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Running head: SCHOOL ATTRITION AND DROPOUT RECOVERY

School Attrition and Dropout Recovery

Ameliorated by Literacy, Engagement, and Resilience

Dissertation

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Submitted to the College of Education

Eastern Michigan University

Ypsilanti, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Educational Studies in Urban Education

July 27, 2015

Dissertation Committee

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Dedication

For my seven amazing miracle children:
Benjamin Robin (Jennifer & Henry Robin), Patricia Janice (Nathan),
and Alexander Joseph (Caitlyn) whom I love beyond all measure.
I am grateful for their intelligence, advice, support, and love!
Always enjoy life as a wonderful adventure!

With love to my Family, Friends, and Students
who have encouraged and supported me:

Always be curious
Everything in life is a learning experience
Good thinking and literacy are key
Be grateful for your gifts and talents
Open the door to opportunity
Walk through with Faith
Smile!

For my beloved husband, partner, and best friend, Robin Richard Voss.
He is the greatest gift of love and laughter that I have ever received.
I am grateful for his unwavering dedication to me,
to our children, to all of our endeavors,
and to our shared faith.

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Linda Lewis-White, Ph.D. – Chair

Paul (Joe) Ramsey, Ph.D.

Nancy Copeland, Ph.D.

Virginia Harder, Ph.D.

William Abernethy, Ph.D.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors and feelings that contribute to students leaving school and later returning to adult education programs to attain a General Educational Development (GED) credential. This process was found to be ameliorated by the positive factors of literacy, engagement, and resilience. These factors were selected because of their importance to the success of the schooling process and their interrelatedness. When these factors were self-reported at low levels combined with negative social circumstances, it was much more difficult for students to avoid school attrition or to reengage in dropout recovery. An explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was employed with an emancipatory lens facilitated by a supportive listener, as researcher, to examine the voices of a disadvantaged population of high school dropouts who shared their educational journeys and reconnection to school. These personal reports were given through the use of the Survey of Adolescent Reading Attitudes (SARA), The Resilience Scale for Adolescents (READ), and ethnographic interviews. Students felt that the inherent value of a high school credential was equally as important as the desire to garner employment. Literacy, they believed, was a protective factor as a skill that was an early-developed asset; however, that ability alone could not help them prevail in view of overwhelming personal roadblocks and ever increasing complex content material. Literacy skills did help reassure students of the possibility of success when finding a good dropout recovery program to obtain a GED. Students' self-determination, through engagement and resilience, revealed an intrinsic feeling of wanting to reach the educational goal for "myself." A significant link between reading attitudes and resilience was demonstrated in a correlation study with the two established assessment scales.

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Introduction: School Attrition and Dropout Recovery

Coming back. This is a challenging path that students who have left school without a diploma must follow to seek a credential for a sustainable job or educational advancement in our society. They progress on a journey to return or reengage with opportunities for education. Out of the tumult of instability and adverse effects from poverty, homelessness, high stress communities, school absenteeism, negative behaviors, lack of adult relationships, and real life drama, the high school “dropout” (a disparaging moniker that often comes with negative social judgment) must overcome multiple barriers that cause the cessation of education. The roadblocks that push students out of school are often the same roadblocks that need to be overcome to reconnect to school. This population, coming back to school, is at a disadvantage due to dysfunction from the physical environment, social, or emotional problems in childhood, a lack of research and programs for returning dropouts, a lack of a national or regional database for tracking re-enrollees, incomplete or inaccurate academic records, and funding issues. Services for older high school dropouts are now centered in adult basic education (ABE) programs where students can update their academic skills, study for the high school diploma connected to their school of origin (if that is available), or enter a program to prepare for an equivalency credential.

Rather than viewing high school dropouts as disconnected outcasts of our society, we are presented with a chance to engage with them and recognize the great potential of their creative thinking and community contributions while discovering the different ways they have found to navigate their return to the institutional system. The power of their stories of coming back to get a high school credential can be harnessed and employed to support returning students who value education for themselves, their families, and their communities. Pursuing a General Educational

Development (GED) credential, considered a high school diploma equivalent, is the salutary spirit of resilient students taking action to reengage to define and reach for their goals.

Purpose of This Study

This study is undertaken to investigate factors and feelings that contribute to students leaving school and later returning to adult education programs to attain a GED. This process is ameliorated by the positive factors of literacy, engagement, and resilience. The study should demonstrate that when self-reported low levels of literacy (resulting in low academic achievement), engagement, and resilience are present, it is much more difficult for students to stay in school and reconnect once again. When these students report high efficacy in literacy, engagement, and resilience, they should feel successful and complete the steps in their personal goals. The interplay of these factors is expected to show a bolstering or increase of student achievement. The research focuses on a disadvantaged population of students who are overcoming or have overcome environmental, social, and personal roadblocks to education. The demographic data of this population and the reported attitudes toward literacy, engagement, and resilience are of special interest. These data will reveal a more clear profile of how successful GED students seeking credential recovery are affected by literacy, engagement, and resilience in their journey of coming back to school.

Rationale

Why Literacy, Engagement, and Resilience?

When researching students who have left and then returned to school, it would be important to note why these three educational process elements are selected for this study. Cognitive skills stand out as the gold standard of learning as evidenced by the traditional social pressure to celebrate IQ and ACT scores grounded in the nationally accepted standardized

achievement tests (ACT, 2006), and acknowledge actual measured academic achievement (Putnam, 2015).

It should be considered that all behaviors are related to our cognitive realm. Economists quantified hard cognitive skills needed for securing jobs and often disregarded the “soft” skills of character traits of good disposition or temperament (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Currently myriad “noncognitive” abilities or social and emotional learning skills (SEL) (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015) are needed to improve achievement and are at the forefront of understanding the learning needs of students. (Kautz, Heckman, Diris, ter Weel, & Borghans, 2014; Kamenetz, 2015b; Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001). Heckman and Rubinstein (2001) reported that students achieving a GED and high school graduates are about equal in terms of cognitive ability. However, the GED graduates lacked sufficient non-cognitive skills; therefore, they were less successful in attaining jobs and achieving life choices than their counterparts. In fact, even Heckman’s early research showed that early childhood intervention’s transcendent effect over time was with non-cognitive skills like motivation, not necessarily in the cognitive outcome years later (Heckman, Hsueh, Rubinstein, 2000). Most mainstream research had been completed in the “one-dimensional ability” (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001, p.145), usually interpreted as cognitive skill, and all but ignored these other essential affective traits. Today, common achievement is measured on standardized tests with little regard for non-cognitive or affective skills. “Much of the neglect of non-cognitive skill and analysis of earnings, schooling, and other lifetime outcomes is due to the lack of any reliable measure of them” (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001, p. 145). However, the noncognitive or affective elements of engagement (interest, connection, and participation in family, school, and communities), and resilience (perseverance, self-efficacy, and grit) (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007) are now getting

attention because they not only support learning, but are also recognized as necessary for academic success (Gibbs, Erickson, Dufur, & Miles, 2014). It appears that grades are better indicators of future student success more than standardized tests, mostly because it takes into account the many other noncognitive issues of following directions, working in collaboration, and character issues needed for the social aspects in school and later in life (Hiss & Franks, 2014). The three elements of literacy, engagement, and resilience are interrelated as they can provide a synthesized network of skills that includes both the cognitive and noncognitive (similar to the range of assessment that grades can give) and are used for reciprocal communication, meaningful connection to relevant content, and an intrinsic will to learn.

Literacy

Powerful literacy or critical literacy is analysis of complex texts, deconstruction, reconstruction, and the creation of new ideas that work with and challenge society, and must be taught in schools. It must have an aspect of situating the individual in society for an awareness and participation in the social activities to which literacy can open the doors (Janks, 2010).

Literacy is getting more attention as researchers see the need to teach literacy at every grade. The reading continuum starts with learning to learn to read, learning to read, and finally reading to learn as children encounter more complex texts (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) use a model with basic literacy (elementary level) at the base of a triangle, then moving up to intermediary literacy (usually with more vocabulary and text structures introduced in middle grades), and finally at the top of their pyramid, one would find the disciplinary literacy portion to effectively teach students to use powerful literacy in ways that professionals in the field might employ. Informational text is the centerpiece of middle and high school, usually exemplified in content literacy (knowledge of subject matter) and leading to disciplinary literacy

(which focuses on the tools and ways of thinking and analyzing in the field). The Council for Advancing Adult Literacy (2010) states, "...adolescent students need explicit instruction in reading and writing all the way through the 12th grade" (p.18). The Council is concerned that students are dropping out or graduating unprepared because of the lack of this instruction. Action must be taken, supported by research, to teach literacy skill for complex tasks in the upper grades. It is now evident "that secondary school students in the United States are not reading well enough to succeed in careers or college, with particular concerns about their readiness to participate in the so-called STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Mathematics) professions" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012, p.16). Moreover, many high school students, especially minorities from low resourced schools, struggle to keep up with class content because of low literacy skills and drop out with the belief that they will not graduate (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). This issue has been a known concern; yet, secondary literacy proficiency has not improved (Council for Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010).

The literacy component is contained in the cognitive domain of skills, while engagement and resilience generally reside in the noncognitive or the social and emotional spectrum for optimal learning. Currently, people are focused on the "cognitive hypothesis" (Tough, 2012) where parents and teachers are looking at the academic or cognitive skills of students to see how they compare to others, and to predict future economic and social success. Levine and Smith (2001) performed research for the Carnegie Institute in 1994, reporting how vitally important early childhood development was on student future academic success. This precipitated a national conversation, legislation such as initial government grants for Head Start in 1995 (Administration for Children & Families, 2015), and many state and community movements to address early childhood learning concerns to lay the foundation for all students. Many parents

are investing in high quality early preschool, private lessons, and literature. Of course, the importance of reading aloud to students is essential (Kalb, G. & van Ours, J. C., 2013; Tough, 2012). From early childhood, the beginning reading instruction helps students to get to the “reading to learn” stage where content/information material is more challenging.

Literacy as a cognitive skill is not simply an inoculation in elementary school for all future reading tasks (Council for Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010). It must be taught through high school to develop the critical literacy and disciplinary literacy skills to go beyond basic functioning to the ability to participate fully in college and society with a job and social responsibilities (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). This cognitive area is vital for students to develop and improve as printed and digital challenges arise. Otherwise, they will be short of the skills or desire to complete high school and to move on to career and college. It is important for this foundational skill to be measured, compared, and related to the other research factors of engagement and resilience because it is a lynchpin for all learning. Powerful literacy, not just basic or functional literacy, but *critical literacy*, as a personal and social justice issue, is recognized throughout the world.

The World Literacy Foundation explains, “Literacy involves not only reading and writing but also the acquisition of the skills necessary for effective and productive performance within society” (Cree, Kay, & Steward, 2012, p.3). Gardner (2007), from his book *Five Minds for the Future*, builds his five cognitive aspects of thinking on the mastery of literacy and incorporated the necessary skills of respect, discipline, synthesis, ethics, and creativity on the social and work environment which appears to value the integration of some noncognitive skills (pp.160-161). Certainly, literacy is connected to the affective aspects of learning.

Noncognitive Skills and Affect

It is clear that all schools have geared toward achievement accountability since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and that post-secondary education requires adequate grades to attend specific colleges. In addition to academic rigor and an increased fervor that the government has shown toward improving the graduation rates (Yettick & Lloyd, 2015), more attention is being paid to the “educational pipeline” with new research for career and college readiness (Hooker & Brand, 2010).

Persistence, positive dispositions, and general psychological affect or emotional state are equally as important as natural intelligence for student success in school and in careers (Hooker & Brand, 2010). Kautz, Heckman, Diris, ter Weel, and Borghans (2014) detail their reasons for noncognitive skills being a more predictive indicator of student success. They declare that all skills (cognitive and noncognitive) are not carved in stone, but can actually be more plastic— influenced by interventions in early childhood and throughout life from people and environments that can alter behaviors and support lifetime learning. Dweck (2006) bases her student success model on a growth mindset. Her psychological process is founded on an outlook that has optimistic productivity, rather than a fixed mindset of skills that are limiting. Teachers are encouraged to promote a growth mindset so that students will learn from their mistakes and achieve at a higher level with the next task. Cognitive skills can indicate student ability for achievement, but noncognitive skills can go beyond that narrow calculation. “Noncognitive skills are universally valued across all cultures, religions, and societies” (Kautz et al., 2014, p.10).

Engagement

The information that we have on students who left high school indicates that engagement and resilience played a key role in their struggles. Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison in “The Silent Epidemic” (2006) confirm that students needed to be engaged to learn. The research shows that from the lack of attendance to a lack of commitment (due to boredom), achievement in a class did not happen and students dropped out. In “Don’t Call Them Dropouts” (America’s Promise Alliance, 2014), it is found that with little connectedness to school and with resilience in need of support, it is essential to overcome the combination of factors or struggles in toxic environments.

The dropout literature designates that one of the most important reasons that students leave school is that they are not engaged or personally committed to the learning that is taking place in class. “Student engagement has emotional, behavioral, and cognitive components, which are sometimes classified as social and academic engagement,” according to Mac Iver & Mac Iver (2009, p. 5), based on 1989 research by Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez. This aspect is integral to the student connection or disconnection to attending school. While engagement is appraised as the physical act of participating and concentrating (thus cognitive), there is a specific social and emotional aspect that can be labeled as noncognitive. It is the noncognitive component that is more difficult to measure. A teacher might notice the student in attendance and perhaps jotting down a note, yet if the student is not immersed in the subject and actively processing information for comprehension, then the student is not interested or engaged.

Lawson & Lawson (2013) recognize engagement as a “dynamic system of social and psychological constructs as well as a synergistic process” (p. 432) that encompasses all of the stakeholders and the environments in the student’s life. The social and emotional cultural milieu

is the framework from which each child must navigate to participate with interest and connect to school. Students seek out relevant material and placement in classes that are chosen and crafted for their ability and success (Learning Point Associates, 2007, p. 6). Why the focus on engagement? Because we have seen many studies that show disengagement leads to dropping out, for example, from “The Silent Epidemic” (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006) to “Don’t Call Them Dropouts” by America’s Promise Alliance (2014), that show that students want to be engaged and connect to teachers. Astin (1984) originally described engagement as a mostly behavioral action of participation. It is now known to be a social emotional connection filled with interest, relationships, relevancy, commitments, and yes, a “cognitive investment” (Leach & Zepke, 2011, p. 193), or a curiosity or a yearning to learn. These researchers have found that there are many facets to engagement, including what motivates students, length of time on task, collaborations, personal relationships with peers, mentors, teachers, and community members. Two main aspects of engagement revolve around the ability of a student to construct a personal knowledge of the materials offered and to build a transactional exchange of purposeful learning between the student and the teacher or mentor. These indicators reveal the necessity of including the active learning process enhanced by engagement in this research.

Resilience

The characteristic of resilience has also been a highlight in pedagogical circles. It means to have a positive outcome in the face of significant struggles. Research indicates that resilience is strengthened by the following:

- motivation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002)
- self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000)
- self-efficacy for accomplishment (Bandura, 1997)

- self-efficacy toward learning goals (Schunk, 1991)
- grit, or the toughness and ability to stick to a goal (Duckworth & Gross, 2014)
- perseverance (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007)
- a “growth mindset” that encourages students to believe in their own growth in learning with repeated attempts at problem-solving with incremental learning (Dweck, 2006).

Yeager & Dweck’s (2012) research reveals that students who believe or are taught that academic and social skills are flexible and can be improved with development show resilience in the face of academic and social challenges. These character skills, or the noncognitive skill sets, are so highly prominent and valuable in helping student achievement, that teachers desire its measurement in their classrooms. The problem comes in that the measurement of resilience is somewhat in its nascent stage, and is influenced by the personal remembrances and biases of students and teachers. As of now, Duckworth and Yeager (2015) are hesitant to give a blessing for a standard instrument for measuring resilience, even though others (Kautz et al, 2014) find some very “reliable” ways to measure these skills. The authors agree that resilience is a profound characteristic that influences student outcomes and achievement. Pink (2009) suggests that the inner drive toward personal goals is the most motivating strategy of all. He builds on previous research to show that humans have an innate desire to make choices, problem-solve, and persevere toward self-satisfaction on personal accomplishments intrinsically without external rewards. The downside of his observations is that most entities use incentives with positive results. Self-reporting from students demonstrates that they are easily able to describe their own perceptions of how they strive toward a goal. It is with this knowledge that this important and seemingly well-researched phenomenon is included as one of the factors in this

study. A new approach to quantify the students' self-reporting of resilience is found with a well-known, valid, and reliable instrument, the Resilience Scale for Adolescents from the Norway Institute of Science and Technology (Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006). Prior to the research at hand, this tool had only been used for psychological studies in Norway and not in the social sciences or education, according to a personal communication with the authors. The current study presents an opportunity to find a relationship with resilience and the other dropout/recovery factors of literacy and engagement, using their resilience scale.

The importance of both cognitive and noncognitive traits is valuable to study. These are uniquely related to both the failure and success of students in high school or rejoining for a credential and should be studied as they were represented in bundles of naturally occurring responses that students had in previous studies. Therefore, literacy, engagement, and resilience have been combined in this study not only because of their own unique values to student learning, but also because their combined value could bring new understandings to the students who have not been in the center of research thus far. This combination of the three educational components or factors can have the benefit of balancing strengths and supporting weaknesses during the learning process. It is an inquiry into discovering the personal allegories of the students as they describe how these three important aspects of the educational process interplay as they reach their goals despite the social, personal, and environmental roadblocks

Grit

The will to learn, termed "grit," or the perseverance and conscientiousness toward a goal (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), is hard to measure, but is important to gaining good grades, a diploma, and personal achievement. Recent research by Magdalena G. Grohman, (Sparks, 2014, p. 9) finds that grit does not have an effect on creativity and its openness to free-

forming parameters for new ideas. It appears to be specific to structured frameworks like school or situations with defined strata for achieving goals. Grohman contends that knowing the elements required for goals, and how to achieve them, are a separate category than that of creativity. This population of disadvantaged high school recovery students, or any student, experiences education in a more traditional format that is linear and structured; and the parameters for success are fairly clear. This historical school format benefits students with high levels of grit. Unfortunately, the opportunities for success are limited for students that are in crisis, have tremendous adversity, have unstable living conditions, or have little adult support and, therefore, do not have chances to exhibit high levels of grit during the high school or middle school years.

Background

Much emphasis has been given to “dropouts” in America. A key player in efforts to resolve the dropout crisis is Robert Balfanz, Director for the Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University. He specifically delineated for the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) that many schools were organized for failure and that the “implemented design does not match their educational challenge” (Balfanz, 2010, p. 4). He pointed to an educational task that has “three inter-related” components: academics, engagement, and poverty. Attention to elevating student skills to grade level, boosting engagement through active learning, and enacting programs of resilience for goal achievement and reduced absenteeism, while responding to the circumstances of student urban poverty, would improve learning conditions. More networked support systems with wrap-around services focused on graduation, centered in schools, and bolstered by communities, could address these needs.

Balfanz states, “We cannot have a country in which entire communities are cut off from the only real avenue to prosperity—a good education” (2010, p. 1). Students who have returned for their “good education” have unique viewpoints of this journey; these can inform educators of ways to improve the pedagogy of literacy, engagement, and resilience. Few studies have attested to the endeavors and struggles of these students, and none is known to have incorporated the aspects of these three key components of the educational process. Documented in this mixed methods study are personal stories of struggles toward an academic credential, thereby shining a light on the paths that many travel toward economic and personal freedom in our society. These students volunteered to share their remedies to overcome roadblocks so that they could encourage their contemporaries.

According to the National Coalition for Literacy (2012), “Nearly 30 million adults in the U.S. have below a high school education...” The literacy skills for about one out of five adults in our society are weak. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014) data rank 12th graders as only 38% at or above proficient (rating is measured using basic, proficient, and advanced levels with proficient meaning grade level). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2013b, p. 20) reported that one out of every six adults in the United States reads at *below* the basic reading level. It rates these same students only 26% at or above proficient levels. The statistics are more serious when looking at the break down by race: White students scored 47%, Blacks scored 16%, and Hispanics scored 23% at or above proficient in reading in 2013. The scores for math in the same year resulted in 33% for Whites, 7% for Blacks, and 12% for Hispanics students at or above proficient (Heitin, 2014, p. 6). These students, soon to be young adults, without better secondary content literacy and numeracy instruction, will need adult basic education.

In this research study, these students, who left and returned to school for further education, are viewed as successful individuals who have fought through the obstacles and chose to be pro-active in attaining tools to improve their livelihoods. Whereas a high school diploma is not a panacea, it does situate a person in the best position to take advantage of resources, have more job opportunities, and offers a better quality of life. In “America’s Youth: Transitions to Adulthood” (Aud, KewalRamani, & Frohlich, 2011), there is evidence that higher levels of educational achievement for an individual bring about higher median job earnings, higher health status, and lower rates of poverty than those with limited achievement (such as forgoing a high school diploma).

The explanatory sequential mixed methods investigation planned for this study includes collecting a sample of their voices through demographic data and surveys followed by voluntary ethnographic interviews. By allowing students who have come back to get their high school credentials the opportunity to tell their textured stories, it will give some hope and share steps that others might utilize as they follow their own paths. The viewpoint taken by this researcher is an emancipatory philosophy—one that respects dropouts’ struggles, cheers for the breaking of stereotypes, and suggests changes to make the situation better (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The emancipatory viewpoint is a valuable approach, since it is possible to take a stand, recognize a personal belief that everyone deserves an education, and confront the negative social constructs of the high school dropout. This researcher encourages change by employing close inspection of their situations through demographics, collected data, the context of disadvantaged individuals and their situations, and the social realities of lived experiences through incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Mertens (2009) considers the emancipatory framework as being transformative because each researcher brings a human perspective based on one’s own

interests and attitudes, acknowledges those beliefs, and acts as an advocate of change for a democratic society. These behaviors influence the construction of knowledge that the researcher builds from the data that can transform the circumstances of underrepresented groups by shining a light on this population. In addition, this makes the case for the importance of funding and effective programs for students who are coming back to pursue new opportunities in jobs and college classes by completing their GEDs.

Hypotheses

The quantitative portion of this study was a self-reported school information form on demographic and descriptive data along with surveys that measured factors that align with reading achievement, engagement, and resilience. Hypotheses were as follows:

- Students who dropped out of high school have had difficulties in literacy.
- Reading attitudinal factors can be identified and related to engagement and resilience.
- There is an identifiable correlation between the students who dropped out of school and their low levels of engagement in the learning process.
- If students can make connections to school, social, and family structures, then they will be more willing to attend, engage, and succeed at getting a GED.
- Students who have dropped out of high school and returned to get a GED, or succeeded in completing a GED, will have a high level of resilience that can be motivating for college classes/employment.

