). Both parents and teachers can play a major role in graduation potential (Allensworth, 2013). However, research on dropout also shows that peers have a significant influence on each other. Accordingly, for many young people academic performance is closely tied to peer relations (Schwartz, Kelly, & Duong, 2013). Yet, peer interactions are generally understudied (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Negative peer norms have been tied to problematic academic outcomes (Megens & Weerman, 2012; Monahan, Steinberg, & Cauffman, 2009; Vargas, 2011) while positive peer relations may act as a reference point (Stewart, 2008) helping to reduce the

possibility that a student will succumb to negative influences (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). According to Carter, Asmus and Moss (2013) the critical issue is that for youth with developmental disabilities, quality relations are generally elusive. Students with disabilities spend much of their day in the company of teachers, paraprofessionals and other specialists. Close relations with same-age peers are generally the exception to the rule because these students often have social skills that are inappropriate (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). About 50% of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and about 25% of students with intellectual disabilities report never having been invited to another student's social event outside of the school setting (Carter, Amus, & Moss, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

One of the most evident signs that a child is on the path to dropping out of school is disengagement from school (Kortering & Christenson, 2009). Disengagement can manifest itself in a variety of different ways: from the child who comes to school unprepared and does not complete class work or homework to the child with behavioral issues that lead to suspensions and expulsions. It has been substantially documented that frequent absences from school are one of the main differences between students who drop out of school and those who complete school (Mathwig & Heinrich, 2008). Students who are out of school because of suspensions or absenteeism fall behind in their schoolwork. Students with multiple suspensions and frequent absences are often unable to catch up which leads to poor academic achievement and failing grades

(Brownstein, 2010). As a result of frequent absences tied to the medical issues connected to having a disability, students with disabilities are often absent from school and fall behind in their class work. These students are among those with the highest drop out rates (Williams-Bost & Riccomini, 2006).

Much of the research on dropout focuses on the role that adults, such as parents and teachers, play in the process that leads to a student leaving school without graduating (Kilian, Hofer, & Kuhnle, 2013). However, given the increasing amount of time that young people spend with their peers as they move from elementary, to middle school and then into high school (Li, Lynch, Kalvin, Liu, & Lerner, 2011) and the increasing influence that peers have (Monahan, Steinberg, & Caufman, 2009), there is a need to better understand the role that peers play in the drop out process (Farmer, Estell, Leug, Trott, Biship, & Caims, 2003). Therefore, given that there is enough research to indicate that at this age (i.e., early adolescence) peers are very important and influential yet that there is very little research on the effect peers have on the decision to drop out of school, more research is needed.

The literature on the influence of peer relations on engagement discusses both negative peer influence (e.g., Megens & Weerman, 2012; Monahan et al., 2009; Vargas, 2011) and positive peer influence (e.g., Estell, Farmer, Pearl, Van Acker, & Rodkin, 2008; Ream & Ruberger, 2008; Shin, Daly, & Vera, 2007; Stewart, 2008). This literature shows a strong correlation between negative peer relations and negative outcomes – both academic and social - with negative peer relations being tied to behavioral issues, school dropout, drug and alcohol

consumption and juvenile delinquency (Monahan et al., 2009). However it also shows a strong correlation between positive peer relations and pro-social behavior (Wentzel, McNamara, & Caldwell, 2004). Kortering and Christenson (2009) highlight the need, especially for students with disabilities, to move from interventions that attempt to prevent negative outcomes to interventions that promote positive outcomes such as academic engagement. These authors suggest that effective interventions need to focus on more than just academic skills. They also need to account for the student's commitment to learning, feelings of academic and social competence, achievement motivation and a sense of belonging. Following this train of thought, there is also a need for research that focuses on strengthening the social, emotional and academic commitment of at risk students, especially those with disabilities, to learning.

Statement of the Problem

As a consequence of the difficulties youth with disabilities have in making friends, intentional efforts to develop meaningful relationships are especially important (Carter et al., 2013). A shift in location, from the classroom to extracurricular activities, can lead to frequent interactions and facilitate the creation of new friendships and a deeper sense of belonging (Carter et al., 2013). Also, several researchers have documented that getting students involved in school related, non-academic activities is the most powerful strategy to help students become engaged in school and learning (e.g., Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Knifsend & Graham, 2012; Kortering & Christenson, 2009).

Theoretical data indicate that peers are particularly important during adolescence yet the role peers play in academic engagement, and in the decision to drop out or to stay in school, is often overlooked (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Accordingly, the aim of the present study was twofold. First, the study explored the use of an afterschool program that served as a social club for students about to transition into middle school. The objective of the afterschool club was to foster positive peer relations between students who are academically engaged and students who show the warning signs of being at risk for school dropout. Second, the study evaluated the effectiveness of the afterschool club as a way to engage at-risk students with disabilities in school. This study therefore sought to promote positive peer group norms giving the disengaged students a more accurate perception of positive behaviors in school, and related benefits, hypothesized to lead to a positive change in their perception of the academic experience and to engagement in school.

Conceptual Framework

The theories driving the conceptual framework of this study stem from two major areas of study. The first is Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. The second is social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory (SCT), which together form the social identity approach (Hornsey, 2008). The social identity theory and the self-categorization theory are linked by their attempt to better understand the processes that surround how individuals define themselves as members of social groups (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010).

Psychosocial Development

As a consequence of the complexity of peer influence on individuals, it is necessary to discuss how people define themselves as members of social groups and why some individuals are more influential than others. Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development offers an excellent starting point. According to Erikson personality develops in a series of stages that begin during childhood and each stage is impacted by social interactions (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Cultural attributes and societal norms inform an individual's behavior and whether or not that behavior fits societal norms helps form the individual's sense of identity (Hoare, 2013). During middle and late childhood, the latter part of the stage that Erikson calls industry verses inferiority (circa 10 to 11 years of age), a child's world begins to include more than just the home. Social institutions begin to play an important role in the development of the individual's identity (Elkind, 1970). During this period there is an expansion of cognitive skills, skills of self-awareness and an expanded view of the child's social world. At this point acceptance from peers becomes important (Eccles, 1999). During adolescence, the stage that Erikson calls identity versus confusion, individuals explore their independence and develop a sense of self. They do so through experimentation; whether or not a behavior will be continued depends on the rewards individuals receive from their peers and milieu (Erikson, 1956).

Social Identity Approach

Tajfel and Turner (1986) later sought to better understand social behavior. They contended that purely interpersonal interaction between two individuals by themselves was rare (Hornsey, 2008). The rationale being that social behavior contains the unstated assumption that individuals live and behave in a social medium that consists of individuals who relate to each other (Tajfel,1979). Tajfel and Turner argued that human social behavior ranges on a continuum from purely interpersonal - entirely as individuals in the absence of social groups or group categorization (e.g., a husband and wife) - to purely intergroup, where a person's individuality is overtaken by his or her group membership (e.g., the behavior of soldiers during battle with an opposing army). How people see themselves and each other depends on their position on the continuum at a given moment. For Tajfel (1974), group membership contributes positively, or negatively, to an individual's self-image.

In the 1980s, Turner and his colleagues focused on intra-group processes of how individuals define themselves as a member of a group (Hornsey, 2008). According to Turner, Oakes, Haslam, and McGarty (1994) social identity refers to groupings that define the individual in terms of the similarities that he or she shares with members of specific social categories. Whether or not individuals define themselves in terms of a specified social category depends on their readiness to use that category (accessibility) based on their goals and current tasks (Stets & Burke, 2000). Whether or not a social categorization becomes salient depends on the degree to which it fits as a description of the similarities,

or differences, between the actions of group members and this depends on the social context (Oakes, Turner, & Haslam, 1991). Individuals take on diverse identities and choose groups that exemplify significant aspects of their identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and embodying the prototypical attitudes, behaviors, and values of the group opens the door to influence from the group (Hornsey, 2008). This pattern takes into account culture and cultural differences (Hopkins & Reicher, 2011).

Social Identity Formation and Disability

Using databases such as Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Education Full Text, Google Scholar, PsycInfo, PsycNet, and search terms such as social identity formation and disability, social groups and disability, group identification and disability, or search terms that included specific disabilities such as deafness, blindness, learning disabilities and autism, no studies were found that specifically focused on how an individual with a disability constructs his or her own social identity as he or she grows up. The bulk of the literature focuses on the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities vis-à-vis the social construct of the disability label (see Beart, Hardy, & Buchan, 2005). Johnstone (2004) pointed out that disability identity in the literature is not homogenous but rather an expression of the diversity and the multiple definitions of disability. The definitions of disability shift across cultures.

The construction of social identity has been researched in a variety of geographical and cultural settings suggesting that individuals, regardless of sex, national, ethnic or religious identities (Hopkins & Reicher, 2011) alter their

behavior with reference to the in-group (Reicher et al., 2010) and the mere act of dividing people into groups is enough to create a group identity (Tajfel, 1974). One can therefore contend that, based on the research concerning the social identity approach, the same holds true for individuals with disabilities. The following points provided the rationale and further strengthened the purpose and need of the present study:

- Individuals develop their identity in stages (Erikson, 1968), at each stage development is impacted by social interaction (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010), with adolescence being particularly important in this development (Erikson, 1956).
- Group membership contributes positively, or negatively, to an individual's self image (Tajfel, 1974).
- Individuals choose groups based on accessibility and fit (Oakes et al.,1991) and once they embody the attitudes, behaviors and values of the group, the door is open to group influence (Hornsey, 2008).
- Peer support is a predictor of school engagement and engagement in school is predictive of school completion (Estell et al., 2008).
- The influence of peer relations on dropout is understudied (Ream & Rumberger, 2008).

It is feasible to think that based on these basic premises, one can harness salient aspects of adolescence and social identity formation to create programs capable of engaging students at risk for dropping out of school. The goal of fostering

student engagement in school for students with disabilities at risk for school dropout was at the forefront of this study.

Research Questions

This study investigated the effectiveness of an afterschool social club as a way to engage students with disabilities who show signs of academic and social withdrawal from school. Accordingly, the following research questions were considered:

Question 1: Are there discernable positive changes in the academic engagement of students with disabilities at risk for school dropout who participate in an afterschool social club with academically engaged peers as measured by GPA, grades, absenteeism, detentions, suspensions, teacher reports and student self-report?

Question 2: Does an afterschool social club for students with disabilities who show signs of academic disengagement and students who are academically engaged foster friendships between the members of these two groups as measured by student self-report?

Question 3: How do students who participated in the afterschool social club view their educational experience after having participated in the social club?

Operational and Constitutive Definitions

The following terms were defined to clarify the meaning of key words used throughout this study:

Student with a disability. As defined in Public Law 108-446, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), a student with a disability is a child "(i) with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this title as 'emotional disturbance'), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and (ii) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services" (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Special Education Research, n.d.)

Other Health Impairment. Having limited strength, vitality, or alertness. It includes, but is not limited to, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Tourette syndrome, diabetes, epilepsy, or a heart condition (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], 2016).

Dropout*.* For the purposes of this study a dropout is a student who was enrolled at any time during the previous school year who is not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year and who has not successfully completed school (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

At risk students*:* At risk students are those students considered in danger of not graduating, being promoted, or meeting other education-related goals. Risk factors may include, but are not limited to, low socioeconomic status (SES); academic background; failing grades in mathematics and/or reading; behavior, cognitive, or physical problems; a difficult family or community

environment; and a limited school capacity to meet student needs (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2008).

Academic engagement*:* Academic engagement can be seen as a multidimensional construct. There are three distinct dimensions to this construct: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Fredricks et al., 2011; Mahatmya, Lohman, Matjasko, & Farb, 2012). According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) these constructs include:

- positive conduct such as following the rules and adhering to classroom norms and the absence of disruptive behaviors such as skipping school and being reprimanded (i.e., behavioral engagement);
- persistence, concentration, and contributing to class discussions, liking the school, the teacher, and the work and feelings of belonging (i.e., emotional engagement);
- a readiness to invest in learning, the desire to go beyond the requirements, and a willingness to exert the effort that is needed to understand and master difficult ideas and skills (i.e., cognitive engagement).

Engaged – for the purposes of the present study a student was considered engaged in school if (a) the student had a grade point average of B or above in all their classes; (b) the student complied with school and classroom rules and had never been suspended or expelled from school; and (c) the student had a positive attitude towards school as measured by teacher and counselor observations.

Disengaged – for the purposes of the present study a student was considered disengaged in school if (a) the student received failing grades in mathematics and/or language arts/reading; (b) the student had behavioral issues as measured by detentions (i.e., an average three or more detentions per 9-week grading period), suspensions (two or more suspensions in the previous school year or in the present school year), and/or past expulsions; and/or (c) the student had a high absentee rate (i.e., 13 or more days out of the previous school year or an average of 4 or more absences per quarter during the school year in which the study took place).

Group norms: For the purposes of this study group norms were defined as the customary attitudes and behaviors that characterize a group and distinguish it from other social groups; they are shared patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior within a particular context (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

Afterschool program. Afterschool programs can be defined as programs that operate immediately after school dismissal and offer a variety of structured activities for children that are safe and supervised and that are intentionally designed to promote learning and social development outside of school hours. These programs may run before or after school, on weekends or on holidays and during summer vacation (Afterschool Alliance, 2011). For the purposes of this study however an afterschool program refers to a program that takes place immediately following school dismissal.

Social club. For the purposes of this study a social club will be understood as an extracurricular activity that takes place in school but is not

required by the school. This is a particular type of afterschool program that provides recreational and social opportunities for its members.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 began with an overview of the consequences, both personal and to society in general, of high school dropout, introducing the need for the present study. Dropout is often tied to negative outcomes such as increased levels of incarceration. It is also tied to such consequences as higher levels of unemployment or to employment that does not offer livable wages. The consequences to society in general are also steep and include issues such as lost fiscal contributions and an increase in subsidies to citizens who need financial assistance.

The research on why individuals drop out of school often focuses on the role that adults play in the process, however, given the increasing amount of time that individuals spend with their peers as they grow, there is a need to better understand the influence peers have on each other and possibly harness peer influence to engage disengaged students in learning. Theories such as Erickson's stages of psychosocial development and Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory and self-categorization theory shed light on the role peers may play in fostering academic engagement. Peer relations are often overlooked in the literature on dropout. This study examined the use of an intervention based on peer relations, designed to engage students at risk for school failure.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there is no one factor that leads to school dropout, several researchers (e.g., Balfanz et al., 2007; Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007) have created sets of predictor variables, based on the student data available in school systems, which indicate that a student is on the path to dropping out of school. According to the American Psychological Association (2012) these pertain to the individual, their family, their community, and the school the individual attends. Variables inherent to the individual student generally include factors such as engagement, or lack there-of, academic performance, behavior, disability status, and absenteeism. Some researchers (e.g., Dotterer, McHale and Crouter, 2009; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Whiting, 2006) take into consideration factors related to the student's personal identity, such as the student's academic self-concept, racial identity and academic identity. Factors that pertain to the individual's family often include variables such as low SES, having parents who are recent immigrants, and coming from highly mobile families. Factors that are connected to the individual's community that may influence the decision to drop out of school include overcrowding, high unemployment, a lack of positive role models, and the general perception of neighborhood risk. Lastly, factors that pertain to the school may include variables such as inadequate funding, inexperienced teachers, and disciplinary procedures that lead to suspensions and expulsions which potentially contribute to students

falling behind. However, there are some aspects of the process that leads to dropout that have not been studied in depth (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). These pertain to the effects of peer relationships.

The present study focused more specifically on individual and school related factors as these can be easily influenced by the classroom teacher. Teachers can do very little to change a student's home life or the community the student lives in but teachers can change what happens in the classroom and in school. This chapter provides a review of the literature associated with the factors that lead to school dropout. It also reviews literature concerning why some students who are at risk for dropout graduate.

Individual Factors

The lack of appropriate engagement in school, both academically and socially, indicates withdrawal. School dropout is often the final act of that disengagement. Academic engagement reflects a student's identification with learning, school, and fitting in (Patterson et al., 2008; Reschly & Christenson, 2006). Disengagement for most future dropouts begins in early adolescence (Balfanz et al., 2010). However, it can begin as early as first grade for those students who experience academic and behavioral difficulties (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Kemp, 2006). When asked why they dropped out, students who left school without graduating cite factors that span multiple domains and a complex interaction among risk factors (Hammond et al., 2007), but the most frequently given reason for the decision to drop out was that it was because of boredom. These students felt that they were not challenged enough in the classroom, and

saw no connection between what they were learning in school and real life applications. The lack of connection typically led to a lack of motivation (Bridgeland, 2010). Using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) which collected information while students were in middle school and high school, Reschly and Christenson (2006) studied the association of student engagement to school dropout focusing in particular on students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) and with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD). Reschly and Christenson found that boredom is positively correlated with student preparation and behavior; higher values reflected poorer preparation, such as coming to class without writing utensils, paper or books, and poor behavior, such as fighting, absenteeism, tardiness and cutting class. Also, boredom was found to be negatively correlated with the amount of time students spend doing homework or interacting with teachers. These researchers found few differences between students with disabilities and students without disabilities in terms of their engagement at school.

Using data obtained from official school records and from county juvenile court records, Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig and Heinrich (2008) examined the differences in developmental pathways of high school graduates and dropouts. The participants in the study were a random sample of 60 graduating students and 60 dropouts chosen across four cohorts (i.e., students who begin kindergarten in a specific year and are tracked over time to high school graduation or dropout). Absenteeism is one of the main differences that exist between students who graduate and students who do not. These researchers

found that dropouts missed an average of 124 days of school between kindergarten and eighth grade. Because of the numerous absences students fall behind academically, and the continuing absences make it difficult for them to catch up. Falling behind can lead to poor grades, course failure and retention (Brownstein, 2010; Williams-Bost & Riccomini, 2006). Hickman et al. (2008) found that dropouts were significantly more likely to have been retained than graduates; most of these retentions took place between fifth and sixth grade.

Penna and Tallerico (2005) conducted in-depth interviews that centered on the school experiences of dropouts who had been retained in school. Sixteen males and eight females volunteered to participate in a study that aimed to shed light on grade retention. Twenty of the 24 participants identified grade retention and its consequences as the major factor in their decision to drop out. Participants in the study felt nothing much had changed the second (or third) year in the same class. The assignments were the same, the textbooks were the same and the instruction was the same. Therefore, in the repeat year the redundancy and boredom were even more frustrating. Moreover, students who had been retained were negatively targeted by other students both for having failed a year and for being older than their classmates. Retainees who participated in Penna and Tallerico's research said they were often mocked, picked on, bullied and teased. Peers referred to them as "worthless" and "losers." These authors found few remedial benefits in being retained, with retention serving only to continue the cycle of failure that leads to drop out.

How students view themselves as learners has consequences on school engagement and on school completion. The connection between a student's personal identity and the student's academic identification – the student's role as a learner – is an important component of academic motivation, engagement, and performance (Hope, Chavous, Jagers, & Sellers, 2013). In an attempt to determine the relationship of academic self-concept to GPA and standardized test performance (which are considered measures of academic performance), Awad (2007) recruited 313 students from psychology classes at a historically Black university in the Northeast. A secondary purpose of the study was to determine if there is a relationship between racial identity and standardized test scores therefore the participants were all Black. Twenty-two percent of the participants were male and 78% were female. Using questionnaires to collect data, Awad found that students who have higher levels of academic self-concept - a positive attitude toward school and toward their own scholastic abilities - are more likely to do better in class and have a higher GPA than others. When students believe in their capability to perform a given task they place a higher value on that task, are more motivated, participate more and perform better (Wei & Marder, 2012). Domains that enhance self-concept are those that individuals are most likely to connect with and are those, which in turn will motivate an individual to continue investing time and energy (Hope et al., 2013). Self-concept patterns are similar for students with and without disabilities. Self-concept is highest around age eight, decreases to its lowest level around ages 11 to 14 and increases back to the same level as for a 9-year old when the student is about 17

and boys with disabilities tend to have a lower self-concept than girls with disabilities (Wei & Marder, 2012).

Cultural pride and awareness have been found to be significant predictors of academic resilience (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Positive racial group identification can serve to strengthen the connection between self-esteem and achievement (Hope et al., 2013). Students who have high levels of ethnic identity and racial group identity report higher levels of school engagement when compared to students who have lower levels of racial/ethnic group identity (Shin et al., 2007). In their study of socio-cultural factors and school engagement among Black adolescents, Dotterer et al., (2009) found that ethnic identity had a positive effect on school bonding for these students. However, in their attempt to shed light on the link between the identity processes among Black students and academic achievement, Hope et al. (2013) found that the relationship between racial group identification, self-esteem and academic achievement is inconsistent for Black students. Participants in the study were 324 traditional-aged (median age was 18) Black college students from three large public universities in the Midwest and Southeast of the United States. About 74% of the participants were female and 26% male. These researchers found that for some Black students a strong racial identification is tied to academic achievement while for others identifying with a group that, because of historical and contemporary racism, is stigmatized can put students at risk for academic failure. Internalizing negative views of one's own group can lead students to experience lower than average academic performance. Group identification may be tied to school

disengagement in other ways too. Students who feel that economic and social barriers exist for their group may decide that education is not the route to upward mobility for their group leading them to seek identities outside the academic domain (Butler-Barnes, Williams, & Chavous, & 2012).

The studies in this section have shed light on some of the factors that pertain to the individual student that can ultimately lead that student to drop out of school. Reschly and Christenson (2006) found that boredom is one of the main reasons given for leaving school. Not being challenged leads to disengagement (Bridgeland, 2010) and absenteeism, the main difference between students who graduate and those who do not (Hickman et al., 2008), with students who eventually drop out of school often being absent on average 124 days between kindergarten and eighth grade. The difficulties in catching up created by absenteeism can lead to grade retention and the redundancy of repeating the same curriculum can lead to more boredom and frustration and eventually drop out (Penna & Tallerico, 2005). Also, aspects such as how students see themselves as learners (Hope et al., 2013) and cultural pride and awareness (Gonzlaez & Padilla, 1997) were also found to be predictors of dropout. However, other factors that pertain to the individual student are not the only ones that lead to dropout. Factors such as the student's family may also contribute.

Family Factors

Socioeconomic Status

Family factors have also been the focus of research in an attempt to find the reasons why some students drop out of school (Nygreen, 2006). Low

socioeconomic standing is among the strongest predictors of school drop out. Coming from a family that lives in poverty significantly increases the risk that a student will drop out of school (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). As part of a meta-analysis of the literature on SES and academic achievement, Sirin (2005) reviewed articles published in professional journals between 1990 and 2000. To be taken into consideration for the review, the research in the articles needed to include a sample of students in the United States, Kindergarten through 12th grade, and needed to report quantitative data detailed enough to be able to calculate correlations between SES and academic achievement. Sirin's aim was to determine the extent to which a relationship exists between SES and academic achievement. After an in-depth search for studies, 58 published journal articles met Sirin's criteria for the review. There were a total of 75 independent samples from the 58 published journal articles. The total student level data included 101,157 students from 6,871 schools in 128 school districts. Sirin found that at the student level, family SES is one of the strongest correlates of academic performance. Family SES, according to Sirin, sets the stage for student academic performance by providing the resources and social capital needed to succeed in school. It determines the kind of school the student will attend and influences the quality of the relationship between school personnel and the parents. Sirin also found that, with the exception of high school, the relationship between SES and academic achievement increases significantly starting from primary school and continuing through middle school. During high school it returns to the elementary school levels. Sirin posits that the results of

the high school samples may be result of the effect of the cumulative process of poor academic achievement begun in elementary school because of family SES culminating in the dropout of many poor achieving students in the samples.

Students who live in poverty generally come from single-parent families headed by a mother who is often herself a school dropout (Murray & Naranjo, 2008). Because of economic difficulties, the need to survive may take precedence and these parents may therefore have a survival-oriented approach to child rearing rather than a child centered approach (Ford, 2011). Children who live in poverty rarely see a doctor, dentist, or optometrist, therefore, these children find themselves going to school with uncorrected vision problems, toothaches or chronic health issues (Gándara, 2010). Families that live in poverty do not have the funds necessary to provide their children with resources, such as books, that can create a stimulating environment. Parent presence may be low and children may be left alone to make choices for themselves and a child that is unsupervised may well spend more time on activities that are not related to school, causing the child to fall behind (Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009).

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement was not specifically explored in the present study. During the focus groups however it quickly became evident that parental involvement, particularly parental expectations, played an important role in the daily academic experience of the children that participated in the afterschool social club. Therefore this section of the review of the literature is dedicated to parental involvement.

To better understand the effects of early parental involvement and parental expectations, Froiland, Peterson and Davison (2012), examined the extent to which parental expectations in both kindergarten and eighth grade affect achievement. Data used for their study came from the National Center for Education Statistics Early Child Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K). This study followed families from 1998 to 2006. The analysis involved about 7,600 students who remained in the study from kindergarten to eighth grade. Families were equally sampled across five different SES levels. Parents completed questionnaires that gave information on demographics and parental involvement at the beginning of kindergarten and at the end of eighth grade. Student achievement was assessed individually by trained ECLS – K staff. Assessment in kindergarten took into consideration reading, mathematics, and rudimentary knowledge of social studies and science. Eighth-grade achievement was based on mathematics, reading, and science.

Although these researchers did not find a direct relation between SES and race/ethnicity and parental expectations in eighth grade they did find that early parental involvement was a predictor of later success for their children. Froiland et al. (2012) found that parent expectations for high levels of attainment in post secondary education predict better achievement in eighth grade. Parental expectations in kindergarten have an indirect effect, via later parental expectations, in eighth grade. In kindergarten, parental involvement helps children develop skills that they will need to succeed academically. Students who perceive their parents to have high expectations for their educational attainment

have higher graduation rates (Owens, 2010). Dropouts however tend to have parents who are not involved in their education or their lives (Bost & Riccomini, 2006).

School Factors

School Culture

Stereotypes and prejudices held by teachers and staff can make both students and their parents feel unwelcome at school (Gallegher, 2002). The school's lack of understanding of parental roles based on cultural background adds to the difficulties experienced by members of minority groups (Patterson et al., 2008). According to Patterson et al., the public school system in the United States is based on White, middle class values and norms and educators, and staff, in these schools interpret the performance and behavior of low-income and culturally diverse students, and their families, through a White, middle-class lens. These views reflect the belief that low income and/or racial minority students do not perform as well in school as non-minority students. In a qualitative case study, Patterson and colleagues used personal interviews, focus groups, and a review of school documents to examine how the culture and structure of a school can influence instructional practices and result in conflicting beliefs about the students and their families. They used a purposive sampling strategy to select students, including students who had dropped out of school, parents/family members, and school personnel to participate in the study for a total of 68 participants. All participants were asked to share their ideas as to why so many

students from this particular school left before graduation and what measures they felt would ensure more students graduating.

In the years preceding the Patterson et al., (2008) study, an influx of immigrants from Mexico and Central America had replaced the White, middle-class families and businesses in the area surrounding the school. This particular school was chosen for the study because of the high dropout rates. Researchers found contradictions between the valuing of diversity stated by staff and faculty and the description of their actual actions. In particular the contradictions revolved around their beliefs regarding students and parents, between the school structure and instruction and between student needs an actual instructional practices. Although on the one hand staff and faculty praised the diversity within the school on the other hand they expressed a deficit view of the students and their families blaming the lack of school persistence on the fact that they were low income, racial minority students. According to the authors, staff members made comments such as, "[students] just don't have a desire to get in there and try to pass a class" and "their socioeconomic status is real low and they need a lot of support... I mean we're 75% free and reduced lunch so a lot of these homes aren't involved in their child's education" (p. 6). Faculty and staff blamed the school's high dropout rate on the familial culture and background of the Latino students. They expressed the notion that the cultural traditions of these families encourage students to leave school because education was not valued. Students however expressed the view that teachers stereotyped them using race and ethnicity. "The way I see it is that they look at us -- if a Mexican don't care all

Mexicans don't care" to which a Black student responded “that's how they look at Black kids, too. When Black kids fail, automatically all of them are bad” (p. 7). Students shared that a typical class consisted of the teacher writing notes on the board and students completing assignments on their own, "they don't even talk to you" (p. 8).

What constitutes competence and acceptable behavior is based on those White, middle-class values and norms but those values and norms do not always align with the values and norms of low income and culturally diverse students and their families (Klingner et al., 2005). Because the students’ performance and behaviors do not align with White, middle-class parameters, their performance and behavior is often regarded as deficient and inappropriate which in turn can lead to expectations, and the use of instructional strategies, that contribute to student disengagement and low academic performance (Patterson et al., 2008).

Low-income Schools

Schools are seen as a means toward upward social mobility (Harry & Klingner, 2014), yet, the reality is that upward mobility is elusive for many students because their schools are inequitably funded, their teachers have low expectations, and curricula is differentiated along social-class lines (Oakes, 2010). While students who live in middle- and high-income neighborhoods attend higher quality schools, low-income and culturally diverse students are more likely to attend schools that are not adequately funded and staffed (Harry & Klingner, 2014) with a less-rigorous curricula which results in an inadequate preparation (Owens, 2010). Because schools are typically funded through property taxes,

schools in low-income communities tend to have low per pupil expenditures. They cannot afford the high standard environment with selective programs found in schools in high income neighborhoods (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). High poverty schools are often found in Hispanic and Black neighborhoods, with schools in Black neighborhoods fairing worse than schools in Hispanic neighborhoods (Harry & Klingner, 2014).

Schools in low-income areas are often large, overcrowded, dirty and unsafe, with shortages of instructional materials such as textbooks, math manipulatives, and even paper to make photocopies for the students (Oakes, 2010) and they are bureaucratic and hierarchical with relationships that are often impersonal (Patterson et al., 2008). Zvoch (2006) used data from student and school records of a large urban district in a southwestern state to investigate the relations between student and school characteristics and high school freshman dropout. The study examined the 2001–2002, ninth-grade student cohort. Five percent of this cohort, 1,254 students, were identified as dropouts; having left school before entering the 10th grade. The measure of school climate was taken from teacher responses to a 60-item school environment survey. Zvoch found that school organization and school social context were significant predictors of student drop out and that school social context becomes increasingly unfavorable to disadvantaged students as school poverty increases. In other words, the greater the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch (a proxy for school SES) in the school the greater the odds are an economically disadvantaged student will drop out. Students in large, overcrowded schools are

almost invisible. The interaction between students and teachers is minimal and the environment is uninviting and often intimidating especially with regard to cultural diversity (Gallegher, 2002). In these classrooms, Hispanic students, for example, rarely encounter a Hispanic teacher or a teacher trained in bilingual or multicultural education practices. This, in turn, is tied to discriminatory school-based practices (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006).

Discipline Policies

Inadequate behavior management skills can lead to an overreliance on zero tolerance policies (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). These policies mandate predetermined consequences for infractions of rules no matter what the circumstance (Brownstein, 2010). The original purpose for these policies was to keep schools drug free and to protect the school environment from the threat of violence (Fuentes, 2012). However, today, in an attempt to convey the message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated (Skiba & Peterson, 2000) these same policies, with their harsh disciplinary consequences, are often used to deal with misconduct for which a student would have once been simply sent to the principal's office (Fuentes, 2012). Schools with large minority, low-income populations are more likely than schools in higher income neighborhoods to use zero tolerance policies (Fuentes, 2012). Because of ambiguous definitions and practices and historical racism, Black and Hispanic students are disproportionately targeted by zero tolerance policies (Klingner et al, 2005). Students of different races and ethnicities find themselves being treated differently for the same infraction, with students of color being treated more

harshly than other students. Students of color are more likely than White students to be suspended or expelled for moderate infractions such as disruptions or tardies and truancies (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). The suspensions and expulsions typical of zero tolerance policies can cause students to fall behind in class work and make it difficult for them to catch up which in turn can lead to disengagement from school and even dropout (Brownstein, 2010; Stearns & Glennie, 2006)

McNeal and Dunbar (2010) looked at zero tolerance policies from the perspective of the students. Their qualitative study consisted of face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions, and focus groups, to better understand how students view zero tolerance policies. The participants in the study were 90 students in 11th and 12th grade from 15 urban high schools in a Midwestern city. Ninety-nine percent of the students were Black and 1% was Hispanic as the authors aimed to give voice mainly to Black youth because they are "noticeably absent from educational research" (p. 298). McNeal and Dunbar found that students feel zero tolerance policies are ineffective, often because of a shortage of security guards; the quality of security services is lacking, for example, faulty metal detectors allow students to bring weapons to school; and these policies are not enforced with consistency, double standards, based on school staff relationships with students, are used in applying sanctions. McNeal and Dunbar conclude that based on the perceptions of these urban high school students, zero tolerance policies have done little to enhance the students' feelings of safety in school.

Community Factors

Neighborhood conditions are a significant predictor of educational attainment. The neighborhood conditions in which a child lives may shape the child's ideas about his or her potential and goals (Owens, 2010). Owens used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to test how high school graduation and college graduation vary in accordance with school and neighborhood contexts. Owens analyzed the family background, school and neighborhood data for approximately 11,097 students from 77 high schools and found that a disadvantaged neighborhood was a significant and negative predictor of high school graduation. Living in a high poverty neighborhood with high unemployment rates reduces the odds of graduating from high school. However the author also found that the impact of neighborhood influence was different based on age. Students sampled while they were in middle school were more influenced by neighborhood factors than students in high school. Owens posits that if a student from a disadvantaged neighborhood reaches high school there is an increased chance of graduation because the odds of graduation may depend on the student's ability to stay out of trouble and complete school assignments. She found, however, that the odds of high school graduation are reduced for students from lower SES neighborhoods among peers from higher SES neighborhoods. According to Owens this may be due to less rigorous curricula in schools serving lower SES students. Therefore, when students from a lower SES feeder school find themselves in a higher SES high school they may be ill-prepared for more rigorous work. This may also negatively

shape the student's ideas about their own potential and ability prompting them to adjust their goals accordingly.

Long term exposure to the most disadvantaged, as opposed to the least disadvantaged, quintile of neighborhoods, has a deleterious effect on high school graduation rates (Wodtke, Harding, & Elwert, 2011) in part because these disadvantaged, high poverty, areas are characterized by high crime rates, drug trafficking, drug use, and the possibility of becoming the victim of crime (Cohen-Vogel, Goldring & Smrekar, 2010). Disadvantaged neighborhoods may socialize a child into attitudinal and behavioral patterns that can disrupt a child's progression through school (Wodtke, Harding, & Elwert, 2011). These communities tend to be overcrowded (Oakes, 2010), characterized by family and neighborhood instability (Cohen-Vogel et al., 2010), unemployment, welfare receipt and few well-educated adults (Wodtke, Harding, & Elwert, 2011). When people who live in high poverty communities find good jobs, they move to new neighborhoods leaving the community with few role models for children (Cohen-Vogel et al., 2010). Children who see neighbors who have a good education and high status jobs may see them as examples of what individuals in his or her community should be like (Owens, 2010), but when positive role models leave the community the positive behaviors of these individuals will no longer be available to younger members of the social group to imitate. Hence, the influence of desirable behaviors such as staying in school to better one's own situation will no longer be strong (Durlauf, 2003). In the same vein, neighborhood violence renders residents cautious and less willing to get involved or socialize with

neighbors, which leads to fewer social ties, which in turn weakens community norms, such as those regarding school attendance. Neighborhood violence is a strong predictor of school dropout (Harding, 2009). It is difficult to effectively monitor and enforce proper behavior when there is a lack of social organization and of informal social controls (Mrug & Windle, 2008).

Daly, Shin, Thakral, Selders and Vera (2008) examined the effects of risk factors such as perceived neighborhood crime/delinquency problems, and neighborhood incivilities, and protective factors such as teacher support, family support and peer support on school engagement. Participants in the study were 123 urban adolescents from a public elementary/middle school in a large Midwestern city. White participants were excluded from the final analysis so the sample was composed of ethnic minorities, which mirrored the demographics to the overall student body of the school. Data were collected through anonymous questionnaires. The researchers found that perceived neighborhood risk predicts lower school commitment and perceived social support - protective factors - do not modify the effects of a dangerous neighborhood especially on the engagement of early adolescents. More specifically, adolescents who report a higher perception of neighborhood risk also report lower levels of school engagement. Daly et al. found that in younger children, family support increases the level of school commitment while for older children school commitment increases as the perception of neighborhood risk decreases. Elements such as poverty, instability, crime, overcrowding, and the lack of positive role models can negatively impact a student's engagement and performance in school and

ultimately lead to school dropout (Hammond et al., 2007) with boys being more susceptible to neighborhood influences - than girls (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2004).

Racial and ethnic minorities and foreign-born populations are overrepresented in high poverty neighborhoods. About half of the nation's Black and Hispanic students attend schools in low-income areas with dropout rates that range from 40 to 50 percent (Belfanz & Letgers, 2006). Nearly 75% of these children attend schools where the majority of students are of color. These are schools where most of the student population lives in poverty and qualifies for free and reduced lunch. The higher the level of school poverty, the higher the probability that students will drop out (Zvoch, 2006). Because children go to the schools in their neighborhoods, schools tend to reflect the socioeconomic, racial and ethnic makeup of the neighborhood that surrounds them, therefore, schools in low-income areas inherit the inequalities of the neighborhood (Benson & Borman, 2010). According to Tate (2008) studies of academic performance do not take into consideration the community context in which the school is situated. If policymakers want to improve the schools in low-income neighborhoods they need to reproduce in those schools the high quality standards, such as hiring effective teachers and providing adequate resources for students, that are typically found in the schools in higher-income neighborhoods (Benson & Borman, 2010).

Benson and Borman (2010) linked data on the socioeconomic character of neighborhoods from the 2000 Census and measures of the relationships

between neighborhood and school context, and student achievement to investigate the degree to which social context and race/ethnic composition in neighborhoods and schools affect the achievement, more specifically the reading achievement, of young children. Data for this quantitative study came from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), which looked at students in kindergarten and first grade, and from the 2000 Census data on neighborhood social and race/ethnic measures. The sample for the study included 4,180 students who attended one of 290 schools and lived in one of 700 neighborhoods. The data on the students included test scores, demographic characteristics and family background. The researchers found that students from low SES families entered school less prepared than students from high SES families. They also found that the social context of the neighborhood was especially important for students reading achievement at school entry in kindergarten and for their reading achievement growth especially during the summer. When compared to middle- and high schools, elementary schools are more strongly tied to neighborhood-based attendance, which can create school segregation by poverty, race, and ethnicity. Therefore the unique qualities faced at the beginning of kindergarten are rooted in the larger social context of the neighborhood.

Disability and Dropout

According to Hammond et al. (2007) the only individual background characteristic found to be a significant predictor of dropping out of school was whether or not a student had a learning disability or an emotional disturbance.

Students with SLD are three times more likely to drop out than other students and students with EBD are five times more likely to drop out of school. Dropout rates vary by type of disability. In a report on dropout risk factors, Hammond et al. aimed to identify the factors or conditions that increase the likelihood that a student will drop out of school and also to identify exemplary, evidence-based programs that address those factors. The authors completed an extensive review of the literature, however, only major articles that had school dropout as the primary goal of analysis were used for this report. A total of 44 articles were found that met the criteria. The researchers found that students with disabilities have risk factors for dropout that are similar to those of students without disabilities however they are more likely to have multiple risk factors; among these are academic performance risk factors. Students with disabilities in high school are often three years behind grade level in core subjects such as reading and math. They have lower grade point averages and a higher probability of having failed a course then do students without disabilities.

Students with disabilities often have less desirable engagement in school then do students without disabilities (Reschly & Christenson, 2006). The lack of engagement manifests itself in both behavior and attitudes (Hammond et al., 2007). In particular, students with disabilities tend to have engagement issues related to behavior, such as fighting or lack of appropriate social interaction, and related to preparation for class, such as coming to class without a pencil or completed homework. For students with SLD and EBD, the engagement

variable adds substantially to the prediction of school dropout (Reschly & Christenson, 2006).

In her study of the impact of SES and SLD, Ingrum (2006) used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) 1997 Cohort. At the time of the survey the youth interviewed were between the ages of 12 and 16; at the time of Ingrum's study they were between the ages of 21 and 25, therefore Ingrum was able to use school records to determine the highest grade completed by these youth. The final sample size was approximately 7,110 youth. Through the NLSY survey, Ingrum was able to determine if the students had a learning disability. She found that like their peers without disabilities, poverty plays a major role in determining the high school completion rate for individuals with disabilities. A lower SES means that parents are less likely to be able to help their children overcome a disability because there are fewer resources for medical treatment. Therefore students with a low SES and SLD find that the interaction of these two factors intensifies the negative effect of each factor, deterring the student from completing high school.

The plight of individuals with disabilities is worse than that of individuals without disabilities. Individuals with disabilities often struggle with issues such a low self-esteem and self-concept due to repeated failures and limited, often inappropriate, social skills (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). Having a disability makes the education experience more problematic by adding difficulties in the cognitive process, leaving students with disabilities years behind in core subjects like math and English (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002).

The arrest rate of dropouts with disabilities is significantly higher than for those who graduate. Davis, Banks, Fisher, Gershenson and Grudzinskas (2007) found that 58% of adolescents and young adults with serious emotional disabilities had been arrested at least once by age 25, with the first arrest most commonly being before age 18. The arrest rate for males is significantly higher than that of females (69% for males as opposed to 46% for females), with the first arrest of males being at a younger age than females. Davis et al. examined the relationship between age and gender and the risk of arrest among adolescents and young adults who were clients of the Massachusetts public health system between 1994 and 1996. There were 1,519 participants, 781 of which were males and 738 females. Data obtained from the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) database showed that individuals with disabilities who have been incarcerated are three times more likely than those without a disability to be repeat offenders.

This section focused on the relationship between disability and dropout. Students with disabilities have an increased likelihood of dropping out of school due to the fact that they often have multiple risk factors (Hammond et al., 2007) such as engagement issues tied to inappropriate behavior and a lack of preparation for class (Reschley & Christenson, 2006). They often struggle with issues tied to self-esteem and self-concept and inappropriate social skills (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). These issues are compounded by poverty, which plays and even bigger role in the life of students with disabilities because it negatively affects the availability of medical treatments (Ingrum, 2006). Yet, even

under the most difficult circumstances there are children who are at risk for dropout that do complete school.

Resiliency

In their qualitative study of male youth with SLD, Bear, Kortering and Braziel (2006) compared students with SLD who completed high school with those who did not. The participants in the study were 76 boys with SLD, 45 of whom graduated within four years after the study and 31 dropped out of school. Through one on one interviews, these researchers found no significant differences between the students who completed school and those who did not with regards to academic achievement, intellectual ability, self-worth, their perceptions of teachers or their satisfaction with reading and behavior. Bear et al. found that both students who completed high school and those who did not complete it, entered high school with rather low levels of academic achievement. These authors posit that factors other than academic achievement may be the key to school completion, such as how these students apply their skills to the different learning activities. In other words, Bear et al. feel that the key to school completion may not be the skills that the students possess but rather how they apply skills such as the motivation to complete schoolwork and homework, to attend class or to avoid suspensions. Bear et al. conclude that more research is needed to better understand how school completers apply their academic skills.

Not all students who are at risk of dropping out leave school without graduating. Studies show that there are students who graduate even though they exhibit several of the characteristics of students on the path to drop out. In their

qualitative study of low income, Black students with SLD who were on the path to graduating from high school, Murray and Naranjo (2009) found a number of factors that contributed to the students' persistence in school. Participants in the study were 11 graduating seniors with SLD all of whom came from low-income backgrounds. These students attended a school were approximately 80% of the incoming freshman class failed to complete school. The researchers found that the factors tied to school persistence were associated with the individual student, their families, their fellow students, and their teachers. Factors inherent in the students such as self-determination and a strong sense of independence were among the themes that students who participated in this research believed helped them persist in getting an education. The willingness to seek help and support when they needed it and a belief in the value of an education also helped them throughout high school. Factors pertaining to family include parental involvement and support from their families to finish school and high parental restrictiveness or monitoring. Parents who kept abreast of what their children were doing and were willing to go to school and talk to teachers and advocate for their children contributed to lower drop out rates. Because of the high potential for exposure to deviant behavior, all participants of the Murray and Naranjo study spoke of isolationism, which they had to forego relationships with other at risk students in order to stay on track in school. Lastly, factors that pertain to the teachers were also important in helping students stay in school. Factors such as student-teacher ethnic match (teachers and students being of the same ethnic group), teachers with a powerful presence in the classroom, with high

expectations for students yet supportive and willing to help, were all seen as factors that weighed heavily on the students' decision to stay in school (Murray & Naranjo).

In her seminal work on resiliency, Werner (1987) found that resilient youth grew up in families where they received a great deal of positive attention from at least one caregiver, be that a parent, a grandparent, an older sibling, or even a regular babysitter. In their examination of the factors that facilitate educational resilience among Black high school students, Cunningham and Swanson (2010) found a positive correlation between the mother's work history and educational resilience. Participants in the study were 206 Black adolescents from a large urban city in the South Central United States and data were collected through a 40-item survey. The results of this study suggest that having a mother who is or has spent a great deal of time in the workforce is associated with a home environment where an education is valued. The authors suggest that these students may be more aware of the connection between an education and work opportunities.

In their study of high-risk students who stayed in school, Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, and Royer (2009), found that self-efficacy played an important role in the students' persistence. Participants in the study were 60 Canadian middle school and high school students. Data were obtained through face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions. Resilient students believed that through hard work they could complete even difficult tasks and pass classes. According to the authors, these students know where to find support when

difficulties arise, they make decisions that keep them on track towards graduation, and they set goals for themselves, as well as work to reach those goals. The students also have a positive self-concept, faith in their ability to control their own fate, they believe that their destiny is not controlled by anyone but themselves and they take pride in doing high quality work.

Based on the literature reviewed in this section, several factors seem to contribute to the school completion of resilient students. Bear et al. (2006) speculate that how students apply their skills, rather than the skills they have, makes an important contribution to school completion, while Murray and Naranjo (2009) and Lessard et al. (2009) emphasize factors such as positive self-concept, self-efficacy, self-determination and a strong sense of independence and a willingness to seek help and support when needed. Resilient students have parents who are present in their lives, talk to their teachers, and advocate for them and they often have teacher with a powerful presence in the classroom and have high expectation for their students. Cunningham and Swanson (2010), on the other hand, stress the importance of the mother's role. They found that having a mother who spent time in the work force may be associated with greater awareness of the connection between an education and work opportunities.

Adolescence and Identity

In *Identity: Youth and Crisis (1968)* Erikson posits that personality develops in a series of stages that begin during childhood and continue throughout life. Development at each stage is impacted by social interaction (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). In Erikson's theory of psychosocial

development, cultural attributes and societal norms play an important role in informing an individual's behavior. According to Erikson, the extent to which an individual's behavior fits with societal norms is fundamental to a person's sense of identity (Hoare, 2013).

During the years between ages 6 and 12 circa, children move from home to a broader social context (i.e., school; Eccles, 1999). It is at this point that according to Erikson (1956) the wider society becomes significant. This period introduces new social roles in which social status is tied to competence and performance. Children begin to be concerned with being accepted by their peers and there is an increased focus on peers. Conformity to peers peaks in adolescence (Eccles, 1999). During this period the child who successfully completes academic, physical and/or social tasks develops feelings of competence and achievement. The child who is not satisfied with his or her skills risks developing a sense of inferiority and inadequacy (Manning, 1988). Manning suggests that understanding this stage can provide clues as to why students are uninterested in school and what causes social and academic failure during middle school.

By adolescence, each individual has become attuned to particular societal, cultural and national perspectives (Hoare, 2013). Adolescence is a period when the individual "through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society" (Erikson, 1956, p. 66). For Erikson (1956), it is important that during this period a young individual be recognized by others, be responded to, and be given a function and status as a person. It is during

adolescence that individuals acquire capacities that will be needed in the adult world. This process takes place through experimentation in a safe environment (e.g., with friends) and whether or not a behavior will be continued depends on the rewards available from the “peer clique” (Erikson, 1956, p. 73).

In a study conducted in the mid-1980s, Pickar and Tori (1986) tested three variables - Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development, self-concept, and delinquent behavior - to better understand any differences that might exist between students with and without learning disabilities. A total of 86 adolescents participated, of whom 39 were diagnosed as having a learning disability and were receiving special education services. Both groups were similar in age, grade level, social status and racial composition. Also, all participants were required to have an IQ score of 90 or higher. Self-report measures were used to obtain data. According to the results of the study, students with learning disabilities do not exhibit more delinquent behavior than do students without disabilities. However, students with learning disabilities are less likely to develop a global sense of competence and are more likely than their peers without disabilities to report feelings of being less popular. Pickar and Tori feel that these results are most likely due to years of failure in school and to the difficulties individuals with disabilities often have in the interpretation of social cues such as facial expressions and body language.

Erikson was aware that his concepts might be time-bound, consequently, Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke (2010) tested Erikson’s theory in an attempt to better understand the role that time, and the cultural changes that take place over time,

play in the development of identity. In this 10-year, multi-method, longitudinal study in Germany, the authors tested identity development through a questionnaire where participants completed open-ended questions. Identity formation was tested at ages 15 and 24 with identity achievement also being tested at age 24. There were 93 participants (52 females and 41 males) who were invited to participate in all of the assessments for a total of eight at varying intervals. Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke found that Erikson's theory is still valid for adolescents of the 21st century, that identity develops in a network of sequential stages and in relational contexts and that a mature identity is achieved once these experiences are integrated, that is, built upon, enlarged and incorporated into earlier experiences. These findings are in accordance with Erickson's theory that identity develops with age, typically moving from a stage of conformism during adolescence, marked by identification with the group and adherence to the group, which then stabilizes in young adulthood at a stage of self-awareness and consciousness, a stage in which alternatives are considered and explored and decisions are made after consideration of the options.

In their seminal 1970s research, Tajfel and Turner sought to better understand the process that surrounds the way individuals define themselves as members of a social group. More specifically, they sought to understand when and how social structures and belief systems impact what people do (Reicher et al., 2010). In an attempt to establish the minimal conditions in which a person will distinguish between an in-group and an out-group and behave accordingly, Tajfel and his colleagues categorized schoolboys, ages 15 and 16, into groups on a

trivial basis (e.g., a preference between the artists Klee or Kandinsky) and asked them to decide how points, worth money, should be divided between two subjects. The participants in the study worked alone and did not know each other; participants were designated by code numbers, and all that was known about the two who were to be assigned the points was their group membership. The assignment of the points was invariably in favor of the unidentified members of the in-group (Tajfel, 1974). This behavior could not be explained in terms of self-interest as the boys awarding the points had nothing to gain nor was there any material competition between the groups. Tajfel reasoned that this behavior could be understood only if we assume that people define themselves through the groups to which they belong. The mere act of being categorized as a member of a group was enough to show favoritism to that group. People attach meaning and emotional significance as well as their own sense of esteem, or self-definition as Tajfel (1974) put it, to the fate of the group, hence the fate of the group members is tied to their own (Reicher et al., 2010). In other words, Individuals strive to achieve a positive image of the group because their own self-esteem can be enhanced by the positive evaluation of the group (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). Individuals are members of numerous social groups and this membership contributes, positively or negatively, to the image that the individual has of her- or himself (Tajfel 1974).

Self-categorization as a member of a group is a function of accessibility and fit where fit implies that the similarities and differences between group members can be perceived (Oakes et al., 1991) and accessibility refers to the

individual's predisposition to use a given category as a basis for perception or action (Reicher et al., 2010). Ashforth and Mael (1989) built on these concepts and reviewed the literature on social identification and applied Social Identity Theory to organizational identification. They assert that within organizations Individuals determine their own social category membership according to the perceived prototypical characteristics they attribute to group members and adopt for themselves those characteristics. The group is more than an extension of interpersonal relationships and group membership can come about even when there is no interpersonal cohesion because individuals choose groups that embody salient aspects of their own identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). According to Ashforth and Mael an individual's "identity is an amalgam of loosely coupled identities" (p. 30) since an individual takes on diverse identities. The authors give the example of a female identifying herself as a woman and as a Canadian.

Lund and Jolly (2012) extend these concepts to the learning environment arguing the current literature on student engagement/disengagement does not fully take into consideration the social aspect of learning, especially with regard to student disengagement. These authors see learning as a process of adapting – or not - one's different identities to the new situation created by what has taken place in the classroom. Engagement in learning depends on accepting information that threatens one's identity, processing and resolving it. Accepting the changes modifies values, norms and expectations relevant to identity. Students who reject these changes eliminate the dissonance that has been created by rejecting the learning activity (i.e., not participating in the class

discussion) or through disruptive behavior. It is the student's sense of identity that is responsible for his or her readiness to participate in a learning activity. Lund and Jolly feel that by engaging in learning, students will not stay the same "self" and by helping students access authentic resources educators can support the new "learner self".

Adolescence and Peer Relations

The main focus of most theories that aim to explain why students leave school without graduating is on how various factors (e.g., family background, disability, academic engagement, school discipline policies) interact and shape the decision to drop out. In this context however some aspects of the process that leads to dropout have remained understudied, in particular, the social aspects that lead students to leave school without a diploma (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). More specifically, there is a need to clarify the relationship between students, their peers and dropout (Farmer et al., 2003) given the shift during adolescence from interaction that is predominantly with adults or parents to interaction that is predominantly with peers (Li et al., 2011). Peers are in the classroom, not parents (Kilian et al. 2013) and for many young people, academic performance in the classroom is closely tied to peer relations (Schwartz et al., 2013) yet most studies focus on the influence of adults (Li et al., 2011).

An individual's peer relations, or friendships, change with age because of intrapersonal concerns, changes in specific behaviors and in the patterns of involvement with friends and because of changes in the configuration of groups (Rubin, Bukowksy & Parker, 2006). Early adolescence tends to be characterized

by same-sex friendships, which become mixed-sex peer groups in middle adolescences. These peer groups begin to disintegrate as individuals begin to spend more time with members of the opposite sex as part of a romantic couple (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002). As this process of maturation goes on so does a decline in antisocial activity because the individual (and their peers who are going through the same process) is becoming increasingly independent of peer influence (Monahan et al., 2009).