Research Questions

Over twenty-five years of research have been performed with the population of high school dropouts (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009), but far less have incorporated the population of students coming back for more education. Some general questions arise for this investigation:

“Who are the dropout recovery students?” “What do they report about their levels of literacy, engagement, and resilience?” Considering the perspective of the high school dropout situated in history, both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this study investigated student-reported responses concerning the obstacles encountered in schooling, dropping out, and the successes of returning to school. The information from returning or dropout recovery students was collected to answer the questions below:

- What are the demographics of the population of returning or dropout recovery students?
- What influences do the factors of literacy, engagement, and resilience have on students returning to school or are successful in getting a GED?
- What are the reading attitudes of young adults who return to school for a GED?
- What are the resilience levels of students who return?
- What is the relationship between reading attitudes and resilience?
- How does the level of engagement make a difference to these returning students?
- What are the difficulties and successes of dropping out of high school and returning to an adult education program?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the working definitions used in this research are as follows:

- **School Attrition:** The process of leaving school due to personal, academic, or behavioral issues so that a high school diploma has not been an outcome of schooling. Forty-four percent drop out because of absenteeism and 37% because they considered it an easier path to pursue the GED. About a third

leaves because of pregnancy or other life events, 35% to earn money, and 38% because of a record of school failure (Education Week, 2013, 10-11).

- Dropout: A student who does not complete school with the cohort assigned with his/her age. A process that usually is not a single event, but behaviors and circumstances over time create a “push out or a pull out” situation leading to the exit from school by the student. Sometimes this population is called disconnected youth (Khadaroo, 2013).
- Dropout Recovery: A decision by the student to reenroll in a high school or adult education program for credit recovery or to attain a high school equivalency called a General Educational Development certificate. This process is often called reengagement for a neglected population (Sparks, 2013).
- Literacy: Understanding, evaluating, using, and engaging with written text to participate in the society, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013, p. 59). Literacy is the process of actively comprehending, assessing, reading, writing, viewing, and communicating through the written word in print and digital forms. It means one can participate and engage in society to influence or change conditions (Gipe, 2013).
- GED: The General Educational Development certificate based on the set of four tests that equate skills to a high school diploma (www.acenet.edu).
- Engagement (for the learner or student): The personal association, social connection, or relationships to the people/the context (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012, p. 743). It is affected by active participation, concentration,

attentiveness, commitment, motivation, sense of belonging, and the level of involvement one has toward a situation. Engagement must occur before learning can take place (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). These authors include the dimensions of affective (noncognitive), behavioral (action taken), and cognitive. High levels of engagement stem from the work on “flow” which is the total involvement, active awareness, and complete concentration of a person responding and learning from stimuli (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

- Motivation: The purposes or reasons that cause specific behavior (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).
- Resilience: The level at which one can use personal and social competencies and resources to persevere in the face of adversity (Hjemdal et al., 2006).

Significance of the Study

We have recently seen a history-making 81.4% graduation rate from high schools for the year 2013 (Everyone Graduates Center, 2015). This follows three decades during which the rate averaged from 70% to 75% (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014, pp. 9-10). Similarly, the number of students who left school each year has hovered around one million annually (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012), but recently dropped to roughly 800,000, according to America’s Promise Alliance (2014, p. 3). With three consecutive years of improvement in this rate, it is believed that the United States is on course to meet its 90% graduation by the year 2020 (Powell & Powell, 2014). This would meet the Grad Nation’s stated goal defined with the construction of the Civic Marshal Plan in 2010 to increase graduation rates and to mitigate the issue of “dropout factories” which are high schools that graduate 60% or less of their senior cohort in a given year (Balfanz & Legers, 2004; Balfanz, Bridgeland, Fox, DePaoli, Ingram, & Maushard, 2014, p. 3).

The news about the current 81.4% graduation rate is encouraging, but it is not all good. We still have about one out of five students who do not graduate. Heitin (2014) analyzed results of a report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress showing concern that twelfth grade students had not improved in reading and math scores since 2009. The report also showed that students in minority groups scored lower than Whites, “with African-American students scoring about 30 points below whites in both subjects” (p. 6). Further, this assessment *excludes* in its measure of academic skills the students who left school and *did not take the test*. Low academic skills result in lost credits and disrupted educations.

This disconcerting assessment portrays the majority of those who did complete high school as “underprepared students” heading toward postsecondary schools or jobs (Perin, 2013). The pathway for students who have dropped out of school and did not graduate with their four-year cohort is more limited and dependent on dropout recovery programs, usually involving the General Educational Development credential (GED) in an adult or community education program (Heckman, Humphries, LaFontaine, & Rodriguez, 2012). The new educational movement for accountability of learning endeavors to ensure that a high school diploma is attained with skills that carry students to college or careers using 21st century skills (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). Continued education from a diploma or a GED is just the springboard into adult life with a career or post-secondary classes and training—and not an endpoint.

Recent Research

Comparison Study

Notably, a prior study named “Don’t Call Them Dropouts” by America’s Promise Alliance (2014), led by Jonathan Zaff, profiles those who are called “interrupted high school enrollment students” (America’s Promise Alliance, 2014). The Alliance, describing itself on its

website (www.americaspromise.org) as the “nation’s largest partnership dedicated to improving the lives of young people.” The most well known partnerships related to high school graduation and dropout issues are the Alliance for Excellent Education, Grad Nation (www.GradNation.org), Civic Enterprises, Center for Promise (Tufts University), and the Everyone Graduates Center (John Hopkins University). These are all non-profit and well-connected agencies that work with communities, businesses, and the government. The umbrella of the America’s Promise Alliance group operates in collaboration with 360 civic, corporate, labor, and non-profit organizations to reach a goal of 90% graduation rate by the year 2020. Its charter was declared at the Presidents’ Summit for America’s Future in April 1997 with the signatures of Presidents Ford, Carter, Bush, Clinton, and Nancy Reagan (representing Ronald Regan), with subsequent endorsements by Presidents Bush (2001) and Obama (2014).

Students who leave school prefer not to be called “dropouts,” or some other politically correct euphemism. In the America’s Promise Alliance (2014) research, most students who left school and returned to mainstream or alternative education venues wanted to be given credit for their self-empowerment, reengagement, willingness to undergo the rigors of more education, and resilience. Its research outcomes, based on interviews and surveys of approximately 3,000 students nationwide, show that “interrupted enrollment,” or leaving school for at least one semester, is typically the result of a group of multiple adverse factors. These are condensed into four major themes that describe the reasons why students left school: “clusters of factors,” “toxic environments,” “yearning for connectedness” to others/engagement (for good or ill), and “resilience in need of support,” meaning a significant supportive factor, usually an adult (America’s Promise Alliance, 2014, p. 7). His methodology employed the linear sequential method of qualitative research followed by an informed quantitative survey.

The “Don’t Call Them Dropouts” report analyzes a variety of factors such as individual characteristics, risk factors, and context (America’s Promise Alliance, 2014, p.11), influencing both categories of “interrupted students” and “completers.” They inquire about the motivation to return, since most of the participants were culled from youth reengagement programs. The youth revealed that the top reasons to return were the need for more education to get a good job (51.6%), encouragement from someone else (41.1%), more time available to work on school (32.3%), and the support of family (27.6%) (America’s Promise Alliance, 2014, p. 13-38). The researchers do not delve into more aspects of their current status in a recovery program, nor do they specifically look at the three factors of literacy, engagement, and resilience in an ameliorating way toward success in gaining a credential. The America’s Promise Alliance (2014) research is sensitive to the needs of this disadvantaged group by starting their study with focus groups to develop a list of their concerns before conducting a survey.

The primary conclusions for “dis-engagement and re-engagement” with school in the “Don’t Call Them Dropouts” report (America’s Promise Alliance, 2014, pp. 37-38) numbers in five categories at the given times of action for releasing or reattaching to school. They are the relative strength or personal efficacy of the student, the roadblocks encountered, relative ease of leaving or returning, relationships with adults, and constructive community support. The Alliance’s study is most closely related to the current study. However, it does not separate out the issue of literacy, does not spend much time analyzing the ways that returning students overcame roadblocks, nor does it focus on the interrelatedness of all of the factors on current conditions and status/success of those coming back to school.

It is the America’s Promise Alliance study that prompts this researcher to further investigate the voice of students coming back to school. It performs an exploratory sequential

mixed methods design with focus group discussions with 200 students, followed by a survey sent to students who are both high school graduates and non-graduates. In that study, the qualitative data informs the quantitative survey. The current study will follow the explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The initial quantitative section of this research will target the self-reported measure of GED students and GED graduates' reading attitudes, aspects of engagement, and resilience responses. Its results will inform the qualitative ethnographies that follow with structured questions to be used in the interviews. The sample sizes will be smaller—around 100 students for the surveys and 10 students for the interviews, depending on the commitment of volunteers. The comparison of these two studies will extend the understanding of these opportunity youth.

Education Begins with Literacy

The 2013 report, “The Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC)” [The acronym is part of the report title, and stands for “Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies”] reveals a protective factor in the United States for students born to better-educated parents—they usually have greater abilities in literacy. “The odds of being low-skilled are ten times greater among low-educated adults born to low-educated parents than among high-educated adults born to high-educated parents—much greater than in other countries” (OECD, 2013a, p. 10). “Students who struggle to read and write well, make up a substantial portion of the 1.2 million students who leave high school without a diploma each year” (Haynes, 2012, p. 1).

Today, young adults need an education more than ever to cope with the digital information age where the ability to secure a job is dependent on problem-solving skills, collaboration, and many forms of literacy. Students, starting in middle school and certainly in

high school, must learn disciplinary literacy. Gardner (2007) notes that there is a distinct difference between subject matter and discipline: “Disciplines represent a radically different phenomenon. A discipline constitutes a distinctive way of thinking about the world” (p. 27). In other words, practitioners of a discipline make certain observations, classifications, experiments, and theories. Students need to transcend subject matter to think in the disciplines to advance their critical thinking skills and be proficient in a career. This refers to literacy in content areas beyond foundational knowledge. Students need subject area expertise and comprehension skills when approaching a problem and must think like an historian or a scientist, for example (Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This extends reading to learn—and we must teach critical thinking skills in authentic contexts. However, one must have the rudimentary proficiencies to reach this level (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) reports that in 2005, only 30 million adults (age 16 years and older) could read at the basic level and 63 million read at the below *basic* level. In total, 93 million adults lacked the ability to take on extra classes in postsecondary schools or in job training (National Commission on Adult Literacy [NCAL], 2008). Of these, only 3% are receiving instruction through federal programs, English language instruction, or Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs (Haynes, 2012, p. 10). For many, this means the absence of a high school diploma and inadequate English language skills. The NAAL questions the silence of the American public on the issue of inadequate preparation for jobs due to insufficient literacy training. This is a national crisis that is linked to our public schools and their effectiveness (NCAL, 2008).

The international Survey of Adult Skills, conducted in 33 countries for the PIAAC, shows that the average literacy score for U.S. adults in 2012 on a five-point scale is at Level 2,

with Level 5 being the highest (OECD, 2013a). This means that the average American adult can carry out tasks that require finding similarities between digital or printed texts containing information and have some paraphrasing and low-level inference ability. This same survey determined that some Black (35%) and Hispanic (43%) adults in the United States scored below Level 2. At this level, adults could read short texts printed or digital and locate text-based answers to straightforward questions using basic vocabulary. Level 1 or below indicates the lowest level where adults are asked simple questions about text to find information and are not expected to understand text structure beyond simple vocabulary (OECDa, 2013, p. 11).

Since literacy is the bedrock of learning and must be mastered through interacting with multiple forms of communication, technology, graphics, and print, they must also be engaged and attentive to the task. In addition, a returning student in dropout recovery must find the self-determination and personal resilience to succeed. As noted by the U.S. Department of Education (Kamil, Borman, Dole, Kral, Salinger, & Torgesen, 2008, p.3), “Reading ability is a key predictor of achievement in mathematics and science, and the global information economy requires today’s American youth to have far more advanced literacy skills than those required by any previous generation.”

One can conclude that there is generally a hierarchy of skilled adults, with Black and Hispanic populations at the bottom of the scale. This disproportionately disqualifies them for many jobs or even access to GED programs that require a ninth grade reading level. Once these young adults are out of school, there are few avenues of support—they are left to proactively seek out programs rather than having the benefit of school counselors who seek them out. This is when students realize that it is incumbent upon themselves to undertake the burden of self-sustaining behaviors—which at this point is more difficult. However, the Kauffman Index of

Entrepreneurial Activity in 2012 reported that high school dropouts created 17% of all new businesses (Sparks, 2013). This is perhaps the best indicator of the potential for success when students find a way to reengage in productive opportunities.

The young adult population that has dropped out of school and has returned must be able to read at the ninth grade level to qualify to get a General Educational Development certificate (GED), considered to be high school diploma equivalency, at adult learning centers. Otherwise, those unable to qualify must take remedial classes to attain that level to continue. Of high school graduates continuing onward to two-year colleges, 43% will need remedial or developmental classes in literacy; and at four-year colleges, 29% will need these classes. Research shows that even for students who successfully enroll in college, literacy struggles are a possible inhibitor for success, and may contribute to the 30% college dropout factor in the first year (Bauerlein, 2011). Students who have dropped out of high school have even a greater need of support since they have missed large segments of their education.

Poverty

The Anne E. Casey Foundation (2015) in their “2015 Kids Count Data Book” raises the concern for students who have not fared well in this economy. One in five, or 10.1, million children lives in poverty, approximately 3.1 million more than in 2009. This is a deep concern for families still dealing with financial troubles after the recession. This environment of poverty affects all other aspects of a young person’s life, including schooling. “Economically-disadvantaged youth are less likely to graduate from high school and lead successful lives. Youth in poverty grow up to be parents in poverty, and the vicious cycle continues” (America’s Promise Alliance, 2015, p. 1). Many of these new facts and figures are just starting to be

analyzed and interventions relating to the opportunity gap for students in poverty should be at the forefront.

Balfanz (2010) notes that low skilled students come from under-resourced urban schools in areas of poverty that cannot produce a good education. Both academic abilities and soft skills or non-cognitive skills are affected by the weight of negative factors leading from poverty. This aspect must not be overlooked as students review their school interactions relating to their emotional responses to their life circumstances. According to Polakow (1995),

What happens inside classrooms does matter to children; it shapes their self-perceptions and the meanings they attribute to their daily school lives. Early tracking, scapegoating, sorting and sifting, and marginalizing, are not isolated experiences—rather, they are part of the pattern of neglect, of humiliation, and of disenfranchisement experienced by thousands of our children who are the targeted recipients of the pedagogy of the poor. (p. 268)

Rumberger (2013) acknowledges that poverty has a profound and lasting impact on students struggling to stay in school. A low-resourced environment can disadvantage students by reducing their social and economic choices. These imperiled or dropout factory high schools have now decreased in number by one-third, from 2,007 in 2002 to 1,359 in 2012 (Balfanz et al., 2014, p. 4). Families of color more often live in neighborhoods of poverty (Balfanz, 2010). The effects of poverty, and especially homelessness, are cited by 87% of high school dropouts in a recent research study as the cause of leaving school (America's Promise Alliance, 2014).

The U.S. Department of Labor also provides some pertinent information: Of those in the workforce in 2010, 21.4% of non-high school graduates were classified as “working poor,” compared to 9.2% for high school graduates, 4.5% for those with an associate's degree, and

2.1% for those with a bachelor's degree (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012, p. 2). The disadvantage of poverty has lasting effects throughout the school years causing absenteeism, disruption in grade content learning, and estranged peer groups.

The Race Factor

Until recently, the graduation rate for high school students has been roughly the same for the past forty years, fluctuating around 75 percent (Rumberger, 2011). As the graduation rate has improved from 75% to 80% generally reflects better news, about four in ten minority students drop out: "They are disproportionately male and from minority groups" (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012, p. 1). A recent study shows some improvement in the numbers for minority students, noting that White students graduate at a rate of 85%, Hispanic students reached a 76% rate, and African American students are at a rate of 68% (Balfanz et al., 2014, p. 9). Unquestionably, the stated Civic Marshal Plan goal of reaching a 90% rate by year 2020 must be coupled with a task to close the graduation gap for minority students.

The potential for becoming a dropout can be highly dependent on the attended high school. Balfanz and Legters (2004) dubbed 10% of high schools as "dropout factories," those which account for 40% or more of all dropouts and almost 75% of minority students who do not graduate and exist mostly in urban areas of deep poverty. This means that many of the students who drop out are poor, live in the cities, are students of color, and have low resourced schools with inexperienced teachers who were not well paid (Rumberger, 2011).

The curriculum that is delivered at high dropout rate schools with low levels of expectation and limited pedagogical expertise focuses on control of students and curtails the achievement of minority students in urban schools. In fact, there is a "hidden curriculum" (Anyon, 1980, p. 67) of work that prepares students for the slot in society similar to their parents.

It is more akin to preparing students from families of the working class, with parents of limited skills, for basic tasks for jobs that are routine, simply trained, or call for more supervision.

Whereas, the more affluent or higher class students learn skills that provide them with the abilities for tasks that are more complicated and the capabilities to oversee others (Anyon, 1980).

Robbins (2008) explains the structure of schools in this way:

The hidden curriculum...elides the ways by which girls and boys of lower classes and of color are deprived of similar expectations as a result of the structuring of divergent expectations into the organization of school curricula and ...explicitly into the content of curricula. (p.58)

Further, the lackluster preparation at middle school may have left students ill prepared for the rigors of high school (McPartland & Jordan, 2004). The disadvantages posed by attending poorly performing schools, along with social and economic challenges, produce environments that are difficult to overcome. Students who strive to rise above their negative circumstances need support in academic literacy, engagement, and resilience. Action must be taken to ameliorate the issue that minority students in high poverty cities are more likely to drop out of school. Once identified, these schools could be targeted for an infusion of resources to increase the graduation rate.

Incarceration

Rather than being viewed as a victim of circumstance or personal/family choices, the high school student who is not in school is considered the representation of dysfunction and a possible contributor to crime. This perception is not without basis. According to Sum, Khatiwada, and McLaughlin (2009) for the years 2006/2007:

In every race-ethnic group, young male dropouts were overwhelmingly more likely to be incarcerated than their peers who graduated from a four-year college or university. For all young males, high school dropouts were 47 times more likely to be incarcerated than their similar aged peers who held a four-year college degree. (p. 11)

The detrimental social costs of criminal behavior are of significant concern. This is discouraging because these students are being viewed collectively in a negative way without individual strengths being calculated.

Students have low chances of achieving economic independence with few jobs that hire un-credentialed or unskilled employees. These circumstances find more students not in school or employed and competing for jobs in the low wage market. Since there are 2.3 million adults in American prisons (about 1% of adults), it is important to look at this population for people who have missed the opportunity to complete a diploma or credential. Of these inmates, 43% lack a high school credential of any kind (National Center for Family Literacy, 2013; NCAL, 2008). Each completed year of education reduces the likelihood of involvement with crime (Moretti, 2005). In another study of roughly 3,000 18–25 year olds, 18% of those with interrupted enrollment had a parent in jail, compared to 6% of those who were continuously enrolled through graduation. Having a parent incarcerated is associated with a 79% higher likelihood of interrupted enrollment (America's Promise Alliance, 2014, pp. 9, 10, & 68). Incarceration takes a parent away and leaves a void in the secure support system that students need. Higher rates of people living in poverty and in prison highlight a breakdown in our social system. This issue can be mitigated with more students in better venues for high school education, graduating, and going to college.

Dropout Effects on the Economy

Today, approximately 39 million adults do not have a high school diploma or equivalent (Hanford, Smith, & Stern, 2013, September). These numbers indicate a population that is ill prepared for the demands of the job market, with many who are struggling to fully participate in their communities. The White House Council for Community Solutions (2012) expressed concern about the economic and social costs associated with the graduation rate. Its estimate of \$93 billion directly related to whom it interchangeably refers to as “disconnected youth” or “opportunity youth” clearly indicates a monetary toll on the United States. The undeveloped value potential of these students contributing their talents to society is staggering. High school graduate students, in comparison with non-graduates, are more likely to be less dependent on social resources, vote, participate in communities, pay taxes, create businesses, volunteer, and share their skills in myriad ways to contribute to the well-being of society (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012).

“Opportunity youth” is also used as a common nomenclature in research for youth that have great potential. They have not finished school, have not found a sustainable career, and have family responsibilities that hinder their ability to gain job skills. These young people are disconnected and chronically unemployed. The nation carries a burden while the person and family suffer a lower standard of living. “America loses \$192 billion, or 1.6% of GDP, in combined income and tax revenue with each cohort of 18-year-olds who never complete high school,” laments the Campaign for Educational Equity in its first annual symposium, the Social Costs of Inadequate Education (Levin, 2005, p. 2). “The 20-year-old opportunity youth will impose a full taxpayer burden of \$235,680 and a full social burden of \$704,020...in 2011 dollars” (Belfield et al., 2012, p.2). This is calculated by estimating the lost earnings and tax revenues

over the lifetimes of individuals in the workforce. There is a large difference in personal and family income for those who do not finish high school credentials compared to those who do. It is estimated that over the life of just one student, she or he earns an average of \$260,000 less income and pays approximately \$60,000 less in taxes (Levin, 2005, p. 2). Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce, and Fox (2012) suggest that the loss of income figure is closer to \$130,000 over a lifetime. To put this into perspective, the USDA estimates that the average cost to bring up a child in the United States is more than \$245,000 (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2014). Over the next ten years, without improvement in the graduation rate, the U.S. will lose about 12 million students through school attrition with a loss in economic revenue of \$1.5 trillion, according to Balfanz et al. (2012). The economic loss alone would be staggering; but we are currently losing revenue, productivity, and innovation while students who have left school are losing their economic freedom for themselves and their families.

Since the publication of *Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), which rang the alarm bell claiming that American education was slipping in comparison with other countries, there has been a debate that the United States will be “at-risk” to fail to be competitive for future challenges. In 1970, the United States held the top ranking for high school graduation rates in the world. In 2012, it ranked only 21st (OECD, 2012); this continues to be a national problem. International economic competition is grounded in the highly trained nature of the workforce. America is losing its competitive edge to other countries that are gaining economic market share in many categories. By the year 2018, more than 62% of American jobs will require postsecondary education, compared to 28% in 1973, according to the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE, 2012), a national policy and advocacy organization that promotes federal policy to improve high student academic levels and graduation rates (Haynes,

2012). The AEE projects that the United States will soon be three million workers short of the employment positions available for skilled technical jobs, if training is not forthcoming (p.1).

Needed Research

Identifying the factors that precipitate the event of “dropping out,” reducing dropout factories, and raising awareness in the U.S. education system have been crucial components of raising the high school graduation rate to 81.4% (America’s Promise Alliance, 2015). However, we need more information from dropout recovery students about their reflections on literacy, engagement, and resilience. We need to know about how these areas affected their educational journeys to enlighten educators. The goal of a 90% graduation rate is hollow, given that our minority students are lagging behind in the graduate rate as a whole. If it is to be met, all students must be prepared with the necessary skills in literacy, connectedness, and the motivation to keep persisting for college and careers. Without significantly growing the body of knowledge in these three important aspects of education to shrink the remaining 20%, we will miss opportunities for meaningful change. While research on the voices of those who have been disengaged from high school continues, additional focus on the voices of those who have returned to seek the diploma or an alternative credential is essential.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review is posed with two different branches. The first addresses history through general background information about individuals, schools, and the General Educational Development program. The second branch discusses the educational factors of literacy, engagement, and resilience.

History

Labels

Pedro Noguera (2003), like many urban activists, believes in the original power of a free public school for democracy and educating the young for future prosperity, but not without equality of opportunity, addressing the educational needs of poor children, and surrounding children and parents with a strong socio-cultural public school support system for the context of learning:

“My faith in the possibility that education can serve as a vehicle of individual transformation, and even social change, is rooted in an understanding that human beings have the ability to rise above even the most difficult obstacles, to become more than just victims of circumstance. I have seen education open doors for those who lacked opportunity, and open the minds of those who could not imagine alternative ways of being and living” (P.10)

Throughout the history of American education system, the bodies of students have been moved to a state of marginalization, when they did not fit into the classic structured system. Access to education and its consequent tracking, sorting, and segregated systems were ingrained into the beginnings of schooling based on religion, socioeconomic standing, race, cultural origins, and

social desirability (Spring, 2011). The American IQ test developed during World War I gave a scientific way to sort people due to intelligence, ostensibly, to separate people into abilities for “manpower needs;” however, it was brought into middle schools to sort students into future vocations (Spring, 1989, p. 38). The tracking system grew in earnest in the middle 1950s, after the federal law integration was enacted. It gave credence to schools, beginning in kindergarten, to sorting students into ability levels, so that they could legitimately be separated (Kirp, 1974). Tracking is the way that the hidden curriculum doles out the “educational and social opportunities” after considering “race, class, and gender” (Robbins, 2008, p.58). The society’s intentions of providing schooling according to abilities for workforce, actually seeks only to replicate the status quo. Too often, we have denied students access, segregated them into groups according to our perceived notions, sought to institutionalize them, branded many with the special needs label, relegated them to the back of the classroom, exiled them to detention, and retained or suspended them until they are ushered right out the door to become dropped out.

The first home for wayward youth was in 1825 in New York to which juvenile delinquents and other juvenile outcasts were relegated and in 1899, the first juvenile court was created. In fact, “juvenile delinquent” was the first moniker given to those youth that did not fit in and in the 1950s, the term “dropout” was interspersed to indicate rebellious youth. During and beyond World War II, America was determined to funnel or track students toward military service or to education with a curriculum rich in technology to meet the challenges posed by the Soviet Union. It was at this time that educators had to consider how to address the educational needs of women and minority groups, so the United States would not be short of workers who now went from being labeled students to being a cog in the wheel of industry. The government was very much in control of deciding the future of its youth (Spring, 1989).

It was the *Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence of Education, 1983) report that dubbed the youth “at risk.” The super-predator was also used intermittently, but gained prominence in the 1990s when society expected a crime wave (which never came about) due to low graduation rates, prompting governmental intervention (Dilulio, 1995; Kamenetz, 2015a). Students who were from poverty or rural areas were traditionally not given resources like good teachers, buildings in good repair, or any extra services and were seen as failing schools which did not graduate their students in sufficient numbers (Noguera, 2003).

Many schools found ways to handle disruptive children and those who could not be taught in normal classroom settings separately. According to Carver, Lewis, and Tice (2010), such students were sent either to alternative programs (within their regular schools) or to alternative schools (schools or facilities outside of their regular schools). They went on to report, “...alternative schools and programs are typically [for students] at risk of educational failure” (p. 1).

When those who are treated by school systems as undesirables depart the district, they no longer filled spaces in the educational institution; their voices were no longer heard. According to Fine (1991), educators have stopped listening to their voices long before their departure. She argues that the manipulation of these student bodies deliberately silenced them. We will continue to have high schools reproducing the negative conditions and status of individuals in the dropout culture if we do not address the issues of equity and provide good literacy programs with excellent culturally responsive instruction before these disadvantaged students become dropouts.

Dropping Out

Whether some see the students as instrumental in their own choices or if others see the government tolerant of the structural inequality in a system that pushes students out, the result is

that the dropout crisis is real and the students and society suffer. It becomes an accepted outcome and becomes more solidified in the opinion that such students who drop out are failures. In other words, if no one challenges the stereotype of the dropout, the negative connotation becomes the norm. The typecast of the student who has dropped out of school must be reassessed in terms of how society has lost focus on democratic values for them in relabeling and enabling them to travel different roads through the social and economic bramble (Fine, 1991).

Attention paid to the issue of high school attrition has grown in importance as a societal and governmental focus over the past decade, spurred by the inception of the 2003 White House Task Force on Disadvantaged Youth, which advocated more effective management, accountability, connections, and prioritized aid for those having the most need (2003, p. 2). There are now 6.7 million young adult Americans between the ages of 16 to 24 who are not working, not going to school, not disabled, not incarcerated, and not staying at home with family related responsibilities (White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012; Belfield et al., 2012). These are generally referred to as disconnected, disadvantaged, forgotten, or opportunity youth. Of these students, 47% report that they lacked the academic skills needed for jobs, continuing education, or even to enter a youth support program (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012; White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012; Belfield et al., 2012). This subgroup of opportunity youth, with difficult circumstances and without a high school diploma, is now being examined by research centered on listening to their voices (America's Promise Alliance, 2014; Bridgeland & Milano, 2012; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

The long road to dropping out due to life pressures could originate at a very early age. Long-ranging effects of early childhood stressors reemerge in later life as an additional barrier to success. Shonkoff and Garner (2012, p. 239) developed an "ecobiodevelopmental framework"

that models the cause-effect adversity that displayed a process of how these negative toxic stressors, even in early childhood, can impact learning and manifest into a morass of negative behaviors. Not only can poor health and toxic environments harm students, but they can also lead to social and emotional difficulties that evolve into behavior problems, absenteeism, and low achievement goals—and the possibility of dropping out. This framework paints a lifelong struggle.

Balfanz & Legters “Locating the Dropout Crisis” (2004) study serves as a catalyst for more contemporary research on dropouts. The Everyone Graduates Center produced “The Silent Epidemic” (Bridgeland et al., 2006) which is the first survey for high school students to explain the reasons why they dropped out. These two groups, along with America’s Promise Alliance, the Alliance for Excellent Education, Civic Enterprises, and others work together for the annual Grad Nation Summit, which shows the progression of research and interest in this population. Additionally, Education Week (2013) devotes an entire periodical, “Diplomas Count 2013: Second Chances,” to highlighting the issue of American high school students who either dropped out by choice or were forced out by behaviors and their subsequent return to schooling.

Social Construction of Schools

The social construction of the dropout has been created and jostled around through the history of schooling in the United States. Before the high schools were created and became commonplace, society did not consider the act of leaving school as an issue, because most were working on farms or family businesses. It was commonly accepted during the industrial revolution when students left school to get a job, when the demand for laborers was high. Dropouts during the Depression were relatively few as a result of the scarcity of jobs.

At mid-nineteenth century, the social construction of the negative stereotype was not in evidence because there was no expectation of high school graduation. Indeed, there were few high schools in existence. Public secondary schools had only been established in seven cities by 1840, and fourteen by 1850 (Dexter, 1904, p. 171). During this period, there was typically little money budgeted for selective high school tuition and there were few grants or scholarships; families usually could not afford to send their teenagers to school. Funding for elementary schools was common throughout the country; however, most thought funds should not go beyond that point, “Only the leaders of thought dared assert that the state should go farther, the great mass of the people believing that beyond this stage, all education should be by private enterprise” (Dexter, 1904, p. 170). Instead, families enjoyed the benefits of consigning their young people to work in factories to garner wages.

Over time, employment became more difficult to secure for young people, especially during the Great Depression, and the role of custodianship was first introduced to the high school (Dorn, 1996, p. 33). The requirement for school attendance, skills for an ever-increasing technical world, and the social norm of schooling for young adults was firmly established. The end of World War II brought the first time that society expected students to finish high school. Successful completion of high school grew into a rite of passage (Orfield, 2004). With this evolution came the expectation and responsibility of the high school to somehow prepare students for adulthood, that is, to “help students adjust to adult life” (Dorn, 1995, p. 33). Today’s generation of students will have demands from a society that renders jobs mostly to highly literate workers who have post-secondary school experience (Moje, 2015).

The institutions which Americans value are considered contributors to the welfare of society. These would include the Red Cross, Social Services, religious organizations, and other

entities. The importance of the institution of education lies in the foundation of our social, civic, and economic existence. The confidence that Americans placed in education as early as the eighteenth century continues today (Kaestle, 1983). Additionally, United States high schools have been the bastion of teenage education and development since the first half of the twentieth century. The growth of the high school and compulsory education laws brought secondary schooling into the view of our population as the dominant institution for instruction and the socialization of teenagers. However, it took seventy years for secondary schools to become the standard process for every adolescent (Dorn, 1996).

The graduation rate from high schools has roughly fluctuated around the three quarter mark for all students over the last forty years (Rumberger, 2011). “One in four Americans, and four in ten minorities do not complete high school with their class” (Balfanz et al., 2012, p. 1). However, movement is now on the upswing with one in five students graduating (Everyone Graduates Center, 2015) and the educators have been responding to the need for improved high schools to help students get the credential. Now there is a need to include wrap-around social services, improve secondary literacy, and give second chances to students who come back to connect to educational opportunities. Funding for young adults in the workforce should be a priority.

Historical Growth of the High School

The historical document in Figure 1 (Goldin, 1998, p. 348) shows the growth of graduation rates from 1890 to 1970. This demonstrates the continuum of the establishment of the high school institution and the increase of student attendance in accordance with the social dynamics of the times.

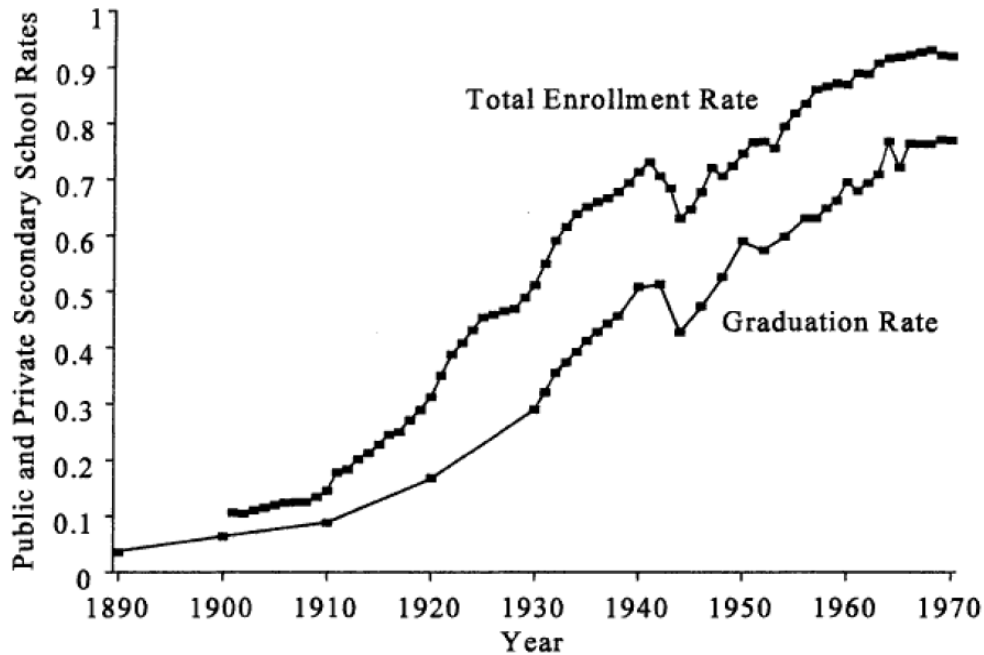


FIGURE 1
SECONDARY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND GRADUATION RATES:
ENTIRE UNITED STATES

Notes: Enrollment figures are divided by the number of 14 to 17-year olds; graduation figures are divided by the number of 17-year olds. The total includes both males and females in public and private schools.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *120 Years*, tables 9 and 19.

Source: Goldin, C. (1998). The evolution and spread of secondary schooling in the twentieth century. *Journal of Economic History*, 58(2), 348.

Figure 1. Secondary school enrollment and graduation rates, 1890-1970.

According to Joel Spring (2011, p. 96), the first high school was established in Boston in 1821, but did not evolve into a “mass institution” until early in the twentieth century. Only after the expansion of the secondary schools in the late 1800s did the notion of high school attrition become known. Attendance was scarce and reserved for those who could pay the tuition or garner a scholarship. The term “dropouts” was in the language, but used rarely. High school attrition was previously viewed as students being eliminated from school, or simply a pattern of early school leavers (Dorn, 1996). Understanding the social construction of the dropout

necessitates a look back at the origin of the modern-day comprehensive high school and how societal views shaped the accepted norms.

High schools were selective and private in nature in the 1800s, thus ensuring the value of the diploma upon graduation. The thought of universal high school education made those who had come to cherish the institution of elementary schools hesitant. For families, common or public high schools would bring more taxes, take their teenagers out of the workforce, and impose state control (Dorn, 1996). Education was valued as a central part of citizenship. In fact, elementary schools provided instruction for some students until the age of eighteen. The charts in Figures 2 & 3 show the growth of the common school in the United States from 1869 to 1902 (Dexter, 1904, pp. 164-165). Many characteristics of the common school, including enrollment, length of terms, demographics, teacher gender, and even the number of schoolhouses in America during this time period are indicated in these charts.

COMMON SCHOOL STATISTICS OF THE UNITED STATES

	1869-1870	1879-1880	1889-1890	1896-1897	1897-1898
I. — General statistics					
Total population	^a 38,558,371	^a 50,155,783	^a 62,622,250	^b 71,445,273	^b 72,792,617
Persons 5 to 18 years of age	^a 12,055,443	^a 15,065,767	^a 18,543,201	^b 20,484,160	^b 20,782,210
Pupils enrolled (duplicates excluded)	6,871,522	9,867,505	12,722,581	14,823,059	15,103,874
Per cent of total population enrolled	17.82	19.67	20.32	20.75	20.75
Per cent of persons 5 to 18 years of age enrolled	57.00	65.50	68.61	72.36	72.68
Average daily attendance	4,077,347	6,144,143	8,153,635	10,052,554	10,356,458
Relation of same to enrolment (per cent)	59.3	62.3	64.1	67.8	68.6
Average length of school term (days)	132.2	130.3	134.7	142.0	143.0
Total number of days attended by all pupils	539,053,423	800,719,970	1,098,232,725	1,427,402,478	1,480,466,644
Average number of days attended by each person 5 to 18	44.7	53.1	59.2	69.7	71.2
Average number attended by each pupil enrolled	78.4	81.1	86.3	96.3	98.0
Male teachers	77,529	122,795	125,525	131,221	132,257
Female teachers	122,986	163,798	238,397	273,737	278,556
Whole number of teachers	200,515	286,593	363,922	404,958	410,813
Per cent of male teachers	38.7	42.8	34.5	32.4	32.2
Average monthly wages of male teachers	—	—	—	\$44.62	\$45.16
Average monthly wages of female teachers	—	—	—	\$38.38	\$38.74
Number of schoolhouses	116,312	178,222	224,526	243,753	242,391
Value of all school property	\$130,383,008	\$209,571,718	\$342,531,791	\$477,321,190	\$495,912,048
II. — Financial statistics					
Receipts					
From income of permanent funds and rents	—	—	\$7,744,765	\$9,047,097	\$9,333,554
From state taxes	—	—	\$26,345,323	\$33,941,657	\$35,122,035
From local taxes	—	—	\$97,222,426	\$130,317,708	\$135,515,785
From all other sources	—	—	\$11,882,292	\$18,652,908	\$19,862,008
Total received	—	—	\$143,194,806	\$191,959,370	\$199,833,382

Source: Dexter, E. G. (1904). *A History of Education in the United States* (p. 164)

Figure 2. Common School Characteristics of the United States, 1869-1898.

COMMON SCHOOL STATISTICS OF THE UNITED STATES—*Continued*

	1898-1899	1899-1900	1900-1901	1901-1902
<i>I. — General statistics</i>				
Total population	^b 74,178,966	^a 75,602,515	^b 77,262,743	^b 78,544,816
Persons 5 to 18 years of age	^b 21,090,070	^a 21,404,322	^b 21,897,678	22,261,863
Pupils enrolled (duplicates excluded)	15,176,219	15,503,110	15,603,451	15,925,887
Per cent of total population enrolled	20.46	20.51	20.20	20.28
Per cent of persons 5 to 18 years of age enrolled	71.96	72.43	71.26	71.54
Average daily attendance	10,328,396	10,632,772	10,692,091	10,999,273
Relation of same to enrolment (per cent)	68.1	68.6	68.5	69.1
Average length of school term (days)	143.0	144.3	144.2	145.0
Total number of days attended by all pupils	1,477,016,244	1,534,822,633	1,542,074,801	1,594,738,835
Average number of days attended by each person 5 to 18	70.0	71.8	70.4	71.6
Average number attended by each pupil enrolled	97.3	99.0	98.8	100.1
Male teachers	131,207	126,588	123,941	122,392
Female teachers	283,065	296,474	306,063	317,204
Whole number of teachers	414,272	423,062	430,004	439,596
Per cent of male teachers	31.7	29.9	28.8	27.8
Average monthly wages of male teachers	\$45.25	\$46.53	\$47.55	\$49.05
Average monthly wages of female teachers	\$38.14	\$38.93	\$39.17	\$39.77
Number of schoolhouses	244,833	248,279	249,969	254,076
Value of all school property	\$523,679,996	\$550,069,217	\$576,963,089	\$601,571,307
<i>II. — Financial statistics</i>				
Receipts:				
From income of permanent funds and rents	\$9,007,887	\$9,152,274	\$9,823,482	\$10,522,343
From state taxes	\$35,341,064	\$37,886,740	\$38,476,250	\$38,330,589
From local taxes	\$144,897,878	\$149,486,845	\$161,245,764	\$170,779,586
From all other sources	\$14,090,384	\$23,240,130	\$25,422,423	\$29,742,141
Total received	\$203,337,213	\$219,765,989	\$234,967,919	\$249,374,659

^a United States Comm.^b Estimated.Source: Dexter, E. G. (1904). *A History of Education in the United States* (p. 165)

Figure 3. Common School Characteristics of the United States, 1898-1902.

Much of the early reports of free public schooling in America included glowing reports of the inclusiveness, democratic values, and access (Garrison, 2009). The growth of high schools “was one of the lasting achievements of urban school reform in the nineteenth century...by the 1880s, free public high schools challenged the hegemony of tuition academies throughout the northern states, as they finally exceeded those of their private competitors” (Reese, 2007, p. 79). It was grounded in the purpose to instill “modern or so-called English curriculum to educate young people for the world of work and to reinforce middle-class sensibilities. They taught specific values about labor, capitalism, the character of American democracy and the cosmos” (Reese, 2007, p.79). In the nineteenth century, those were chiefly intended to serve students in preparation for higher education and for careers, or business, professional, and “mechanical pursuits,” as described by Angus and Mirel (1999, p. 7). During that time, high schools were becoming more available to the masses in urban areas (Tyack, 1974). However, Kaestle (1983) cautions about the inequity of the free high school:

Even a free secondary school was bound to have a clientele skewed toward the middle class, both because informal class discrimination existed and because many working-class families could not afford to forego the earnings of teenage labor. For blacks, of course, discrimination was often formal and absolute.

Various obstacles to secondary education remained for women, but their opportunities were expanded by academies, and they gradually came to predominate in public high schools. (p. 118)

In contrast, Spring (1972) believed that the school was created for the state in line with production like a factory output of workers. “The public schools of the twentieth century were organized to meet the needs of the corporate state and consequently, to protect the interests of the

ruling elite and the technological machine” (Spring, 1972, pp. 1-2). Given the mixed messages of the purpose of high school, inequality, and the goals of education for many stakeholders, it is incredible that students can traverse the unfamiliar land of high school without some difficulties.

Most educators welcomed the establishment of the high school, which enabled them to focus their attention on the needs of the elementary student with the knowledge that more education would be forthcoming (Dorn, 1996). The rationale for high school education was different from the ideology of the early republic for primary schools, which were for the religious, civic, and economic good of its citizens. Elementary schools mainly focused on teaching literacy (Kaestle, 1983). The high school was intended as a place to prepare for higher learning and jobs.

The educational structure began to take on new meaning when all students were required to attend. Education reformers began to question the curriculum with a call for pragmatics. Students should be prepared for life differently than for college. This would oblige different content for different purposes that translated into the elite and the working-class receiving different tracks, namely differentiated instruction. Given the attention publicized by these reformers, the public demanded secondary schools to administer both academic and nonacademic subjects (Rumberger, 2011).

The progressives, those seeking change and open access, spoke out. Prominent educator and author Ellwood Cubberley of Stanford University wrote that Americans needed to realize that there existed social classes in our society and that a “social efficiency” stratified plan that targeted the different skills of individuals with special programs would be the most effective (Tyack, 1974). Cubberley believed in the common school or the comprehensive approach to high school, and thought that this would benefit communities, solve social problems, and lessen

the strife over class differences (Spring, 2011). The middle-class viewed this as social mobility (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). The controversy continued as schools provided for the influx of students.

The debate over the traditional curriculum versus a modern program had gained momentum. Traditionalists advocating for strong foundational subjects, long-standing in the privileged curriculum, challenged the progressive modernists who wanted a more comprehensive and differentiated school plan. The government commissioned a group of elite educators, called the Committee of Ten who were involved with the National Educational Association (NEA), to research the issue. Chaired by Charles W. Eliot of Harvard, the committee was to create a report in 1893 on the purpose and pathway for high schools (National Educational Association, 1894; Rumberger, 2011). It continued the selective high schools theme with equal treatment, standard classes with identical teaching methods, and challenged academic standards that would educate for college. Its members were in agreement that high schools should not be based on class—the rich should not get a better education than the poor; however, education should only be available to the small percent of students who could benefit (Spring, 2011). The secondary school remained predominantly focused on a common college preparation with the traditional curriculum.

Additionally, there is evidence that female participation in Boston, Massachusetts had grown to a slight majority, as shown in Figure 4 (Dexter, 1904, p. 179). It is prescient that girls overshadowed boys in their exuberance for education in Boston, since it was the birthplace of the American high school generally conceived for male students. Females had a difficult time getting access to schooling in the early 1800s, and eagerly welcomed the opportunity as high schools became increasingly popular at the end of the century. Women also entered the

workforce as teachers in growing numbers and sought the credential for employment (Dorn, 1996).

The following table shows the ages of those in the high schools of Boston for the years 1902–1903:—

	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19 AND OVER	TOTAL
4th year boys	—	—	—	2	9	25	41	40	117
girls	—	—	—	1	33	68	85	68	255
3d year boys	—	—	9	26	104	159	106	47	451
girls	—	—	2	39	180	218	99	33	571
2d year boys	—	3	37	131	213	148	69	26	627
girls	—	5	59	211	283	191	82	26	857
1st year boys	8	79	239	358	272	128	35	11	1130
girls	4	52	259	425	414	201	62	21	1438
Total . .	12	139	605	1193	1508	1138	579	272	5446

Rep. Boston
Supt. Schools,
1903, p. 147.

Source: Dexter, E. G. (1904). *A History of Education in the United States* (p. 179)

Figure 4. Boston High School Enrollment: 1902-1903.

The publicity around dropping out in the early years of high school was very limited. Dexter, in a definitive book entitled *A History of Education in the United States*, gave no mention of dropouts or high school attrition (Dexter, 1904). Dropping out was not considered an issue because *most* students did not stay in school. Dropouts were not considered a social problem in the early twentieth century because high schools were just beginning to open for students not interested in going to college. People saw schooling primarily as a choice (Dorn, 1996). With roots in the abolition of child labor, schools were opening to assure opportunity to all children—in other words, access. The worry was that most students had been restricted from “dropping in” to school, not that they would “drop out.” The populace was more concerned

about equality than with the subject of dropouts. There was some concern about the process of education and whether it welcomed all students with the expectation of success.