When it comes to the study of peer relationships, the focus is typically either on dyadic friendships or on larger peer group networks. Peer networks are voluntary and based on dyadic friendships within that group. They are organized in such a way as to maximize with-in group homogeneity (Rubin et al, 2006). In their study of the differences between the effects of close friends as opposed to distant friends, Carbonaro and Workman (2013) analyzed data from surveys from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). The subsample used for Carbonaro and Workman's study consisted of 10,388 students, of which 1,325 were classified as dropouts. According to Carbonaro and Workman, a unique feature of the Add Health survey is that it asks students to nominate up to five male and five female friends. These are also placed in order from closest to least close friend, allowing the researchers to identify the different groups of friends within the schools that participated. The researchers found that distant friends (i.e., members of the same peer network) are more influential in a student's decision to drop out than are close friends with whom the student has a more intimate relationship, therefore more intimate information,

due to frequent interaction. Carbonaro and Workman argue that a close friend's decision to drop out is less influential because knowing a person well allows the individual to devise an explanation for their actions based on the friend's circumstances and personality. However, an individual has less information about a distant friend's circumstances and therefore the individual will make inferences in order to interpret the distant friend's actions. Through this process the distant friend's actions may serve as a normative model that defines which behaviors are permissible and/or expected. According to Carbonaro and Workman this finding is consistent with social identity theory, which emphasizes that individuals will behave in accordance with members of a group with which they identify. Adolescents in particular are afraid of being an "outcast" or a "loner" (Warrington & Younger, 2011).

An important topic in the existing literature on peer relationships and performance in the classroom is the risks associated with negative peer norms (Schwartz et al., 2013; Shin et al., 2007). The literature shows an unmistakable connection between negative peer influence and problematic outcomes such as behavior problems, school drop out, consumption of drugs and alcohol, or juvenile delinquency (e.g., Megens & Weerman, 2012; Monahan et al., 2009; Vargas, 2011). Engaging in antisocial behavior and having antisocial peers are closely tied (Monahan et al., 2009). In their research on adolescent friendships, Crosnoe, Cavanagh and Elder (2003) also analyzed Add Health data. Data from 9,223 adolescents revealed that students who had friends who liked school or did well in school had fewer academic problems than those whose friends were not

as academically engaged. The study focused on a subsample of the Add Health data, which included only Black and White adolescents. The inclusion of only these two groups grew out of the literature on the differences between these groups and because participants from other racial/ethnic groups were too limited in number or too concentrated in certain schools. Information was obtained through surveys and only adolescents who nominated at least one friend were included in the sample. Crosnoe et al. found that having friends with higher levels of academic achievement and school attachment was associated with lower levels of off track academic behavior. Controlling for prior academic behavior, these researchers found a change, for the better, in academic problems across and 8.5-month span. These findings did not differ by race but were moderated by school context. In other words the role of friends' attitudes and behaviors, in part, depended on the type of school the adolescent attended; in moderate- or high-performing schools students were less likely to be off track when they had friends who did well in school and this interaction was even stronger in low performing schools. However, for Black adolescents, friends' achievement was less productive in disadvantaged, large schools; possibly due to the impersonal climate often associated with the schools. These researchers also found that the actual achievement level of friends was more important than the feelings these friends expressed about school. The authors hypothesize that the actual performance, more than pro-school attitudes, opens information channels and streams of other valuable resources for the students. It is possible that friends who do well in school have mastered testing and homework skills, have closer

ties to school staff and have greater information about opportunities and activities.

During adolescence, peer opinions become more important than those of adults (Shin et al., 2007) and the susceptibility to peer influence increases during this period in an individual's life, reaching its peak around age 14 (Monahan et al., 2009). In their 1997 study of sixth-grade students, Wentzel and Caldwell found that group membership was related to academic performance for both boys and girls. A group of 213 sixth grade students were followed for two years to examine the relationship between friendships, peer acceptance and group membership to academic achievement. These researchers found that the more cohesive the social group the more influential in promoting and enforcing norms and values capable of undermining or facilitating academic achievement. As students enter middle school the potential for groups to influence the adoption of specific norms might be especially strong given that identification with peers and the pressures to conform to peer norms increase in early adolescence. The results of Wentzel and Caldwell's research also shows that pro-social behavior explains associations between sixth grade peer relationships and eighth grade achievement providing evidence that behavioral skills link social competence and academic competence at school. In other words pro-social behavior might be linked to learning in meaningful ways rather than representing simple social competency.

Research on peer relationships shows just how complex the question of peer context, peer relationships and outcomes is, therefore, we need to not only

distinguish between negative peer relations and outcomes but also between positive peer relations and outcomes. Positive peer behaviors reduce the likelihood that a student will succumb to the influence of others who drop out of school (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Positive peers act as a reference point thus adolescents who associate with peers, for example, who value school and are committed to an education, create attachments to school and conform to the values associated with it (Stewart, 2008). According to Estell et al. (2008) peer support is a significant predictor of school engagement and of school completion. In their study of sixth grade students and their adjustment to middle school, Wentzel, McNamara, and Caldwell (2004) followed 242 middle school students from sixth grade to eighth-grade in a predominantly middle-class community. Data were collected through questionnaires filled out by the students when they were in sixth grade and then again in eighth grade. The researchers found that students without friends showed lower levels of pro-social behavior and academic achievement then students with friends. The authors speculate that because pro-social behavior is social and interactive, this behavior provides cues as to what is appropriate and desirable behavior. In this process, a friend is likely to reward or reinforce (Kindermann, 2007) a peer for appropriate behavior, and adolescents who feel their peers at school are supportive and caring tend to be interested in school (Wentzel, McNamara, and Caldwell, 2004). Peer support may serve a protective function especially for at risk students (Shin et al., 2007). Peer support can serve to increase motivation and participation in academically related activities and elevate school as a priority (Crosnoe et al., 2003). The

influential role of friendships in academic behavior does not differ by race or ethnicity (Crosnoe et al., 2003) however Black and Hispanic youth, as opposed to White youth, may not be as strongly influenced by positive peer associations with respect to negative behaviors but rather they have a more protective influence against negative behaviors from family, church or other social sources than do White youth (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009).

School Clubs

Given that school clubs may be a venue for intentionally promoting positive friendships for students at risk for dropout, a search of the literature on these was completed. Using databases such as *ERIC* and *Education Full Text* and using search terms such as *social clubs, extracurricular clubs,* and *after school clubs,* no studies were found that focused specifically on social clubs that take place after school. Therefore, the review of the literature focused on school-sponsored activities that occur outside of school hours. Broh (2002) analyzed data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988. The aim of this study was to test the effect of participation in extracurricular activities, in particular participation in interscholastic sports, on high school achievement. The population sample included 24,599 eighth graders from 1052 public private and parochial schools from around the country. The students completed surveys about schoolwork, relationships, family, attitudes, and behaviors; follow-ups were conducted again when the students were in 10th and 12th grades. Mathematics, science, reading, and history achievement tests were also administered during these years in order to measure academic performance. The results indicate that

participating in extracurricular programs, in this case sports programs, boosts achievement in the classroom and in particular on standardized math tests.

Bonny, Britto, Hornung, Klostermann and Slap (2000) found that school connectedness was malleable, in other words, interventions designed to increase school bonding had enduring effects. Among the interventions that these researchers considered were extracurricular activities. In their attempt to identify factors that differentiate youth who feel connected to school with those who do not feel connected to school Bonny et al. studied a group of students from eight public schools in grades seven through 12 who participated in a modified version of the Add Health survey. A sample of 1959 students submitted usable surveys. The survey included five items that dealt with school connectedness. Bonny et al. found that school connectedness was positively associated with extracurricular activities.

In their 5-year longitudinal study of middle school and high school students that took place in Chicago on the effects of extracurricular participation on individual students' ambition and achievement, Guest and Schneider (2003) use data from the Alfred P. Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development. Survey and interview data were collected for students in 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th grades in four waves between 1992 and 1997. The results of the study suggest that the importance of participating in extracurricular activities depends on the school. In low performing schools students who participate in sports are seen as good students with higher academic expectations whereas participants in non-sports extracurricular activities are more likely to be seen as good students in

schools in wealthy communities. However, the results of the study suggest that participation in non-sports extracurricular activities has a consistently positive effect on achievement and ambition. Participation in activities such as student government, drama, and journalism are associated with higher grades and the aspiration to higher levels of education. Whereas participation in sports varies across schools in its relation to the achievement of higher grades and higher aspirations with regards to education, meaning that athletic participation is more subject to context. Sports related activities have a positive influence on grades and higher educational aspirations in lower and middle class schools.

Anderson-Butcher (2010) looked at 21 after school programs in central Ohio in order to better understand the qualities of an afterschool program that foster school connectedness. These programs enrolled a total of 1,238 school-aged youth. Her findings show that participation in these afterschool programs did contribute to the success of these young people in school particularly among the middle school attendees. The results show that the students who participated in the programs had higher homework completion rates, had decreased levels of absenteeism, were involved in fewer fights and had fewer behavioral issues. The findings of this research point to several features of these programs that work towards enhancing school connectedness. Among these features or characteristics of the programs are the positive promotion of relationships, the development of a sense of belonging, enhanced engagement of parents and guardians, increased connectedness to teachers and classrooms, a reinforcement of school rules and practices, and the establishment of high

expectations and standards.The findings of these studies suggest that participation in extracurricular activities such as clubs that have as their goal school connectedness and improved achievement positively correlate to school engagement and improved GPA.

Chapter Summary

A review of the literature reveals that there is no one reason why a student chooses to leave school early and there is therefore no single approach to solving the problem of high school dropout. Researchers have created sets of predictor variables that indicate that a student may be on the path to dropping out of school. These variables include factors related to the student such as absenteeism and boredom and factors related to the child's family, such as low SES and parent immigrant status. A third set of predictor variables is tied to the school. These include factors such as teacher and staff prejudices and inequitable funding which leads to overcrowding, shortages of materials, and an unsafe environment. The last set of predictor variables is tied to the community. Areas, for example, plagued by unemployment, crime, and a sense of insecurity negatively affect academic engagement and reduce the odds of graduation. The literature also shows that factors such as having a disability increases the likelihood of dropping out of school due to a combination of multiple risk factors that includes issues such as inappropriate engagement and difficulties in the cognitive process often leaving the student with disabilities years behind in core subjects.

Erickson's theory of psychosocial development and Tajfel and Turner's theories on the process that surrounds how people come to identify themselves as members of a social group help clarify the influence of interpersonal relationships and group membership on individual decision making, such as the decision to drop out of school. According to Erikson it is during adolescence that the individual acquires the capabilities that are needed in the adult world and these are acquired through interactions with others. The research of Tajfel and Truner on the other hand brought them to the conclusion that the mere act of being categorized as a member of a group was enough to show attachment to that group. People attach meaning and emotional significance to their belonging to a group, which opens the door to the ability of the group to influence the individual.

The focus of this chapter then turns to the relationship between peers. The literature shows an unmistakable connection between negative peer influence and problem behaviors such as school dropout (Monahan et al., 2009). However, research also shows that having friends with higher levels of academic achievement is negatively correlated to off-track academic behavior (Crosnoe et al., 2003). During adolescence peer opinions become very important (Shin et al., 2007) increasing the susceptibility to peer influence (Monahan et al., 2009), which is especially strong in middle school (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997).

Lastly, this literature review looked at afterschool clubs. Research that focuses specifically on social clubs was not found therefore the literature review turned to extracurricular activities in general. The results show that

extracurricular activities do tend to improve student engagement and student achievement in school. However, the research shows that the effects of the type of club differ based on factors such as school SES. In lower SES schools, sports related clubs have been found to be positively correlated to improved academic achievement whereas in higher SES schools, non-sports related clubs have been found to be positively correlated to improved academic achievement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The literature reviewed in the previous chapter sheds light on the gravity of the decision to leave school without graduating. Dropout has generally decreased in recent years however students still drop out at alarming rates. This is particularly true for students of color, Hispanics, and students with a disability status. Much of the research on school dropout and its possible solutions focuses on the role of adults such as parents and teachers. Research on the role that peers play is limited. Therefore, this study examined, in particular, if peers might be used as a resource to promote the academic engagement of students with disabilities. Chapter 3 describes the methods used to examine the research questions that guided this study. The chapter begins with a review of the research questions proposed in Chapter 1 of this study and the corresponding hypotheses. The research questions and hypotheses are followed by a description of the setting that includes a section on the participants. Next, the research design is discussed. A modified mixed-methods sequential design was used for this study, therefore the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods phases are described in depth. The chapter ends with a description of the afterschool social club and the activities that took place during the intervention.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Based on the review of the literature, the following research questions and hypothesis were developed to guide this study.

Question 1: Are there discernable positive changes in the academic engagement of students with disabilities at risk for school dropout who participate in an afterschool social club with academically engaged peers as measured by GPA, grades, absenteeism, detentions, suspensions, teacher reports and student self-report?

Hypothesis 1A: There will be a significant increase in GPA from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure.

Hypothesis 1B: There will be a significant increase in grades from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure.

Hypothesis 1C: There will be a significant decrease in absenteeism from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure.

Hypothesis 1D: There will be a significant decrease in detentions from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure.

Hypothesis 1E: There will be a significant decrease in suspensions from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure.

Hypothesis 1F: There will be a significant increase in academic engagement as measured by teacher reports from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure.

Hypothesis 1G: There will be a significant increase in academic engagement as measured by student self-report from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure.

Question 2: Does an afterschool social club for students with disabilities who show signs of academic disengagement and students who are academically

engaged foster friendships between the members of these two groups as measured by student self-report?

Hypothesis 1: Friendship between students with disabilities who show signs of academic disengagement and students who are academically engaged will be significantly strengthened after participation in an afterschool social club as measured by student self-report.

Question 3: How do students who participated in the afterschool social club view their educational experience after having participated in the social club?

Setting

The setting for this study was a K-8 Center (Pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade) located in Miami-Dade County in Florida. This school is located in the fourth largest school district in the nation. About, 68.4% of Miami-Dade County residents are of Hispanic origin, 22.3% are Black, 7.5% are White Non-Hispanic and 1.8% of the population is made up of American Indian, Asian, and Multiracial categories (Miami-Dade County Public Schools [M-DCPS], 2015). Over 30% of children in Miami-Dade County live in poverty (Miami-Dade County Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources, 2015). About 73.3% of Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (M-DCPS, 2015). About 17.3% of M-DCPS students receive special education services (M-DCPS, 2015).

The school in which this study was conducted had a total of slightly over 900 students when the study was conducted. Approximately 100 of these students were enrolled in Grade 5 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Over

half of the students in this school qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. About 91% of the students at that time were Hispanic, 7% White Non-Hispanic, less than 1% were Black and about 1.5% were Asian. The number of students who received special education services was comparable to the district average (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The median household income in the area where the school is located was comparable to both county and state averages. High school graduation rates were also similar to county and state averages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b).

In Florida K-8 Centers are schools of choice therefore they are not typically the home school for students who attend the school. Also, K-8 Centers do not offer many of the options available in traditional public schools, such as afterschool athletics or drama and theatre. Because this school offers few extracurricular activities the researcher had the opportunity to provide a program that was unique to the school. The focus of the present study was fifth grade students. This age group was chosen because it corresponds to that period in life when acceptance from peers becomes important (Eccles, 1999) and individuals develop a sense of self (Erikson, 1956). It is also during this period that the process of disengagement that can lead to dropout often begins (Balfanz et al., 2010).

Up until the 2013-2014 school year, Florida schools had been given a letter grade based on student achievement on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), the annual state standardized student achievement test. At the time of data collection for this study, Florida was in the process of

changing this grading system. The new system was to be based on the percentage of total points earned on measures of achievement on state wide standardized tests in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies and on graduation and college credit and/or industry certifications earned. Learning gains were not used in the calculation of school grades that year because there was only one year of data for the new standardized assessment, the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA), available. For the 2014-2015 school year each school continued to have the grade obtained on the 2013-2014 FCAT. The 2014-2015 school year acted as baseline for future school ratings (Education Accountability, 2014). The school in the present study had been recognized as a grade "A" school 12 years in a row (FLDOE, n.d.). However, it had been classified as a School in Need of Improvement as its population of students with disabilities and that of its ELLs had not met the state established annual yearly progress on the FCAT (FLDOE, n.d.).

Participants

Given the increasing amount of time that young people spend with their peers as they move into middle school (Li et al., 20011) and the increasing influence that peers have at that age (Monahan et al., 2009) the present study focused on fifth grade students who were nearing the end of elementary school and preparing to enter middle school. Purposive sampling was used to choose the participants in this study. Purposive sampling, also called judgment sampling, is the "deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses" (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). In other words, using this

technique the researcher decides who the participants will be, on the basis of criteria that are important to the study. It is a non-random technique that does not need a set number of participants, and is used in both quantitative and qualitative studies (Tongco, 2007).

To determine which students would be best suited to participate in the afterschool program the researcher consulted school records, conferred with, and sought recommendations from school counselors and teachers. Two distinct groups of participants were chosen. One group was comprised of students who were engaged in school. These were the students who participated as positive peer role models. For this group, the counselors and teachers were asked to provide the names of students who met the following criteria: (a) students who had a grade point average of B or above in all their classes; (b) students who complied with school and classroom rules and who had never been suspended or expelled from school; and (c) students who had a positive attitude towards school based on teacher report and counselor observations.

The other group of participants was comprised of students who showed signs of academic disengagement, more specifically, students who were at risk of failing core subjects (i.e., language arts/reading and mathematics), had behavioral problems and/or excessive absences. For this group of students, the group that would benefit from the intervention, counselors, administrators, and teachers were asked to name students who: (a) were receiving failing grades in mathematics and/or language arts/reading; (b) students with behavioral issues based on teacher, administration, and counselor report, and/or (c) students with

high absentee rates. Generally, the number of detentions a student receives is indicative of non-compliance or disruptive behavior in the classroom. In this particular school a student who received a detention had to bring their lunch and eat it in the classroom of the teacher who gave the detention. Official records of which students served detentions were not kept. Therefore, teachers were asked to provide information concerning which students often served lunchtime detentions as a measure of disruptive behavior. Based on the researcher's personal experience as a middle school and elementary school teacher, students who are engaged in school, who complete assignments and do not misbehave, do not accumulate detentions.

Students who were not disruptive in the classroom and who did not tend to have failing grades but had high absentee rates were also invited to join the club. According to Hickman et al. (2008) dropouts miss about 124 school days between kindergarten and eighth grade, which averages out to a little over 13 days out of each school year or a little over 3 days a quarter. Once the students for both groups had been identified they were invited to participate in the afterschool program. Prior to data collection and following approval by the university's Institutional Review Board, consent was obtained from parents and guardians and assent was obtained from the students themselves.

Of particular interest to the present study were students with disabilities who were showing signs of disengagement since students with disabilities are among those with the highest school drop out rates (Bost & Riccomini, 2006). However, only students with disabilities who were on track to receive a

standard/regular diploma, as stipulated by their individual educational plan (IEP), were invited to participate. In order to receive a standard/regular diploma, students must complete 24 credits in high school and have a 2.0 grade-point average on a 4.0 scale (FLDOE, 2014). Students who were on track to receive a certificate of completion/attendance or certificate of achievement, as per their IEP, were not invited to be a part of the afterschool program. These students are not required to meet the same criteria as students on a standard diploma track.

There were approximately 100 students in the fifth grade of whom approximately 19 met the criteria for participation in the intervention group (i.e., students who had an IEP, were failing core subjects and/or had behavioral problems). All 19 were invited to join the club. Originally 16 of those students joined however three stopped attending club meetings. An equal number of academically engaged students (e.g., 19) were invited to join the club. Seventeen engaged students joined. None of the engaged students dropped out of the club. At the onset of the club meetings therefore there was a total of 31 students. The academically engaged students were to act as the positive peer role models. Those students who were at risk for school failure, yet did not participate in the social club became part of the control group. All of the at-risk students who participated in the club were Hispanic. The group of students who were academically engaged was also predominantly Hispanic. However, three of the girls were White, non-Hispanic and one girl was Asian. Table 1 shows demographic information for club participants for whom the researcher had parental permission to use student data for this study.

Table 1

Demographics of Participant Sample Directly Quoted in Qualitative Results Section

Participant*	Gender	Age	Primary Exceptionality	Ethnicity
Albert	Male	11	OHI	Hispanic
Sara	Female	11	SLD; LI	Hispanic
Ivy	Female	11	OHI	Hispanic
John	Male	12	OHI	Hispanic
Ava	Female	11	OHI	Hispanic
Adam	Male	11	SLD	Hispanic
Jane	Female	11	SLD	Hispanic
George	Male	11	OHI	Hispanic
Jill	Female	12	OHI	Hispanic
Ari	Male	11	OHI	Hispanic
Abe	Male	11	OHI	Hispanic
Danny	Male	11	SLD	Hispanic
Joshua	Male	11	ASD; OHI	Hispanic
Irene	Female	11	N/A	Hispanic
Kathy	Female	11	N/A	White, non-Hispanic
Nancy	Female	11	N/A	Hispanic
Judy	Female	11	N/A	Hispanic
Noel**	Male	11	OHI	Hispanic
Connie	Female	11	N/A	White, non-Hispanic
Atticus	Male	11	N/A	Hispanic
Cacy	Female	11	N/A	Hispanic
Chloe	Female	11	N/A	White, non-Hispanic

Table 1 shows the gender, age, disability, and ethnicity of club participants for whom the researcher had parental permission to use student data for this study.
*All participants' names are pseudonyms.
**Student with a 504 Plan not an IEP.
OHI - Other health impairment; SLD - Specific learning disability; LI - language impairment: ASD – Autism; N/A – Not applicable as this student does not have a disability

Afterschool Social Club

The afterschool social club provided students with disabilities who are at risk for school failure with regular opportunities to meet and make new friends in a structured yet relaxed environment that offered stimulating and fun activities.

Students with disabilities who showed signs of being disengaged from school had the opportunity to interact with academically engaged peers in a non-classroom environment, which is at the same time tied to the school. The aim of the activities was to create opportunities for peer interaction and to promote friendship formation and experiences of mutual support.

Structured peer interaction was the target of weekly activities that had two components: team building activities and an anchor activity in the form of a school wide recycling campaign spearheaded by club members. Anchor activities in the classroom are ongoing assignments that students work on if, or when, they finish an assignment before others in the class. Those who do not finish the anchor activity in class finish it as homework. Anchor activities in the classroom serve to maximize learning opportunities (Perry, 2012). For the purposes of this study, however, an anchor activity was an ongoing activity that tied the club to the school and that acted as a common thread for the weekly meetings. Teams of students, which consisted of both students at risk for school failure and students who are engaged in school, worked with school staff, such as teachers and custodial personnel, to identify recyclable materials throughout the school and organized the collection, storage, and hauling away of the materials. The weekly meetings gave club members the opportunity to organize these activities but were also an opportunity to build camaraderie. To this end club members, in pairs or in small groups, depending on the activity, were given a task to perform and together they decided the best way to perform the task. An example of one such activity is silent line-up where teams lined up according to shoe size without

talking to each other. Each team consisted of both students at risk for school failure and academically engaged students. Teams were chosen in such a way as to appear random. Each activity was chosen based on its ability to provide students with the opportunity to connect socially (See appendix D for a description of the activities and how teams were chosen). Most activities took place during the meetings. However, students who enjoyed drawing and/or writing volunteered to put together a logo for the club and posters with slogans for the recycle campaign. This was done during the club meetings and at home.

The club met after school on Wednesdays for approximately one hour (at times the meetings lasted longer depending on the activities). Also on a weekly basis, during homeroom, the teams of students collected the recycle materials from the participating classrooms. Teams were chosen by the researcher in such a way as to have both at-risk students and engaged students on each recycle team. Additionally, club members participated in a field trip to a local historic preserve which offers activities that focus on environmental conservation.

Research Design

For this study the researcher had originally intended to use a mixed-methods sequential exploratory design. As one can see from Figure 1, in a sequential design, two sets of data (one quantitative and one qualitative) are collected and analyzed in succession. The second sample cannot be chosen until the results of the first are analyzed and evaluated. The purpose, questions, sample or other components of the second set of data that is collected and analyzed are dependent on the results of the first set of data (Tashakkori &

Newman, 2010). The conclusions that are made on the basis of the results of the quantitative phase lead to the formulation of questions, data collection and data analysis in the qualitative phase and the final inferences are based on the results of both of these phases of the study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006).

As the end of the school year neared it became evident that the research design would have to be modified. During the club meetings student conversations turned to what they would be doing during the summer vacation and to plans for the following school year. Several of the students mentioned that they would be away during the summer and some mentioned that the following school year they would transition into the 6th grade in a traditional middle school or in a private school. It was apperent that some students might not be available after the end of the school year to participate in the focus groups and others would not be available the following school year to participate in eventual focus groups at that time.

As can be seen from Figure 2 the research design was modified. A preliminary analysis of the pretest was conducted. Using field notes and observations coupled with the results of the preliminary analysis, tentative questions for the focus groups were devised. At the last club meeting students completed the posttest and *t*-tests were immediately run using this data. The results were examined to see what, if any, major changes had occurred from pretest to posttest in order to be able to make any necessary changes to the questions that would be asked during the focus groups. No in-depth analysis of the pretest or the posttest was done at this point. The final questions focused

Figure 1

Sequential Research Design

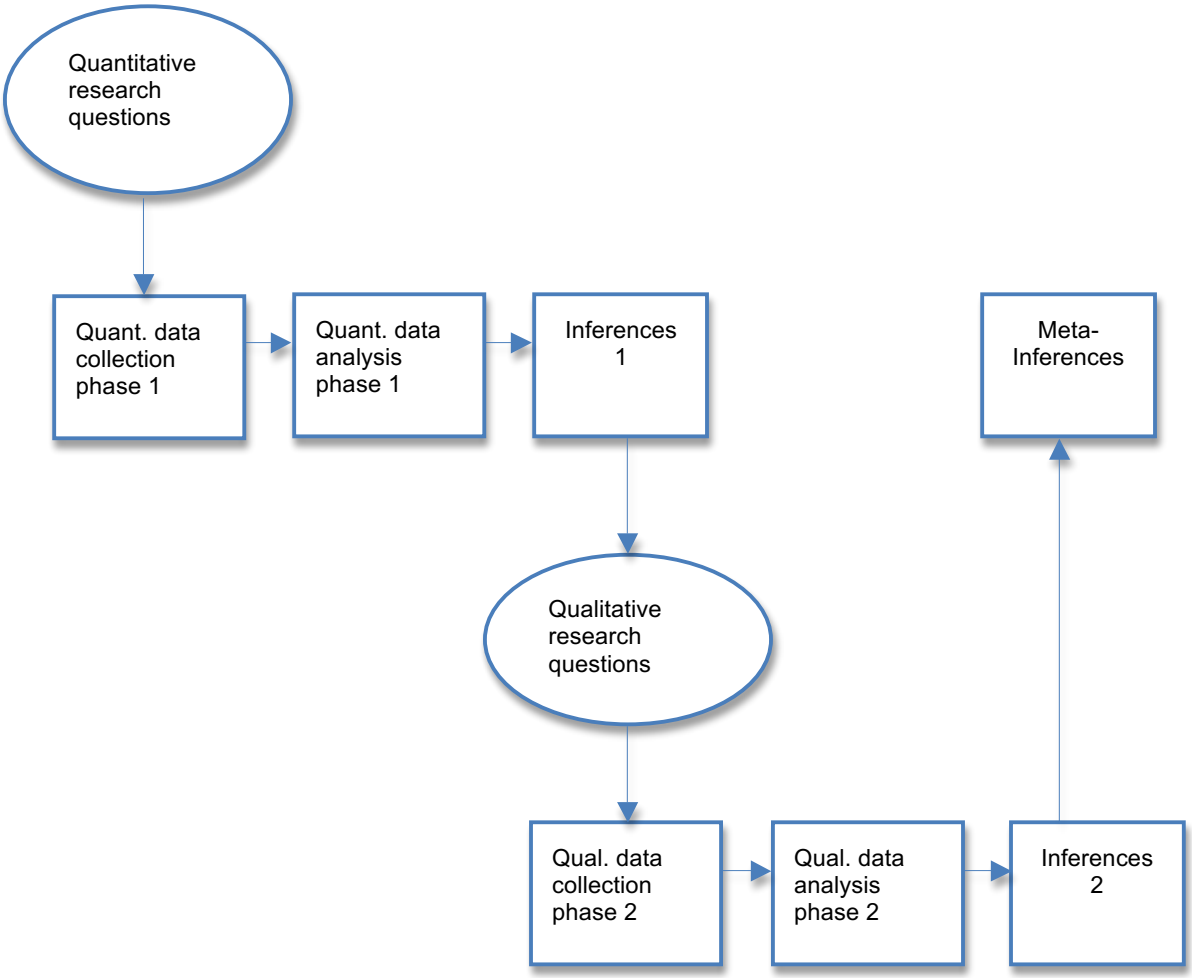


Figure 1: In this quantitative/qualitative sequential mixed design, research questions for the qualitative phase emerge from the findings of the initial quantitative phase. The final meta-inferences are made from the integrations of quantitative and qualitative findings. Adapted from Tashakkori and Newman (2010) Mixed Methods: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches to Research. In McGaw, B., Baker, E. & Peterson, P. P. (Eds) International Encyclopedia of Education (3rd Edition).

on two main areas: the school and the club (see appendix E for questions). As the conversations evolved questions initially not forseen were asked to probe or clarify what the students had said.