Physician Luther Halsey Gulick wrote in 1910 about the concerns of leaving school at age fourteen (Gulick, 2012). He brought attention to the curriculum that he thought was too difficult for the average student while not being engaging, and noted the concern over health issues that inhibited learning. A concern for children's health brought child labor scrutiny to industrial commerce and brought activists to the forefront of the debate to insist that children should be in school rather than at risk of injury on the job.

As high schools, the new institution for mass instruction (Dorn, 1996), grew from urban areas to the rural countryside, many more families began sending their children to public high school with the numbers increasing from 202,963 in 1890, to 519,251 in 1900, and to over 1.1 million in 1912 (Spring, 2011, p. 237). During this swell in enrollment, the debates about the purpose of high school continued. There were students with different skills and abilities. The majority began to see secondary schools as crucial for the new and complex world. They called it the "People's College" (Dexter, 1904, p. 174) for those average citizens whose education would not continue to the post-secondary level. New laws requiring compulsory education began to impact school enrollment, including mandates for the attendance to begin with elementary school and continue into the child's sixteenth year (Dexter, 1904, pp. 623-626). Angus and Mirel (1999, pp. 3-4) indicate that the high school system picked up more of a custodial responsibility early in the 1890s, and stated that this change "profoundly shaped the modern history of the institution and its quest for equal educational opportunity."

"Social efficiency" continued to challenge the old tradition of classic high school goals (Spring, 2011, p. 239). An NEA committee was established for the "Reorganization of

Secondary High Schools.” It produced a 1918 report, *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, which made differentiation a priority. It recommended transformation of the curriculum to include not only college preparatory, but also vocational skills (National Education Association, 1918; Spring, 2011; Rumberger, 2011; Dorn, 1996). The resulting differentiated curriculum laid the foundation for the modern comprehensive high school to be based on collaboration, specialization, and equity. The report emphasized two important aspects of democratic education: “specialization and unification” (Spring, 2011, p. 241). This meant that the high school should organize students to different activities according to their abilities, socialize the students for the capacity to get along with others, and develop skills necessary for working together in a democratic world. With specialization, students became tracked with the selection processes of new intelligence tests of the time (Rumberger, 2011; Tyack, 1974). Unification resulted in many extracurricular activities, which became a mainstay of the concept of high school. The high school was viewed as a hopeful panacea for socialization, sorting of skills and abilities, credentialing of students, elimination of poverty, and preventing of social destruction by keeping adolescents busy and out of trouble. The practices that were put into place as a result of the Cardinal Principals continued into the twentieth century (Dorn, 1996). The high school became publicly funded, regulated by a central administration, and managed by expert educational professionals. The public now placed high value on education and the rewards it would bring. It became a basic requirement that employers sought when hiring (Kaestle, 1983).

Child Labor

The possibilities of employment for young people who did not possess a high school diploma followed the state of the economy. The Industrial Revolution brought many more jobs

in the cities. Families, many immigrants, and people from the rural areas who had their farms bought by corporations were hired. Teenagers were able to get jobs in the workforce and supplement the incomes of their families within this fast-growing capitalist economy. Very few young people had attended high school before 1900 (Tyack, 1974). Attending the required (in most places) six years of elementary school and then getting a job became commonplace. The attrition rate at secondary schools was only marginally noticed because it was acceptable, and most people viewed high school only as a gateway to college (Dorn, 1996).

Helen Todd, a factory supervisor in 1909, investigated the reasons why teenagers were working in harsh environments instead of being in school. In her survey, 412 out of 500 preferred the conditions in the factory to those in school. The responses were so compelling that she documented them. She found that the primary reasons for avoiding school included the difficult task of learning, harsh conditions, brutal teachers, bullies, the useless value of school curriculum, and the lack of income while in school. An overwhelming number of 269 children told her that their teachers would physically beat them in school. She pondered whether they had been “pushed out or dropped out” (Tyack, 1974, p. 177-178). As more female teachers entered the schoolroom, there was less brutality. Typically, women were employed for the spring and summer months when the male students were working on the farms. They brought in male teachers after the harvest to handle the rough and tumble nature of the boys in the classroom (Kaestle, 1983, p. 123). Teachers of both genders became more common with more schoolhouses and the need for education due to the changing job market. Consequently, with higher enrollment, schools became more accepted, more needed, and more scrutinized by society, but controlling students remained a priority.

Child labor reached its highest level during the first decade of the 1900s. Attitudes toward keeping children in school became more dominant as the society grew more aware of the harrows of working for young people. It drew moral outrage and calls for mandatory school attendance laws, as social activists saw education as an opportunity to protect children in an institution that would separate them from the workplace. The introduction of child labor laws centered on the concern that children would become slave laborers in factories, being paid a small pittance, and forced to work long hours, or on farms where they might be harmed by the machines of agriculture (Tyack, 1974).

Higher levels of resistance to the employment of children in the North resulted in businesses moving to the South for the labor, much as companies change geographic locations to seek cheaper labor in contemporary times. As unions were formed and working conditions became more supervised, fewer children were hired. The National Child Labor Committee was established in 1904 and activists insisted on reform, insisting that children be sent to school. Laws were passed, overturned, and then passed again until 1938, when they were firmly established with governing requirements of minimum hours and pay for young people (Child Labor Public Education Project, 2012). When new labor laws, compulsory education laws, and improved enforcement intersected with the economic tumble of the Depression, there were fewer jobs employing children. More immigrants could be paid small amounts for labor taking available positions and families depended less on income from children (Dorn, 1996; Tyack, 1974).

Vocational Education

The introduction of vocational education, a method for students to have an applied curriculum in a skills-based format, inadvertently resulted in an incentive for students not to drop

out. These training programs offered a welcome alternative to the more strict college track curriculum. Educators believed that giving such an option to those who were primarily from working-class families opened the high school to all students. Businesses and educational institutions in the 1890s supported vocational training, enhancing the development of skilled labor. The labor movement promised hope to the working-class for an enhanced standard of living and pushed for vocational education. The influence of business labor proved to bolster differentiation of the curriculum, a departure from the common traditional content of specific courses, and provided a skill base for future employment (Rumberger, 2011).

Society supported a nonacademic curriculum for life skills (Dorn, 1996). The Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 granted federal aid to schools to support vocational training (Spring, 2011, p. 246). Educational reformers argued that vocational education should be available in large high schools, but not segregated into technical schools. In response, schools began to reorganize to include support for the industrial economy. Thus, schools could educate working-class families for working-class jobs as well as prepare students for college or careers (Dorn, 1996). Many educators believed that this would help students to stay in school, seeing a purpose in the credential for future employment (Rumberger, 2011).

The introduction of vocational education coincided with an awareness of growing global competition. The government encouraged strengthening high school education to compete in the changing world. Manufacturing and industrial education groups fostered an appreciation for the educated worker through high schools, which spawned the concept of “human capital” (Spring, 2011, pp. 244-247). Federal expenditures flowed for vocational education and in 1917-1918; twenty-seven percent of federal education money supported this expansion (p. 247). Unfortunately, the infusion of funds resulted in a “dual system” of education (p. 247), where

students of the working-class were sent to vocational training programs while the elite were tracked to college preparation—all in the name of giving students what they need. Tracking became an accepted practice. However, the vocational path offered a curriculum believed to be conducive to lowering the dropout rate.

Wartime

During World War I, the Wechsler Scales IQ tests, along with the Army Alpha and Beta tests, were used to evaluate the men who signed up for the draft (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007). They were based on those that schools had used to sort students (Rumberger, 2011). Two tests were distributed – one for English speakers and one for non-English speakers. In due course, the government identified the illiterates by concluding that those who scored low marks on the test could not read. Many cultural biases were “verified” by the use of these tests. If they could not speak English, then they were ostensibly not smart enough to be literate. Young men could sign up for the armed services with low literacy levels, but they signed with a “mark” on their record to indicate that they were illiterate. “Of the ten million men who registered for the draft in the summer of 1917, 700,000 signed with a mark” (Brandt, 2004, p. 491). Education was compulsory and valued, but joining the military was essentially still a choice. Most people at that time had little extensive education beyond rudimentary reading skills.

Following the war, the high school became the dominant education institution for the general public in the 1920s with enrollment reaching 28% of the youth population. By 1930, it reached more than half of students in the United States. By 1940, it served more than two thirds of youth ages fourteen to seventeen (Spring, 2011, p. 237).

The draft was reinstated in preparation for World War II and with it, the use of IQ tests. However, a greater demand for literate men was necessary for understanding technologies that

are more advanced and for operating the weapons of war. The essential skill of literacy was required and the “adequate level of education moved from fourth grade to twelfth grade in a matter of a few years,” thus the Minimum Literacy test emerged for those who did not have a basic level of education (Brandt, 2004, p. 485-486). Education was no longer ostensibly about each individual, but about what each individual could offer to the nation. It was a commodity that was necessary and measured. The country realized that a high school diploma was an imperative for defense. The need for literate men had grown enormously, given that the initial number of 1.6 million men drafted grew by seven million after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

However, the diploma did not guarantee literacy skills. Schools were not graduating students who had the literacy and academic skills necessary to satisfy the requirements needed to manage military technologies. So began the biggest literacy campaign in United States history, and the army met this task with significant success. The army enlisted high school graduates and then put them through their own literacy courses, which many passed (Brandt, 2004). This is indicative of extreme motivation for a job in the army, perhaps more engaging and goal-oriented than following a high school curriculum. The army had an added advantage in that the men could not easily drop out. After World War II, many men who returned took advantage of the GI bill to advance their education, amounting to about 80% of those who had successfully passed the basic education classes given by the army (Brandt, 2004). There were many jobs in the post war period, but ageism or the expectation of schooling for adolescents had become the custom. High school was seen as appropriate behavior for adolescents. Dropping out was no longer considered an option.

The growing issue of juvenile delinquency influenced the belief that the dropout would be an economic burden on society, which weighed heavily on the public psyche (Dorn, 1996).

Rather than blaming the schools or the unfair distribution of resources, the common belief was that the student simply did not measure up. In 1950, many people believed that truancy led to dropping out. The dropout issue provided a convenient scapegoat for teenage crime.

The language and negative perceptions about students dropping out accelerated in the 1960s due in part to the prejudices and biases wrapped in the anxiety of the Civil Rights movement. These fears led to the disenfranchisement of students who did not fit the regimen of the secondary school. “Dropout” was a label that meant different things to different people and not necessarily all related to race and class, but many public fears of racial chaos were common. Post-war literature depicted the typical dropout as male, poor, and unskilled. It portrayed dropouts as being deficient in moral character (Dorn, 1996). The dropout problem rose to a crisis level in the 1960s with the social construction of the negative stereotype. Graduating in that decade was less achievable than it is today (Dorn, 1996).

James Bryant Conant (1962), President of Harvard University, called the situation in the city slums “social dynamite” and felt that dropouts led to serious delinquency and dependency, needing government intervention (p. 106). Unskilled job openings were on the decline at a time when employers increasingly required high school diplomas. Daniel Schreiber (1963), the National Education Association director of the Project on School Dropouts in 1962, endeavored to bring public awareness to the problem, using Conant’s “dropout” term. He was a vocal proponent of the belief that students who dropped out of school would become a drag on the economy, threaten a growing delinquency issue, and enter a world for which they were not prepared (pp. 216-217). Stressing the “unforgivable waste and destruction of human potential, of human talents and resources” (p. 217), he went on to promote programs involving schools with

business and industry that were directed at students on the verge of dropping out. These educators energized public awareness about the serious socially damaging dropout problem.

President John F. Kennedy was also concerned about the dependency of the dropout on society in 1963 and placed the blame on schools. He introduced the Summer Dropout Campaign to raise public awareness to promote the identification and return of dropouts to school. His initiative included improving counseling services, extracurricular programs, course offerings, and community connections; thus providing incentives for children to return to school (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1964, pp. 5-6). To society, it appeared that dropping out was a new social phenomenon (Dorn, 1996). The historical perspectives leave the observer with the belief that the “dropout crisis” had been linked to access, selectivity, employment options, economic conditions, and variation in the curriculum. Instead of being a victim of circumstance or personal/family choices, the high school student who was not in school eventually became the representation of dysfunction and a possible contributor to crime. Today there are statistics that show that 43% of people in prison do not have a high school diploma (Moretti, 2005). So, it appears that there is some truth to the fact, that graduating from high school does have some power as a protective factor for people against incarceration.

History of the GED

Research shows that since 1940, when the United States Census first began to collect data on adults with high school diplomas, collaborative efforts by governments and educational institutions have developed many intervention and alternative programs for students to stay in school, reregister, or attain a GED (Education Week, 2013, 8-9). The GED was developed in 1942 by the American Council on Education to meet the needs of the U.S. military. It has been changed over the years and its fourth iteration occurred this past year, 2014-2015. There has

always been a down swing in test takers after a new test (Adams, 2015), but there seems to be quite a difference in the numbers of GED graduates from 2012 with 401,388 people, 2013 with 540,535 people, and now to only 90,000 in 2014 (GED Testing Service, 2015), which is an 83% decline. There could be a number of factors, but most observe that the more rigorous test of four units could be the main reason. Many flocked to finish the set of tests in 2013, judging it easier than would be expected for the new test. However, the decline in enrollment that followed is enormous (Higgins, 2015). The more the social clamor for accountability and increased knowledge for our high school graduates, the more testing and packed content for 21st century skills comes into play. Therefore, the GED cannot be an easy second chance, nor can it really show the determination of a student who has stayed the course in four years of high school, which is what employers want to see (Rumberger, 2011). Many states are looking into alternative diplomas in programs that meet the differing needs of high school students eschewing traditional high school structure.

There are hundreds of programs encouraging students to stay in school while motivating them to return with a focus on choices and transition to an adult life occupation. Students who remain in school benefit by gaining both academic and workplace skills while developing “on-ramps” to employment (White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012, pp. 30-33). For example, Youthbuild U.S.A. engages approximately 10,000 low-income dropouts with the mission to build structures following the destruction caused by natural disasters; they develop occupational skills in construction while taking academic classes (Sparks, 2013). The student who has dropped out has had a long winding road through repeated disengagement and school failure. It was not a single event. Engaging students remains in the domain of student-driven outcomes and early detection of disengaged students is targeted from the first signs of losing

interest in elementary school. Students should always be part of the solution with choices that are attainable and built on the resilience of each individual (White House Council for Community Solutions, 2012, p. 36).

New research from the OECD (2013a), “The Survey of Adult Skills,” looks at a subset of young adults 16-24 years of age and assessed the abilities of “literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments” (p. 3). Cognitive and non-cognitive skills were based on competencies needed for high tech serviced-based societies around the world. It concluded that education is not just what you know, but how you apply what you know in your community and the world. The students we want to reengage in education should see more of a focus on knowledge and skills learned for the workplace for the best outcome for a productive society. The OECD (2013a) noted that an abundance of education might not be as helpful if there is no application of skills to authentic situations: “Proficiency in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments is positively and independently associated with the probability of participating in the labour market and being employed, and with higher wages” (p. 24). The resilience of students returning to school may be based on economic and social realities. They may have more opportunities with a credential and the proficiencies developed during the courses of study.

The “Dropout” Term

The term “dropout” has been associated with the ubiquitous term “at-risk” of failure. The seminal book *Children and Families at Promise: Deconstructing the Discourse of Risk* (Swadener and Lubeck, 1995) consists of selections by several authors who approach the subject from many perspectives. Its authors describe the actual realities of living on the margins in our society, while challenging the “at-risk” construct. Citing Lubeck and Garrett’s 1990 work, they

note that the “at-risk” label predicts the probability of failure: “The generalized use of the ‘at-risk’ label is highly problematic and implicitly racist, classist, sexist, and ableist, a 1990s version of the cultural deficit model” (Swadener and Lubeck, 1995, p. 3). They detail the inherent disparagement of the students and families who are named “at-risk.”

The “at-risk” designation has become a label that influences low expectations in teachers, schools, and in students themselves. As a result, students are put on the defensive. They have to work doubly hard to overcome the stigma of negativity around them so that the resulting stresses that they endure do not become internalized. The resulting miasma of doubt in their capabilities and potentials compounds the pressures of other toxic situations in which they are entrapped. Swadener and Lubeck prefer to use the term “at-promise” to empower the students and families to be acknowledged for their potential in school and the community. As Polakow (1995, p. 286) explains, “The armory of at-risk labels, which ironically gain many poor children access to early childhood preschool programs from which they would otherwise be excluded, also contains proliferating weapons of future educational exclusion.” So, the seeds of discouragement may be planted in early school experiences, opening some doors only to close others.

Today, even though the “at-risk” label is still common, there is some evidence that the mindset is changing. The 2003 White House Task Force on Disadvantaged Youth adopted the term “disadvantaged” (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012), and the term “opportunity youth” has more recently been used by the White House Council for Community Solutions (2012) to denote young adults who are neither in school nor working. More recently, the term “at-promise” (Ragsdale & Taylor, 2014, p. 5) is recognized. The phrase “non-graduates with interrupted enrollment,” engendered by America’s Promise Alliance (2014), is the most non-judgmental

term used to date. While the American high school dropout now has more options, it will still take time to engender the universal support of society.

The Voices of Dropouts

Rotermund (2007) compared three dropout studies finding that many of the students complained of the traditional schooling process; for example, just not liking school, were bored, were not engaged, missed classes, received failing grades, and even believed that getting a GED would be easier than completing high school. A closer look at current reasons for dropping out focus on social emotional combinations of issues due to family responsibilities and lack of real purpose in attending school (America's Promise Alliance, 2014).

The seminal study "The Silent Epidemic" (Bridgeland et al., 2006) was the first to survey those who had dropped out—the stakeholders in the educational system that did not work for them. Reenrollment of high school students, or drop out recovery students, was the theme of research performed by the Regional Educational Laboratory at WestEd in California (Berliner, Barrat, Fong, and Shirk, 2008). These authors engage in a study of a student freshman cohort numbering more than 3,856, following them for five years (2001/02-2005/06) in San Bernardino, CA to observe their behavior patterns of dropping out, reenrollment, and graduation (or lack of it). The study finds that there were "push and pull factors" that influenced decision making of whether to stay in school. These include personal behavior issues resulting in being pushed out and life situations that necessitated a pull out from school. Academic challenges, attitudes, and social pressures also contribute to the results, those being the 35% drop out rate, the 20% transfer rate, and the 45% graduation rate of this cohort five years later. Reenrollment into a high school occurred for 31% of students with a success rate of 18.4%. However, those who reenrolled (most after dropping out in the 9th grade) typically lasted only a year and made little progress

toward a diploma (Berliner et al., 2008). This significant study addresses a population that had been concealed by a dearth of research. It was not until 2005 that all fifty states agreed to sign the National Governors' Association pact to follow cohorts of high school students to get consistent accurate numbers for those who graduated, dropped out, or transferred. At the same time, the United States government offered grants for retention, prevention, and reenrollment of high school dropouts (Sparks, 2013). This was significant since before that period, schools did not follow students that dropped out. It was not known whether students switched schools, entered an alternative program, or simply did not continue their education. Community colleges and adult education programs received students who wanted to get a high school equivalency through a GED, which many felt would be easier than following the traditional education route. This may have been a misguided expectation. In "The Silent Epidemic," returning students reported that the GED was more difficult than they had expected (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Several more recent studies of the voices of "dropouts" have shed significant light on the concern. Most take responsibility for their choices and value education as a means to a good life, but also describe many factors that led to the long road of disengagement from school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006, p. 2; America's Promise Alliance, 2014). These factors include irrelevancy of curriculum to real life, disinterest, chronic absenteeism affecting between 5 million and 7.5 million students (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012, pp. 3-6), and low literacy levels (Perin, 2013). Lack of engagement (with school, adults, and community), academic struggles, lack of attendance, suspensions, out-of-school trauma, home instability, poverty, and the need to control their own lives without the interference of traditional school are paramount to the concerns of students who leave school (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 3; Bridgeland & Milano, 2012; Balfanz et al., 2014; America's Promise Alliance, 2014; Fulwood, 2014).

“Opportunity Road” (Bridgeland & Milano, 2012) examines the number of students out of school and out of work who are not using their talents for their own benefit or that of their community. These students (68%) say that they have a support system in their lives, but need support in school and job matters. Another study by Everest College in “The 2012 High School Dropouts in America Survey” (America’s Promise Alliance, 2012) follows the progress of over five hundred adults across the nation, ages 16 through 35. One-quarter of these students report little or no parental support, with twenty-one percent reporting that they had become a parent with responsibilities that drew them away from high school completion.

Many students who have dropped out have complained that they were bored or not engaged in the process of schooling (Sparks, 2013). Eighty-one percent of dropouts surveyed in “The Silent Epidemic” (Bridgeland et al., 2006) responded with the need for “more opportunities for real-world learning” (p. *iv*). New research from the OECD (2013a, pp. 45-54, 101-140) studies adults with a subset of young adults ages 16 to 24 and assesses the abilities of literacy in a digital age primarily, along with numeracy, and problem solving. It evaluates cognitive and non-cognitive skills based on competencies for high tech serviced-based society worldwide. It concludes that education is not just what you know, but how you apply what you know in your community and the world. The OECD (2012) has also indicated that an abundance of education might not be as helpful if there is no application of skills to authentic situations. The students we want to reengage in education should see more of a focus on knowledge and skills learned for the workplace for the best outcome for a productive society.

Even with the evolution of terminology from “dropout” to “non-graduate” or youth with “interrupted enrollment,” students who leave school continue to struggle with the societal labeling of being personally deficient or are believed to have come from dysfunctional families.

In April 2014, the “Building a Grad Nation” report focuses on ameliorating the dropout crisis by reducing the opportunity gap “in a way that gives low-income students a clear pathway to adult success - a high school education that prepares them to succeed in post-secondary endeavors” (Balfanz et al., 2014, p. 14).

The America’s Promise Alliance (2014) “Don’t Call Them Dropouts” research finds that students with “interrupted enrollment” felt that they were accountable for their own choices, perceived that they had caring parents (55%), had caring teachers (53%), and indicated that they had lived in a “caring” neighborhood (56%); however, the authors suggest that is not enough to overcome the complex negative factors and a supportive network is required (p. 31). The four major findings of this study show that students who were non-graduates had “clusters of factors” that impacted the decisions to remain in or leave school, that these students often existed in “environments that are toxic,” that they had a “yearning for connectedness” (for meaningful relationships), and that they had “resilience in need of support” (pp. 7-8). Factors that would influence students to remain in school include relationships with school personnel, after-school activities, and positive peer groups that valued graduating. In this survey, it appears that students initially made generally positive statements about their circumstances, but were more apt to relate their hardships in answering more specific issue-related questions.

Comparatively, the “Building a Grad Nation” report notes that the early warning signs of absenteeism (even in middle school or earlier), the disconnection of minority youth, and the absence of an adult mentor suggest the disadvantages to be equally profound. Most of the young adult dropouts reported that more mentorship and support systems are needed (Balfanz et al., 2014, p. 46). Students often experienced multiple hardships in dealing with homelessness, loss

of a parent (death, disease, and incarceration), absenteeism, and/or issues related to poverty (Balfanz et al., 2014, p. 36-52; America's Promise Alliance, 2014).