Figure 2

Modified Sequential Research Design

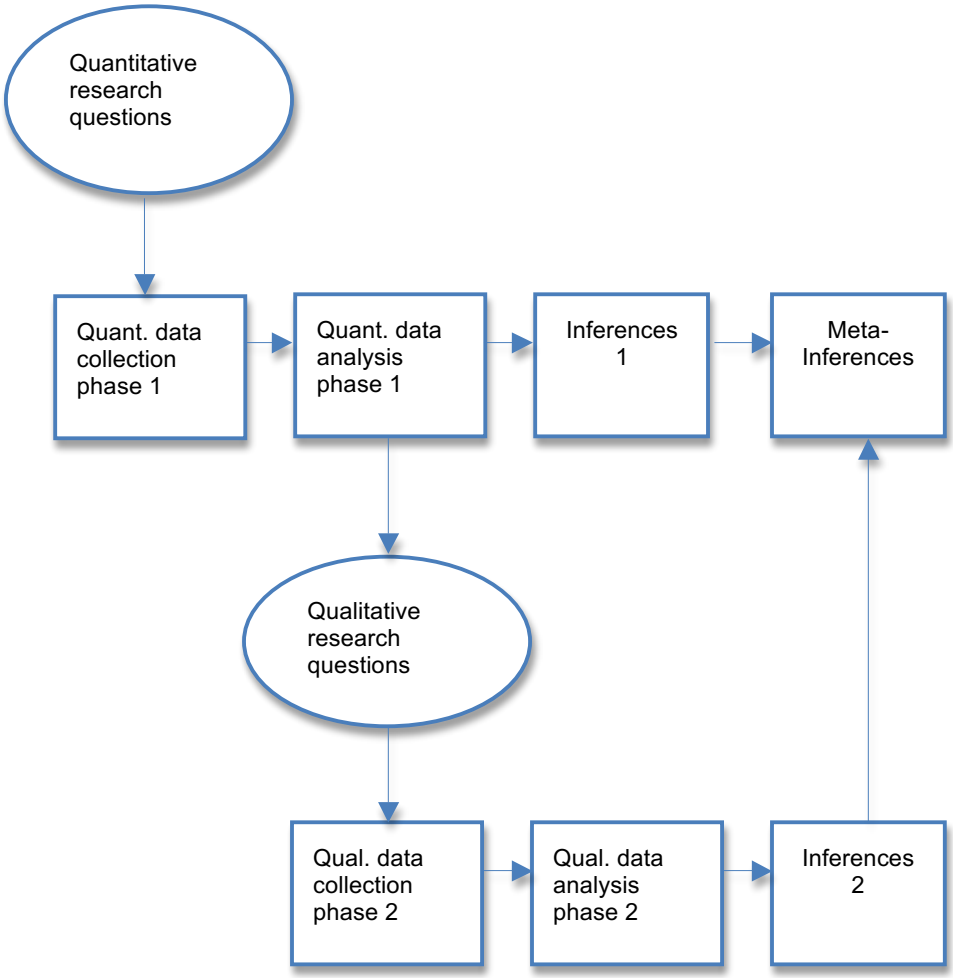


Figure 2: In this modified sequential mixed design, research questions for the qualitative phase emerge from the preliminary findings of the initial quantitative phase. The final meta-inferences are made from the integrations of quantitative and qualitative findings. Adapted from Tashakkori and Newman (2010) Mixed Methods: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches to Research. In McGaw, B., Baker, E. & Peterson, P. P. (Eds) International Encyclopedia of Education (3rd Edition).

With permission from the students' teachers, the students were taken out of class in small, homogeneous groups. The groups were comprised of either at-risk students or engaged students. The focus groups were held during school hours on the days immediately preceding the final day of school.

Data collection in mixed methods research consists of both numerical and narrative data that is gathered using quantitative and qualitative techniques, such as open-ended interviews and questionnaires. Both sets of data are then compared, contrasted, and integrated in order to better answer the research questions and therefore better understand the phenomenon under consideration (Tashakkori & Newman, 2010). This section discusses the rationale for the design selection and the components of the design. In this section the researcher also describes the procedures used to collect and analyze the numerical data (quantitative) and the narrative data (qualitative). The section begins with the description of the procedures utilized to collect the quantitative data, which will be followed by a discussion of the procedures utilized to collect the qualitative data.

Rationale for the Selection of a Mixed-Methods Design

Mixed methods research uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative information because together these work to provide the best understanding of a research problem (Creswell, 2003). A combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods allows each method to complement the strengths of the other while avoiding an overlap of weaknesses (Johnson & Turner, 2003). The rationale for using multiple methods in the present study is that together quantitative and qualitative methods allowed the researcher to make use of both objective data collected during the quantitative phase of the study and subjective data collected during the focus groups held for the qualitative phase of the present study. This allowed the researcher to develop a

more complete understanding of the use of peers as a resource to enhance the academic engagement of students who are academically disengaged.

Phases of the Study

This study consisted of three phases: a quantitative phase, a qualitative phase, and the final phase, mixed methods, which is the integration of the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. Qualitative data and quantitative data were colected in order to gain a more in-depth perspective of the information obtained during both phases of the study.

Phase One: Quantitative Phase. During the quantitative phase a pretest-posttest design was used in order to detect any changes that may have occurred in student academic engagement. The pretest was given to students and teachers before the first meeting of the social club and the posttest was given at the last meeting of the club.

***Instrumentation*.** Survey instruments were used to collect data from both the academically disengaged students who participated in the study and their teachers in order to develop an understanding of the students' level of motivation, effort, and participation in learning activities. The student instrument that was used is the Motivation and Engagement Scale (MES; Martin, 2003). Also, the teacher version of the Engagement versus Disaffection with Learning Survey (EvsD; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009) was used.

The MES includes 11 subscales that assess adaptive and maladaptive cognitive and behavioral dimensions of student motivation and engagement (Fredricks et al., 2011). The 11 subscales of the Motivation and Engagement

Scale can be grouped into three cognitive dimensions (called booster thoughts), three adaptive behavioral dimensions (called booster behaviors), three maladaptive cognitive dimensions (called mufflers) and two maladaptive behavioral dimensions (called guzzlers; Martin, 2014). Booster thoughts measure student confidence in their own ability, how much value students place on schooling, and how focused on learning the students are. Booster behaviors measure how much students plan their schoolwork and keep up with their progress, the way students organize their homework, and student persistence in doing difficult or challenging tasks. Mufflers measure anxiety, avoidance, and student uncertainty about how to do well in school. Lastly, guzzlers measure loss of interest in school and the students' willingness to sabotage their own success (Martin, 2012).

The developer of the MES reports that confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) demonstrates construct validity of the 11 subscales and that there is significant correlation between achievement and other academic outcomes (Fredricks et al., 2011). The developer reports that the CFA yielded an acceptable fit to the data (chi square = 4018.91, *df* = 695; Tucker Lewis Index [TLI] = .91; Relative Noncentrality Index [RNI] = .92; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA] = .045; Martin, 2003). As for reliability of the instrument, the developer reports a mean Cronbach's alpha of .78 for the junior school version, which was the version used for this study (Fredricks et al., 2011). See appendix A for sample questions from the MES.

The EvsD is made up of 32 items on six subscales that measure emotional and behavioral engagement and disengagement. The developers of the EvsD report that confirmatory factor analysis for the teacher survey provides evidence of construct validity. There was modest agreement between the teacher and student subscales and there was a positive correlation between teacher reports and external observer reports. However, goodness of fit indices were not provided, which is a limitation. The developers report internal consistency reliability of .81-.87 for the teacher report subscales (Fredricks et al., 2011; Skinner et al., 2009).

A second survey instrument was administered to students who participated in the afterschool social club in order to determine if friendships between academically disengaged students and academically engaged students could be intentionally fostered through an afterschool social club. For this part of the quantitative phase a modified – adolescent appropriate - version of the Peer Nomination Form (Weitz, 1958) was used. This instrument was modified by the researcher to better fit the purposes of the present study. This judgment was made based on a review of the literature, on the researcher's personal experience, and the consistency between the two. In order to modify the peer nomination form two key points were kept in mind: the type of information that needed to be collected and the reading comprehension level of the fifth grade participants. Feedback from teachers who work with this age group was sought in order to make sure the instrument had been properly modified.

This new version of the peer nomination form asked students to rank order at least three (but no more than five) schoolmates according to a variety of criteria. For example, students were asked to nominate and rank schoolmates they would prefer to work with on a tough assignment. Students who nominated each other were considered friends for the purposes of this study. The nomination form was administered as a pretest and a posttest.

The questions on both the MES and the peer nomination form were read to students; however, those students who wished to go ahead were allowed to. Any questions that were not clear to students were explained to them. Students were provided with a list of all the fifth graders in the school in order to assist them with the writing of the full names of students they wished to nominate. Students were asked to choose only fifth graders because those were the students who would be in the classrooms with them.

The original version of the Peer Nomination Form used in the present study was developed in the late 1950s to test the hypothesis that good supervisors could be identified by peers at the time that a potential supervisor was still in a subordinate capacity (Weitz, 1958). In his conclusions, Weitz put forward the idea that this technique could be modified and used in other situations. Peer nomination forms have since been used extensively in the business world. They have also been used in education in a variety of situations, for example, to identify victims of bullying (e.g., Phillips & Cornell, 2012), malicious and disruptive behavior (Henry, 2006), high-risk students (Henry, Miller-Johnson, Simon, & Schoeny, 2006), or to identify ethnic minority students

who are gifted (Cunningham, Callahan, Plucker, Roberson, & Rapkin, 1998). In a 1978 review of three methods of peer assessment (i.e., peer nominations, peer ratings, and peer rankings) Kane and Lawler found that peer nominations had the highest validity (more specifically, criterion-related validity was considered for the purposes of their review) and the highest reliability of the three types of peer assessment, with internal consistency and test-retest medians for the studies reviewed being .89 and .78 respectively. As more recent studies show (e.g., Henry, 2006; Henry et al., 2006; Phillips & Cornell, 2012) peer nomination forms continue to have high levels of validity and reliability, however, it is a limitation that specific numbers do not exist for the particular form used in the present study.

Quantitative Data Collection. The sample included all fifth grade students who showed signs of disengagement from school as evidenced by GPA, behavioral issues, and absentee rates. School counselors, teachers, administrators, and school records were used to identify potential participants in the social club. All students identified were invited to participate in the afterschool social club. After obtaining written parental permission, two groups were formed: the treatment group (i.e., those students at risk for school failure who participated in the afterschool social club) and the control group (i.e., students at risk for school failure who met the criteria for participation in the afterschool social club but did not participate). Using this method the result was non-equivalent groups. The surveys were administered before the beginning of the intervention, which began during the third quarter of the school year and lasted until the end of the

fourth quarter, for a total of 18 weeks. The surveys were administered a second time at the end of the 18 weeks.

Youth who participate for two to three years (as opposed to those who participate one year or less) in out-of–school activities sponsored by the school, earn higher grades, have greater academic aspirations, greater college attendance and are more apt to vote and do volunteer work (Bohnert, Fredricks, & Randall, 2010; Fiester, Simpkins, & Bouffard , 2005; Greene, Lee, Constance, & Hynes, 2013; Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). However, empirical data indicating how long a child must participate in a club before a positive change in academic engagement begins to be seen was not found. Therefore, 18 weeks was chosen for logical rather than for data based reasons. Eighteen weeks, which are equal to two quarters with their corresponding report cards, were thought to be enough time for teachers to begin to see a trend towards improvements in academic and behavioral outcomes, if these existed. The limited timeframe however can be considered a limitation of the study.

The EvsD teacher report is grouped into four subscales, with a total of 20 questions that measure the student's behavioral engagement, behavioral disaffection emotional engagement, and emotional disaffection. Each teacher completed the report for all students in her class who participated in the present study. Teachers indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement along a four-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 to 4 with 1 being "not true at all" and 4 being "very true." See Appendix B for the teacher report.

The modified version of the *Peer Nomination Form* was also administered to students. The nominations of schoolmates on both the pretest and the posttest were cross-checked to see which students had nominated each other in the various scenarios described in the questions. The administration of a pretest and a posttest allowed the researcher to identify changes in nominations that might be attributable to participation in the afterschool club. See appendix C.

School records were examined before and after the intervention. The aim of this part of the study was to investigate changes, or the absence of changes, in student GPA, absentee rates, and behavioral issues that could be attributable to participation in the afterschool social club.

Quantitative Data Analysis. A *t*-test was used to test whether there was a significant difference between the responses to the pre- and post-intervention engagement surveys of the at-risk students who participated in the club. As the hypothesis for research question two predicts an increase in the academic engagement of students with disabilities at risk for school dropout, who participate in an afterschool social club, a one-tailed test of significance was performed. A one-tail test is used when the direction of the relationship is indicated. This type of test is more powerful than a two-tailed test because it is more likely to detect a relationship, if one exists, in the hypothesized direction (Newman & Newman, 1994). If a strong difference in the opposite direction is however detected the results will not be significant and the hypothesis will have failed to be substantiated. As for the GPA, grades, and absences of the disengaged students, gain score analysis was used to measure variance.

Quantitative data were analyzed using a software program called Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22.0.

Due to the small sample size, a power analysis was calculated to determine the probability of making a Type II error at an alpha level of .10, thus having a 90% confidence level (McNeil, Newman, & Fraas, 2012). An alpha level of .10 was chosen because the *N* size was small therefore power, the ability of detecting a difference when a difference exists (Newman & Newman, 1994), was poor. In order to make power less poor, a less stringent alpha level was chosen. Although this increased the risk of a type I error, (i.e., detecting a difference when a difference actually does not exist; Newman & Newman, 1994), this, for the purposes of the present study, was preferable to the risk of committing a type II error (i.e., failing to detect a difference when a difference actually exists).

Three power analyses were run, one for small effect size, one for medium effect size and one for large effect size at an alpha level of .10 with $N = 13$. The results show that power for this particular study would be about .4. This means that if there was a very large effect you would be able to detect it only about 40% of the time. For the remaining 60% of the time you would not have enough power to detect even a large effect. A small effect would be considerably less possible to detect. Because of the lack of power quantitative data were used to enhance the understanding of the qualitative results.

Phase Two: Qualitative Phase. The qualitative phase was conducted in order to obtain rich and meaningful descriptions of the students' perceptions of their academic engagement during and after the intervention/social club. The

qualitative phase of this study consisted of two parts: (a) focus groups with both the students who showed signs of academic disengagement and the students who were engaged in school and participated in the social club and (b) researcher observations. The aim of the focus groups with the students who were disengaged in school was to gain a better understanding of the students' lived experiences in the classroom setting; more specifically to gain insight into the students' perceptions of any changes that may have occurred in their level of academic engagement as of the beginning of the intervention/social club. The focus groups with the engaged students served to highlight any differences that might exist in the academic experiences of at-risk students and engaged students. The focus groups also helped clarify the results of the quantitative phase of the study.

For the purposes of this study a more inclusive definition of focus group was used. This approach to the definition considers most forms of group interviews as a variant of focus groups (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Morgan, 1996). The focus group was chosen over one-to-one interviews in order for the researcher to have the opportunity to observe the natural interaction among the students while they talked about their academic experiences and to gain insight into what the range of views were (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the researcher recorded detailed field notes during the intervention/social club. This allowed the researcher to develop a complementary picture of the relationships between participants in the club thus allowing for a more complete understanding of those

relationships. Rather than simply recording a detailed description of the activities during the intervention/social club, the researcher also included important insights that came to her during the collection of data. Keeping detailed notes also allowed the researcher to gain awareness of possible biases that could have influenced the interpretation of the data (Newman, Newman, & Newman, 2010).

In their 2005 article, Oliver, Serovich, and Mason suggest that researchers incorporate reflection on interview transcription into their research design. Oliver et al. see transcription as an act of representation and representation can affect how data are conceptualized. According to these authors there are two dominant modes of transcription. One is naturalism, in which every detail, including involuntary vocalizations such as coughing or sniffling, are transcribed. In the other, which is the denaturalized approach, grammar and interview noise are corrected. Both have strengths and weaknesses. Naturalized transcription represents the language used in real conversations; how the ideas are conveyed is as important as the ideas themselves. However, the naturalized approach may lead researchers to make assumptions resulting in biased data analysis. For example someone who is sniffling may be construed as crying when in reality they have a cold. According to Oliver et al. (2005) denaturalized transcription however allows the researcher to focus on the meaning of what is being said. On the other hand, the denaturalized approach could result in the removal of information that might improve the outcome of the study.

For the purposes of the present study, a naturalized approach was chosen. A naturalized approach allows the researcher to capture verbal and non-

verbal cues that give added information about the conversation and the meaning of what is being said. Removing these features may lead to the risk of missing important conversational cues (Oliver et al., 2005).

Qualitative Data Collection. The qualitative phase consisted of a focus group and researcher observational notes. After the last meeting of the afterschool social club, participants were asked to meet in groups to discuss their learning experiences in the classroom during the time that they were participating in the social club. Focus groups commonly consist of six to 10 participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992; Morgan, 1996). However, given that the number of participants at risk for dropout was limited it was necessary to form smaller focus groups in order to have groups of similar sizes. The group sizes ranged from four to six participants.

The researcher acted as moderator during the focus group meetings, guiding the groups' interactions and asking open-ended questions that were prepared beforehand, based on results from the quantitative phase, observations, and the field notes. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour. All participants agreed to allow the sessions to be audio recorded. However, detailed notes were also taken by the researcher in order to capture non-verbal information that might otherwise be missed in a recording. Once completed, the recordings were transcribed. The data were reread and any words, phrases, patterns of behavior, ways of thinking, and events that stood out were used to develop a coding system and sorted, according to commonalities, for analysis and interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Throughout the duration of the afterschool social club the researcher maintained detailed field notes. These observational notes included a description of the people, events, activities, and conversations that occurred (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992) during the meetings of the social club. These were also coded and sorted for analysis and interpretation.

Qualitative Data Analysis. The analysis of the qualitative data entailed breaking the data down into manageable units in order to be able to search for patterns in the responses and determine what was important and what could be learned (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The sessions with the focus group were recorded, transcribed verbatim and read to begin the identification of those patterns. As patterns and themes emerged they were coded using colored pencils and sorted into categories, which were refined in order to finally arrive at the construction of the whole picture (Merriam, 1998) of how the students experienced the classroom following their participation in the afterschool social club. By linking the categories and concepts, theories were generated to answer the research questions (Merriam, 1998). The researcher observations were similarly coded and patterns and themes categorized in order to help build a composite description of how the participants collectively experienced the classroom after they began participation in the afterschool social club. The researcher used member checking to clarify and/or confirm the accuracy of the focus group transcripts. Participants were asked to review the information, which was read to them, for accuracy and intent of their words. Member checking

served to safeguard the legitimacy of the study (Newman et al., 2010). This was done at the beginning of the following school year.

Several other techniques were used in this study to estimate the legitimacy or truth value (i.e., the trustworthiness of research: Onwuegbuzie, 2002) of this research project. These components represented issues of both internal and external validity and helped the researcher reflect on the strengths and credibility of the findings (Newman et al, 2010). The techniques that were used, as described in Newman et al (2010), included triangulation and reflexive journal writing. Triangulation, which is the collection of data using multiple methods to confirm findings, was achieved through the comparison of data obtained from teachers, researcher observations, school documents, such as report cards, and student self-reports. Also, throughout the duration of the investigative process the researcher kept a detailed journal that allowed the researcher to reflect on her thoughts thus helping control for potential biases.

Mixed-Methods Analysis

Once the quantitative data and the qualitative data were analyzed the themes that emerged from the quantitative data and from the qualitative data were used to inform each other (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006) in order to form a coherent whole (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). By combining the findings of the quantitative and qualitative phases the researcher was better able to explain the results of both (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006).

This third phase of the study is the negotiation between the quantitative and the qualitative dichotomy. This is the meta-inferences that answer the

research questions through the integration of the statistical and content analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative findings (Tashakkori & Newman, 2010). During the quantitative and qualitative phases, data were collected and analyzed; afterwards the themes that emerged from the quantitative data were compared with the qualitative data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). The integration of the quantitative and qualitative approaches allowed the researcher to generate theoretical explanations that might not have emerge otherwise (Tashakkori & Newman, 2010).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 introduces the methodological approach that was used for this study. The chapter begins with the presentation of the research questions and the hypotheses that guided the study. The section that follows sets the stage for the study describing the setting and the participants.

This study took place in a K-8 center located in the fourth largest school district in the nation. Participants in the study were fifth grade students with disabilities at risk for school failure. The participants in the study were chosen using purposive sampling and the choice of possible participants was based on school records and school counselor, administrator, and teacher recommendations. The section that follows describes the research design.

For this study a modified mixed-methods sequential exploratory design was used. Quantitative data was collected through the use of surveys and the examination of student records. Once the quantitative data were obtained they were entered into a statistical analysis program (i.e., SPSS), checked for errors

and accuracy (e.g., Are the responses complete?) and categorized in order to be able to describe the data and explore relationships. A one-tailed *t*-test was used to test for significance while gain score analysis was used to measure variance. The alpha level was set at .10. Although this increases the risk of committing a type I error this is preferable to the risk of committing a type II error. Qualitative data included group interviews in the form of focus groups and researcher notes. Once the qualitative data were obtained the researcher transcribed recorded data, coded it, and identified key patterns and themes. During a third and final phase of the study, the quantitative data and the qualitative data were used to inform each other in order to better explain the results of both.

Chapter 3 ends with an overview of the afterschool social club. This final section describes the activities that served to tie the club to the school and to create friendships and increase academic engagement for the at-risk students who participated in the social club.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Overview

The main purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not an afterschool social club that lasted 18 weeks (the equivalent of two quarters) was capable of fostering friendships between students, with disabilities, who are disengaged from school and those who are academically engaged, in order to give disengaged students a more accurate perception of positive academic behaviors and related benefits. Secondly, this study investigated possible significant changes in absences, GPA, (see Table 2 for averages of at-risk club participants), grades, detentions and suspensions of disengaged students after having participated in the afterschool social club. Lastly, the study investigated how students who are disengaged from school, and are consequently at risk for school dropout, perceive their academic experience after having participated in an afterschool social club with students who are academically engaged. Data were obtained from pre- and posttest surveys completed by students and their teachers, student focus groups and researcher field notes. This chapter presents the findings.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section describes the results of the first phase of the study, that is, the quantitative data gathered through pre- and posttest surveys administered to both students and their teachers. This section also discusses the results of the examination of school

records conducted before and after the intervention. These data answer research question one: Are there significant changes in the academic engagement (as

Table 2

Averages of At-Risk Participants

Participant	Math GPA	Reading GPA	Absences*
Albert	1.39 D	1.54 C	1
Sara	2.05 C	1.72 C	2
Ivy	1.66 C	1.94 C	9
John	.97 F	1.67 C	12
Ava	1.80 C	2.19 C	3
Adam	.48 F	1.32 D	9
Jane	1.77 C	1.89 C	9
George	1.34 D	1.45 C	10
Jill	1.93 C	1.74 C	3
Ari	2.68 B	2.13 C	4
Abe	.83 F	1.15 D	13
Danny	2.00 C	1.29 D	5
Joshua	1.32 D	1.65 C	17
Total average	1.55 C	1.67 C	7.46

Table 2 shows the average GPA for math and reading and the number of absences of the at-risk students who participated in the afterschool social club.
*Represents the total number of days the student was absent throughout the school year.

measured by GPA, grades, absenteeism, detentions, suspensions, teacher reports and student self-report) of students with disabilities at risk for school dropout who participate in an afterschool social club with academically engaged peers? The second section describes the results of the Peer Nomination Form administered to students who participated in the afterschool social club. These data answer research question two: Does an afterschool social club for students with disabilities who show signs of academic disengagement (as measured by

GPA, grades, absenteeism, detentions, suspensions, teacher reports and student self-report) and students who are academically engaged (as measured by GPA, grades, absenteeism, detentions, suspensions, teacher reports and student self-report) foster friendships between the members of these two groups (as measured by student self-report)? Lastly, the third section describes the results of the focus groups and answers research question three: How do the students view their educational experience after having participated in an afterschool social club?

Phase One: Quantitative Data

A total of 13 students at risk for school failure participated for the full 18 sessions of the afterschool social club. However, five of those students either did not furnish parental permission or did not return one or both of the pre- or posttest surveys, therefore usable surveys from eight participants (62%) were available for this portion of the study.

This study sought to examine a diversified sample of students with disabilities at risk for school failure. However, the entire sample consisted of Hispanic students, possibly due to the high percentage of Hispanic residents in the district (65%; MDCPS – Office of Economic & Demographic Research, 2016) and the high percentage of Hispanic students in this school in particular (92.29%; Miami-Dade County Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources, 2015).Of these eight students, five students were males and three students were females. All were in the fifth grade.

Results for Research Question 1

In order to test hypothesis 1A student report cards were examined. Hypothesis 1A states that there will be a significant increase in GPA from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure. Gain scores were computed for both treatment group and control group. Gain scores were calculated by subtracting the pretest results from the posttest results (i.e., gain score = posttest – pretest). An independent-samples *t*-test was then performed to compare the GPA of at risk students who participated in the club and those who did not. Results show that there was no significant difference in the scores of participants in the club (M = -.042, SD = .249, gain score = .037) and those who did not participate in the club (M = -.098, SD = .196, gain score = -.088); $t(16) = 1.12$, $p = .141$. These results suggest that participation in an afterschool social club has no significant effect on GPA. Table 3 presents the results for hypothesis 1A and for the following two hypothesis (i.e., hypothesis 1B and 1C).

Hypothesis 1B states that there will be an increase in grades from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure. To test this hypothesis reading and mathematics averages were used as research shows that failing these subjects is a warning sign that a student could be on the path to school dropout (Allensworth, 2013; Balfanz & Legters, 2006). To test hypothesis 1B, gain scores (gain score = posttest – pretest) were computed for both the treatment group and the control group in both reading and mathematics. Afterwards, an independent samples t-test was performed to compare the grades in each of these subjects of at risk students who participated in the club and

those who did not. Reading results show that there was no significant difference in the scores of participants in the club (M = .247, SD = .571, gain score = .256) and those who did not participate in the club (M = .546, SD = .655, gain score = .546); $t(16)$ = -.926, p = .184. Mathematics results show that there was no significant difference in the scores of participants in the club (M = .012, SD = .566, gain score = .012) and those who did not participate in the club (M = -.270, SD = .439, gain score = -.27); $t(16)$ = .998, p = .208. These results suggest that participation in an afterschool social club has no statistically significant effect on reading or mathematics grades (see Table 3).

Student attendance records were analyzed in order to test hypothesis 1C, which states that there will be a significant decrease in absenteeism from pretest to posttest of at risk students in the treatment group who receive social club exposure. Gain scores (gain score = posttest – pretest) were computed for both treatment group and control group. An independent-samples t-test was then conducted to compare gain scores in participants and non-participants in the after school social club. Results show that there was no significant difference in the scores of participants in the club (M = -.154, SD = 2.44, gain score = .154) and of those who did not participate in the club (M = .400, SD = 2.79, gain score = .4); $t(16)$ = -.415, p = .342. These results suggest that participation in an after school social club has no significant effect on absenteeism (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 1D, which states that there will be a significant decrease in detentions from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure, could not be tested. In this particular school, teachers gave lunch-time

detentions and no records were kept of the frequency with which a student received detentions.

As for hypothesis 1E, which states that there will be a significant decrease in suspensions from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure, only one student had been suspended during the school year in which the intervention took place. This was a two-day, outdoor suspension,

Table 3

Independent Samples t-test Results for Academic Records Variables

	Club Participants		Non Participants		Gain Scores				90% CI	
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*CP*	*NP*	*t*(16)	*p*	*LL*	*UL*
GPA	-.04	.25	-.09	.19	- .04	-.09	1.12	.14	-.078	.36
Grades										
Reading	.24	.57	.55	.66	.26	.55	-.93	.18	-.834	.26
Math	.01	.57	-.27	.44	.01	-.27	.99	.21	-.212	.78
Attendance	-.15	2.44	.40	2.79	.15	.4	-.42	.34	-2.88	1.78

Table 3 shows the results of the independent samples *t-tests* computed using the information obtained from the students' academic records.
Note. CP = club participants; NP = non-participants; CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit. $p < .1$

which occurred the quarter before the beginning of the intervention. At no other time during the school year were any of the participants in the club suspended.

The Engagement versus Disaffection (EvsD) with Learning Survey was used to test hypothesis 1F, which states that there will be a significant increase in academic engagement as measured by teacher reports from pretest to posttest of at risk students who receive a social club exposure. The EvsD was

administered to teachers both at the start of the intervention and once the intervention had ended. As one can see from Tables 4, 5, and 6, 32 *t*-tests were performed for each of the three core subject area teachers. No item showed a

Table 4

Paired Samples t-test for Teacher 1

		Paired differences					
Questionnaire Items		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	*t*	*d*	sig. *(1-tailed)*
t-test 1	Participates	-.40	.55	.24	-1.63	4	.089
t-test 4	Thinks of other	-.20	.45	.20	-1.00	4	.187
t-test 5	Restless	-.60	.89	.40	-1.50	4	.104
t-test 7	Does just enough	-.20	.45	.20	-1.00	4	.187
t-test 8	Interested	.60	.55	.24	2.45	4	.035
t-test 11	Does more	.20	.45	.20	1.00	4	.187
t-test 12	Unhappy	.20	.45	.20	1.00	4	.187
t-test 14	Worried	-.20	.45	.20	-1.00	4	.187
t-test 16	Appears frustrated	-.20	.45	.20	-1.00	4	.187
t-test 17	Involved	.20	.45	.20	1.00	4	.187
t-test 18	Uninterested	.20	.45	.20	1.00	4	.187
t-test 19	Not care	.20	.45	.20	1.00	4	.187
t-test 20	Listens	.20	.45	.20	1.00	4	.187
t-test 24	Not trying	.40	.55	.24	1.63	4	.089
t-test 26	Keeps trying	.20	.45	.20	1.00	4	.187
t-test 28	Bounces back	.40	.89	.40	1.00	4	,089

Table 4 shows the results of the EvsD for teacher 1.
Note: p < .1. Gain scores = posttest – pretest. To be in the predicted direction questions 1, 3, 6, 8, 11,15,17, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32 needed to be positive. All others needed to be negative. Certain items are not shown as the correlation and *t* could not be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.

Table 5

Paired Samples t-test for Teacher 2

		Paired differences					
Questionnaire Items		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	*t*	*d*	sig. *(1-tailed)*
t-test 1	Participates	.09	.54	.20	-.56	10	.294
t-test 2	Inattentive	.18	.40	.40	1.49	10	.084
t-test 4	Thinks of other	.27	.47	.53	1.94	10	.041
t-test 5	Restless	.09	.30	.26	1.00	10	.171
t-test 6	Works hard	.00	.45	.24	.00	10	.5
t-test 7	Does just enough	.09	.54	.39	.556	10	.294
t-test 8	Interested	-.18	.40	.04	-1.49	10	.084
t-test 9	Anxious	.09	.30	.26	1.00	10	.171
t-test 11	Does more	-.09	.30	.07	-1.00	10	.171
t-test 12	Unhappy	.00	.45	.24	.00	10	.5
t-test 13	Unprepared	.09	.30	.26	1.00	10	.171
t-test 14	Worried	.18	.75	.59	.80	10	.220
t-test 17	Involved	-.09	.30	.07	-1.00	10	.171
t-test 18	Uninterested	.18	.40	.40	1.49	10	.084
t-test 19	Not seem to care	.18	.40	.40	1.49	10	.084
t-test 20	Listen	-.15	.37	.03	-1.48	10	.084
t-test 21	Attacks work	.27	.47	.53	1.94	10	.041
t-test 22	Gives up	.09	.30	.26	1.00	10	.171
t-test 24	Not trying	.55	.93	1.06	1.94	10	.041
t-test 26	Keeps trying	.09	.54	.39	.56	10	.294
t-test 27	Feels terrible	.09	.30	.26	1.00	10	.171
t-test 32	Works harder next time	.09	.54	.39	.56	10	.294

Table 5 shows the results of the EvsD for teacher 2.
Note: p < .1. Gain scores = posttest – pretest. To be in the predicted direction questions 1, 3, 6, 8, 11,15,17, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32 need to be positive. All others need to be negative. Certain items are not shown as the correlation and *t* could not be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.

Table 6

Paired Samples t-test for Teacher 3

		Paired differences					
Questionnaire Items		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	*t*	*d*	sig. *(1-tailed)*
t-test 1	Participates	-.29	.49	.18	-1.55	6	.086
t-test 2	Inattentive	.29	.49	.18	1.55	6	.086
t-test 3	Enthusiastic	.14	.38	.14	1.00	6	.178
t-test 4	Thinks of other	-.14	.38	.14	-1.00	6	.178
t-test 6	Works hard	.29	.49	.18	1.55	6	.086
t-test 7	Does just enough	-.14	.38	.14	-1.00	6	.178
t-test 8	Interested	.14	.38	.14	1.00	6	.178
t-test 9	Anxious	.00	.58	.22	.00	6	.5
t-test 13	Unprepared	-.14	.38	.14	-1.00	6	.178
t-test 14	Worried	-.14	.38	.14	-1.00	6	.178
t-test 15	Feels good	.29	.49	.18	1.55	6	.086
t-test 17	Involved	-.29	.49	.18	-1.55	6	.086
t-test 18	Uninterested	.14	.38	.14	1.00	6	.178
t-test 19	Not seem to care	.14	.38	.14	1.00	6	.178
t-test 20	Listens	-.14	.38	.14	-1.00	6	.178
t-test 23	Gets frustrated	.14	.38	.14	1.00	6	.178
t-test 26	Keeps trying	.14	.38	.14	1.00	6	.178
t-test 30	Gets mad	-.14	.38	.14	-1.00	6	.178
t-test 32	Works harder next time	.29	.49	.18	1.55	6	.086

Table 6 shows the results of the EvsD for teacher 3.
Note: p < .1. Gain scores = posttest – pretest. To be in the predicted direction questions 1, 3, 6, 8, 11,15,17, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32 need to be positive. All others need to be negative. Certain items are not shown as the correlation and *t* could not be computed because the standard error of the difference is 0.

significant difference across all three teachers. Items two, eight, and 24 showed a significant difference for two of the three teachers . For item two, scores for teacher T2 are (*M* = .182, *SD* = .405); *t*(10) = 1.49, *p* = .084. Scores for teacher T3 for this item are (*M* = .286, *SD* = .488); *t*(6) = 1.55, *p* = .086. Neither are in the expected direction. For item eight the scores for teacher T1 were (*M* = .5, *SD* =

.548); $t(5) = 2.24$, $p = .035$ and the scores for teacher T2 were ($M = -.182$, $SD = .405$); $t(10) = -1.49$, $p = .084$. Both are in the expected direction. Item 24 also showed a significant difference for teachers T1 and T2. The scores were ($M = .333$, $SD = .516$); $t(5) = 1.58$, $p = .087$ for teacher T1 and ($M = .545$, $SD = .934$); $t(10) = 1.94$, $p = .041$ for teacher T2. Neither are in the expected direction. Results are shown in Tables 4, 5, and 6.

The EvsD uses four items to measure behavioral engagement, four items to measure behavioral disaffection, four items to measure emotional engagement, and eight items to measure emotional disaffection (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). These items were grouped together in order to run a paired samples t-test on each grouping for each teacher. However, the number of subjects available was very small and a test of significance could not be run for lack of power. As can be seen from Table 7, the means of the pretests and the posttests for teacher T2 were in the expected direction. But, for teachers T1 and T3 only one grouping was in the expected direction.

To test the hypothesis that there was an increase in academic engagement, hypothesis 1G, students were administered the Motivation and Engagement Scale both at the start of the intervention (the after school social club) and once the intervention had ended. In both instances, all questions were read to students and explained to them as needed. The 11 subscales of the MES were grouped into booster thoughts (the three cognitive dimensions), booster behaviors (the three adaptive behavioral dimensions), mufflers (the three maladaptive cognitive dimensions), and guzzlers (the two maladaptive behavioral

Table 7

EvsD Groupings Means: Teacher Reports

Grouping	Test	T1 Means	T2 Means	T3 Means
Behavioral Engagement	Pretest	2.400	1.970	2.000
	Posttest	2.400	2.210	2.040
Behavioral Disaffection	Pretest	2.400	3.050	3.040
	Posttest	2.500	2.810	3.050
Emotional Engagement	Pretest	2.700	2.010	2.190
	Posttest	2.700	2.450	2.180
Emotional Disaffection	Pretest	2.500	2.090	2.460
	Posttest	2.500	1.990	2.490

Table 7 shows the mean scores of the groupings that measure teacher perceptions of student engagement.

dimensions). A paired samples *t*-test was then performed on the gain scores for each grouping. Gain scores were calculated by subtracting the pretest results from the posttest results. Results for the booster thoughts grouping measures student confidence in their own ability, show that there was a significant difference in the scores from pretest to posttest of at risk students who participated in the club however scores are not in the expected direction. (M = -9.7, SD = 12.926, gain score = -9.7); $t(7) = 2.122$, $p = .036$. Results for the booster behaviors grouping, which measures how students plan their class work and monitor their progress, show that there was a no significant difference in the scores from pretest to posttest of at risk students who participated in the club. Gain scores for booster behaviors were also not in the predicted direction (M = -

3.087, *SD* = 10.205, gain score = -3.91); *t*(7) = .856, *p* = .211. Results for the muffler grouping, which measures anxiety avoidance and student uncertainty, show that there was a no significant difference in the scores from pretest to posttest of at risk students who participated in the club. Again gain scores were not in the expected direction (*M* = 6.437, *SD* = 16.353, gain score = 6.79); *t*(7) = -1.113, *p* = .151. Results for the guzzler grouping, which measures the student's loss of interest in school and the students' willingness to sabotage their own success, show that there was a significant difference in the scores from pretest to posttest of at risk students who participated in the club. However, results were also not in the predicted direction (*M* = 13.75, *SD* = 15.491, gain score = 13.44); *t*(7) = -2.51, *p* = .02. Results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Paired Samples t-test Results for Academic Engagement

Groupings	*M*	SD	*t*(7)	*p*	90% CL LL	90% CL UL
Booster thoughts	-9.70	12.93	2.12	.036	-1.11	20.51
Booster Behaviors	-3.09	10.21	.86	.211	-5.45	11.62
Mufflers	6.44	16.35	-1.11	.151	-20.11	7.23
Guzzlers	13.75	.49	-2.51	.020	-26.70	-.79

Table 8 shows the gain scores for the four groupings of the MES.
Note: CL - confidence interval; LL – lower limit, UL – upper limit: $p < .1$.

Results for Research Question 2

Hypothesis one of research question two states that friendship between students with disabilities who show signs of academic disengagement and students who are academically engaged will be significantly strengthened after

participation in an afterschool social club. To test this hypothesis a modified, child appropriate, version of the *Peer Nomination Form* was administered to students both at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. All students who participated in the club were asked to name from three to five students with whom they would like to do a variety of school related activities. Once the questionnaires were returned, a tally was made in order to cross-check which students nominated each other in the various scenarios described in each question. Both students who participated in the club and students who did not participate were nominated. A total of 68 students received at least one nomination. While in two instances an academically engaged student and an at risk student nominated each other in the pretest, no such nominations occurred in the posttest.

Figures 3 and 4 show the nominations made by the at-risk students and the academically engaged students respectively. The figures show which students were nominated and the color coded boxes show whether the student was nominated on the pretest (i.e., yellow boxes), on the posttest (i.e., aqua boxes), or on both (i.e., green boxes). The rhombus indicates that students nominated each other on the survey corresponding to that particular color. As can be seen by a comparison of the two figures, students R8 and R12 each nominated student E1 and vice versa on the pretest survey only. They did not nominate each other on the posttest. Students who did not participate in the club but were also nominated were not included in the figures as these nominations are of marginal interest for the present study.

Figure 3

Nominations made by At-Risk Students

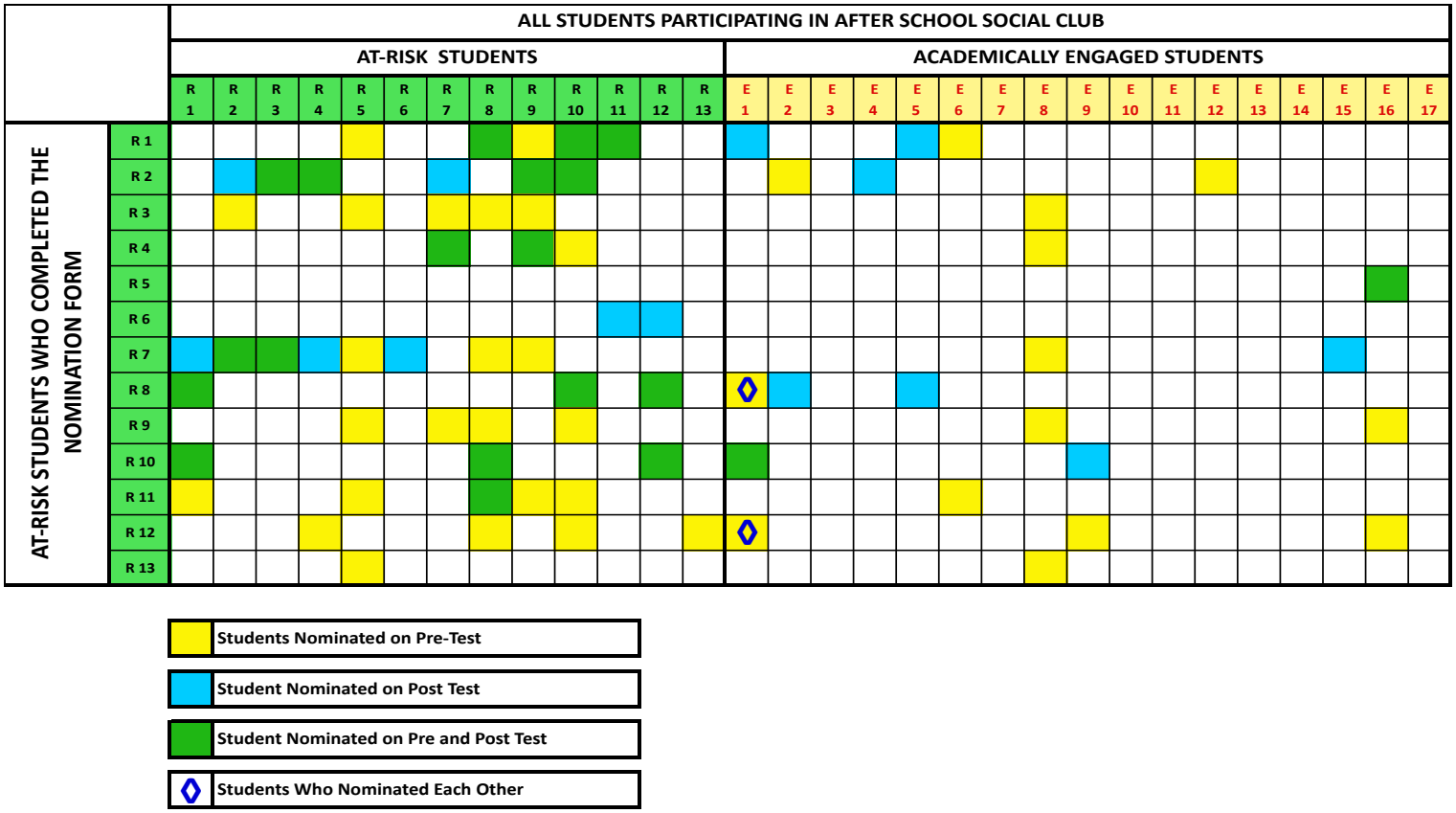


Figure 3: As can be seen in figure 3 at-risk student R8 and at-risk student R12 nominated engaged student E1 in the pretest. The rhombus indicates that the nominations were reciprocal. Student R7 nominated a total of 10 different students on the pre and posttest while student R13 nominated only two club members and these nominations were on the pretest. Only nominations of club participants are shown.

Figure 4

Nominations made by Academically Engaged Students

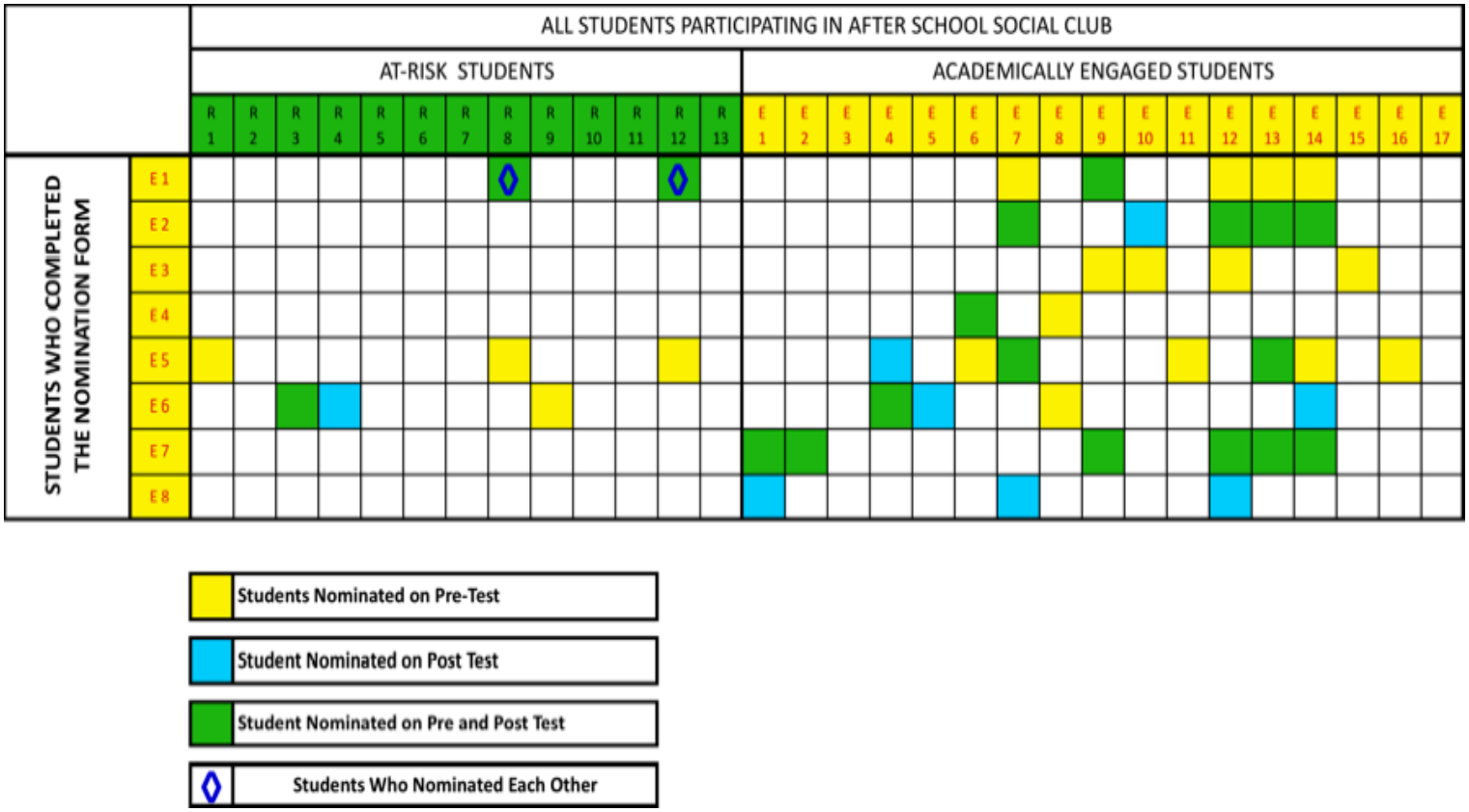


Figure 4: Only nominations of club participants are shown. As can be seen in figure 4 engaged student E1 nominated at-risk student R8 and at-risk student R12 in the pretest. The rhombus indicates that the nominations were reciprocal. Student E5 nominated a total of 10 club members on the pre and posttests. While student E3 nominated fellow club members only on the pretest.

Phase Two: Qualitative Data

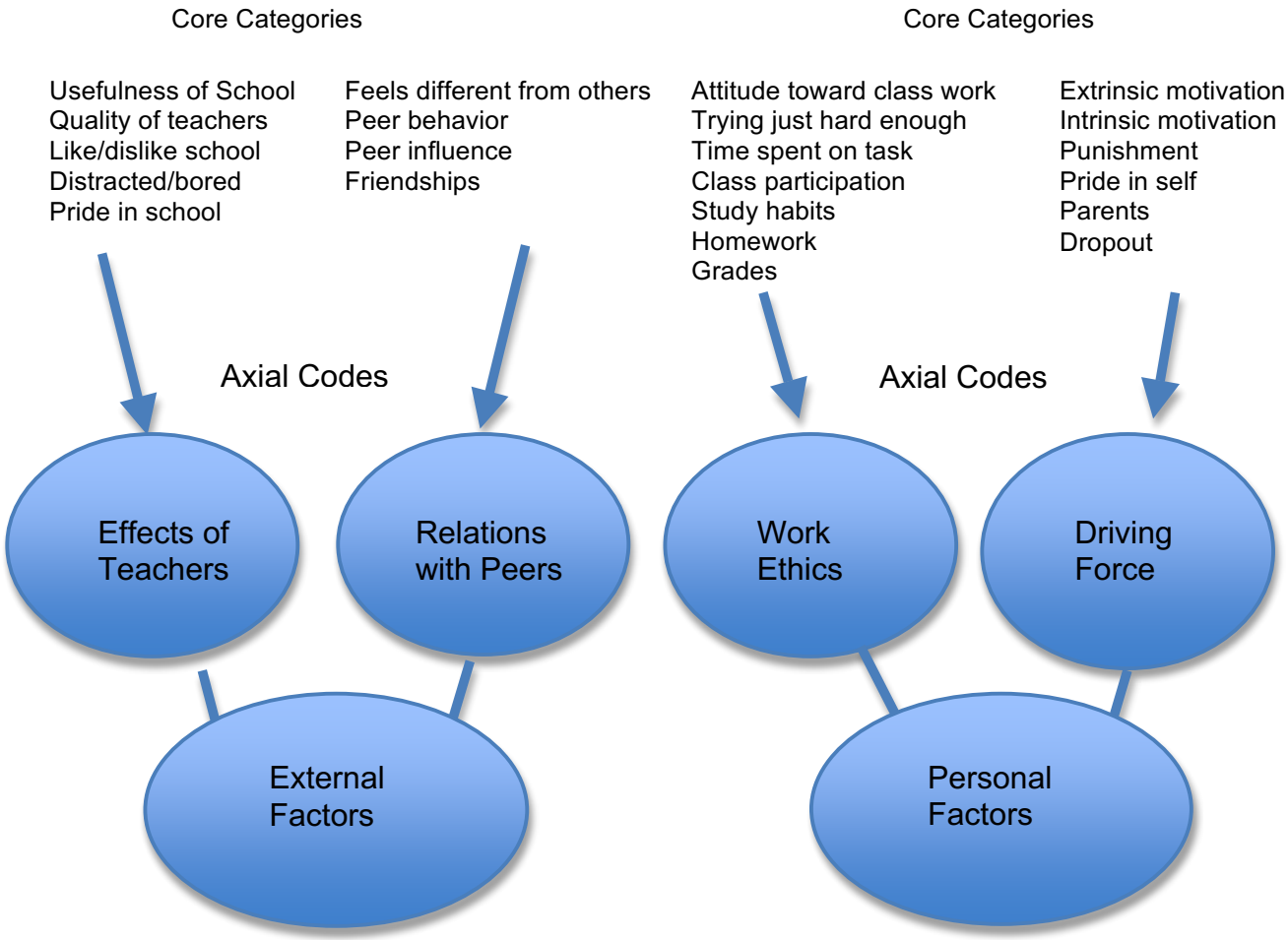
This section presents the findings of the qualitative data that were gathered to answer research question three: How do the students view their educational experience after having participated in an afterschool social club? Both the at risk students and the academically engaged students participated in focus groups after the last meeting of an afterschool social club. Each focus group was recorded and notes were taken. The recordings were subsequently transcribed.