The circumstances of navigating the social emotional environments have a great impact on engagement and academic success. The "social and emotional learning" (SEL) component of the affective school environment has proven to be an essential competency cluster suggested for pre-K through 12 classroom curricula (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013, p. 36-52; Balfanz et al., 2014, p. 7). Influences of positive and negative relationships clearly steered students either toward or away from graduation. The connectedness or engagement with home, school, and the community was part of the tug-of-war, drawing support or leaving the student bereft of following the educational path.

The Voices of Dropouts Who Return to School

The journey back into the educational system, for students who had left school more than two decades after Fine's assertion that the voices of dropouts had been deliberately silenced, is a story of resilience. With their presence, have come their voices. These students, who came back with hope to fulfill their destinies, offer their life details and their personal narratives so that others will be inspired to follow. The hopeless demeanor of marginalized students who show a disinterest and a lack of physical participation, beyond their silent voices in the classroom, is the embodiment of what disadvantaged students normally feel (Fine & Weis, 2003). This is an indicator for teachers and parents to intervene. The telling of these stories will bring their voices back into the realm of the institution of education. Perhaps this time, we will listen to their voices and address the needs of those who are disengaged.

"Dropout recovery" is the term used for programs to address the issues of students who wish to return to school. This term is used by America's Promise Alliance (2014), which

performed the largest research of high school dropouts who return for their credential in the U.S. to date. Studying the numbers, characteristics, and feelings of these students is a relatively new vein of research. The full potential of the student needs a strong network united with her or his own personal short and long-term goals. The study in the Alliance's focus groups worked with youth in community programs, so it drew interviewees who were resilient and reaching out for connections. The roughly 3,000 youth in its sample, both graduates and non-graduates, responded to a nationally distributed survey from those that may or may not have been in a community educational, or dropout recovery program. However, these findings, of positive nature, unquestionably show that the non-graduate students are within our reach—to be empowered to return to school for a high school credential and to develop and participate with all of their talents. These students' ways of knowing and belief systems reveal openings to build an understanding and commitment from educators and community members to the youth at-promise. The recent information indicates that the voices of returning students can inform stakeholders how to keep students in school and to incentivize students to reach out for opportunities while becoming an empowered credentialed citizen.

Factors that Contribute to Dropouts

There are always combinations of factors for leaving school, but most are found in the social fabric of our children's lives. The "ABCs of Dropping Out," or the main predictors for school attrition, revolve around attendance, behavior, and course failure (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog; 2007; Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009). In fact, the Center for Equity and Excellence in Education found the aspect of engagement (or non-engagement) of the individual and of the institution is a key issue that drives students to quit school or to be asked to leave (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009). Social connectedness (engagement), to the family, school, and community

groups in general, is essential for the successful student (America's Promise Alliance, 2014). Whereas, Rumberger and Lim (2008) note that the school is about 20% responsible for producing dropouts (also in Mathis, 2013), Rumberger (2011) later pulls back from this and identifies families "as the single most important factor" (p. 9). The school is indicated to be the second aspect with communities listed third. These institutions influence students and provide the context in which this issue plays out (Rumberger, 2011, Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Rumberger (2011) argues that dropout factors are categorized into two main groups: individual issues and contextual issues. His research shows that high school students would typically have multiple factors that affect their decision to drop out, or exhibit behaviors that result in expulsion. The individual's attitudes and behaviors influence the school experience; and if assessed, can be used to predict the risk of dropping out. Having a history of low academic performance, absenteeism, disengagement, and disruptive behaviors can also predict the possibility of leaving high school without a diploma (Rumberger, 2011). The contextual issues revolve around families, schools, and the community. Families that do not value education, have dropouts in their history, are not strong with providing emotional support, or do not supervise behavior may have students who will drop out. Schools must give students choices in the curriculum, employ teachers who build relationships with their students, and offer counselors that care about their issues. Students must be invested in the high school and school staff and community support must inspire that investment (Milliken, 2007). Communities with concentrated poverty, joblessness, and inadequate support for teenagers will likely find their youth dropping out.

Peer groups are contextual factors that produce attitudes and behaviors that can interrupt or cement engagement. Lack of connectedness, support, or intrinsic motivation can also impede

the way to graduation. The National Dropout Prevention Center (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007) issued a report that found similar factors in two categories: the individual and the family. The individual domain contains six subgroups of risk factors, mostly based on unproductive and harmful behaviors and the family domain is categorized around two subgroups: family background characteristics and engagement through commitment to education.

Children of poverty are in danger of never finishing high school, not only from attending under-resourced schools, but also from their families living in poverty (Mathis, 2013). A ten-year longitudinal study of nearly 4,000 students at various economic levels were chosen from a governmental database and given periodic reading tests (Hernandez, 2011). The results showed that the combination of poverty and poor reading skills put those children in “double jeopardy” (p. 4) of dropping out of school. In fact, students who could not read at the basic level were six times more likely to drop out, and students who were simply poor readers were four times more likely to leave school. Thirty-five percent of students from low-resourced neighborhoods, who lived in poverty, and had poor reading scores did not graduate with their class (p. 4). Multiple risk factors over time compounded the struggle for these students to graduate. The effect of this longitudinal study frames a socioeconomic condition that has not been eradicated over time and has negative consequences for the next generation’s educational and economic success.

A contributing factor to the dropout issue is the attitude of society toward amelioration of the problem. The aspect of public opinion and school structures that influence the stereotype make the environment more hostile to the high school dropout. A 1973 Gallup poll indicated that 76 percent of respondents believed schools were “extremely important” to a student’s future success and an additional 19 percent believed that they were “fairly important” (Tyack, 1974). The social perspective is now more attuned to the inequality and social justice outlines of the

dropout problem while in the past (and to some extent the present) the negative stereotype placed blame on the victim (Dorn, 1996; Rumberger, 2011). The expectation of the community that every high school student should graduate puts a glaring spotlight on those who do not. Many U.S. presidents, including Jefferson, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama have maintained a strong interest in the value of public education. They championed reform and presented ideas, guidelines, goals, and funding for governmental programs that support education while aiming to increase graduation rates (Rumberger, 2011).

The societal pressure for getting a job affects students today. Only since the mid-twentieth century has the rate of students who try to hold down jobs and go to school at the same time become significant. The idea that many students want and need money in today's environment causes some to stop schooling when they find jobs, as indicated by a 2002 longitudinal survey (Rotermund, 2007). The social construct of getting a job is made more difficult because of employers requiring high school diplomas. In addition, applying for most jobs today is accomplished online by submission of job applications. Without technology skills or computer access, the high school dropout has trouble gaining access to job postings. Even the fast food industry is now taking applications online. Public computers are found at the libraries, but are limited to specific hours and are often unavailable due to high demand. The link between the economy and job opportunities for those without diplomas plays a factor in the twenty-first century, just as it did when high schools were developing at the turn of the twentieth century.

Along with absenteeism, students who believed they had found another less complicated option in the GED, left school in pursuit of that credential (Rotermund, 2007). The GED was born during World War II and used by the U.S. Army Institute for high school equivalency testing. Students coming out of high school did not seem to be properly prepared to perform in

the army. The GED proved to be a popular alternative to the disciplined structure of the public school in the 1970s, and became the main thrust of adult education in the 1980s. The dominance of the dropout as a serious problem faded, but became important on the social conscience once again in the 1990s (Dorn, 1996).

The availability of the GED has a few negative outcomes. For example, the GED might actually increase the rate of dropouts since students feel that it is a good alternative to staying in school, so they drop out (Rumberger, 2011, p. 36). Forty-one percent of students who dropped out believed that it would be easier to get a GED than a conventional high school diploma (Hanford, Smith, & Stern, 2013; Rotermund, 2007). Unfortunately, the lower value of the GED certification when compared to the diploma is significant; employers presented with both would more likely choose the applicant with a diploma. The availability of the GED could also cause data on high school dropouts to be misconstrued due to the miscounting of these students as absent from the high school graduating class (Rumberger, 2011, p. 94).

Who are the Dropouts?

For children who are at risk for dropping out, “Low socioeconomic status, low parental educational level, family disruption, high-risk peer groups, low achievement, and poor attendance are just some of the risk factors” (Mathis, 2013, p. 2). The act of dropping out sometimes begins as early as elementary school and travels along through middle and high school ending in a trail of discouragement, with the endpoint of leaving school early or leaving involuntarily. Balfanz (2010) reported to the U.S. Senate Help Committee:

Dropout factories... [are] engines of the underclass. Each of these high schools, in turn, is linked with one or more middle schools, where at least half of the eventual dropouts begin the process of disengaging from school and achievement gaps

become achievement chasms. Thus, by the time they get to high school, many students already have one foot out the door, as witnessed by their declining attendance, poor behavior, and course failure during the middle grades. As a result, high schools face an intense educational challenge they were not designed to meet (p. 1)

Dropouts are disenfranchised youth who left school after being tracked and controlled, and after having repeated grades due to a pattern of absenteeism or course failure from underdeveloped academic skills (Balfanz, 2010) while given low expectations for success. They have not benefitted by high-quality instruction, and usually are students of color. Fine, in *Framing Dropouts* (1991), considered how society dealt with high school dropouts as a simple practice of social utility. Her study centered on one New York high school with mostly minority students that graduated only 13% of its students. She described two categories of dropouts, the first of which dealt with cumulative failure, or being incrementally disenfranchised over time. The second is of educational disruption, or a sudden absence, where the student is “labeled” dropout because of retention, truancy, or absenteeism. The selective or coercive measures of regulating and controlling students’ behaviors were humiliating to students. She preferred to consider dropouts as students who were “pushed out” by the educational system that forced students to fit into pre-defined disciplines. She cited a failure to recognize the inequality of services, especially in concentrated areas of poverty with minorities. This system of low expectations for disadvantaged youth is often exemplified in middle school and is continued into high school.

Students going into ninth grade are at great risk of dropping out. A lack of success in the ninth grade may serve as a good indicator of the risk of not graduating with a high school

diploma. One third of students who drop out in the United States do so while in transition to or attending ninth grade (Rumberger, 2011). It is a sensitive time for students as they try to connect to the expectations, content, and structure of the high school. Almost 40% of ninth graders attending dropout factories end up repeating the grade, and up to 15% percent of those students do not finish high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010, p. 2). The ninth grade is where one third of high school students are typically lost to the system (p. 2). The secondary school is the target area most in need of intervention for minorities: “The nation’s lowest-performing high schools produce 58 percent of all African American dropouts and 50 percent of all Hispanic dropouts, compared to 22 percent of all white dropouts” (p. 2). The lowest performing students measured in achievement (6 million in 2010) are twenty times more likely to drop out of school (p. 2). This presents a key opportunity for intervention even when society might think it is too late for secondary students.

The students who are indicated as dropped out are students with an uncertain status according to Balfanz et al. (2012). These youth are cut off from the opportunities of school and employment. Their backgrounds typically include diverse family structures, a lack of parental education, and/or poverty. “An estimated one in six...of the 38.9 million youth ages 16 to 24, are disconnected...they collectively cost taxpayers \$1.6 trillion over their lifetimes, and represent significant untapped potential for the nation” (Balfanz et al., 2012, p. 6). Understanding who drops out gives educators, families, and communities the opportunity to intervene with constructive supports to reduce the risk factors that surround these individuals (Hammond et al., 2007, p. 6). The 2006 survey evidence from “The Silent Epidemic” shows that nearly all of the adults who did not finish high school reported that they had regrets about leaving, 81% believed that a high school diploma was essential and 74% would have stayed in school if they could have

done it all over again (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. *iv*).

A National Concern

International competition for an educated populace regarding issues such as the economy, the global market, scientific research, and defense becomes increasingly acute in today's fast-paced world. The graduation rates of each country represent an important measure of competitiveness in this world arena. Data from 2008 showed the United States graduation rate of high school students at 77% of the total population, which was below the 80% average of all of the countries that participated in a survey by the OECD (Rumberger, 2011, p. 84). Recognition of this statistic and its ties to the dropout issue reduces America's stature in the world.

The dropout issue became a national concern in the 1960s and again in the 1990s in response to the link between school attrition and the rising economic and social costs (Schreiber, 1963; Dorn, 1996; Rumberger, 2011). With the advancement of globalization, today's American labor force is meeting new worldwide competitive challenges at every level. For example, many work tasks are becoming increasingly digitized, allowing businesses to electronically outsource work tasks anywhere in the world. As the skills necessary to complete these tasks become more available in other countries at lower cost, the jobs follow. Coupled with that advancement is the improvement in the quality of education across the globe (Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies [PIAAC], 2013), which assures that the globalized economy is not going away. When considering all worldwide high school graduates moving on to college, the proportion of those being from the U.S. dropped from 30% in 1977 to 14% in 2007 (National Center on Education and the Economy [NCEE], 2007, p. 4). The world is quickly catching up with the modernity of America. The NCEE cautioned that this would place "good, well-paying, middle-class jobs involving routine work" (p. 5) at risk of automation and outsourcing

programming. Despite the improvements in the quality and levels of education in other countries, it must be understood that the risk of missing the opportunity to prepare high school students for the global economy demeans the economic competitiveness of the nation. Without improvement in the high school graduation rate over the next ten years, the U.S. would stand to lose about 12 million students through school attrition, resulting in a loss in economic revenue of \$1.5 trillion (Balfanz et al., 2012).

As the United States loses revenue, productivity, and innovation, the students who have left school are losing their economic freedoms. The social cost of criminal behavior also hurts society. In 2010, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the working poor consisted of 20% of the population of adults without a high school diploma compared to about 2-3% classified as working poor for those with a college degree (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2012). Higher rates of incarceration and families living in poverty highlight a breakdown in our social system, which could be restructured with more students graduating from high school, and continuing on to post-secondary schooling to gain the skills necessary to navigate local communities as well as the global economy. Schools are encumbered with the job of addressing all types of social problems along with educating the adolescents.

President George H. W. Bush, in 1990, introduced the Six National Goals for the year 2000. They included a 90% high school graduation rate and a reduction of the graduation gap between white and minority students (Rumberger, 2011, p. 3). The achieved outcome missed that mark. A national awareness of the inability for states to measure the dropout rate realistically and consistently came from having different accountability tools between states. Schools did not typically note when a student dropped out, nor did they follow up to see where the student might have reentered school in another place or another program, such as an

alternative school. The twenty-first century reveals public anxiety for dropouts at the national level, as President Bush enacted the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ([NCLB], 2002). In this bill, there were provisions for encouraging schools to reduce the dropout rate, but schools have mostly disregarded that provision (Spring, 2011). In any case, there was a trend toward improving the graduation outcomes in 24 states from 2002 to 2010. Sixteen states achieved limited or no progress while ten states lost ground (Balfanz et al., 2012, p. 28). The number of schools that would be considered dropout factories has dropped from 2,007 in the year 2002 to 1,550, or about 10% of schools, in the year 2010. The issue of education has become a national case of expecting schools to solve all of the problems of poverty, crime, dependency, and social disruption in an instrumentalist construction (Balfanz et al., 2012).

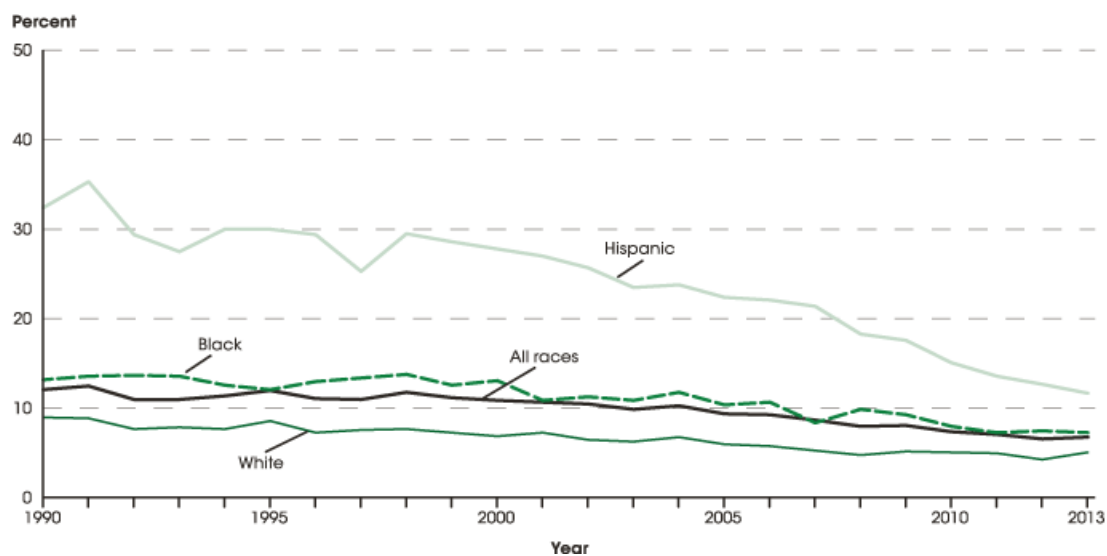
This dropout issue continues to be recognized as a national concern. “Building a Grad Nation” is an annual report that updates the information on the work of several groups devoted to adolescent education. In the latest report, it endeavors to support the White House’s expectation of a 90% graduation rate for the total population by 2020 (Balfanz et al., 2012). To accomplish this, its authors created a “Civic Marshal Plan,” so named because it was inspired by the Marshal Plan, which consisted of measures to rebuild Europe after World War II. It sets many ambitious goals, such as targeting dropout factories for intervention, improving the minority graduation rate, improved accountability for dropout statistics, and intervention for academic achievement, among others. The early warning system plan, monitoring attendance, negative behaviors, and missing credits aims to prevent dropping out with academic coaching and social support for those who struggle to stay in school (Balfanz et al., 2012).

Societal Impact of Dropouts

Schools continue to be the target of reform, but families, especially in poverty, need attention. Taking a societal point of view, it appears that researchers/educators feel that they can make more of a difference in the schools where they have more power to change the environment with supportive programs that meet the social and physical needs of families. The goal is for schools to work in partnership with families to support education. For example, dropout factories and graduation rates can be measured. Rumberger (2011) and Mathis (2013) have observed that families are ground zero for defense against dropping out, so intervention to support family investment in schools will make a difference. Families should be encouraged to take advantage of tutoring, counseling, advising, special interest groups, and engaging in school events. Mathis (2013) contends that for people in poverty, the school might actually be a strong framework for the student's road to a diploma. It gives the prospect of attachment for students and families to get the aid that they need. Schools must be resourced to answer those needs, because society expects them to improve the lives of adolescents. From a social justice perspective, it seems that changes should start in the school to reduce the oppression that many generations of minorities had to withstand (Sanders, 2000).

The historical and contemporary perspectives represent the development of the social construct of the high school dropout. Based on history and the challenges of today, many governmental programs, community groups, and businesses have come together to find ways to not only keep students in high school for the credential, but are leading the way to post-secondary education for the jobs of the future. The social construction of the word "dropout" should be replaced with a view of the high school norm as a process, whereby adolescents are given powerful education and important choices for college and careers.

The most recent trend of dropout rates from 1990 to 2013 is illustrated in Figure 5, as published by the National Center for Education Statistics (2015). It shows the rates for 16-24 year olds who dropped out and are not pursuing a diploma or equivalent credential. Its positive aspects show a decline in the overall U.S. dropout rate from 12% in 1991 to around 7% in 2013. The negative aspects show a continued gap in 2013 occurring between Whites (5%), Blacks (7.5%), and especially Hispanics (11.5%). The task of closing these gaps lies ahead of us.



NOTE: The "status dropout rate" represents the percentage of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential (either a diploma or an equivalency credential such as a General Educational Development [GED] certificate). Data are based on sample surveys of the civilian non-institutionalized population, which excludes persons in prisons, persons in the military, and other persons not living in households. Data for all races include other racial/ethnic categories not separately shown. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). The Condition of Education 2015 (NCES 2015-144), Status Dropout Rates.

Figure 5. Status dropout rates of 16- through 24-year-olds, by race/ethnicity: 1990 through 2013.

Literacy, Engagement, and Resilience

Literacy as a Foundation

The importance of literacy in the success of high school graduates still remains an obstacle for future achievement in school and careers. If the 2012 high school graduates had only about a 38% rate of reading proficiency at or above grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014), then students who have left school should expectedly score lower. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) stated that reading is a complex system of deriving meaning from print in the simplest form. It went on to list more complex reading behaviors and focused on the importance of obtaining literacy skills in school. Critical literacy, defined as the higher-level cognitive ability to analyze, evaluate, and construct new meaning with text (Sousa, 2011, p. 257), must become a priority in order to avoid academic failure and dropping out. Moreover, students in secondary schools need rich academic experiences with diverse texts that are cognitively challenging, interesting, relevant, and motivating to stimulate engagement or “psychological investment” in order for learning to take place (Rumberger, 2011, p. 149).

“Reading achievement predicts the likelihood of graduating from high school and attending college” (Child Trends, 2014, p. 1). Literacy concerns include reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, visually representing, and thinking (Gipe, 2013). It can be both powerful and functional. One might use the terms of Dooley and Assaf (2009) of critical and functional literacy. Critical (or powerful) literacy provides the ability to know how to exchange ideas, construct texts, transact business, and take action to produce social change. It is grounded in multiple communication skills to problem-solve, participate in society, and contribute to social justice. Functional literacy is limited to the ability to read and write for specific purposes of

everyday living (Finn, 2009). It remains perfunctory and is used for basic tasks. There is evidence that functional literacy instruction is prevalent in what Balfanz (2010) termed “dropout factory” high schools, where only 60% or less of students graduate.

Greenleaf and Hinchman (2009) argue that action should be taken concerning “the travesty that typically passes for literacy instruction for older youth in the United States who struggle with reading” (p. 1). It amounts to a bare bones instruction that leaves the student as only functionally literate. These authors find that the poor attitudes and low expectations of teachers in urban schools result in poor literacy instruction. In addition, the authors explained the distribution of literacy in education as being designated for selected groups of people. The advantaged, well-resourced schools with higher socioeconomic populations benefit from access to teachers who value higher level thinking in reading and writing.

The disadvantaged youth in urban high schools have teachers who are inexperienced and who limit instruction to the “basics” because they lack pedagogical knowledge and training to attend to the needs of “underprepared students” (Balfanz, 2010, p. 2). These urban high school students usually come from a chain of middle and elementary schools that exist in the same socioeconomic condition. They grow to become disenchanted with the school system in middle school, or perhaps even earlier; and begin a slow slide out of the educational system with disengagement, low literacy skills, retention, poor grades, absenteeism, and antisocial behaviors. This aligns with the individual predictors of dropping out, explained by Rumberger (2011, p. 160) in four main categories: “educational performance, behaviors, attitudes, and background.”

Literacy skills are essential to every learning task. Shortcomings in literacy lead to difficulties in keeping up academically. Students having difficulty with reading may develop a pattern of missing class time and falling behind while struggling to recover. The learning gap

from missing class content widens over time. This brings frustration and disillusionment, and the connecting strings to the school and peer groups grow tenuous (Rumberger, 2011, pp. 170-171; America's Promise Alliance, 2014). As students are required to perform higher levels of literacy for today's jobs, the risk is that they are not getting the instruction necessary:

“Adolescents who fail to master these more complex tasks in their learning process are likely to become unskilled workers in a world where literacy is an absolute precondition for success” (Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010, p. x).