In order to capture the ideas of the students as authentically as possible, a naturalized approach to the transcription of the focus group recordings was taken. In a naturalized transcription all utterances are transcribed in as much detail as possible (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). Written field notes were taken both during the club meetings and during the focus groups. Based on these notes, non-verbal features of the interactions, such as the shrugging of shoulders or facial expressions, were also included in the transcripts as these can sometimes change the interpretation of the interaction (Oliver et al., 2005).

As suggested by Holton (2010) the analysis process began with line-by-line open coding of the data. Initially over 40 codes were generated. During this phase however many of these initial codes were quite similar. Codes that were similar or repetitive were collapsed, reducing the open codes that emerged to a little over 20. As the coding and analysis continued, relationships among the codes began to emerge. Four axial codes emerged: (a) effect of teachers, (b) relations with peers, (c) work ethics, and (d) driving forces. Lastly, the axial codes

Figure 5

Organization of Data



Note: Shown are the codes that emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data.

were merged into two theoretical codes, which integrate all the other code categories (Hernandez, 2009) and provide a broad picture (Glaser & Holton, 2005). These last two codes are external factors and personal factors (see Figure 5). The following depicts student responses to the focus group questions. All names are fictitious.

Effect of Teachers: Academically Engaged Students

Students in each of the focus groups expressed an interest in learning. Students equated learning with a better preparation for what the future might bring but also for its use in daily life. As Kathy put it, “I like that they can teach us more and most of the stuff we learn is for outside.” Connie added, “ I like the learning part…because, like, you have to learn to be prepared for what is in the future.”

As evidence of their interest in learning several students talked about not wanting to be absent from school. Nancy said she “once cried over not going to school” while Noel said, “I have perfect attendance for a reason, ever since kindergarten!”

Discussions on student interest in learning and on the desire to be in school almost inevitably turned into discussions about the teachers and the effect they have on the quality of the academic experience. When asked why she liked this school as opposed to the school she had previously attended Kathy said,” because the teachers are nice and I can get along with the teachers.” Others however appreciated the teachers at this school because “they are not too mean

but they're not too nice.” These students expressed the desire to have teachers who have control over the class; teachers who make the students earn their grades because this allows the students to feel pride in what they do. In Judy’s words, “... I don't want it to be too easy because then like we’ll just do the samething over and over and we won't learn anything.” Atticus interrupted, finishing Judy’s comment, “for the future we won't learn anything for the future.” While Nancy added, “if you want to get a job.” Nancy continued the discussion on the teachers by adding, “sometimes they are mean that's perfect because we don't want them to be like easy-going.” She was interrupted by Noel who elaborated on the concept of earning their grades, “We earn As we don't get them by just having fun all day. We earn them.” While Kathy and Nancy emphasize the need to feel pride in earning grades, “We need to feel proud.” “[Because] you actually earned it.”

How the teacher manages the class is however also the source of frustration and distraction. As Kathy explains,

> I don't like art either because when I go to art everyone is talking and then the teacher automatically assumes that everybody's talking and gets us in trouble and then she always talks and doesn't let us do art. She is always talking and talking and talking and we're like when are we supposed to do art?

Several students mentioned long explanations as the catalyst to their distraction. Nancy for example said that she daydreams when the teacher is explaining, while Kathy mentioned that “when there is a long explanation, like, when she explains really long, I'm like ‘oh my gosh what did she say?’”

Effect of Teachers: At Risk Students

Like the students in the engaged group, students in the at-risk group see a connection between learning in school and future possibilities. As Adam put it, "I'm proud because when you grow up you can do amazing things. That's what my dad always says…" However, most of these students tend to look at the immediate gain or what is fun about school without mentioning the possibilities for the future. Adam continues stating his opinion by adding, "… and I get to be with my friends here. I have friends outside school but most of my friends are here at school." The interest of at risk students in school focuses more on the projects they do in particular classes and how much fun they are to work on. As Albert put it, "I like when we were doing the recycling club, making the boxes and all that…that was pretty fun to get on our own, like, in a group, have our own responsibilities on it." Ari specified, "In Ms. Adkins's class we did a lot of projects." Sara added to Ari's explanation, "Yeah, in the computer…we did one project in social studies just by doing a board and we had to create a board."

When asked if they like school these students talk about their electives such as physical education and music. Some students, such as Ari, like school, "for the activities, field trips, clubs." Only one of the at-risk students explicitly indicated that she enjoys school. Sara mentioned that, for the most part, her grades were good and that she received As and Bs. When she was asked if she liked school she only timidly answered "yeah" without further elaboration.

Other students expressed their dislike for school. However, they focused on the non-academic aspects of school such as the time of day that school begins or on the conditions of the school's upkeep. Jason explained, "It depends. It depends on what time in the morning…the earlier you go to school the earlier you get out." While Joshua stated, "Yeah, it [the school] pretty much needs updating." However, as did the students in the engaged students' groups, the focus inevitably turned to teachers as the main catalyst of like or dislike of school. As is true for the engaged students' groups, for the at-risk students how the teacher manages the class plays an important role in the formation of the student's opinion about school. Jill talked about being frustrated because although she felt she had followed the teacher's instructions she was punished for not completing her homework. Adam explained, "Sometimes we get punished, like, we don't get to go to the picnic or like you (looking at Jill) and John. John has to stay like 20 minutes and you've got 10 because you didn't do your homework." Since the interviewer did not know what had happened the students explained. Jill began, "Because I didn't understand in math how to represent the zero so I didn't do it because I didn't want to put a wrong answer because then she thinks I'm just like putting random answers so she thinks I didn't do it just because I didn't want." Ava added, "So now they have to stay like 10 or 20 minutes before the picnic." Students were referring to a class picnic that was going to take place the following week. The interviewer then asked if Jill had explained to the teacher that she hadn't done her homework because she didn't understand it. Jill's answer was, "She [the teacher] likes that I explain it but

sometimes she doesn't like it because she says that we have too much reasons [excuses].” Ava interjects,

> She tells us to try our best and put an answer that you think it is but at the same time, like, if you go to school, like, with a random answer she's going to think that you were guessing. Jill did want to do it but she didn't understand it and she didn't want to put a random answer, number. The teacher is going to think that she was guessing on the homework.

The interviewer asked Jill how not being believed by the teacher made her feel. “Like really bad because she's like oh now you have 10 minutes before the picnic. I feel bad because I did want to put my effort but I just didn't understand it really good.”

Abe does not like school because he feels he gets “yelled at” unjustly. “Because Ms. Adkins thinks I always do everything and I don't do anything. She always gets mad at me for no reason…because Ms. Adkins thinks I always do everything and I don't do anything. She always gets mad at me for no reason…she said I have a third strike and you know how some people snap at dogs? She snaps at me. My mom always tells me no you can't let her snap at you because you are not a dog.” Since the interviewer did not understand what he meant when he said the teacher snapped at him Abe explained, “She goes like this to me (Abe snaps his fingers). Come on let's go!’...Like if John and Albert are running she only blames me and them two, they’re okay and I'm in detention.” The interviewer asked the other students if he really got blamed for things he did not do. In unison the students said, “yeah, yeah.”

Albert, John, and Ari feel that teachers arbitrarily give homework as a form of punishment. According to Albert, “Most of our teachers, they just get mad and

then all of a sudden they think that the solution is giving us homework." Ari continued, "Yeah, more homework to me makes no sense." John interrupted, "It's going to get us worse because that's what we mostly hate!" John continued his thought, "I don't like school much because, not to be mean or anything, some teachers are like, Ms. Abella, super mean. When you get her angry she gives you more and more and more homework."

Relations with Peers: Academically Engaged Students

Almost all students mentioned friends as a positive aspect of school. When asked if they liked being in school Nancy answered, "Yeah, cause of your friends and you get to do stuff," while Kathy answered, "I like the learning part and the friend part…" However, as part of the aim of this study was to better understand if an afterschool social club could foster friendships between students who are academically engaged and students who are academically disengaged, students were specifically asked if they had made any new friends as a result of participating in the club. In general, students felt they had made new friends. In unison students said, "yes, we did!" Atticus added, "I have been nicer to them!" While Noel said, "Yes! Closer! It gets you closer."

In some cases, students who already knew each other but who only had limited contact began to talk to each other more often. Judy explained, "Like in the beginning I talked to them a little but now I talk to them more; like to her (indicating Nancy). At the beginning I never talked to her." Nancy laughing added, "I never talked to her (indicating Judy)." Nancy continued, "Like Noel, I never liked him but then I started (laughing), now I don't, I still don't like him but

he (starts laughing), I like him a little bit more." Connie clarified, "then she used to." Students also talked of having had misconceptions about others that had now changed. Noel for example said, "I really started thinking she [Irene] was annoying, she was like…" Nancy interrupted, "but now you talk to her more often." The researcher asked Noel if he still considered Irene annoying to which he answered, "less than I used to," but he was interrupted once again and did not continue his thought.

Students were also asked if they felt that being part of this type of club was a good way to make new friends. Kathy described how this could happen, "You could because, okay, you could meet all of your friends' other friends, then your friend can let you meet their friends and their friends could let you meet their friends."

Nevertheless, when pressed to give examples of who they had become friends with some students began to list students with whom, based on researcher observation, they were friends before the beginning of the club. Only one student, Ivy, mentioned students from both the engaged group and the at risk group. It must be noted however, that Ivy was invited to join the club because she suffers from an anxiety disorder and often expresses the desire to be home schooled rather than come to school. Although she has an IEP and is in resource classes because of the smaller environment, during the club meetings she always sat with the girls from the engaged group who were typically in classes for advanced and gifted students. Ivy said, "I get along with Cacy, Jane, Ava, Jill, Kathy, and Daniela, Carolina, that's pretty much it. Oh, and Sara." When asked

with whom they had become friends, some students began to list students who had joined but then dropped out of the club or students who had never been a part of the club. Irene said, “I like talked to Erik once and that’s it.” Nick on the other hand said, “One kid that I haven't like met, said hi…what's his name? The one that's friends with Lionel. Kevin, Kevin.” However the interviewer clarified that Kevin had never been in the club. To which Nick answered, “Are you sure?”

When asked if they would consider sitting with these new friends in class thefollowing school year Kathy answered, “well, maybe…because some people can get in trouble easily…if we’re always in trouble then we’re always going to get detention. Nobody wants that on the record.”

Another aspect that became evident during the conversation about friends was the fact that students in this school generally did not have the possibility of associating with certain students because they were in different classes. Typically the students with disabilities in this school are served in resource classes comprised only of students with disabilities for math and languge arts/reading and are in the inclusive setting for other subjects. However, the higher performing students, such as those who participated in this afterschool social club, are not in those inclusive classes but rather in classes for advanced and gifted students.

As part of the club meetings students were taken on a field trip and during this occasion one boy in particular was seen associating with other boys with whom he did not typically sit during the club meetings. When asked if he also associated with them in class now he answered, “not that I didn't want to but I

couldn't ‘cause some of the kids are in different classes.” Nancy continued this idea, “like Irene, I never talked to her because she's in a different class.” Judy added, “I talk to Irene a lot more now.”

This conversation continued and shed light on misconceptions students might have had about each other that seemed to be cleared up because of contact during club meetings. Noel said, “I really started thinking she [Irene] was annoying. She was like…” Nancy interrupted, “But now you talk to her more often.” The interviewer asked for clarification, “You don't think she's annoying anymore?” To which Noel answered, “less than I used to.”

Relations with Peers: At-Risk Students

Students in this group also mentioned friends as a positive aspect of school. When asked what they liked best about coming to school Jill answered, “socializing” while Ari said, “I like it mostly for the friends.” Adam liked being in school because “… I get to be with my friends here.” John on the other was happy because the school year was ending but at the same time he was unhappy because he was not going to see his friends. In his words he liked school “because it’s ending but then I’m not going to see my friends.”

Some students in this group felt they had made new friends in the club. Ari said, “I talk more to Chloe than usual.” While George yelled out, “the red haired girl, yeah Cacy, I just talk to her a little bit, I mean I never talk to her[1], I just talk to her.” Both girls are part of the engaged students group. Abe mentioned talking to Kathy more. “I talked to one person, that one person was Kathy.” But, Abe went

[1] For students in this age group “talking” to someone has the connotation of being in a relationship with someone.

on to add, “I don’t like her. She’s mean to me.” Kathy is also one of the academically engaged students.

When asked if he had made any new friends Joshua, who has autism, said, “probably nobody except you” [referring to the interviewer/researcher]. Like the students in the engaged group these students also mentioned students who had not participated in the club. As an example of this Atticus said, “Me? I used to be Jason's friend but I started talking to him more here because I'm not in his class. Yeah Jason and Christian, I was usually talking to them.” Neither Jason nor Christian were members of the club.

Atticus’s comment once again brings up the issue of students not being able to associate with each other because they are either in the special education resource setting or in the general education setting. When asked for clarification as to why they did not talk to certain students George responded, “It’s just because we’re in different classes that we can’t talk to them.” Atticus added, “Exactly. It’s a class issue.” These students also added that they could not talk to students from other classes at lunchtime. According to Sara, “She [the lunchroom monitor] doesn’t let us.”

While most students in this group felt that the club was a good way to make new friends some students disagreed. George thought it was a “so-so” way to make friends and Abe agreed, “It’s so-so. I think it’s a chance of learning how to make...” but Ari interrupted: “or communicate and work together.” For George, “if it’s working together then yeah, that’s how you make new friends.”

Work Ethics: Academically Engaged Students

This section looks at how students feel about schoolwork and at the strategies they use to tackle difficult assignments. When faced with a difficult assignment these students have a strategy in place. Casey explains:

> I usually break it down into smaller steps so I can understand more…I like cut the words like I separate the words and I read it slower and if I can't do that and like if it says divide I just look at the first two and if that doesn't work I look at the next two.

Kathy had a different strategy:

> What I do is I would like go and then look at it and if I can't figure it out I'll move on to the next question so I have time to do all the other questions and then I'll come back to that and I'll focus on this one.

If after trying on their own they still do not understand what needs to be done these students are willing to seek help from outside sources rather than hand in an incorrect assignment. Kathy seeks help where she can, "My best friend, her older brother is in sixth grade so like if he had the class last year I can discuss it with him."

Enjoying the learning experience and expecting to do well in school were prevalent themes among the academically engaged students. Connie sums it up by saying, "but it's fun to learn." When students were asked to express their opinions about the afterschool club what emerged was their opinions about being in class. Judy responded that she "liked the fact that it was after school because if it was during school you would have to miss class." Nancy added, "I don't want to miss a class so much." Noel indicated that it was acceptable to miss class sometimes. However, Nancy clarified that it was acceptable to miss "if we didn't

want to do what the teacher wanted us to do, we'd be like okay. We would rather go to the club."

If they do not do well on an assignment, on the next assignment they simply, as Judy explained, "try harder…study longer, pay more attention." For the most part, grades on report cards for these students do not go below a C. One student in particular, Connie, was poked fun at by her friends because when asked what would happen if she got a low grade she couldn't answer. One student said, "it just isn't happening." Another student added, " she's like, I don't know about that so I can't answer that question."

Work Ethics: At-Risk Students

Early on in the focus groups it became evident that students in the at risk group used a rather negative tone when referring to the work that needed to be done in school. When asked if they liked school, some of these students expressed indecision as to whether or not they liked it because of the amount of work, especially homework, that they had to do and because of the difficulty of the work given them. Jane "kind of" liked school "but there's too much homework." Adam explained:

> Because sometimes like there is too much work like I don't know how to explain it but like it's too much work…When I was little it wasn't like work. It was like work but it wasn't that much. I used to have fun all the time in school like in pre-K and now it like gets harder every year. It gets harder.

With one group the conversation turned to an assignment that was due that same night. This shed light on the study habits of the members of the group and on their attitude toward grades. Students needed to complete 30 computer based math practice sessions and 30 computer based reading practice sessions.

The assignment had been ongoing throughout the quarter. Based on researcher experience with the program each session takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. Adam described his situation, “like right now I know I'm not going to finish the iReady before midnight so I'm going to fail [midnight was the deadline].” Jill added, “in her [the teacher’s] thinking we have to do one each a day; one in math one in reading,” To which Ava exclaimed, “Every day!” Jill clarified,

> Some people left it till the last minute ‘cause we didn't have just that homework. A long time ago she just said to do it. At that time, it didn't have to be graded but now it's graded because people didn't do it. Now it's worth two grades. It was like for us to take it seriously.

When asked how many lessons they had left one student had 11 still to do and another still had 14 lessons to do. When asked why he had waited until the last minute to complete the assignment Adam simply answered, “I’ve been doing stuff.”

Grades seemed to be a sore subject for the at risk group. When asked about their grades Adam’s comment was, “uh, uh, uh.” Jane’s was, “ay, ay, ay…yeah, cause, yeah.” Ari’s answer was, “ummmmm.” Whereas Sara answered, “That’s challenging.” While grades on report cards for students in the academically engaged group did not go below a C, for the at-risk group they tended to not go above a C in core subjects such as math, language arts, science and social studies. These students were quick to talk about the As and Bs they received in classes like physical education, music or art but they more timidly mentioned the Ds and Fs received in core subjects. John seemed to sum up best the general attitude towards grades, “I care for my grades but I just don’t

get like boo-hoo.” When asked if they worry about getting low grades Danny laughed and said, “it happens all the time.”

Driving Forces: Academically Engaged Students

The role that parents play in motivating students was evident. How parents might react came up often in the focus groups with these students. Some students gave the reaction of their parents as the reason for trying to get good grades. When asked how they felt about getting bad grades Irene answered, “I get mad because my dad is going to probably scream at me. He won’t scream at me but like he’ll tell me next time you'll get a better grade or like try harder. That's what my dad tells me.” Nancy on the other hand explained, “If I get a bad grade, I’ll be like okay [said with excitement]. If my parents don’t see it, it’s okay.” When specifically asked if they worked to please their parents Nancy was quick to clarify that she worked for her own pleasure. “I do it for my own pleasure. I want to get a good grade. I don't want to get an F or a D in class. I want to get an A or a B.”

Some teachers make students call home when they misbehave or when they get a low grade. Connie described what would happen in one class, “like our Spanish teacher, if we get a D she wouldn't make us call our parents but if we behave bad she would. Noel added, “they send a note home or then if it's even worse they call your parents. Send a note home, it's not that bad because your parents just have to sign it. If they call your parents…” Judy interrupted, “they know it was really bad.” Nancy added,

> Not that it [a note home], it's not as bad as talking to them in person; your teacher saying, your child got a D in my class. I just wanted you to know

> that and when you get home you are going to get grounded. Then you're not going to do any fun stuff.

Connie added, “and the scariness!”

These students are also concerned about how teachers might react to certain situations. There is a conscious effort to avoid a negative reaction on the part of the teacher. When asked if they ever feel worried in class Nancy responded that she worries “when I forget something. I'm like oh my gosh the teacher is going to kill me or if I don't do my homework and think the teacher’s going to scream at me.”

Driving Forces: At-Risk Students

The role that parents play in the academic experience of students was also evident in the comments made by students participating in the focus groups with the at risk students. However, the “scariness” element of possible reactions for misbehavior or for low grades seemed to be missing in their comments. Abe describes:

> My mom, if I tell her the truth, she's always told me you rob a bank, you kill a person, you do the worst thing in the world, you tell me and it's going to be okay. It's a way of saying…With the truth my mom, she'll always fix it.

The interviewer asked for clarification, “So you don't lie to your mom?” To which Abe responded, “oh, I can't. If I lie, oh my God!” His fear was the consequences for not telling his mother the truth independently of what was happening in school.

These students spoke of tangible rewards for getting good grades as opposed to the intangible pride in earning As that the academically engaged students had spoken about. When asked how they felt when they got a good

grade Adam responded, “sometimes I get rewarded… Yesterday they [his mother and father] took me to IHOP. The other day I think I went to Dave and Busters…Sometimes I get to play my PS3.”

For these students a sense of satisfaction in what one does comes from being trusted by their teacher. This was evident in Albert’s comments:

> I like when we were doing the recycling club, making the boxes and all that…yeah that was pretty fun to get on our own like in a group, have our own responsibilities on it…we had our little group so we could have our responsibility and Ms. Abella could like more trust us on doing our own things…yeah I don't really like them helping us on everything. Like, oh, you have to do this…It's about making your own thing I really liked it when we did that.

Ari added his experience in another teacher’s class, “in Ms. Adkins’ class we did a lot of projects…like, all the projects that we did was by ourselves. Ms. Adkins helped us but she didn't put it together for us…We put it together by ourselves.” When asked why that was important to him Ari answered, “you get like the feeling that you’re older…you get the feeling that your older and maybe you can be trusted.”

One last aspect of the conversation with the at-risk group can be added to this section. With one group in particular the question “Do you like school?” turned into a conversation about college and not dropping out of school. The conversation started with John mentioning his sister, “I don’t want to be like my sister…she dropped out.”

When asked why she had dropped John was hesitant to respond but Albert called out to explain, “He told me…. Can I tell her? She didn't really like school. Like, she didn't like it.” John’s sister was in 11th grade when she left

school. John continued, “She wants to finish it but she can't do it here since she dropped out…She wants to do it in Cuba. It’s like that sucks for you because they go to school at seven and get out at four and summer is only one month…She wants to go to a school that's only three hours. I'm like that's never going to happen.”

These students were asked if they had seen a difference in their grades since they joined the club. The answer was a resounding, “no, no, not at all.”

Theoretical Codes: External Factors and Personal Factors

Initially the data obtained from the focus groups was broken down and coded in order to find similarities and differences, that is, relations between what the various students in the groups were saying. Once those relationships were identified the codes were grouped together and organized into four axial codes that evolved into two theoretical codes that conceptualize the relationship between all the other codes (Hernandez, 2009). The content of each category was analyzed to determine the relevancy of the codes included within that category.

External Factors

Early on in the coding process it became evident that forces external to the students were an important piece in the formation of the students’ feelings towards school. The category called effect of teachers included comments that revolved around the school itself. This category included student comments on the usefulness of an education for the future, why they were proud of their school and what they liked and disliked about being in school. However, students put

major emphasis on the role teachers play in making school a place where want, or do not want, to be, hence the name of the category.

Students who are engaged in school tended to have a more positive attitude towards teachers, making comments such as "…the teachers are nice and I can get along with the teachers." While the at risk students mentioned episodes of misunderstanding between students and teachers that make students feel "really bad." Both groups talked about how the teachers managed the classrooms and in both cases this was cause for frustration. Taken together these codes gave insight into just how important teachers and the relationship with teachers is in the academic experience of both engaged and at risk students.

In the category of relations with peers it became evident that the friendships formed at school were considered a positive aspect of school and a major incentive to go to school every day. One student in fact was both happy and unhappy the school year was coming to an end. He was unhappy because, "…I'm not going to see my friends." While students in the at risk group like school "mostly for the friends," students in the academically engaged group like school in part because of friends and in part because they enjoy learning. These students also commented on the trouble certain peers might create and expressed hesitation in wanting to associate with them. Both the academically engaged students and the at risk students commented on the separation that exists in this particular school between the different classes. Together these codes give insight into friendships in school and into the impediments that exist

to the deliberate creation of those friendships. The two themes, effect of teachers and relations with peers, formed the theoretical concept of the external factors that influence how students feel about their academic experience.

Personal Factors

A third category, work ethics, looked at how students felt about class work and home work and at the strategies they used to tackle assignments. This category comprised the effort students put into the work that needed to be done, their attitude toward grades, and their study habits. Their comments provided insight into just how willing the two groups are to do school work. It became evident that the academically engaged group tackles the work as soon as they get an assignment and have a strategy in place in case they do not understand something, while the at risk group puts off doing assignments until the last minute. At risk students focused on the amount of work that was given by teachers expressing the notion that they were given too much work or work that was too difficult; a notion that was not expressed by the engaged students. As Albert said, “most of our teachers, they just get mad and then all of a sudden they think that the solution is giving us homework.”

Elements of the fourth category, driving forces, could also fit in the effect of teachers category, however, a slight distinction exists between the two. This fourth category is not so much about physically being in the school as it is about elements that are more personal and individual to each student such as what motivates them or how their family influences how they experience school. In fact, in this fourth category, parental involvement was an unmistakable driving

force in the educational experience. How parents might react to a bad grade was motivation for the engaged students to strive to do well in school. A different element however became evident in the comments of the at risk students. There seemed to be more of an acquiescent attitude on the part of the parents of these children. The idea that “she’ll [mom] fix it” seems to take the focus off of the actions and responsibilities the student placing it elsewhere. It also became evident that intrinsic motivation drove the academically engaged students. These students wanted to earn good grades rather than have them given to them by a teacher who might easily give out good grades because they “need to feel proud.” Extrinsic motivation, tangible rewards, on the other hand drove the at risk students. Together the categories of work ethics and driving forces formed the theoretical concept of the personal factors that frame how students feel about their academic experience.

Chapter Summary

This chapter was divided into three sections. The first two sections focused on the quantitative data collected through surveys administered to both the students and their teachers and by consulting the students’ academic records. The third section concentrated on the qualitative data gathered through focus groups held when the meetings of the afterschool social club had ended.

The first research question sought to identify changes in the academic engagement of students at risk for school failure after participation in an afterschool social club. To better understand if any changes in engagement had occurred student academic records were consulted. Independent-samples t-tests

were performed to determine if there were any significant differences in student GPA, grades, and/or attendance. Results indicated that there is no significant difference in the scores of participants in the club and of those who did not participate in the club. These results suggest that participation in an 18 week after school social club has no significant effect on academic engagement. A statistical *t*-test was also performed on the surveys administered to teachers in order to measure student disaffection. Results of these tests also suggest no significant difference.

The second research question sought to understand whether or not academically engaged students and students who are disengaged from school would form friendships after participation in an 18-week afterschool social club. Students were administered a modified version of the *Peer Nomination Form* both at the start of the afterschool social club and at the end. Results from the surveys indicate that no new friendships between academically engaged students and students who are at risk for school failure were formed.

The third section sought to answer research question 3. The qualitative data gathered through focus groups was transcribed, read and reread in order to understand how the students viewed their educational experience after having participated in the social club. Student comments were coded and themes began to emerge. The themes that emerged ranged from topics such as the quality of the teachers to dropping out of school and parental influence. These themes were merged into four axial codes that are (a) effect of teachers, (b) relations with peers, (c) work ethics, and (d) driving forces. Through the intertwining of the

codes, two final theoretical codes emerged: external factors and personal factors. The external factors are those outside factors, such as the relationship with teachers that influence students to either want or not want to go to school. Personal factors on the other hand are those factors, such as pride in oneself or study habits that come from within the student that influence the academic experience. Together these two theoretical codes help better understand the relationship that exists between all the other codes.

The quantitative analysis indicated no significant effect of the afterschool social club. This may be due to the lack of power. These results are largely supportive of the qualitative analysis, which indicates that participation in the social club had only minimal effect.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Drawing on recommendations from an extensive literature base, the aim of the present study was to investigate the use of an afterschool social club as a means to foster positive peer relations between students who are academically engaged and students who are at risk for school failure due to disengagement in order to promote a more accurate perception of positive behaviors and related benefits in disengaged students. It was predicted that friendships could be purposely fostered between students who are academically engaged and those who are not. It was also predicted that at-risk students who participated in the afterschool social club would show a significant increase in academic engagement, GPA, and grades, and that they would show a significant decrease in absenteeism, detentions, and suspensions. Lastly, the present study sought to better understand how students who are academically disengaged view their educational experience after having participated in the afterschool social club. To this end surveys were completed by the students and their teachers, school records were consulted, and focus groups were held.

This final chapter presents the conclusions derived from the results of the quantitative and the qualitative components of the study. It also presents the integration of these two approaches in order to identify overlapping themes. Additionally, the chapter includes a discussion of the implications of the research findings, the study's connection to the existing literature, and its relation to the conceptual framework.

Analysis of the Findings: Quantitative Component

An examination of student academic records revealed that there was no significant difference between the grades, GPA, and number of absences of the at-risk students who participated in the afterschool social club and those who did not participate. The grades of both groups tended to fluctuate little throughout the course of the year. Grades tended to range from a low C to an F in core subjects for both groups with a slight decrease in both GPA and grades at the end of the school year indicating that the social club did nothing to improve engagement and consequently grades or attendance.

The results of the EvsD survey for teachers, corroborates the results of the data obtained from the academic records. Teachers were asked to rate students on several variables that pertain to behavioral and emotional engagement. Based on the EvsD, there was no significant improvement in student engagement after participation in the social club. There were however three instances in which at least two of the three teachers saw a worsening from pretest to posttest in student engagement. Teachers found that students were less attentive at the beginning of a new activity, they perceived students as being less interested during their classes, and they saw students as being less willing to make an effort when faced with a difficult problem or assignment.

This result is consistent with research that has documented the existence of a steady decline in academic engagement beginning in kindergarten and continuing through high school (or drop out) with a peak in disengagement during the transitions to middle school (the age of the participants in the present study)

and to high school (Gillet, Vallerand, & Lafrenière, 2012; Skinner, Marchand, Furrer, & Kinderman, 2008).

There could be multiple reasons for this decline. Poorthuis, Thomas, Juvonen, and Denissen (2014) found that receiving low grades sets in motion a downward spiral whereby low grades lead to a decline in engagement, which in turn leads to a further decline in grades. The at-risk students who participated in the afterschool social club tended to begin the school year with average to low grades and to see grades and GPA decline as the school year progressed culminating in a lower GPA in the last quarter of the year with respect to the GPA of the first quarter. This is consistent with research that shows that academic motivation decreases from fall to spring (Ryan, 2001) and consequently grades suffer (Fortuin, van Geel, & Vedder, 2016). It is therefore feasible to think that these students might fall into the group of students who experience that downward spiral.

In a review of the literature on reading and motivation, Morgan and Fuchs (2007) found similar results. These authors found that there is a correlation between a student's ability and his or her motivation. They found that reading skills and motivation predict each other. In other words, a student who has difficulty reading is not motivated to read and a lack of motivation to read does not give the student the opportunity to better this skill simply because the student does not practice it. Several of the at-risk students in the present study expressed a dislike for reading and some spoke about the difficulties they had in

reading. Here too it is feasible to think that these students might be experiencing this phenomenon, which in turn could lead to lower grades.

Boredom could also be an explanation for what the teachers in the present study saw happening in their classrooms. Boring classes are frequently cited as a factor in high school dropout (Bridgeland, 2010). Boredom can be caused by a lack of interest (Pekrun, Goetz, Hall, & Perry, 2014) which can be prompted by a low value, maybe due to a perceived lack of relevance, attributed to an activity (Bieg, Goetz, & Hubbare, 2013). Although many of the at-risk students in the present study said that they valued school because of the possibilities for the future these statements were typically connected to statements such as, “my dad says…” which leaves the listener/reader wondering if these are also the students’ beliefs or if the students are simply repeating what their parents say. Also, when asked if they found school boring or if they got distracted, the consensus was that much of school is boring. Most liked school because of the opportunity to socialize. Based on the research of these authors therefore, boredom could also help explain the results of the surveys.

It can be speculated therefore that the inattentiveness, the lack of interest, and the lack of willingness to try that these teachers saw could be due to variables such as boredom, a decline in interest due to continuously receiving low grades, or due to the problems and frustrations caused by simply having difficulties with the subject matter or with the skills, such as reading, needed to perform the tasks. These were all mentioned by the at-risk students.

The individual survey items were grouped into four engagement indicators. Once this was done there was a lack of power and a test for significance could not be run on any of them. However the means of the pre- and posttest of each of the indicators can shed some light on what was happening in the classrooms of the three core subject teachers. For teacher T1, three of the indicators, behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and emotional disaffection, remained the same implying that nothing much had changed for students in this class from pretest to posttest. However, the behavioral disaffection indicator implied a worsening in this area. Disaffected behaviors include behaviors typical of disengagement, such as passivity, giving up easily and a lack of initiation, attention or effort (Skinner et al., 2009). On the individual surveys, teacher T1 indicated that at-risk students in her class were showing these signs.

For teacher T3, one grouping, behavioral engagement, was in the expected direction but the other three, behavioral disaffection, emotional engagement, and emotional disaffection, were not. At first glance this could seem like a contradiction but a close look at how the authors conceptualize the various indicators can clear up this misconception. For Skinner, Kindermann, and Furrer (2009), engaged behaviors include, among other things, class participation while disaffected behaviors include, but are not limited to, ritualistic participation. What this teacher sees as class participation may in reality be ritualistic participation. Since students cannot withdraw from the classroom they may just be going through the motions. As evidence of this possibility, when

asked if he participated in class, Adam responded, “Yeah, like sometimes they ask you things but like sometimes when I raise my hand I really don't want to raise my hand,” Skinner, Kindermann, and Furrer (2009) found a similar result. The authors posited that a student’s style of self-regulation may prompt the student to participate in class due to guilt or internal pressure.

For teacher T2, all four indicators were in the expected direction. Therefore, based on Skinner, Kindermann, and Furrer’s (2009) conceptualization of engaged behaviors and engaged emotions, this teacher feels that the at-risk students in her classroom were paying more attention, were more persistent, more interested, and were more enthusiastic and they showed less of the disaffected behaviors and emotions such as passivity, lack of effort, dejection, or apathy as time went on. It should be noted that this teacher was a special education teacher and taught most of the at-risk students in a classroom composed only of students with an IEP. The other two teachers were general education teachers and taught these same students in an inclusion setting that was composed of both students with disabilities and students without disabilities. Studies have found that general education and special education teachers have differing attribution styles with regards to students with special needs. Special education teachers tend to have a more positive attribution style than do general education teachers toward these students (Podell & Tournaki, 2007; Vlachou, Eleftheriadou, & Metallidou, 2014, Woodcock & Vialle, 2010). Podell and Tournaki speculate that this difference might be due to the differences in the professional preparation of special education and general education teachers.

Based on the findings of these researchers it is feasible to think that the differences between the responses of the three teachers in the present study might be due to the differing attribution styles typical of the preparation and knowledge of these professionals.

The Motivation and Engagement Scale was used to measure the students' drive to do work in school and to learn. The decrease in motivation and engagement that was witnessed by the teachers and that was evident from the academic records was also evident in the responses given by the students themselves on the MES. Two of the four subcategories of the MES showed a significant difference from pretest to posttest however the significant differences were not in the expected direction. There was a worsening instead of an improvement. These subcategories were booster thoughts and guzzlers. Through questions such as "If I try hard, I believe I can do my schoolwork well," which forms part of the booster thoughts, a student's belief in his or her own ability to perform in school was measured. Questions such as "Learning at school is important," measured how useful students feel school is. Lastly, questions such as, "I feel very happy with myself when I learn new things at school," were used to measure a student's tendency to work hard in order to be the best student possible (Martin, 2014).

Based on the responses given by the students there was an overall decrease in the belief that they can do well in school even if they make the appropriate effort. They were less likely to see the utility of school and of the

assignments given to them. Also, they were less focused on the tasks assigned to them and less willing to work hard to solve problems and develop skills.

According to Bandura (1982) the belief in one's ability to do well is tied to the amount of effort one is willing to exert. People who have doubts about their capabilities tend to put forth less effort in the face of obstacles. Similarly, according to the expectancy-value theory conceptualized by Eccles and her colleagues (1983) students' expectations for successful academic outcomes are tied to increased motivation and achievement. In turn, achievement is positively associated to the value (e.g., interest) that students place on a task (Simpkins, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2006). It would not be irrational to think that after seeing their grades and GPA consistently remain below average as the quarters passed, the students in the present study lost faith in their abilities to get good grades hence a decreased expectation for success which in turn could have led to a decreased interest. This chain reaction is troublesome as the expectation that one's efforts will be fruitful is tied to persistence and those who have serious doubts about their possibilities for success may give up altogether (Bandura, 1982).

Another set of questions that make up the subcategory booster thoughts measures learning focus and is closely tied to the satisfaction of mastering a skill or concept (Martin, 2014). The results of the posttest indicated that the at-risk students in the present study were not as satisfied with themselves, academically, as they were at the time of the pretest. The satisfaction that they

felt when they learned something new or understood a new concept after working hard to reach this accomplishment had diminished.

At this point it should be mentioned that studies have found that there is a slight decrease in competence beliefs and in motivation within a single school year, especially during transition years (Chouinard & Roy, 2008; Tuominen-Soini, Salmela-Aro, & Niemivirta, 2011). On the other hand, many other studies have found a continual decrease in academic motivation from the beginning of primary school to the end of high school. That is, there is an age-related decline in the value that students give to certain academic tasks and to achievement as they grow (Wigfield & Cambria, 2010). Most children like school when they first start. They like to participate in the activities and they feel competent. As they grow older and are confronted with an increasing number of activities and testing, they acquire a better understanding of their abilities and of what they do and do not enjoy. These new insights lead to a decline in their competency belief (Wigfield & Cambria, 2010).

In a study that compared reading motivation in children with reading disabilities and typically developing children and children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Lee and Zentall (2015) found that there was a reduced motivation to read as these children transitioned to middle school. In another study Frenzel, Pekrun, Dicke and Goetz (2012) found similar results for mathematics. These researchers found that there is a decline in interest for math across adolescence. This downward trend, however, varies across the different subject areas (Wigfield & Camgria, 2010).

According to Frenzel et al. (2012), declines in academic interest have been explained as a result of age related changes such as an increase in the complexity of academic content resulting in a need to put forth greater effort in order to be successful. In addition, individual interests become more selective as children grow from the infinite curiosity of childhood to select fields of interest in adolescence. During adolescence social interests compete with academic interests negatively influencing academic interests. Wigfield and Cambria (2010) add that an increase in the emphasis on evaluation leads children to give less value to activities at which they do not do well. While Lee and Zentall (2015) feel that the reason for this decrease can be seen in prior failure, it is possible then that declines in academic interest that the students in the current study were experiencing at the time of the posttest are simply that downward trajectory typical of their age.

There was also a significant difference for the fourth subcategory of the MES, guzzlers. As with the booster thoughts subcategory, the significant difference for the guzzlers subcategory was not in the expected direction. The questions in this subcategory measure students' propensity to reduce their own chances of being successful at school (i.e., self-sabotaging behaviors) and their loss of interest (i.e., disengagement; Martin, 2014). The results of the pre- and posttests showed a decrease in engagement and an increase in the use of self-sabotaging behaviors.

Self-sabotage, or self-handicapping strategies can be viewed as a way to protect the self (Thomas & Gadbois, 2007). It is a way of deflecting the cause of

failure away from the notion of ability and placing it on preconceived excuses before a possible failure takes place (De Castella, Byrne, & Covington, 2013; Thomas & Gadbois, 2007). The implication of failure after having exerted effort can be viewed as evidence of a lack of ability, which in turn can trigger self-perceptions of incompetence and feelings of shame and humiliation (De Castella et al., 2013). To avoid these feelings students may engage in behaviors or establish excuses for performance that ultimately can affect performance (Thomas & Gadbois, 2007) and lead to disengagement from school (De Castella et al., 2013). Some examples of self-sabotage are task avoidance, denial, procrastination, lack of practice or effort, and even reporting illness (De Castella et al., 2013).

If students in the present study began to doubt that they could do well in school, as theorized in the discussion on booster thoughts, it is not irrational to imagine an increase in the use of protective strategies such as self-sabotage. As evidence of this possibility are the comments made by students during the focus groups on waiting until the last minute to finish assignments (i.e., a self-handicapping behavior) or the comments they made on having acceptable grades when in reality grades were low (i.e., an example of denial).

Two interesting observations can be made about the students in the present study. Studies show that self-sabotage is more prevalent in boys than in girls (De Castella et al., 2013). A close investigation of individual responses on the MES shows that the boys in this study are no exception. These boys showed a greater increase in the use of protective strategies such as self-sabotage and

greater disengagement. Also, in the research on self-sabotaging behaviors reviewed for the present study, researchers do not report the number of typically developing children and the number of students with disabilities who participated in their studies; therefore, this researcher does not have an adequate gauge of possible differences between the two. However, it is interesting to note that the students in the present study, all with disabilities, follow the same pattern as reported in other studies.

Two of the four subcategories, booster behavior and mufflers, remained unchanged from the beginning to the end of the social club. Booster behaviors look at how much planning students do for class work, how they organize their schoolwork and homework, and just how much a student keeps trying when faced with a difficult task. Mufflers measure that uneasy feeling some students get when they think about schoolwork. They also measure how much a student feels he or she is in control and is able to avoid failure (Martin, 2007).

A close examination of individual surveys revealed that the at-risk students in this study tended to answer questions in the booster behaviors and the mufflers subcategories in much the same way both on the pretest and on the posttest. Questions such as, “I usually do my homework in places where I can concentrate,” “I’ll keep working at difficult schoolwork until I’ve worked it out,” and “Before I start a project, I plan out how I am going to do it,” (i.e., questions that form part of the booster behaviors subcategory) tended to be given a rating of neither agree nor disagree. The same holds true for questions such as, “When I don’t do well at school I don’t know how to stop that happening next time;” “The

main reason I try at school is because I don't want people to think that I'm dumb;" and "I worry about school and schoolwork," (i.e., questions in the muffler subcategory). This rating seems to indicate that these students may not have recognized that increased persistence, maybe in the form of trying alternative courses of action when faced with academic challenges (Martin, 2007), and extra effort in planning and organizing their work, both of which the students had control over, could have increased their chances of being successful in school.

What needs to be considered at this point is locus of control. Based on research done in the 1950s, Rotter (1966) found that individuals who perceive an outcome as being contingent on fate or the actions of others have an external locus of control and individuals who perceive an outcome as being contingent on their own behavior have an internal locus of control. Rotter felt that these differences were significant in understanding the nature of the learning process. According to Rotter, the tendency to perceive what happens as dependent on an individual's own actions is tied to greater motivation to achieve. Compared to individuals who have an external locus of control those who have an internal locus of control exert more effort and have greater academic success. They take pride in that success and feel guilty if they fail (Bursik & Martin, 2006).

In a study on the development of locus of control in students with intellectual disabilities, students with learning disabilities and students with no disabilities, Shogren, Bovaird, Palmer and Wehmeyer (2010) found that students with intellectual disabilities tended to be more externally oriented than their peers. These students also tended to experience little change in their belief in

their own ability to exert control over their life. For students with learning disabilities and with no disabilities there is significant individual variability in the initial status and over time their perceptions tend to become more positive. However, the initial perception of their ability to exert control is much less in individuals with learning disabilities than for people with no disabilities and that difference persists over time. Shogren et al. (2010) suggest that early intervention is needed to better the perceptions of control in individuals with disabilities. Such intervention may be what the at-risk students in the present study need to better understand the control they have – in the way of planning, organization, and persistence – over outcomes in school.

Martin (2003) has posited that uncertain, or low, control and failure avoidance (e.g., doing schoolwork so as to avoid disappointment) play a greater role in student achievement than do self-belief and persistence. In a cross-cultural study of achievement motivation De Castella et al. (2013) found that the fear of failure heightened self-protecting behaviors and the need to protect a sense of self-worth may lead to self-handicapping behaviors. It is possible therefore that the at-risk students that participated in the social club found a level of persistence, task management, and planning (i.e., the categories that represent the adaptive behavioral components, booster behaviors) that allowed them to protect their self-worth consequently no extra effort was put into persisting in, planning, and organizing their schoolwork throughout the school year.

The results of the *Peer Nomination Form* indicate that friendships between academically disengaged students and academically engaged students were not fostered through the afterschool social club. However, upon initial analysis of the pretest results a major issue regarding this type of survey became immediately evident. Although participants in the club were given a list of all fifth graders in the school and all questions were read to them and explained as needed, it became evident that students did not put much thought into how they were answering the individual questions. The tendency was to answer all questions with the names of the same people. There was very little, if any, variation in the students they chose as their preferred partners in the various scenarios that the questions offered the students. Using the field notes as reference the researcher was able to ascertain that the students nominated on the pretest tended to be the students who sat with each other during the various meetings. In other words if John, Joseph, Jack, and Jason sat together at the club meetings they also (repeatedly) nominated each other on the form. It was hypothesized that the close proximity of the students when completing the form may have contributed to these nominations. That is, since students were sitting close together and they were commenting with each other as they answered the questions maybe they answered based on who was around them and on who was aware of the names that they were writing. The end result was that at-risk students nominated at-risk students and academically engaged students nominated academically engaged students. Only one academically engaged boy nominated two at-risk boys and vice-versa.

In an attempt to avoid a repeat of this issue particular attention was paid to the seating arrangement at the moment of the administration of the posttest. Students were instructed to sit far apart and they were instructed to avoid making any comments until everyone had finished the survey. They were also reminded to put some thought into their choices. The result of the posttest was not much different from the pretest. Students still tended to nominate the same people on every question.

In both the pre- and the posttests more students who were not members of the club were nominated than were members of the club. More specifically, close to 60% of the nominations of the at-risk students in both the pre- and the posttest were not members of the social club. As for the academically engaged students close to 70% of the nominations in both the pre- and the posttest were non-club members. These results seem to indicate that a club lasting 18 weeks - two quarters - does not have the hoped for effect of fostering friendships between at-risk students and academically engaged students who participate in an afterschool social club and therefore a longer timeframe is needed to promote potentially positive peer group norms capable of giving disengaged students a more accurate perception of the behaviors needed to be successful in school. Research indicates that two to three years of participation in out-of-school activities sponsored by the school are needed to positively influence academic outcomes (Bohnert et al., 2010; Fiester et al., 2005; Greene et al., 2013; Gardner et al., 2008). However, as the only students to quit the social club were members of the at-risk group (18% of the original at-risk members quit), one

must wonder how many of these students would be willing to make a commitment to a club that spans multiple school years.

Analysis of the Findings: Qualitative Component

One of the main aims of this study was to better understand if friendships between academically at-risk students and academically engaged students could be intentionally fostered. Research has found that individuals will behave according to the norms of the group they are a part of (Carbonaro & Workman, 2013) and since peer opinions are especially important during adolescence (Shin et al., 2007) and the responsiveness to peer influence is especially high at this age (Monahan et al., 2009) it was hypothesized that an 18-week afterschool social club with a specific focus on team-building could foster relations that would give at-risk students a more accurate perception of what they need to do to be successful in school and of the benefits that that success could afford them. When specifically asked if they had made new friends with other club members, students insisted that they had. They began to name students with whom they talked more often and incidences of changes in misconceptions they had held about other students. However, there were several elements of contradiction in their responses. When asked to name who they had become friends with, the participants often named students who had not been members of the club or students who joined the club but had stopped attending the meetings only after a few weeks. Also, a review of the field notes reveals that throughout the duration of the meetings and even during the field trip that members of the club went on, the same groups of students tended to stay together. However, some of the boys

who typically sat with members of the engaged group during the meetings associated with members of the at-risk group during the field trip. To add to the contradictions, when asked if they would sit with the new friends in class the following year, the academically engaged students said they would not for fear of getting in trouble. If one takes into consideration what was immediately visible to the researcher, in addition to the results of the *Peer Nomination Form,* 18-weeks is not enough to even begin fostering friendships between these two groups. However, if one takes into account the students' perceptions of what was taking place, then 18-weeks is enough to see the beginnings of new friendships. It is possible that based on the limited time that the researcher spent with the students (i.e., once a week during the club meetings) also limited the number of interactions the researcher witnessed and in effect a greater number of interactions were taking place during the school day.

Also, students seemed to place more emphasis on the importance of teachers then on relations with peers. For both the engaged group and the at-risk groups, peers/friends played an important role in making school a place they wanted to be, but students in both groups went into much more detail about the relations with teachers than their relations with other students. In reality this is not surprising as the importance of student/teacher relations has been a prevalent theme in the literature throughout the years (Bear et al., 2006; Gallagher, 2002; Murray and Naranjo, 2009). One major difference between the two groups, however, was that the engaged students had positive things to say about the teachers while the comments of the at-risk students were more negative. These

students saw their teachers as being arbitrary both in how they handed out punishment and in the assignments, especially homework, they gave.

The reason why these students may have made negative comments about teachers is of marginal interest to the present study. What is important is that children who have negative or conflicting relationships with teachers are less likely to be accepted by their peers because they can be a catalyst to social cost for peers. For example, children who have disruptive behaviors may lead to disrupted class activities (Davison, Gest, & Welsh, 2010). This takes us back to the fact that the engaged students in the present study said they would not sit with their newfound (disengaged) friends for fear of getting in trouble. Conflicitive relations with teachers therefore risk defeating any attempt at fostering positive relations between at-risk students and students who might offer constructive examples of how one gets the most out of the academic experience.

Another theme that quickly became evident during the coding of the focus group transcripts was how the students felt about, and dealt with, the actual work they had to do for school. There was a marked difference between the attitude of the engaged students and the at-risk students toward school assignments. The engaged students said they enjoyed learning and expected to do well. If they found obstacles, they simply tried harder or they tried different strategies to find a way to overcome those obstacles. These students would tackle an assignment immediately and if it was a long assignment they would break it up into smaller pieces and complete one piece at a time. These students did not want teachers to be “too easy going.” They wanted to earn their As and be able to be proud of

the effort they put into the work. The at-risk students, on the other hand, procrastinated. They left assignments for the last minute and appeared to joke about getting poor grades. Danny seemed to make light of his poor grades when he laughingly said that he always got bad grades. During the focus groups the at-risk students complained about how much work teachers gave. Not once did the engaged students mention anything about the amount of work teachers gave.

This difference between the views of the two groups is an excellent example of why fostering strong relations with students who can act as positive role models is so important. The students who are not academically engaged seem to focus on the fun aspects of school such as friends, group projects, and field trips. Comments on the value of school during the focus groups were minimal. If these students do not learn to place more value on school, the consequences could be serious since research shows that achievement is positively associated with the value or the interest that students place on what they are doing (Simpkins et al., 2006).

A final major theme to evolve from the student conversations in the focus groups is veiled by the discourse on parent and teacher reactions to low performance and inappropriate behavior. Closer scrutiny of student comments reveals an underlying question. What motivates these students? If we look at the conversations of the students who are engaged in school two main motivating forces are immediately noticeable: parents and their own desire to do well in school. The at-risk students on the other hand tend to focus on the tangible rewards they get from their parents. In other words, the engaged students seem

to be motivated by a combination of factors that arise from outside the student (i.e., extrinsic motivators) and factors that come from within the student (i.e., intrinsic motivators). The at-risk students in this study seem to be predominantly motivated by external factors (i.e., extrinsic motivators such as dinner at a local restaurant or playing video games). This distinction has implications not only for academic engagement (Gillet, Vallerand, Lafrenière, 2012) but also for establishing friendships (Ojanen, Sijtsema, Hawley, & Little, 2010).

Vansteenkiste, Lens, and Deci (2006) describe intrinsic motivation as being self-determined. The reward for an activity is the satisfaction derived from the activity itself. Intrinsic motivation tends to promote task orientation, both short- and long-term persistence at a learning task, and greater conceptual understanding of the learning material. Extrinsic motivation according to these authors involves the attainment of an outcome, such as rewards or avoiding punishment that is separate from the activity. It is a means to an end and it has been found to shift a student's focus away from the learning task to its instrumentality for the extrinsic outcome. In other words, the reward is what is important. It is related to putting less effort into school, to lower performance, and to poorer adjustment (Ojanen et al., 2010). According to Vansteenkiste et al. extrinsic motivation has been found to be tied to cheating, avoidance of help seeking, and self-handicapping strategies.

Ojanen et al. (2010) found that whether an individual is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated also has bearing on friendships and friendship formation. Intrinsic reasons for establishing friendships reflects the enjoyment that comes

from the friendship while extrinsic motives reflect the existence of a perceived reward or pressure from others (especially from parents or teachers). Extrinsic friendship motives are founded in social reputational concerns (i.e., concerns for social appearance; Ojanen, Stratman, Card, & Little, 2013). It is likely that there is less emotional investment in and commitment to a friendship that serves extrinsic motives (Ojanen et al., 2010). Intrinsic friendship motives on the other hand seem to translate into actions that signal caring and commitment to a relationship making individuals with intrinsic friendship motives desirable as friends, especially during stressful moments such as the transition to middle school (Ojanen et al., 2010).

Engaging in friendship for intrinsic motives promotes higher well-being and positive development conversely extrinsic friendship motives are related to lower friendship closeness and poor emotional and social adjustment (Ojanen et al., 2013). Girls tend to report higher intrinsic friendship motivation while boys are higher in extrinsic friendship motivation (Ojanen et al., 2010). These differences have particular implications for the present study as anyone attempting to explicitly foster friendships between students will need to keep these differences in mind.and as these differences are not immediately visible there will be a need to be particularly attuned to any subtle evidence of the type of motivation, intrinsic or extrinsic, through which a child forms friendships. A concerted effort will need to be made in order to make sure the type of friendships that are internally motivated are being formed during an intervention such as the

afterschool social club. Activities that motivate students to participate for the pure pleasure of having fun with others may be a possible means to this end.

Integration of the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The third phase of the study involves the integration of the qualitative and quantitative findings. As stated earlier, this integration allows the researcher to generate theoretical explanations that might otherwise not have come to light (Tashakkori & Newman, 2010). Table 9 shows the results of the quantitative portion of this study with the corresponding findings from the qualitative portion.