Reading First, a centerpiece of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), garnered federal funding through state grants to ensure proficiency in literacy by the third grade in the belief that early intervention would carry benefits to the upper grades. In fact, Rumberger (2011) cautions that “students who were not reading proficiently by third grade were four times greater than proficient readers to not graduate from high school” (p. 166). Extending this concern, “many excellent third-grade readers will falter or fail in later-grade academic tasks if the teaching of reading is neglected in the middle and secondary grades” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004, p. 1). Our educational system has performed very well in teaching kindergarten through the third grade. However, reading scores grow steadily weaker through eighth grade: “...by grade ten, U.S. students score among the lowest in the world” (Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010, p. 1). Thus, the national focus on early elementary reading instruction has produced fleeting results.

In 2004, educational researchers collaborated on “Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004), a report that targeted the needs of adolescents. It expressed alarm over the teaching of only functional literacy skills to many secondary students, indicating that pedagogy centered on content areas,

but not on integrated literacy skills. “Somewhat neglected in those various efforts was attention to the core of reading: comprehension, learning while reading, reading in the content areas, and reading in the service of secondary or higher education, of employability, of citizenship” (p. 1). The issues identified in Reading Next necessitated more governmental and societal support for secondary literacy, and emphasized better practices of instruction for critical literacy. In response, the public and the school systems were slow to implement improvements, prompting a follow-up report in 2009, “Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success” (Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010). It spans a range of fourth through twelfth grades, as the term “adolescents” is broadly applied, finding inadequate literacy practices in middle and high school. Concerns are warranted for the many students who will “drop out of high school or perform at minimal level, and end up graduating without the basic skills that they need to work at the college level, get a well-paying job or act as informed citizens” (p. x). Details in this report describe many paths to literacy for adolescents including teacher training, focus on student learning, literacy coaches, and restructuring time for students to extend learning, among others.

The U.S. Department of Education defines the literacy scale of reading skills at these levels: below basic, basic, proficient (at grade level), and advanced. The Adolescent Literacy fact sheet notes that 25% of eighth graders and 27% of twelfth graders score below “basic,” which indicates that they do not even glean a partial understanding of grade level content (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). This is of concern for educators and should be disconcerting for businesses, postsecondary schools, and the government. Graduation rates conditional on achievement scores demand literacy skills at the proficient level. A recent ACT study of twelfth grade students determined that more than 60% of students scored below the

proficiency who struggle with reading but are able to graduate bring those challenges to the workplace or to post-secondary classes, and are in need of remediation. Nationally, only 52% of high school graduates in the class of 2011 were prepared for the reading demands of college, with little variance during the last two decades (ACT, 2006; ACT, 2012). Another source, “Confronting the Crisis,” indicates that adolescents’ reading scores have stayed at relatively the same level without improvement since 1973 (Haynes, 2012). Not surprisingly, this parallels the stagnancy in graduation rates over the same period.

Consequences of Low Literacy Skills

Many obstacles befall those who lack the ability to engage in their environments with literacy skills. Incarceration, negative consequences on children, unemployment or lifetime minimum wage jobs, and poor health are the potential outcomes for students who have dropped out of school with low literacy skills. Fifty-six percent could not read or write above the basic level and 95% of inmates who are released return to their communities with not only a prison record but also low literacy skills (NCAL, 2008). “Children of dropouts are far more likely to be in weak schools where teachers are not teaching reading skills, perform badly, and drop out themselves, thus creating powerful intergenerational social problems” (Orfield, 2004, p.2).

Family influence on reading and academics, as a factor in student achievement, has an impact on student attitudes toward graduation. Being unemployed or working in a minimum wage job restricts a person from the economic advantages of living above the poverty level. People who live at the lower levels of the socioeconomic strata because of low or lack of wages pass health insecurity on to their families. Low health literacies impede the ability to understand health forms, directions, and medication instructions so it is difficult to take action for personal

health (Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, 2007). The social, economic, and healthcare costs to the American society and the families of dropouts are overwhelming.

Noncognitive skills

Along with the cognitive prowess, academic agility, and accumulation of content understanding, noncognitive skills make up a significant component of what it takes to graduate from high school, according to a report out of the University of Chicago (Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, Nagaoka, Keyes, Johnson, & Beechum, 2012). The report consolidated research-based characteristics into “Five General Categories of Noncognitive Factors” (pp. 8-53). Academic behaviors include the “good student” qualities of participation, attendance, preparedness, and showing up on time. Academic perseverance consists of tenacity, grit, delayed gratification, self-discipline, and self-control. Academic mindsets characterize how one identifies with the academic tasks. Learning strategies pertains to the learning strategies, skills, and goal setting practices. The fifth factor, social skills, is made up of interpersonal skills, empathy, cooperation, assertion, and being responsible. In the report, these factors are modeled as important contributors to the academic behaviors and performance necessary for success in school (p. 12). In the present research, noncognitive skills are viewed in the general terms of engagement and resilience.

Engagement

Engagement is “the conceptual glue that connects student agency (including students’ prior knowledge, experience, and interest at school, home, and in the community) and its ecological influences (of peers, family, and community) to the organizational structures and cultures of school” (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 433). Student social engagement on a school wide level is required to encourage connectedness. Emotional attachment to the institution of

school through teachers, peer groups, socializing, and in after-school activities defines the context for essential learning. In three national surveys of high school dropouts, students with interrupted enrollment self-reported the academic challenges they encountered and the fact that they just did not like school contributed to dropping out (Rotermund, 2007). Educators who want to prevent students from dropping out must promote meaningful engagement that makes a transaction of active processing in learning between the teacher and the student.

Engagement (not only academically, but also socially) is a necessary ingredient for school success. Academically, 64% of students report a desire to be engaged by curriculum that is relevant, motivating, and based on real-world experiences (Sparks, 2013, Adams, 2013). The social emotional learning (SEL) measures must be included for students to feel engaged and connected to the school milieu (Balfanz et al., 2014). Accordingly, general research on the issue of dropouts must necessarily include consideration of the engagement factor. The demographic information and interviews will inform this researcher of the engagement or connectedness that the returning students feel for school and relationships.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) finds that total absorption in an activity with awareness only for the positive sense of well-being or happiness is a characteristic of engagement that he terms as “flow.” This was portrayed as an attentiveness that must be activated for learning to take place. His research concludes that the most relevant activity to the student, *reading*, is the most mentioned flow activity (p. 117). Linking reading to happiness is an advantage for the high school dropout recovery student and for student achievement in general. Yeager and Dweck (2012) reveal that students with a “growth mindset” believe their intelligence or talents can be developed with effort, even if they think they lack the specific IQ level for a skill, are far more engaged and motivated to problem-solve. This is incremental learning, or adjustments to old

knowledge being made by the infusion of new learned knowledge after several attempts at problem solving. In other words, teaching a growth mastery model, instead of simple achievement, keeps students more engaged than preparing for summative high stakes testing.

Engagement also encompasses the personal connectedness to the school, teachers, peers, clubs, mentors, etc. When interrupted attendance, social-emotional problems, negative aspects of poverty, or low grades become a reality, students lose interest and begin the long process of disengagement and the possibility of dropping out (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Rumberger, 2013; Balfanz et al., 2014; and America's Promise Alliance, 2014). Several of these authors call these negative situations risk factors. Even the America's Promise Alliance (2014), with its title "Don't Call Them Dropouts" uses the term risk factors for a cautionary red flag for all involved to take action in support both academically and socially to build connecting bridges toward education and careers. Structuring wrap-around services that are embedded in the school day can provide a relationship or engagement in school as a support system that empowers students with the tools to succeed in school and toward the emancipation from the disenfranchisement born of legacy.

Engagement is the personal connection, active participation, attentiveness, or the level of involvement one has toward a situation. "Social involvement [is] not merely a cultural impetus for literacy but its interpretive underpinning as well" (Brandt, 1990, p. 103). Personal links to the school in a social environment create a space for students to begin engagement in the educational process and reduce the likelihood of dropping out. Personal connections should be developed between the students and the schools. When students join groups, share commonalities with other peers, have mutual respect relationships with teachers, and have an investment in the schools, they are more likely to be successful and graduate (Rumberger, 2011).

In doing so, students must negotiate the academic and social domains of high school. Intrinsic motivation, or an internal self-driven purpose, will help them to become engaged with the tasks placed before them. “Student engagement is predictive of dropping out even after controlling for academic achievement and student background” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010, p. 2).

Appleton, Christenson, and Furlong (2008) describe psychological connections with the school” (p. 369). This informal measurement of student behavior can give educators information to strengthen the relationships to personnel, content, and peer groups. The authors of “The Silent Epidemic” (Bridgeland et al., 2006) gathered data from their national survey of sophomores that delineated self-reported reasons for dropping out. The most important of these are: boredom or non-interesting classes (47%), unable to catch up after missing classes (43%), negative influence by peers (42%), no structure in life (38%), and failure in classes. Susan Rotermund (2007) compares these results to other national surveys showing for engagement that 41% in 1998 and 37% in 2002 simply did not “like” school. Significantly, this demonstrates that minimally engaged students were bored and/or disliked the process of schooling, and what they considered irrelevant content. School officials and teachers must be aware of disengagement from a peer group, a class, or school in general. Negative interactions with peers can cause separation from the group. Absenteeism, retention, and disruptive behavior can start a long journey toward becoming a dropout (Rumberger, 2011).

School Engagement

Engagement can be evaluated on many levels, from the big picture of high school down to specific classes and methods teachers use to deliver the curriculum. Focusing on the school level, the Communities in Schools (CIS) program founder Bill Milliken wrote *The Last Dropout: Stop the Epidemic* (2007). His method involving the constructing small groups of peers with a

counselor along with relevant resources within the school setting is considered very successful nationally. Today it is the one of most well-known and productive programs for youth in schools. CIS is the nation's leading dropout prevention organization, servicing nearly one million students in over three thousand schools. Local collaborations between teachers, families, and communities help students to overcome myriad problematic issues and remain in school by providing tutors, counselors, and services. CIS works at the student level to provide a safe haven for them to feel engaged in school and form relationships that are supportive. Alienation and disengagement are manifested when students are not compelled to connect to any level of schooling (Kerr & Legters, 2004). Sixty-two percent of students participating in "The Silent Epidemic" survey indicated that their school needed staff that could help with problems outside of school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Clearly, adolescents would benefit from personnel who formulate an integrated support system that includes, among other dynamics, literacy tutoring for academic achievement and social service resources.

Classroom Engagement

At the classroom level, interest, relevancy, and purpose are important aspects to include while teaching with engagement strategies. Teachers can contribute to engagement by learning about students' interests, attitudes, and motivations through affective assessments. Affective assessments are created with surveys, checklists, or questionnaires for students to report their preferences. Knowing the interests of the students allows teachers to supplement the curriculum with relevant articles, artifacts, and texts that make learning exciting.

Engagement must have relevancy and purpose at its roots. Students traditionally ask, "When am I going to use this?" or "Will we be tested on this?" Both questions are related to the fact that students do not see purpose. Responses that are connected to life purposes are

necessary and student-driven outcomes should be a priority. Collaboration in small groups contributes to comprehension of text, as students support each other's scholarship. Novelty, interest, relevancy, activities using concrete examples, and simulations all promote learning (Sousa, 2011).

Brain research informs us that a moderate cognitive challenge has a motivational effect on students (Sousa, 2011). Activities or text that is too challenging can be frustrating and tasks that are too easy can cause low interest. A mild challenge is one that students can feel competent when finished. These challenges should be attached to leveled performance assessments. Students should be armed with an array of choices to demonstrate their competencies. Teachers should keep the learning preferences of the students in mind and utilize multiple modalities when delivering content. This will generate interest and curiosity.

Models of Engagement

Susan Rotermund (as cited in Rumberger, 2011, p. 187) created a model of engagement that connects the psychological antecedents of perceived competence, value, and belonging to the engagement aspects using the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains; followed by achievement or outcome, as measured by the grade point average (GPA). This is the point where one, upon not being successful, might drop out. In this model, the affective domain is positioned between the cognitive and behavioral. It appears that the affective (emotional) domain carries significant importance and propels information to the thinking and acting areas. If apprised with the realization that students are emotionally centered, then teachers can activate learning strategies that make learning appealing. This affective mode of engagement promotes a relationship between feelings and thinking. Building a strong bond in this manner helps students to experience learning, rather than just hearing someone talk. It is an engagement model that

necessitates teaching while knowing the feelings of the students. Many teachers do not feel that they have time for more than simply delivering the content. However, teaching with strategies that make use of the domains of Rotermund's model will enable teachers to focus on engagement and connect learning with emotional feedback.

The Wehlage model, as explained by Rumberger (2015), is one of engagement for academic work. Its main components consist of gauging psychological investment, effort, concentration, and motivation. "Engagement is an inner quality of concentration and effort, it is not readily observed, so it must be inferred from indirect indicators such as the amount of participation in academic work...interest, and enthusiasm" (p. 151). To utilize this model, teachers must be observers of behavior to gather information to assess engagement. Every contributor to participation should be noted, including perceived motivations.

Motivation

Student motivation has a significant research base and is a vital component of engagement. Whereas engagement is the personal behavior of involvement, motivation is the will to engage (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997, p. 421; Eccles, 2009). Motivation is defined as the purposes or reasons that cause specific behavior (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Eccles's (2009) research included a subject-task value initiative that encompassed interest, attainment, utility, perceived cost, and empirical support. This means that the individual finds value in the activity through any of these factors. Motivation also includes identity, self-awareness, cultural connections, self-efficacy, and expectations. When these aspects are taken into account by parents and educators, students are more likely to value their experience at school.

John T. Guthrie (2008) has performed significant research identifying intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *Extrinsic* motivation is based on rewards in the environment such as grades,

extra credit, or credentials. *Intrinsic* motivation deals with the personal rewards one gives oneself—a good feeling of accomplishment, a great experience, or spending time with something of interest or pleasure. The objective for teachers is the transfer from extrinsic motivation to one that is intrinsic so that students will engage for personal reasons. Choice and ownership are key ingredients. By giving choices in texts, activities, and assessments, students will become more engaged and own their work.

Teachers should incorporate areas of interest, choice, curiosity, and discovery while addressing class objectives. This process helps a student go from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic self-satisfying rewards. Students begin to engage for their own satisfaction rather than be forced to participate for grades (Guthrie, 2008). Building internal motivation for recreational reading, for example, is dependent on increasing reading experiences using texts that are at an appropriate reading level, are relevant to a person's life, and are specifically geared toward interests. Once this is established, reading knowledge can be transferred to the academic arena. Engagement is dependent upon the learner's attention and interest. Learning takes place through meaningful experiences in which students are engaged (Sousa, 2011).

Literacy and Engagement

Guthrie (2008), a prolific contributor to the research on motivation, observes, “Remarkably, reading engagement was more important than students' family background consisting of parents' education and income. Reading engagement is connected to achievement more strongly than to home environment” (p.3). He has long been a proponent of the need for students to be engaged for personal reward in order to learn. Reading engagement is necessary for attention to multiple tasks in the classroom and for personal development for participating in life. Therefore, when literacy and engagement, seen as reading engagement, are woven into the

fabric of the classroom, students will be more inclined to participate and learn. Rumberger (2004, pp. 133-135) presents a framework of educational performance that models a system of interdependency between engagement (both social and academic) and educational performance, with the system inputs of student characteristics and family/school/community. It models engagement as both causing and resulting from student stability, and illustrates how the student attributes of values, attitudes, and behaviors contribute to achievement, staying in school, or dropping out.

It is important to appreciate the bond between literacy and engagement. Literacy, as an incorporated aspect of learning through inquiry, is essential for student engagement. Students do not see the value in learning something that is not perceived as useful. In the new brain research, the facts confirm what students have been telling us for a long time—they need novelty, they need relevancy to their lives, and they need authentic purpose. Learning must have transfer. In other words, the skills that a student learns must have the flexibility to be applied to new and different situations (Sousa, 2011). Engagement through literacy brings content and instruction into the realm of relevancy. Methods applied in the classroom with student-centered learning, choice, and ownership in reading and writing responsibilities with digital, print, and graphic forms of literacy will prompt positive responses. Teachers who are trained in and apply pedagogy that is engaging are making the connections that are essential to the needs of students.

Resilience

Research on the phenomenon of resilience became quite prevalent in the 1950s. Behavioral scientists undertook research in human conduct that either was adaptive or maladaptive while experiencing simple to extreme struggles. After description, observation, understanding the process, and experimentation, scientists found that the characteristics of each

individual or human factor, in actions and development, were essential in the outcome. Both in research and practice, the concentration has been on intervention, especially for children, to improve their resilience while dealing with adversity (Masten, 2011, p. 493).

Werner (2012) has long been interested in the fact that students that were vulnerable to much adversity actually prevailed to overcome the struggles. She worked with Garmezy and Rutter in the early 1950's, who had also researched this topic. She wrote a book with Ruth Smith in 1982, *Vulnerable But Invincible: A Longitudinal Study of Resilient Children and Youth*. They believed that little credit was given to students who had great resilience in the face of roadblocks, and in fact, were quite surprised with this finding. They performed a ten-year longitudinal study beginning in 1955 on the island of Kauai, following children who lived in stressful environments, expecting that similar negative behaviors would be carried forward when they grew to become adults. Their observations that many of these children grew up to be responsible young adults, not repeating the negative behaviors of their parents, conflicted with prior expectations. They advocate more research on what role children's resilience played in what she had observed, and scrutinize the effectiveness of rendering help to such children. Werner was one of the first in the field to study resilience and its benefits.

Meichenbaum (N.D.) summarizes in 2006 and in prior research, that resilience is "the general rule of adaptation," exists at various levels in each behavioral domain (social, academic, etc.), is "fluid over time," attained through "multiple pathways," and is dependent on the experience of adversities (p. 14). Masten, (2011, p. 495) also finds that people who overcame challenges were found to be resilient no matter how long it took to adapt and beat the roadblocks in their lives.

More recently, resilience has become a factor for those who are overcoming struggles in their backgrounds. It appears to be a personal characteristic exceedingly influenced by the sociocultural environment in which the student exists. Resilience, a key factor in the “Don’t Call Them Dropouts” report by America’s Promise Alliance (2014), is included for the value of self-agency and perseverance. Executive Director Jonathan Zaff expresses the resilient strength of the non-graduates as a key in the process of returning to school. He explains the limitation of a needed “reach up,” or support from an external figure, to assist in the transformation of non-graduate to graduate; resilience alone is not enough. The America’s Promise Alliance research blends connectedness with engagement and resilience and there may be more of a distinction in the two characteristics to find. It is necessary to get more information concerning this trait to uncover the strengths in emancipating oneself from years of marginalization, and to investigate whether the “reach up” is always needed.

Wagnild and Young (1993) created “The Resilience Scale,” an instrument of measurement that is internationally trademarked for use in all populations. They were most well known for investigating aspects of personal behavior that helped people to bounce back during adversity. Resilience is defined in the level at which one can use personal and social competencies and resources to persevere in the face of adversity (Hjemdal et al., 2006). Resilience, therefore, is an important factor that contributes to the indomitable spirit of the dropout recovery student.

Hjemdal et al. (2006, p. 1) define resilience as “the protective factors, processes, and mechanisms that, despite experiences with stressors shown to carry significant risk for developing psychopathology, contribute to a good outcome.” These authors see the factors as “protective,” meaning that possessing resiliency is a way of shielding oneself from the harm of

the world and expecting positive things to happen. In this way, the factors of not only resilience, but also strong literacy skills and active social/school engagement can be protective factors for success in returning to school for a high school credential toward a career or college. In 2003, Friberg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, and Martinussen investigated aspects of the adult resilience scale “protective factors” to find the “dispositional attitudes” that were the underlying positive results of “healthy adjustment.” Their findings are that the predictive ability of the scale to indicate the levels of resilience was helpful in determining the right plan to take for each person’s benefit.

Self-Efficacy

Surveying the five resilience scale dimensions of personal competence, social competence, personal dispositions, family coherence, and social resources (Friberg et al., 2003), the personal competencies and dispositions are related to the view of the ability to act on one’s own behalf in the face of adversity. A high level of self-efficacy is another way of realizing one’s potential for success. Many studies show how strong constructive personal attitudes and motivation result in resilient characteristics. Bandura (1997) created a socio-cognitive model that described self-efficacy, confidence, ability, action, and accomplishment as integral to human agency. Schunk (1991) believes that self-efficacy is related to self-regulation and self-control: “A higher sense of efficacy leads students to perform those activities that they believe will result in learning” (p. 212). The judgment of an individual was inter-related to his or her evaluative methods of the goal. Challenging goals increase self-efficacy and performance.

Modern expectancy and value theories “link achievement, performance, persistence and choice; most directly to individuals’ expectancy-related and task-value beliefs,” according to Eccles and Wigfield (2002). Their model describes an intricate pattern of behaviors that prioritizes choices of options, given the desired outcomes and associated trade-offs needed to

achieve those outcomes. Essentially, they find that students who believe in their own ability to do a given task have more likelihood of accomplishing that task. The value of a task is judged by students for its usefulness in relationship to the goal (Eccles, 2009). “Attributional theory” is a value theory that essentially has been utilized for the past 30 years that emphasizes a person’s beliefs about his/her accomplishments. Weiner (2005) believes that a person’s characteristics or attributes are the cause of their achievement or failure in a given task. Researchers identify intrinsic and extrinsic control factors that influence characteristics or abilities in the environmental context, which can alter outcomes. Students perceive that attributes in themselves and the situation are determinants of success.

In order to be successful, people need to be able to participate in community with adequate skills and engagement with the resilience and fortitude to accomplish personal goals. Knowing the characteristics of this population will benefit teachers and administrators in understanding what happens in the process of dropping out and returning to school. Improving literacy skills for academics through assessing reading attitudes, helping students feel connected or engaged, and evaluating the resilience level of each student can ameliorate the problem of dropping out and the long road to returning for a high school credential.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods processes provide empirical evidence to increase a body of knowledge concerning a research question. They utilize logic and reasoning to arrive at conclusions based on investigation and observation (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). In this study, both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used, incorporated in a mixed methods approach to explore the links between dropping out, returning to school, literacy, engagement, and resilience. The research is situated in a community college and other adult education programs in Michigan where students who have dropped out of high school come back to continue their education. It involves collecting data on students' perceptions through ethnographies of their educational careers, when and why they dropped out of high school, and their successful return to studies in a GED (General Educational Development credential) program.

Conceptual Frameworks and the Researcher

Glesne (2006) explains paradigms as the overall structure or philosophical guide for scientific research. She includes the critical research paradigm as an important contribution to those who are disadvantaged, as are the students in this study. "The critical research paradigm, within which I am including critical theory and feminine research, critiques historical and structural conditions of oppression and seeks transformation of those conditions" (p. 7). This is especially relevant, given the use of the emancipatory lens as a critical paradigm in the present research. Creswell (2007, p. 15) defines worldviews to include philosophical perspectives, and focuses on "post positivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism." As a social constructivist, the researcher in the present study has a general preference for qualitative

research, but appreciates the benefits that a quantitative survey could bring to this study. By integrating both methods in an emancipatory model, it is preferred to take a positive stand for the educationally disadvantaged and promote change by informing the body of knowledge in dropout recovery. The researcher interprets the data and the ethnographies of the description of lived experiences with the participant's personal, contextual, and cultural information. Value is found in the experimental design of both the quantitative and the qualitative studies. The purpose is to include the data collected from a large group and to develop an understanding of the casual factors to delve into specific details, in interviews, that can sketch out a fuller picture of the life circumstances of the students. The mixed methods approach is undertaken with the anticipation that this combination will yield a balanced approach in this research.