The first set of results shows a decrease in both emotional and behavioral engagement among the at-risk students who participated in the afterschool social club. Academic records indicate that grades and GPA were average to below average throughout the year with a slight decline at the end of the school year. Teacher responses to the EvsD also indicate a decline. Core subject area teachers saw students as being less attentive, less interested, and less willing to make an effort at the end of the school year than they were at the beginning of the year. However a distinction needs to be made with regard to the differences between the three teachers who participated in this study. While two of the teachers, general education teachers, saw an increase in indicators that signal behavioral disaffection such as passivity, giving up easily, a lack of initiation, and a lack of attention or effort. A third teacher, a special education teacher, saw the students as paying more attention, being more persistent, and more interested. This difference may be due to the more positive attribution style that special

Table 9

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Results
1. There was a decrease in student emotional and behavioral engagement. a. At-risk students reported that they found school boring. b. At-risk students spoke of conflicting relationships with teachers.
2. Students had less faith in their ability to do well in school and there was increased the use of self-sabotaging strategies. a. At-risk students leave assignments until the last minute. b. At-risk students are quick to point out grades in electives.
3. Students seemed to not realize that increased persistence and hard work could lead to success in school. a. At-risk students have external locus of control. b. At-risk students are motivated by factors tied to minimal effort.
4. There were no reciprocal nominations on the posttest of the peer nomination form. a. Student comments contradict results of peer nomination form. b. Academically engaged students not ready to sit with newfound friends.

Table 9 shows the results of the quantitative portion of this study with the corresponding findings from the qualitative portion.

education teachers have toward special education students (Podell & Tournaki, 2007; Vlachou, Eleftheriadou, & Metallidou, 2014; Woodcock & Vialle, 2010).

These findings were corroborated by student comments in the focus groups. When asked if they found school boring many of the at-risk students indicated that to them school is boring. They liked the fact that their friends were there and that they could socialize. They also liked doing group projects and going on field trips. But the at-risk students felt that teachers gave too much

work. Also as corroboration for the quantitative findings, many of the at-risk students spoke of having conflicting relationships with teachers. One student in particular said he was always getting in trouble with one of the teachers who participated in this study. He felt that he was unjustly singled out by this teacher and his classmates agreed that he was. This tension in a classroom could be seen as a motive to be less engaged in that teacher's class.

The responses to the second set of results show that at the time of the posttest students were less likely to believe that they could do well in school, they were less focused on school assignments, and less willing to work hard to solve problems or develop skills. This decline can be seen as an age related occurrence due to the increase in the complexity of schoolwork, competing social interests that arise as a result of growing up (Frenzel et al., 2012) and possibly due to prior failure (Lee & Zentall, 2015). Studies have however found that as individuals continue to age there is a continuous shift in interests. In particular for adolescents that shift involves a qualitative difference such as an increased thirst for knowledge (Frenzel et al., 2012). It could be argued that this decrease at the end of the school year might be temporary. However, with this decline in academic interest the results of the MES also showed an increase in the use of self-sabotaging strategies.

The qualitative findings support the quantitative results. Students talked about leaving rather large, ongoing assignments until the last minute. On the night the focus group took place one particular assignment was due. Several of the at-risk students had only slightly more than half of it done. Procrastination is a

self-sabotaging behavior. By leaving the assignment until the last minute these students had given themselves a reason for not having the work done (i.e., they ran out of time) and for receiving a failing grade. The comments on grades also show signs of self-sabotage. The students were quick to say they got good grades but when probed it became evident that the good grades were not in core classes but rather in electives. This was confirmed by the students' academic records. In core subjects the at-risk students tended to get below average grades. John summed it up by saying that he cared about his grades but he didn't "boo-hoo" (i.e., cry) over them.

This propensity to use self-sabotaging strategies is worrisome. Although these can be viewed as a way to protect the self (Thomas & Gadbois, 2007), if these students continue to "protect" themselves in this way the odds of them getting any intervention, much less the early intervention suggested by Shogren et al. (2010), risks becoming minimal. As these students grow and go into high school the possibility of attending one of those overcrowded schools where they become almost invisible (Gallegher, 2002) is very real in a county where one-third of the public high schools have an enrollment of over 2,500 students (FLDOE, 2009).

With regards to the third set of results the quantitative component of this study revealed that these particular students, on both the pretest and posttest, tended to answer that they neither agreed nor disagreed with questions that measured the amount of planning, organization or persistence they put into the work they needed to do. Throughout the focus group discussions these students

made negative comments on the amount of work, especially homework, that teachers gave. Comments such as “in her [the teacher’s] thinking we have to do one [computer based lesson] each a day; one in math one in reading,” seem to signal that these students have an external locus of control and that it is the amount of work the teacher gives, not the fact that they waited until the last minute to do the assignment, that caused them to risk not completing the assignment and thus getting a low grade.

Not only do these students have an external locus of control they are also externally motivated when it comes to most aspects of school. Whereas the academically engaged students are motivated by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, the at-risk students are predominantly motivated by extrinsic factors, that is by the rewards given to them by their parents. The distinction between being intrinsically or extrinsically motivated has implications for academic engagement (Gillet et al., 2012) as extrinsic motivators have been tied to the use of a series of negative strategies such as cheating (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006) and to putting less effort into school (Ojanen, et. al., 2010).

The fourth set of results shows a contradiction between the responses on the *Peer Nomination Form* and student comments during the focus groups. When asked to list other fifth graders with whom they would like to perform a series of activities both the at-risk students and the academically engaged students nominated more students who were not in the club than students who were in the club. Also there were three boys, two from the at-risk group and one from the engaged group, who nominated each other on the pretest but no such

nominations occurred on the posttest. As mentioned elsewhere, if one were to simply consider these results one would conclude that the afterschool social club did not foster friendships. The students on the other hand paint a different picture during the focus groups.

When asked if they had made new friends in the club students in each of the focus groups felt that they had. When confronted with the researcher's observation that students tended to sit with the same people during the club meetings, students began to give examples as evidence of the increased contact that they had with club members that they usually did not have the opportunity to talk to. They felt that the club, "…gets you closer," and they also gave examples of the club being an opportunity to clear up misconceptions they might have previously had about each other. Nancy's comment about Noel is an example of this, "…I never liked him but…now…I like him a bit more." The consensus seemed to be that the afterschool social club was a good way to begin to make new friends.

An unexpected theme that arose from the conversations was that at this school students did not often have the opportunity to associate with students who were not in their classes. Therefore it is possible that the club gave students a different perspective on students they did not know well, opening the door to increased interactions even outside the club meetings. However, when the engaged students were asked if they would sit in class with the students with whom they had begun interacting they said that they would not for fear that these students might create trouble. This fourth set of results indicates that an 18-week

afterschool social club does not produce the desired effect of creating friendships that are strong enough to influence academic engagement. However, given the students' insistence on the utility of the club in giving them the opportunity to "get closer" to students they did not have much contact with it is plausible to believe that the two to three years of other studies (Bohnert et al., 2010; Fiester et al., 2005; Greene et al., 2013; Gardner et al., 2008) might not be necessary to begin to see a positive change in academic engagement.

Limitations

Several features of the present study limit its generalizability. First of all the type of school that the study was conducted in is not the typical elementary school. This is a K-8 Center; a combination elementary and middle school. It is a school of choice with no other schools feeding into it. Enrollment in this type of school is generally smaller (FLODE, 2009) than typical elementary or middle schools. The attraction of many parents to this type of school is that their child can stay in the same, small school setting from kindergarten, or even pre-K, through eighth grade. Because students, and their siblings, tend to stay for the duration of kindergarten, elementary, and middle school, teachers tend to know students and their families well, making for a tight knit community and influencing the relationships within the school therefore the results seen in this study might not be the same for students attending a typical elementary school.

The homogeneity of the population in this particular school is also a limitation to the generalizability of the study. Due to the make-up of the population in the school district, and in particular of the neighborhood the school

is in, the sample that participated in the study is almost exclusively Hispanic, middle class. It may not be possible to generalize the findings of this study to other racial/ethnic groups. With a more heterogeneous population sample, results might be different.

Another limitation regards the student surveys. John felt that during some of the club meetings “we were just filling out papers.” The MES had 42 questions. This seemed to be too many as there were many complaints from students during the complition of the pre-test but especially during the completion of the posttest. Also, although the MES was normed on this age group the survey resulted very difficult for many of the low performing at-risk students. Some questions needed to be explained several times which was time consuming.

The *Peer Nomination Form* also had some limitations. The original *Peer Nomination Form* was developed in the late 1950s for use in the business world. It has however been used in a number of different settings including education (Cunningham, Callahan, Plucker, Roberson, & Rapkin, 1998; Henry, 2006; Henry, Miller-Johnson, Simon, & Schoeny, 2006; Phillips & Cornell, 2012). A 1978 review of peer assessment methods found the original assessment to have high validity (.89) and high reliability (.78; Kane and Lawler, 1978). It is however a limitation that such information does not exist for the form used in the present study. Additionally, students generally wrote the same names under every scenario. This raised the question, “did students put thought into choosing who they would like to be with in that hypothetical situation or did they simply write the same names without giving it much thought?”.

The short timeframe can also be considered a limitation. In part this study aimed at detecting the minimum length of time necessary in order to begin seeing the effects of the club. By the end of the 18 weeks of this particular study there were glimpses of new friendships forming. It is conceivable that a longer timeframe may bring about the hoped for results.

A major limitation of the present study is the small sample size. Having a small sample size makes it difficult to detect significant differences and it risks decreasing power to the point of unreliability. Furthermore, as a small sample may not be representative of the poulation, result of the study may not be generalizable.

Given the small sample size the alpha level was set at .10. This less stringent alpha level was set in order to be able to detect a difference if one existed (Newman & Newman, 1994). In this particular case a power analysis however found that with an *N* size of 13 even a very large effect would be detected only 40% of the time. Setting a less stringent alpha level increases the risk of making a Type I error (i.e., detecting a difference when a difference does not exist; Newman & Newman, 1994). This possibility was preferred over the possibility of failing to detect a difference if one existed (i.e., a Type II error; Newman & Newman, 1994).

Implications for Practice

The research on after school programs shows an array of benefits that stem from participation in these programs such as improvement in grades both in the classroom and on standardized tests (Broh, 2002), increased school

connectedness (Bonny et al., 2000), positive effect on ambition for future endeavors (Guest and Schneider, 2003), higher homework completion rates, decreased levels of absenteeism, fewer fights and behavioral issues, the development of a sense of belonging, positive promotion of relationships, increased connectedness to teachers and classrooms, and a reinforcement of school rules and practices (Anderson-Butcher, 2010). Similarly, the research on peer relations indicates that there is a strong correlation between positive peer relations and pro-social behavior (Wentzel et al., 2004), that positive peer relations, such as those with students who are academically engaged, can help reduce the possibility that a student will succumb to negative influences (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Positive peer relations promote positive outcomes such as academic engagement (Kortering & Christenson, 2009). Because students with disabilities often lack the social skills needed to develop quality relations, it has been suggested that interventions that go beyond academic skills are necessary (Carter et al., 2013). These thoughts are the basis for the present study.

Although this study did not have the hoped for effect of creating, in a short period of time, strong relationships between students at-risk for school failure and students who are academically engaged, there are some implications for teachers and school administrators worthy of being noted. First of all, this study reiterates the importance of positive student-teacher relations and the importance of ongoing attempts, and research, aimed at creating those relations. Based on the discussions of both the academically engaged students and the academically at-risk students it is the teachers that, as they say, make or break the

environment at school and the desire for students to be in that particular school and in that particular class. These results imply that schools need to organize and intentionally create opportunities whereby teachers and students can come together in a more informal manner in order to foster those positive relations that will allow students to feel that they belong.

This study also corroborates other studies that have found that there is a difference in the attributional styles of general education and special education teachers (Podell & Tournaki, 2007; Woodcock & Vialle, 2010). As researchers have speculated that this difference may be attributable to a difference in teacher preparation (Podell & Tournaki, 2007) it would be advantageous if teacher education programs included efforts to alert preservice teachers to the differences in their views of general education students and of students with disabilities. Being alert to one's own biases may help future teachers be more objective when interpreting the abilities and efforts of students with disabilities.

As for the true purpose of this study, it would be beneficial to keep in mind that it is during early and middle adolescence that that age related downward spiral of academic disengagement peaks (Gillet et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2008). If this downward spiral is not halted, by the time a student reaches the ninth-grade the risk for not completing high school becomes very real (Belfanz, 2011). Therefore schools need to develop systems that can identify students when they begin to display behaviors that could interrupt the path to school completion (e.g., disengagement, low grades, excessive absences, continuous disruptive behavior) and implement strategies that will pull the students closer to

the school rather than push them away. We should also be reminded that to be successful in school students need to be engaged in the school environment. It is of little importance if that engagement is the result of academic interests or the result of participation in extra-curricular activities such as a club.

Although this particular club did not have the desired effect, students who participated in the club felt that it is a way to make new friends and to foster closer relations between club members. Therefore it is possible to imagine that a club of this type is a starting point to engaging disengaged students in school. Given the importance and the urgency of instilling in at-risk students an intrinsic desire to be in school the dangers tied to doing nothing are immense therefore it is necessary to do something even if that something has effect on only a few students.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study examined the possibility of fostering friendships between students at-risk for school failure and students who are academically engaged. The intent was to create relations between the two groups that are strong enough to change the perceptions of the at-risk students with regards to the benefits of a successful academic career consequently increasing academic engagement and ultimately graduation potential (as opposed to drop out).

Based on the findings of this study several recommendations for future research should be considered. Replications of the present study could be done to determine if a social club with a longer duration (e.g., the entire school year) would be better suited to fostering strong friendships between at-risk students

and academically engaged students. Replications of the present study could also by done with a larger sample size as minimal changes were found in the present study. However, some considerations need to be made. The age group in question is not always easy to manage and adding students with behavioral issues can increase the difficulty in managing the club meetings. This particular afterschool club had approximately 30 participants with one teacher/researcher organizing it. It would not be wise to have a higher teacher-participant ratio. Therefore, to increase sample size it would be advisable to have multiple clubs at the same time rather than one club with more participants.

Replications of the study could also be done in areas with a more heterogeneous population in order to make generalization more plausible. Also, this study could be replicated with sixth grade students or with ninth grade students as these are the transition moments when disengagement is at its peak (Gillet, Vallerand, Lafrenière, 2012, Skinner, Marchand, Furrer, & Kinderman, 2008).

A similar study might also be done with a focus on IEP goals. Teachers could be asked to rate changes in areas such as social skills or self-advocacy after participation in an afterschool social club. A simple tally system (e.g., a plus if improvement is evident, a minus if improvement is not evident) can be used to identify whether or not a student has improved in these areas.

Based on student reports during the focus groups it became evident that teachers for this group were a major catalyst to student satisfaction in school confirming a wealth of research on the subject (Ford, 2011; Gallegher, 2002;

Oakes, 2010; Patterson et al., 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). It could be beneficial therefore to investigate the possibility of a club aimed at strengthening student-teacher relationships. Subsequently both the perceptions of the teachers and the students can be analyzed to determine if positive student-teacher relations can be intentionally fostered and if those relationships can change student perceptions and ultimately their engagement in school.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the quantitative and qualitative research findings and the integration of the two. The chapter begins with the analysis of the findings of the quantitative component of the study. This analysis revealed that student grades, GPA and number of absences per quarter fluctuated little throughout the year. Teacher reports corroborate the results of the data obtained from student academic records.

The teacher reports suggest a discrepancy between teacher perceptions of student engagement. The two general education teachers who participated in the study saw a worsening in student engagement and participation while a third teacher who participated in the study, a special education teacher, was more optimistic with regard to student engagement and participation. This could be due to a more positive attributional style found to be common among special education teachers with regard to special education students (Podell & Tournaki, 2007; Vlachou, Eleftheriadou, & Metallidou, 2014, Woodcock & Vialle, 2010).

The results of the student surveys reveal that no significant difference was found for indicators of behavioral engagement (i.e., booster behaviors) and of

emotional disaffection (i.e., mufflers). Results denote a significant difference for indicators of emotional engagement (i.e., booster thoughts) and of behavioral disaffection (i.e., guzzlers). These results however were not in the expected direction indicating a decrease in student engagement toward the conclusion of the club meetings, which coincided with the end of the school year.

Analysis of the results of the *Peer Nomination Form* also reveals a discrepancy. These indicate that no new friendships came about that might be attributable to participation in the afterschool social club. However, student reports during the focus groups reveal that the beginnings of new friendships that might have come about because of the increased contact during club meetings is a reality.

The analysis of the qualitative data reveals that these students put more emphasis on the importance of teachers rather than on peer relations as a catalyst to a satisfying (or not) academic experience. These results also reveal a difference between how academically engaged students and at-risk students view teachers and the amount of work they give, with engaged students having positive things to say and at-risk students having negative things to say. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and student locus of control with regard to core subject class and to friendship formation were also discussed in this chapter.

The section on the integration of the results of the quantitative and qualitative components of the study gives the researcher the opportunity to generate explanations that might not have been noticed without this integration. Four sets of results were examined.

The limitations section of this chapter examines features of the study that inhibit generalizability. These limitations include small sample size, homogeneity of the sample, type of school the study was conducted in and the surveys that were used. This chapter also includes a section on recommendations for future research and a section on implications for practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Motivation and Engagement Scale sample questions

- Self-belief: “If I try hard, I believe I can do my schoolwork well.”
- Learning focus: “I feel very happy with myself when I really understand what I’m taught at school.”
- Valuing school: “Learning at school is important.”
- Persistence: “If I cannot understand my schoolwork, I keep trying until I do.”
- Planning: “Before I start a project, I plan out how I’m going to do it.”
- Study management: “When I do homework, I usually do it where I can concentrate best.”
- Disengagement: “I’ve given up being interested in school.”
- Self-sabotage: “Sometimes I don’t try hard at school so I can have a reason if I don’t do well.”
- Anxiety: “When I have a project to do, I worry about it a lot.”
- Failure avoidance: “The main reason I try at school is because I don’t want to disappoint my parents.”
- Uncertain control: “When I don’t do well at school I don’t know how to stop that from happening next time.”

Note. From Fredricks et al. (2011) pp. 36-37

Appendix B: Engagement Versus Disaffection with Learning: Teacher Report

Behavioral Engagement

1. In my class, this student works as hard as he/she can.

2. When working on class work in my class, this student appears involved.

3. When I explain new material, this student listens carefully.

4. In my class, this student does more than required.

5. When this student doesn't do well, he/she works harder.

Emotional Engagement

1. In my class, this student is enthusiastic.

2. In class, this student appears happy.

3. When we start something new in class, this student is interested.

4. When working on class work, this student seems to enjoy it.

5. For this student, learning seems to be fun.

Behavioral Disaffection

1. When we start something new in class, this student thinks about other things.(–)

2. In my class, this student comes unprepared.(–)

3. When faced with a difficult assignment, this student doesn't even try.(–)

4. In my class, this student does just enough to get by.(–)

5. When we start something new in class, this student doesn't pay attention.(–)

Emotional Disaffection

1. a. When we work on something in class, this student appears to be bored.(–)

   b. When doing work in class, this student looks bored.(–)

2. a. When working on classwork, this student seems worried.(–)

   b. In my class, this student is anxious.(–)

3. a. In class, this student seems unhappy.(–)

   b. In my class, this student appears to be depressed.(–)

4. a. In my class, this student is angry.(–)

   b. When working on class work, this student appears frustrated.(–)

5. a. When I explain new material, this student doesn't seem to care.(–)

   b. When working on class work in my class, this student seems

   uninterested.(–)

Note. From Skinner, Kindermann and Furrer, 2009.

Appendix C: Peer Nomination Form (Modified version)

For each question, please rank the top students that best fit the answer. If, in your opinion, there are not as many as five people who fulfill the requirements of a particular question, name only the top two or three. However, wherever possible please rank the top five.

1. Who would you prefer to work with on a difficult assignment?
   1st _____
   2nd _____
   3rd _____
   4th_____
   5th_____
2. If you were sent on an errand in school who would you like to accompany you?
   1st _____
   2nd _____
   3rd _____
   4th_____
   5th_____
3. If you needed help on an assignment, who would you prefer to have help you?
   1st _____
   2nd _____
   3rd _____
   4th_____

5th_____

4. Who do you prefer to sit with at lunch?
   1st _____
   2nd _____
   3rd _____
   4th_____
   5th_____
5. Which of your friends is most likely to cheer you up if you feel low?
   1st _____
   2nd _____
   3rd _____
   4th_____
   5th_____
6. Who is the best all-around with other students?
   1st _____
   2nd _____
   3rd _____
   4th_____
   5th_____

Note: Adapted from Weltz, 1956.

Appendix D: Afterschool Social Club Meeting Agenda

Meeting Date*	Team Building Activity	Discussion
January 21	Icebreaker: Find someone who. Students were given a list of statements such as, find someone who has a little brother or find someone who had pizza last weekend. They had to mingle and ask each other questions to find someone who fits the characteristics. The first to complete the list was the winner.	• Introduction to the recycling program. • Students completed pretest surveys.
January 28	Snowball Fight. Students wrote something about themselves on a piece of paper without signing their name. They crumbled the paper into a ball and threw the balls at each other as in a snowball fight. When facilitator yelled stop, students picked up a snowball and tried to find whom it belonged to. Once they	• Viewed video. Bill Nye the Science Guy: Garbage • Discussed waste that school produces. • Identified school recyclables for collection.

	found the person who wrote the statement they asked questions to get more information about what was written. This was done several times. At the end students shared what they had found out about the people they had talked to.	
February 4	Pass the rock. Students were randomly put into two teams**. They sat on chairs, in a line with the teams facing each other. Students passed a small rock behind their backs. When the facilitator yelled stop each team had to guess who on the other team had the rock. The team that guessed the most often won.	• Discussed/brainstormed program logo and slogan. • Students volunteered to bring samples following week for a vote. • Discussed creative recycle bin contest***.
February 11	Toilet Paper Air Toss. Students were divided into groups of 3 and each group was given a square of toilet paper. Each team had to see how long they could keep one square of toilet paper in the air by blowing it. Team members were not allowed to touch the toilet paper or let it fall on their faces. They could only use their breath.	• Voted on logo and slogan. • Discussed/brainstormed presentation to classes to encourage participation in school wide recycling campaign and contest.
February 18	Poster drawing. Students were put into pairs and asked to make posters advertising upcoming recycle campaign and contest.	• Created posters • Hung posters throughout school.
February 28	Pass the hula-hoop. Students formed two circles. A Hula-hoop was placed over one student's arm in each group. Students in each group joined hands. Without letting go of anyone's hand, each team had to find a way to move the hula-hoop all the way around the circle. The team to reach the goal first without letting go won.	• Organized students in groups of 3 or 4. Groups were to present recycle campaign and contest to classes. • Groups prepared presentation speech.

March 4	Alphabet Backpack: Students were divided into groups of 4 or 5. Everyone on the team searched through his or her own pockets, backpacks, etc. The group tried to come up with one possession that began with each letter of the alphabet. The winning team was the one to have objects representing the most letters.	• Groups revised and edited presentation speech. • Groups practiced presentation speech.
March 11	Back-to-Back Drawing. Students were put in pairs and instructed to sit back-to-back. One student was given paper and color pencils. The other student was given a simple drawing. The person holding the picture gave verbal instructions to their partner on how to draw the shape or image they were given (without simply telling them what the shape or image is). After a set amount of time, partners compared their images and saw which team drew the most accurate replica. The process was repeated with students changing roles.	• Devised rubric to judge recycle bins. • Chose teams to judge following week's recycle bins contest.
March 18	Computer scavenger hunt. Students were put in pairs and searched the internet to find the answer to questions about the environment, waste, pollution, recycling, etc.	• Discussed results of scavenger hunt.
April 1	Pair and group stand. Pairs sat back-to-back with arms linked. They had to stand up together. When successful two more students were added and all four 4 did the same thing. Students were added until they could not stand.	• Discussed experience judging contest. • Discussed any issues with recycle collection.
April 8	Guest: Art teacher; crafts with recyclable materials	• Finished crafts
April 15	Telephone chain. Teams of 8 to 10	• Discussed any issues

	members. Team members were spread out in lines. The first person in each line was shown a picture by the facilitator and had to tell the next person what was in the picture. This continued until the last person received the description and then had to attempt to draw the picture. The team with the most accurate drawing won.	with recycle collection.
April 22	Don't Let It Drop. Students were divided into teams of 6-8 people and each member was given a number from 1-3. Each team was given a balloon. At 'go' each team tried to keep their balloon in the air. There were 3 rules: players with the number 1 could not use their arms or hands, number 2 players could not touch the balloon twice in a row and each number three player had to touch the balloon at least once. If a team's balloon touched the ground the team was out and had to sit down on the ground. Last team standing won.	• Discussed any issues with recycle collection.
April 29	Silent Line-up. Two teams. Without talking the groups had to line up according to shoe size from smallest to largest.	• Discussed field trip details, permission slips, due dates, etc.
May 6	Spider Web. Two pieces of string were taped across a doorway, one at about a height of three-and-a-half feet and the other at a height of around five feet. This string was the poisonous spider web. Teams had to get all their members through the opening between the strings without touching it. Difficulty was increased by taping more pieces of string across the doorway as groups succeeded in passing through.	• Discussed any issues with recycle collection.

May 13	Battle of the Air bands. Age appropriate music was used. Teams of 3 or 4 students were formed. Students were given time to decide who would be the singers, guitarists, drummers, etc. They were given time to choose, rehearse, and perform a lip-synced version of their song. After the performances, teams voted on the winner (no one could vote for their own band).	• Finished air bands.
May 20	Few students due to 5th grade prom.	• Students shared experiences during field trip.
May 27	End of year celebration.	• Students completed posttest surveys.

*Each meeting ended with milk or juice and cookies
**Teams were made up of both engaged and disengaged students. Teams were chosen using popsicle sticks. Each popsicle stick had a student's name written on it. The sticks were placed in a container that had a smaller container hidden in it in such a way that it was not visible to students. The sticks of the at-risk students were placed in the inner box and the sticks with the names of the engaged students were placed in the outer box, or vice versa, so as to surround the at-risk students' sticks. An engaged student's stick would be selected then an at-risk student's stick would be selected, or vice versa, until all teams had been formed.
***Participating classes competed to see which had the most creative recycle bin. The administration offered a prize to the class with the most creative bin.

Appendix E: Guiding Questions for Focus Groups

1. How do you feel about coming to school everyday?

Probing questions:

- Tell me more about why you like school.
- Tell me more about why you don't like school.
- If student likes school also ask: What don't you like about school?
- If student doesn't like school also ask: What do you like about school?

2. What grades do you typically get?

Probing questions:

- How do you feel when you do well on an assignment?
- How do you feel when you do badly on an assignment?
- What happens when you get a good grade in school?
- What happens when you get a bad grade in school?

3. What do you do when you have a difficult or long assignment?

Probing questions:

- Tell me about the effort you put into an assignment.
- Tell me about how you organize your work.
- What do you do if you don't understand an assignment?

4. Do you ever fell like giving up on you schoolwork?

Probing questions:

- If yes, ask: What might make you feel discouraged in school?
- If no, ask: What keeps you interested in school?

5. Describe the relationship among the students in you class/grade?

6. What did you think about the club?

Probing question:

- What suggestions could you make for future clubs of this type?

7. Did you make any new friends in the club?

Probing questions:

- If yes, ask: Tell me more about your new friendships?
- If no, ask: Why do you feel you didn't make any new friends?
- What do you think could be done to foster new friendships?

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