Both context-driven reality and derived ways of knowing are essential to interpreting student narratives in qualitative research. As Geertz (1973) explains, the researcher must interpret the many threads into one's "own construction of other people's constructions" of meaning (p. 9). For example, what is the reality and what is the worldview from the perspective of the student who has not finished high school? This constructivist paradigm centers on making meaning and interpreting "thick descriptions" of the ethnographic interview (Geertz, 1973) into the personal message created by people with their own experiences.

The ethnographic nature of this study is supported by the belief that ontological issues (how one looks at reality and existence in the perceived world) as well as the students' ways of knowing, affect their chances in the hegemonic or dominant society. Even when faced with disenfranchisement, students' perceptions are interpreted through their own lenses, bearing the burden of their perceived choices. Indeed, it has been observed that personal human interactions of ethnographic retrospections can give insight from multiple perspectives (Schram, 2006). The

prospect of being a vulnerable observer (Behar, 1996) influences this researcher to celebrate the self-empowerment that each student activates to return for a high school credential.

The performance of a study such as this demands that personal disciplined subjectivity should be monitored with an awareness of proximal distance despite the positionality of being a supportive listener, as prescribed by Behar (1996) and Seidman (2006). The interviewer in this study strives to measure and control personal reactions to disturbing information, to maintain a grounded line of events within each personal narrative, and to construct a foundation for future analysis. The researcher must remember to “tame subjectivity” (Peshkin, 1988) or monitor and subdue personal feelings about the study.

Reflexivity concerns the researcher not only reflecting on her personal interactions and influence in the study, but it also encompasses how the participants, context, and phenomena interact with each other (Glesne, 2006, p. 6). Critical reflexivity is deemed a necessary ingredient to navigate through some of the harrowing aspects that the participants might detail, while it enables follow up with pointed questions to ferret out inconsistencies around some of the shock value responses. During this study, interviewer reflexivity is monitored, yet supportive, to encourage the participants to safely reveal their journeys without judgment. It is essential to balance advocacy for students who were entangled in many situations that held them back from graduation and respect for their acceptance of personal responsibility and resilience toward their goals. Between compassion and stereotypes, between excuses and harsh reality, this researcher’s goal is to listen without bias and to promote stories of success that will positively influence others.

Researchers must mentally assess any biases or any influential transactions that may affect the data collected. This interview process must display a supportive and encouraging

demeanor that allows the students to reveal their feelings about school, knowing that they are already considered successful in returning for more education. The message conveyed to the participants is that an honest dialogue about how their stories of obstacles and successes can motivate others to follow their path to complete a high school credential. This researcher's interest in their stories is about how literacy, engagement, and resiliency are factors in their leaving school and returning.

Quantitative Research Practices

Quantitative research is “the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012, p. 7). Quantitative research is based on the scientific method using a hypothesis and deductive means for objectively gathering data using an instrument such as a survey, questionnaire, or observation (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The researcher makes a prediction of outcome and then gathers objective data from multiple observations, while controlling contextual input factors, to conclude whether there are relationships causing effects in the resulting output variables. Quantitative research is structured, thoroughly tested, and ubiquitously applied in many diverse disciplines. It involves a sample size that is usually large enough to support a generalizable theory at completion. Conclusions confirm or reject the original hypothesis with results that are typically determined to be statistically significant if there is 95% likelihood that a replication of the same experiment would yield the same or similar results within a margin of error that is about five percentage points (Anderson, 2006). The use of statistics for analysis is the foundation for measuring outcomes (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012).

Quantitative Pilot Survey in an Alternative High School

This prior quantitative pilot survey experience took place in an alternative high school where this researcher had been working with the media specialist and the principal for a year. Most of the students were African American and were enrolled until credit recovery was complete and then they transferred back to their home school. Much has been written about the many statistics showing the roadblocks that urban students from minority and impoverished families must overcome in order to be successful in the game of education. In *The Dreamkeepers*, Ladson-Billings (2009) delineates the culturally competent teacher who is required to reach and teach these students with understanding and love. In *The Hows and Whys of Alternative Education: Schools Where Students Thrive* (Leiding, 2008), many positive choices were offered for high school students that ranged from charter schools to distance learning. These two authors take a very positive stance through student support by way of career and guidance counselors in alternative settings. They also set the groundwork for societal interest convergence in the benefits of an educated youth.

The alternative high school setting was just such a place, so the pilot study was enacted in this kind of affirmative environment. Most students reported that they were good readers, even when their Scholastic Reading Inventory scores showed otherwise. They were willing to take the survey and report their attitudes and feelings about their motivations to read and the conditions of their access to computers, books, and other educational supports.

The pilot study was conducted in Michigan (sample size n=22). Three classes were examined for motivation to read in comparison to their Scholastic Reading Inventory scores that consisted of groupings labeled At Risk (significantly below grade level), Basic (below grade level), Proficient (at grade level) and Advanced (above grade level). There were equal numbers

of both genders in the sample, and they ranged from 9th through 12th grade. There were no students rated above the proficient level. A survey was developed after meeting with a focus group of students and expert staff from the school. It consisted of 17 questions that related to intrinsic motivation and 17 questions related to extrinsic motivation (Appendix A). The survey was administered to protect identities and the results showed that even though most students were assessed as being below grade level as shown in the SRI histogram (Figure 6), they reported motivation levels that were moderate to high on all motivational items. This could be because they were self-reporting, they knew the researcher to be a reading specialist who spent many weeks volunteering in their classes, and they wanted to say the right answers on the test, or they simply really were motivated by the atmosphere of caring at the school. These were extraneous variables that could not be controlled.

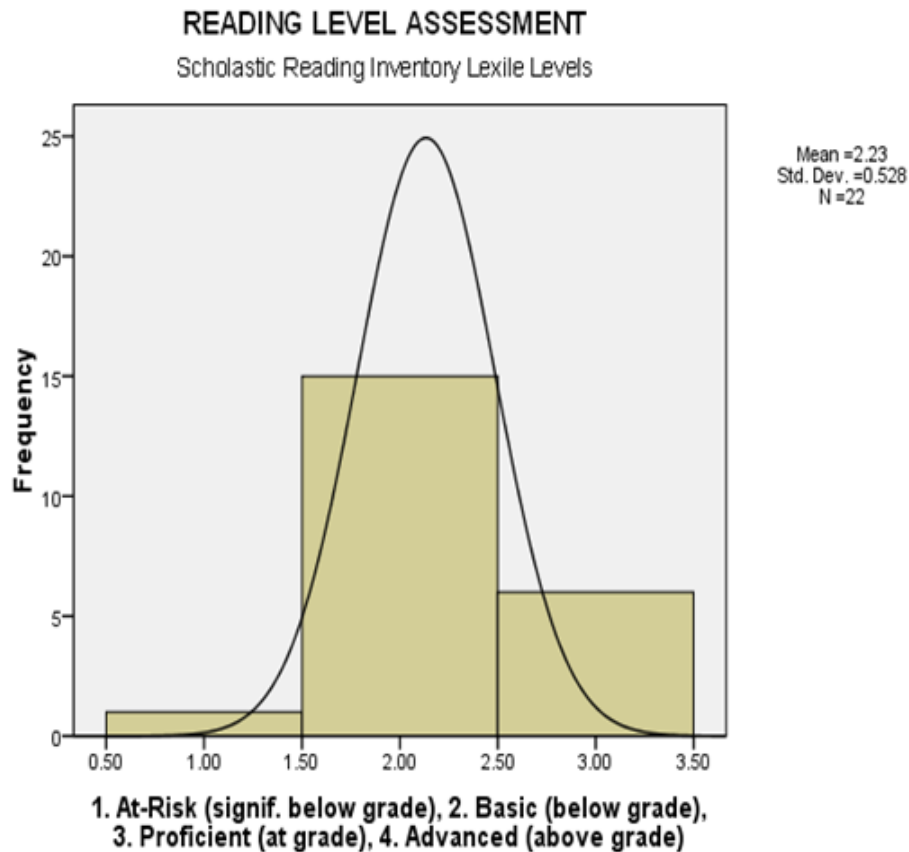


Figure 6. Histogram of reading level assessment at an alternative high school (Voss, 2009).
Scholastic reading inventory Lexile level.

A scatter plot depicting the raw data of the associated student motivation responses plotted against SRI score is shown in Figure 7. Only six of the sampled students had reading abilities assessed at grade level, and none was above grade level; yet only three of the 22 subjects considered themselves to have low motivation for reading. Inferential Statistics were implemented for analysis of the data on the survey. There was found to be a marginally significant correlation between the level of self-reported motivation and the SRI score, ($r(22)=$

0.355, $p = 0.10$; two tailed); indicating that students reporting higher levels of motivation tended to score higher on Scholastic Reading Inventory assessments.

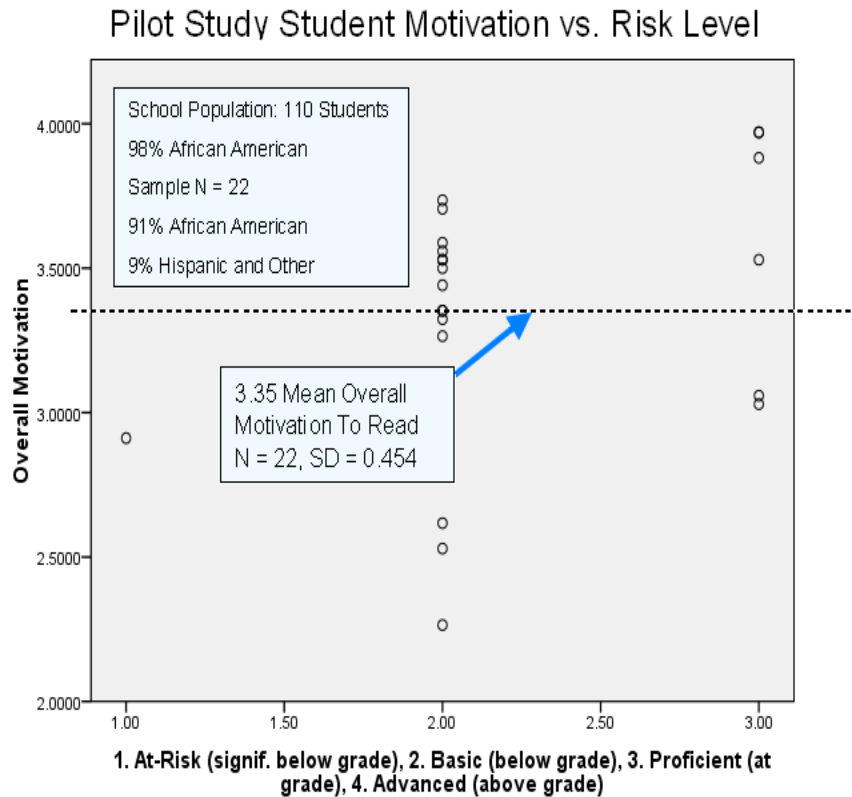


Figure 7. Scatter Plot: Student motivation vs. risk level (Voss, 2009).

A significant factor involved in the pilot study is that the school was an alternative to standard education; as such, it provided an environment that was more motivating to its students than a regular public school. Generalizations to populations outside this school should take into accountability this factor, which might present itself as having a confounding effect with other population parameters. This could conceivably happen for a population that demonstrates reading abilities spread across the spectrum of performance levels.

This pilot study proved to be advantageous in learning about what an effective instrument should be. The population had limited reading ability, and I did not want the instrument read to the participants, which could have affected their high school self-esteem. A test needed to be found that could accommodate their reading ability, but still have important questions covered. The instrument created by this researcher was found to be very effective, but its validity could not be established with such a small sample size.

This study was a researcher-created survey to identify motivational factors that align with reading achievement measures for at grade level or below grade level minority students.

Hypotheses were as follows:

- Students who are below grade level in reading ability are not motivated to read.
- Reading motivational factors can be identified.
- If motivational factors can be identified, then reading pedagogical strategies can be developed to increase student reading scores and to develop interest in reading.

The population during the time of data collection was representative of the school population at any given time. It was also generalized to reflect similar situations of alternative high school minority populations. Given the circumstances of frequent turnover in student membership for the entire school, the point-in-time sample/population was one of convenience. All students were considered eligible for this study. Therefore, there were no planned sample biases other than the selection of this high school for being predominantly minority students having low academic performance.

The demographic data yielded nominal independent variables such as grade, gender, and age. Descriptive statistical analysis treated the Scholastic Reading Inventory Score as an independent variable that would influence motivation. The ordinal scales of the Likert-type

survey were dependent variables, being the student responses. Other dependent variables included aggregated scores showing gender differences. Motivation measurement subscales could be evaluated to see if any operable treatment could be given to students to improve reading achievement scores.

This pilot study survey contributed to the scope of constructing the parameters for the new mixed methods study. The process of conducting the survey for youth trying to recover credits, while still in high school, revealed in their answers some of the frustrations that they had with conventional school. The mixed methods study brings together the quantitative details of students that had gone further—dropped out and returned sharing their narratives of the difficulties in the journey.

Benefits and Draw Backs of Quantitative Research

The survey will be the instrument for collecting data concerning students' reasons for dropping out, attitudes, literacy skills, intergenerational schooling, and future goals. The plan in this study is to access several cohorts of students currently participating in the GED program to acquire data on these themes. The strength of the quantitative method is that data collection is quickly accomplished with large groups, is objective, and numerical data. It utilizes a question platform that can be replicated with different populations at different times (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It can assess cause and effect relationships using broad categories of input factors and observations. Outcomes can be displayed in the form of graphs and/or charts to justify confirmation or rejection of the stated hypotheses. The conclusions can be reached with known confidence and reliability levels. Researcher bias is minimized, as direct participation in the application of the instrument is not required.

The drawbacks of performing stand-alone quantitative research include the inability of the researcher to drill down into the details of the personal narratives of each subject. Additionally, there is a possibility that the research might not apply to the population, or the researcher may miss important observational aspects of the responses. Quantitative research is useful for testing pre-defined hypotheses, but not necessarily conducive to constructing new theories based on observations. Great care should be taken to avoid any cultural or socio-economic text bias that could affect the way the participants comprehend the instrument, which would result in misinterpretation of survey items.

The advantages of the quantitative method would provide a broad understanding of the population of dropouts who returned for a GED. The survey is constructed around the themes noted, and can be easily disseminated, completed, and collected in several venues where the GED program is facilitated. Refinement of the survey instrument can be easily accomplished with a pilot study to identify and resolve any issues prior to application of the formal study. The large sample size in the formal study will yield confidence in the outcome, and provide a justifiable framework future research.

Qualitative Research Practices

“Qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (i.e., nonnumeric) data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012, p. 7). An inductive process begins with a statement of a problem or phenomenon. Situated in particular contexts and derived from personal narratives, ethnographies result in multiple meanings based on the multiple realities of the participants. In other words, there is not one specific answer or outcome and the researcher expects themes to be generated from the analysis of transcripts. Ethnographic interviews, images, and observational

techniques with a typically smaller sample size are employed to form rich contextual conclusions about the phenomenon. The context is not constrained by the researcher; rather, it adds to the body of knowledge to be explored (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). As the researcher gains an understanding of the lived realities of the participants and reviews verbatim transcripts, she generates themes and analyzes those themes for commonality among people in similar situations.

Qualitative research is “inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell, 2007, p. 19). The qualitative researcher must approach and interpret the question or topic area as if encountering an experiential slice of life in the view of the participants within their contexts. The closer the researcher can get to the actual environment where the participants interact—immersion if possible—the more that observations can be made and information can be gathered, and the more accurate the interpretation will be.

In qualitative research, the details are of primary importance; they distinguish one situation from another. The studies focus on observing and interacting with individuals (students in school, for example), yet still consider the situated context, as in the entire school structure and milieu in this analysis. Researchers must organize and analyze the thematic categories that fall out from the collection of descriptive ethnographies. They are interpretive works subjected to an inductive analysis. Here, the researcher takes field notes, make recordings, asks for ethnographic data, and gathers a body of data that will be delineated by themes while being organized by students currently in adult GED programs, and those that may have already completed the program.

“The qualitative epistemology [ways of knowing] holds that you come to know... realities through interactions and subjectivist explorations with participants about their perceptions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 6). Qualitative research may define a study by its use, or by the

combination of methodologies that define the research. Glesne views the categorization of qualitative research as a “fuzzy...overlapping” process, but primarily starting from ethnography and involving philosophical assumptions of the world. She teaches the broad classes of “life history, grounded theory, and case study” as foundational for understanding the versatility of the method (p. 11). There are many varieties of qualitative research and it is specifically useful in discovering information concerning social issues with an emphasis on individual allegory for personal authenticity.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Qualitative Research

The benefits of qualitative research include a smaller sample size, personal interaction with the participants, and the ability to construct meaning from ethnographies to construct new knowledge. Other benefits include the ability to respond immediately with additional questions for the participants to elaborate on their experiences, and enhances in-depth discovery of complicated issues. The interviewer has the flexibility to change venues, extend the timeframe, and adjust to the emotional needs of the participants, and can shift attention to new topics as generated. For reporting purposes, a representative case can be chosen to explicitly show an observed pattern. The researcher can find meaning behind the participants’ own interpretations of experiences. In-depth interactions steer interview themes with probing questions to discern patterns, timing, and dynamic processes (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 20). The drawbacks of qualitative research can include limitations on sample size, the likelihood of researcher bias, the lack of repeatability, and a larger time commitment for data collection, transcription, and analysis.

Mixed Methods

Quantitative and qualitative designs have long been the subject of the paradigm wars (Terrell, 2012). Purists that support one design over another believe that their preferred method is the best source of attaining knowledge. In the 1990s, researchers found that incorporating both methods might lead to more breadth, with larger samples as in quantitative research with its disciplined experimental design, and more depth with qualitative research and its probing aspects of inquiry into a small number of personal lives. Data acquisition tends to be more objective with the former, and more subjective with the latter. “Quantitative tells us ‘If’ while qualitative tells us ‘How or why’” (Terrell, 2012, p. 258).

Quantitative researchers promote a positivist/post-positivist thinking regime, searching for specific answers to specific questions. Qualitative researchers are constructivists, or interpretivists, and seek answers through inductive methods. Each method depicts reality from the perspective of the specific ontological position. Most social science researchers today believe that either method could be applied to any research question. The pragmatist philosophy is the most common framework adopted for the mixed methods design because of a focus on what works. The question and results are more important than the methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

There are several mixed methods designs, including but not limited to the *convergent design* (or convergent parallel design), the *explanatory sequential design*, and the *exploratory sequential design* – all three of which I have considered for my research. The first design simultaneously employs the quantitative data collection and analysis in combination with the qualitative data collection and analysis. These data are then compared and interpreted. The explanatory sequential design begins with quantitative data collection and analysis then moves to

qualitative data collection and analysis, and ends in interpretation. Finally, the exploratory sequential design is initiated with qualitative data collection and analysis, which contributes to the next step of quantitative data collection and analysis, and ends with interpretation of the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 69; Terrell, 2012).

Benefits and Drawbacks of Mixed Methods Design

The benefits of mixed methods design include the acquisition of more data derived from multiple sources. It can encompass a wider range of research questions and the evidence can be reinforced with comparisons of outcomes from those sources. Several design options can be arranged to answer the research questions. Numerical, descriptive, and interpretive data can contribute to the conclusions; if only one process is utilized, valuable information might be overlooked. The quantitative and qualitative processes can be addressed in different sequences or simultaneously.

While incorporating mixed methodology offers more credibility and increased generalizability of the results for other populations, it is more expensive, time consuming, and complicated. There are many cautions that should be observed to ensure the success of mixed methods studies. Alan Bryman (2007) reviewed over 200 research studies and found some irregularities with mixed methods. He takes a panoptic approach to assessing the pitfalls in structure, audience, and method. The researcher must tailor the findings to the specific audiences; and in the end, one data source may be preferred to another. Bryman recommends that the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews should not be performed simultaneously, as the data collected and the conclusions reached are more likely to be influenced by the timing factor. Using two methods in sequence allows the outcomes of the first to serve as inputs to the next phase. This is consistent with the explanatory and the exploratory

sequential designs summarized earlier. Being well versed in both disciplines will result in a high caliber study.

In addition, some researchers place more emphasis on one method over another because of personal bias or expertise and this could affect the outcome or the interpretation. One method may take on the primary role of data delivery and leave the second one as a simple supplement. This may cause some concern of the value of and purpose of mixed methods. Another drawback is that there is a shortage of relevant mixed methods studies that are similar to the one that I proposed. Therefore, there are no comparison studies for analysis. The explanatory sequential mixed methods approach was chosen for this study.

Research Design

Of the three mixed methods design types reviewed, the convergent parallel design was rejected because of the difficulty of facilitating both quantitative and qualitative data processes at the same time in the field. Regarding the remaining two designs, the consideration was a decision between starting with a larger quantitative survey (more subjects) then going to a small population for ethnographies; or conversely, starting with a small study with a few participants and following it with a larger populated quantitative study. My choice is to perform the former—the explanatory sequential mixed methods design; leading with the larger population using a quantitative survey about the demographics of dropouts who returned to school and their attitudes toward literacy in one survey and the second survey of resilience. This would inform the next phase of qualitative interpretative anthropological interviews of a subset of the larger group. The results of the initial survey will highlight areas of importance and significant causal factors for both the high school dropout issue and the resiliency factors associated with returning to school. These in turn will be incorporated into the in-depth interviews that focus on those

factors. Both the survey and the ethnographies will contribute to the final interpretation of results. Ultimately, one may provide more significant data than the other, but the intention is to be informed by both methods.

In this research, the mixed methods process first phase began with the prior mentioned quantitative multiple-choice and short answer surveys. The surveys covered the demographics of the population that returned to school, their future goals, their attitudes toward literacy and engagement, and intergenerational school attendance. The qualitative interviews that followed in the second phase bring an important and necessary aspect of further understanding to the prior quantitative data, and included a systematic approach to the documentation and procedures for an accurate account of the methods (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007). A page of the questions was printed and placed on the table so that the students could see them and the notes that were being taken; and it relaxed them. It was not a surreptitious scribbling of notations, nor was it threatening like a counseling session. Even though the qualitative research is not as structured as the quantitative method, it has its own method of accountability through the collection and analysis of the participants' experiences derived from the interviews. It yields a rich elaboration of the themes found in the initial quantitative survey.

Assumptions

The assumptions made in this research revolve around the fact that students in the GED or adult education programs (or those who have attained a GED) have exited or dropped out of school previous to reenrollment. All students taking part in the surveys or the surveys plus a personal interview will be made comfortable in the fact that the participation will be anonymous. The students in these programs will be able to read, write, converse, and comprehend the process of answering surveys as the researcher reads the material orally and they will make responses.

Those taking part in personal interviews will be able to communicate their personal narratives. Students in this study are believed to demonstrate resilience in enrolling in a GED program to continue their education for a variety of purposes. Students available were subject to their own schedules, and there were other students who had either completed the GED and left or stopped coming to the GED program for their own reasons that could not be recorded.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of this study are centered in the number of programs available in this state. In fact, the community college director notes that there are only three adult programs centered in community colleges in the state. She asked that the information be centered in the Midwest rather than a particular state to remain anonymous. The other GED adult programs are sparsely funded and may or may not be functioning at the time of this study, so the number of participants for this population could be limited to small numbers or expanded into another state. The delimitations are found in the lack of research done with the proposed elements of literacy, engagement, and resilience with students that have been successful in returning to school. There is also concern that many school districts and society ignore the potential in these students to participate in society and lack the moral obligation to make this population a priority.

Context and Participants

The best context for this research was at a local community college program that included a population of students returning to work on a GED (or students in college after completing the program). This program, as with many in the state, are required to admit students who pass a literacy test that places them in an approximate 9th grade reading level; otherwise, they would not be able to comprehend and practice the necessary content for the high school equivalency credential. The context of this particular community college that offered a GED or adult basic

education program was one in which the graduates of such programs are able to go on to post-secondary education/training in the same venue. There are many adult education programs that are attending to dropout recovery, but they may be less effective at transferring the students to higher education because they are not attached to a college community where opportunity is more available. I intended to get the largest group possible, with roughly 100 students, for the school demographic data, two survey questionnaires, and at about ten recorded interviews. The sampling process focused on those who were currently enrolled or who had graduated from GED programs (both community college and adult education), after having dropped out of high school.

Working with the community college director, we identified teachers that were facilitating classes for students to work on getting the GED; I was able to arrange access to the desired population for the study. I have been a participant observer in this community through an internship and professional development.

The Director (who has asked to remain anonymous) has been my contact for the initial research site. Contact was made and approved for Human Subjects permission at this site for the research. The Human Subjects form for Eastern Michigan University was completed and approved as exempt for the participants to ensure that no undue harm will come to them. The results of the online human subjects research course were sent to Eastern Michigan University for the research study to take place. The students come from an area in Southeastern Michigan centered around Washtenaw County. The 2014 population of this county, according to the U.S. Census, was about 356,874 people with approximately equal numbers of men (49%) and women (51%), along with 71.4% Caucasians, 12.9 % Black or African American, 0.4% Native American, 8.4% Asian, and 3.3% people of two or more races. There is a younger segment of

this population of 19% that is under 18 years old (United States Census Bureau, 2015), which is not considered for this research.

Participant Selection

The students gathered in their normal classes and were given a handout lauding their success in their studies and offered a chance to share their thoughts about their educational journey. The introduction and handout given during the 5 minutes of each class was arranged by the teachers. The volunteers were directed to an area where they would be able to ask further questions, get a more personal reading or explanation about the surveys, or participate in the research study. The director of the program designated the areas and times for this to take place. I scheduled the research interaction for approximately 30 minutes and read all of the documents to the students (except those that wanted to read ahead or independently) and responded individually in the designated area. The option for an additional personal interview was arranged within the free time that the volunteering students had at the community college. Many more offered to be interviewed than could be accommodated. The interviews lasted from twenty minutes to an hour and a half. The longer interviews were with very interested students who wanted to tell the whole story of the roadblocks in their lives.

Students who have dropped out are predominantly from low-resourced schools, neighborhoods, communities, and from disrupted families struggling with the situational lack of income (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The community college environment is quite different from the structured traditional school that they had previously encountered. Here, students have access to teachers, counselors, mentors, positive role models, tutoring, interactive labs for developing soft workplace skills, and positive attitudes from instructors. Students have to overcome the fear of returning to a system that had rejected them and have to engage in actively

taking the first step toward economic and career independence. Overcoming this fear may have influenced their attitudes toward this research study and their reflections on their own abilities. Cognizance and sensitivity to this factor is required, as this might have altered the willingness to participate in the study or their estimation of personal resilience.

Data Collection and Instruments

Solicitation and Agreement Consent Instruments

The selection of participants began with the distribution of a flier (Appendix B) within the designated GED study program classes at the community college and to individuals selected by the Director who have successfully completed the GED course of study. This chosen population was connected to the Adult Transitions Program associated with the local community college in a Midwest state and the GED program, including those who have recently achieved successfully completion. The agreement of informed consent to participate in the study, supply personal information, and request personal interviews (if desired) was contained in the Participant Consent Form (Appendix C). These adult education students were age eighteen and above and agreed to be part of the study without parental consent. This form, which was read to each individual, included statements pertaining to the voluntary nature of the activity, confidentiality, anonymity, the research topic, and any additional related facts as chosen by the interviewee.

School Information Instrument

Data collection in the quantitative portion of the study began with a School Information form (Appendix D) for demographic data. This form constitutes the basic data on gender, race, and age, without revealing any personal identifiers for an anonymous research study. It also gathers the employment status, length of time in the GED program, and reasons for leaving and

returning to school with future goals. Students will be asked on the School Information form about their feelings of connectedness to school and people, as well as, interest in courses. They will indicate a positive relationship to the lists given, by marking those in which they found a relationship or interest. The school Information Form also includes inquiries about their feelings on their reading, computer literacy skills, connections to people, perceived difficulties, and an assessment of their grades when they left school. They will create a profile of past and present self-described aspects of their learning endeavors. At the conclusion of the form, each participant is asked whether an interview about his or her successful return to school would be welcome. A space is provided on the form for the students to give a first name and a phone number for further contact.

Reading and Engagement Instrument

The second measurement is in the form of the Survey of Adolescent Reading Attitudes [SARA] (Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna, 2013). This population still struggles with reading and engagement and I have garnered permission to use it. The main goal is to determine areas of literacy that are positive, motivating, and engaging to help teachers to provide invigorating instruction while encouraging students to participate more fully in literacy activities. This will give information on the students' perceived feelings about reading abilities and attitudes toward academic/learning engagement at school and at home.

The survey (Appendix E), with a Likert-type scale for eighteen questions, probes attitudes, motivation, and around reading with a readability level that is easy for this group. Permission has been garnered to use the survey in my study. This SARA probes attitudes, motivation, and engagement around reading with a readability level that is easy for this group. In utilizing this instrument, which was created as a classroom survey, information may be

gleaned into the self-described feelings about multiple literacies in school and at home. It contains eighteen questions on a Likert type ordinal scale with six being very good to one being very bad as a response. The attitudes and feelings are academic in nature, asking about literacy using textbooks, online texts, periodicals, social media, and research. It also asks about the social aspects of literacy in shared texts and free time.

The authors of the SARA focus on how literacy fits into students' lives through purpose and varied mediums—especially in new technology. Encouraging both academic and recreational literacy, the students will become more adept at academic skills because they are engaged in meaningful activities. Knowing this information will give insight into how literacy may be a strength, a need, or a poorly developed skill for students who dropped out of high school. The survey has four subscales derived from purpose for reading and the medium used. The first two subscales include feelings toward academic reading of print (AP) and feelings for academic digital reading of texts (AD). The final two subscales include feelings toward recreational reading of print (RP) and feelings for recreational digital reading of texts (RD). This survey was piloted on students 7-12th grade and administered to approximately 4500 students nationally. The results from utilizing the four subscales were determined to be valid and reliable with Cronbach's alpha to be .78, .82, .86, and .80, respectively (Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna, 2013, p. 568). Given the successful application of this survey by its authors, it will be instrumental for the collection and analysis of literacy data in this research.

Resilience Instrument

The third instrument of measurement is The Resilience Scale for Adolescents [READ] (Hjemdal et al., 2006) from the Department of Psychology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (Appendix F). Students who are in dropout recovery have a motivation

driven by self-determination to return to school. Resilience assessment is often used for psychological purposes to identify people who are susceptible to depression and other negative outcomes from stressful situations (Hjemdal, Aune, Reinfjell, Stiles, & Friborg, 2007). The high school dropout has to overcome the adversity of the lack of a diploma and the obstacles that have caused the school attrition and those blocking possible reentry to academic life. The stressors of the traditional way of “doing school,” along with academic (contextual), and behavioral (individual) issues (Rumberger, 2011) inhibited students from being successful. Measuring the resilience of those students returning to school could be of significant interest to those that want to encourage dropout recovery and those educators who want to help students avoid the downfall of dropping out.

According to two authors, Dr. Hjemdal and Dr. Friborg, of the Resilience Scale for Adults, or RSA (Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, & Martinussen, 2003), and the Resilience Scale for Adolescents, or READ (Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, Rosenvinge, 2006), these tests have never been used in an academic setting—only in psychological studies. Only recently have the authors begun a study in their college setting using these scales for an evaluation of the collegiate dropout problem that they started to encounter at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. The RSA was the original instrument on which the READ was built. The latter READ adolescent instrument was concluded to be the best course of action for my study, due to the young age of the targeted population and their reading ability, after correspondence with the authors. It appears that the language on the READ is more straightforward so that the participants can more effectively concentrate on their answers rather than on the wording.

Generally, resilience scales put into practice are similar to that of Wagnild and Young. However, Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, and Martinussen (2003) presented five sub-scales of

their Resilience Scale for Adults, which included personal competence, social competence, social support, family coherence, and personal structure. The survey language in their adult version, more difficult than their Resilience Scale for Adolescents (RSA) (Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, Rosenvinge, 2006), might prove to be a complicating factor for subjects who have literacy level issues with understanding the form. Resilience is to be measured rather than literacy in this instance, so the lower reading level test for adolescents would be more suitable for the young adult population. This is a perfect tool to measure young adult resilience with students who return to school after dropping out. The predictive factor would be affirmative for resilience at a moderately-high to high level for returning students who had optimistic outlooks on their futures with the benefit of education.

The READ includes five subscales that are present in the source RSA survey: personal competence, social competence, structured style, family cohesion, and social resources. It is a 28-question scale with a Likert type scale of five points with the highest number indicating a stronger level of resilience and the lowest number the least amount of resilience. These psychometric measures are valid and reliable with Cronbach's alpha to .96 in totality and .85, .83, .69, .85, .78, respectively (Hjemdal et al., 2006, p. 95). Utilizing the READ instrument will offer data on the connections that each student uses for support in difficult times and to identify those strong links that the student uses to promote success. Another survey considered but not chosen for my study was designed by Wagnild and Young (2014). It does not include five significant sub scales present in the Resilience Scale for Adults (Friborg et al., 2003).

Qualitative Interviews

The students who completed the quantitative portion of the survey were encouraged to discuss their past schooling experiences regarding literacy, engagement, and resilience in a personal recorded interview. The qualitative second phase consisted of ethnographic interviews (Appendix G) using a framework of semi-structured open-ended questions, similar to the script approach used in Deborah Brandt's research *Literacy in American Lives* (2001, p. 208-210). The student's opinions of the role of literacy were discussed. The interests revealed the aspect of engagement and connections that the student remembered from school experiences. A focus on his or her own personal success story of persistence through resilience was contributed to the qualitative narrative.

While similar to those of Brandt, the questions are designed based on the results of the prior Likert and open-ended questions in my study. The informed interviews serve as extensions to the survey questions and provided opportunities for young adults to share their success stories. The questions revolve around past school experiences, positive and negative situations, reasons for leaving and returning, and future plans. These are extensions of the first survey and create a larger personal narrative of the lived experiences of dropping out and reengaging in the educational process. The goal is to interview ten to twenty volunteers individually with a recorder while taking field notes for an ethnographic qualitative analysis for the mixed methods research.

Ethical Considerations

Both of the Likert-type surveys were found to be valid and reliable for measuring reading attitudes and resilience levels. Care was given so that I am measuring literacy attitudes and not their ability to read the survey; therefore, all instruments are read to small groups or classes of

participants as they followed along. The reading survey of eighteen questions showed a six point Likert scale with six being “very good” to one representing “very bad” evaluating self-assessment of reading scenarios. The resilience scale similarly has ratings from totally agree to totally disagree using questions of a positive nature. The school information form delivers data on a large scale to address individual purposes for leaving and returning to school, feelings about reading ability, thoughts about engagement through connections, and other autobiographical data. The surveys were assessed for subscales of these themes for data summary and analysis.

The succeeding qualitative method of the ethnography is more personal with a one-on-one in-depth interview about the participants’ and their lived experiences. The researcher is the collector of interviews containing thoughts and revelations of past, present, and future schooling; using questions about literacy, engagement, and resilience as themes interjected into the remembrances. The data collected from the qualitative research is transcribed into scripts from the interviews and are coded or organized by themes, subthemes identifying the categories that participants share, significant patterns inspection, and reflection for validity and corroboration (Glesne, 2006). Field notes and observations are noted during the interviews with the intent to compare behaviors with verbatim.

Data Analysis Process

In a mixed methods format, both sets of data are combined for a more complete picture of the characteristics of high school dropouts who were motivated to return to school for academic, college, and career success. When combined, they generate ample data regarding the causal factors for dropping out, the roles of literacy, engagement, and resilience. Following a legacy of schooling disappointments, the participants are lauded for their success in returning to get a GED.

The researcher gathers the quantitative data from each group, and the data is scored according to the directions on the instrument articles. The demographic data yields nominal independent variables; such as age, grades when student left school, employment, and the year the student left school. Descriptive statistical analyses treat the Reading Attitudes scores and the Resilience Scale scores as independent variables that would influence the possible success or completion of the GED. They also are analyzed for Pearson correlation to factor relationships. The ordinal scales of the Likert-type surveys were dependent variables, being the student responses and the students were the independent variables.

The qualitative portion is analyzed for comparative themes and generated conclusions about student lived experiences. Open-ended semi-structured questions were utilized to collect transcripts of data (Seidman, 2006). As Denzin & Lincoln (2003) denoted, the explanations of each student's experiences contributed to the construction of meaningful interpretations, while juxtaposed or triangulated to the socio-cultural, personal, life history, and their school allegories. The researcher acts as the instrument to conduct the interviews, transcribed the texts, then organized, and analyzed the responses into several general themes that the students shared in common (Creswell, 1998). This data demonstrates the vast intricate nature of personal histories that students detail in their interviews.

Chapter 4

Results

Context

The community college provided a safe, supportive atmosphere in which students were respected and attended classes in a college setting. It was not an “adult education program in a middle school, with those students looking at you” wondering why you were there. The GED students welcomed this venue for their program at the community college and were not threatened by this research. Field notes were taken on the question sheets that were printed for the interviews showing relaxed enthusiastic students in the young adult college classroom setting. The students were interviewed in the classrooms or in a corridor adjacent to the rooms of the community college.

Sample

The intended target sample size of one hundred students for the surveys was not realized, since it was near the end of the semester. The students still coming to class were more determined to complete the work than those who had dropped out of the GED class. Some had successfully tested and completed the computer-based subject matter tests and were finished. Others were not able to stick with the program throughout the semester. The adult basic education (ABE) in which the GED program was embedded had 400 to 450 students enrolled last year. That was the final year of the old GED test format. The new format is more rigorous and more aligned with the high school curriculum. The enrollment for this past 2014-2015 year (July 1- June 30) was 187 students. The community college program used for this research was down in enrollment by 58%. This reflected a comparable drop in numbers of students, *enrolled* in the program. This sudden drop parallels previous evidence given that the number of GED

graduates was down nationally by 83% from the prior year (GED testing, 2015). At the time of this research, the session was nearing the end and the participation number was 70 students. This research surveyed and interviewed 44 students (five of which were GED graduated mentors), so the enrolled GED students numbered 39, giving a rate of involvement at 56%. This program had a prerequisite of an approximate ninth grade reading level to handle the reading for the tasks involved in preparing for the GED test.

General Findings

The general findings from the surveys showed that most students left school because of family dysfunction, inadequate school connections/structure, and a distant third reason was the negative influence of peers. The most prevalent reason that they returned, indicated by 17 students, was that they valued education. The second most noted response for returning (16) was their own intrinsic need for self-worth; in other words, they were worth it and worth the effort it took in pursuing the GED. Jobs (14) were the third most mentioned reason to return for a GED. These responses were open-ended answers, not limited to one defining reason and many put more than one reason. Digging deeper into the interviews, the students saw more choices with their own maturity and changes of circumstances. Their personal strength and self-image was actualized through self-determination, grit, and resilience. The participants generally felt that they had good to average reading ability (and previously tested at the 9th grade reading level as a prerequisite for the GED program), but almost half had low or incomplete grades. Engagement, measured in connections, was low, perhaps showing that literacy was not enough for achievement. Results of the surveys and interview showed not just one roadblock, but many complicated issues with peer problems, disconnection with social structures, apathy toward school, and lack of family support systems being the main concerns. Health and homelessness

significantly affected some students. Serious life issues revealed in the interviews marked an impressive ability for those students to bounce back after adversity. Those who were interviewed had positive feelings about learning to read and generally good memories of early elementary school, which provided a good foundation of competency in the early years and that provided confidence for resilience.

The mixed methods approach brought in more data about this population, using both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The students returning for GEDs, or completers of the GED, filled out the surveys easily. This inspired probing questions used in the interpretive ethnographies that provided personal accounts of many issues not indicated on the surveys. The school information form, the reading attitudes survey, and the resilience survey were easy to administer. Instead of listening to the researcher reading every page, many in the small groups rushed ahead to read and answer the questions quickly. When meeting one-on-one for just the survey, the students usually waited to be read each form and question. It took only 15 to 20 minutes to complete the survey, rather than the estimated 30 minutes. Some participants skipped questions. Many said that their stories were far more complicated and personal than the short answer forms would accommodate. The data research chart in Appendix H shows the responses for all of the forms. The charts show the relationship of the demographic data among the participants.

Organization of Data

Throughout this research, the participants have been given codes for confidentiality and for consistency. A multi-symbol code was used for each as an indication of characteristics that set them in a unique position. Within the research, it became clear that a simple numerical code of one through 44 facilitated the efficient manipulation and processing of the data. Therefore,

each participant was initially assigned with a numerical code and was referred to by that code throughout both the quantitative and qualitative processes. The participants in the qualitative portion were represented by their same numeric code as assigned for the survey, and appear in the profiles by that code. Since there are only eleven, whose interviews took place after the survey data collection events, the codes are not continuously sequential. Rather, they appear as they were interviewed.

The school information form was charted with all of the data given by the participants. Formulas were constructed to get a cumulative score of similar data points. Each student's race was an open-ended question, and they self-identified. Those monikers were used throughout the data sets. There were both multiple choice and open-ended questions in this form. The data was collected for all 44 students and organized such that commonalities were collected in formulaic columns to collect similar data points. This matrix was described in the narrative within the dissertation and is included in Appendix H. These will be discussed in the outcomes.

Similarly, a transcription matrix was created for the eleven volunteers who participated in the interviews. Within this matrix, there is a chart of the common themes, denoted as having positive and/or negative influences on those participants. This chart is embedded in the narrative of the dissertation. The remainder of the matrix was designed around twelve questions and additional information cells. There are field notes within the matrix responding to each question, which include some selected verbatim. This information can be found in Appendix I. The student profiles are in the dissertation and refer to the original transcripts, which are also included in Appendix J.

There were 25 people, or 56.8% of the 44 survey respondents, who offered to share their stories. Of these, fourteen were involved in the qualitative interviews, which were conducted

shortly after the surveys. This reflected a keen interest on the part of high school dropout recovery students wanting to be heard. In fact, two participants did not give a reason why they returned to school, but offered to do an interview to give more details about their lives. Of the fourteen interviews, eleven were used for the theme analysis following the scripted questions. This represents 25 percent of the participants in the entire survey. They were selected with knowledge of diversity of gender, race, and representation of unique conditions in personal histories. For example, several students reported health issues as roadblocks; hence, another with that situation was eliminated. The structure of the questions provided recursive themes that were consistent with the data points on the surveys, but intended to broaden descriptions. This researcher provided a sheet of ten questions on which are found notes taken during the interviews. In addition, students were asked about advice they would offer to others thinking of dropping out and what they would say to high school administrators and teachers to improve schools. The former question resulted in words of caution for those contemplating quitting, because staying in school was easier than the task of following the road to the GED. There was also a general theme advising current high school students to persevere in the difficult times. The latter question elicited repeated wishes for schools to “listen” to students.

The typed ten-question form made it seem quite natural to write the answers that they gave. It appeared to be a calming influence since the participant could see the ten brief questions typed out. This did not steer them away from answering additional questions or from adding anecdotal information. The format of the interview was intended to get to the heart of the issues. Since the participants were liberal in their time frames, it was still generative with unique descriptions and textured themes. The script process was helpful in keeping students moving on to each subject area.

The students were excited and quite willing to share stories of their present successes and enjoyed the supportive listener role of the interviewer. Repeatedly, they gave lengthy descriptions of their families, circumstances, and roadblocks that they had to overcome to get to the GED program to improve their lives. It was a comfortable environment and the students welcomed the friendly affirmation and the congratulations on their successes. Many of the interviews had to be gently ended due to length, because the students enjoyed the experience and wanted to extend the positive attention. Several students offered to be re-interviewed, or wanted to be called “just to talk,” while another student even offered to help with the research. By taking the position of viewing these students in a respectful way and seeing them as success stories with important knowledge to share with others, it left them with validation of their efforts.

Quantitative Outcomes

There were roughly equal numbers for each gender (as shown in Appendix H). Twenty-four females and twenty males with an age range between 18 and 59 years of age took part. In the 18-25 year old range, there were twenty-nine participants. The 26-35 year old span included seven people and there were eight at age 36 and above. There were thirteen that self-identified as Black or African American, seventeen people were White or Caucasian, four called themselves mixed race, three labeled themselves Hispanic, two were Arab, one Asian, and one labeled himself as from India. Five of the respondents had finished the GED and the remaining thirty-nine were presently in the GED program studying for the tests. Thirty noted that they had free or reduced lunch, two did not respond to that question, and twelve paid for their own lunches. No one listed poverty or low income as a difficulty or a roadblock. Forty students overwhelmingly noted variations of how they used computers “for everything.” Only four out of forty-four had trouble, did not own, or did not answer the open-ended question on using

computers. Technology was not expressed as a barrier or consideration for these students to leave high school. Only three students considered their reading ability to be low, fifteen reported an average reading ability, and twenty-six listed themselves as good readers. Yet, half said that they had low/incomplete school grades at the time they left. Fourteen students reported average grades and the remaining eight indicated good grades.

The difficulties or roadblocks while in school were multifaceted and each participant listed several obstacles. The school structure received 32 votes, peer issues were described 7 times, family problems were mentioned 7 times, and engagement (lack of interest, focus, or concentration) received 16 nods. Within school structure, they predominately focused on school subjects (20 people mentioned specific subjects, such as math (13), reading (8), and science (5)) while a few other people put “everything about school.” The reasons for leaving school were many and varied. They focused around a major issue, but were centered on family (21), school issues (19), peers (10), and health (5). Therefore, people blamed the school for their difficulties, yet the family was the most important theme for actually leaving school, followed closely by school itself. This could be because family issues were influencing difficulties at school. The reasons for returning usually were given in multiples, they mentioned returning to get educated—to complete what they started and finally seeing value in a credential that opens doors (17 times), for “myself”—realizing personal self-worth (16 times), jobs and opportunities (14 times), for family (9 times), and to achieve goals (8 times). Two people did not give an answer for why they returned. The students were split on working, with 23 stating that they were presently employed and 21 said that they were unemployed. They almost all planned to get better jobs with more education. Thirty-nine participants stated that future plans included college or more

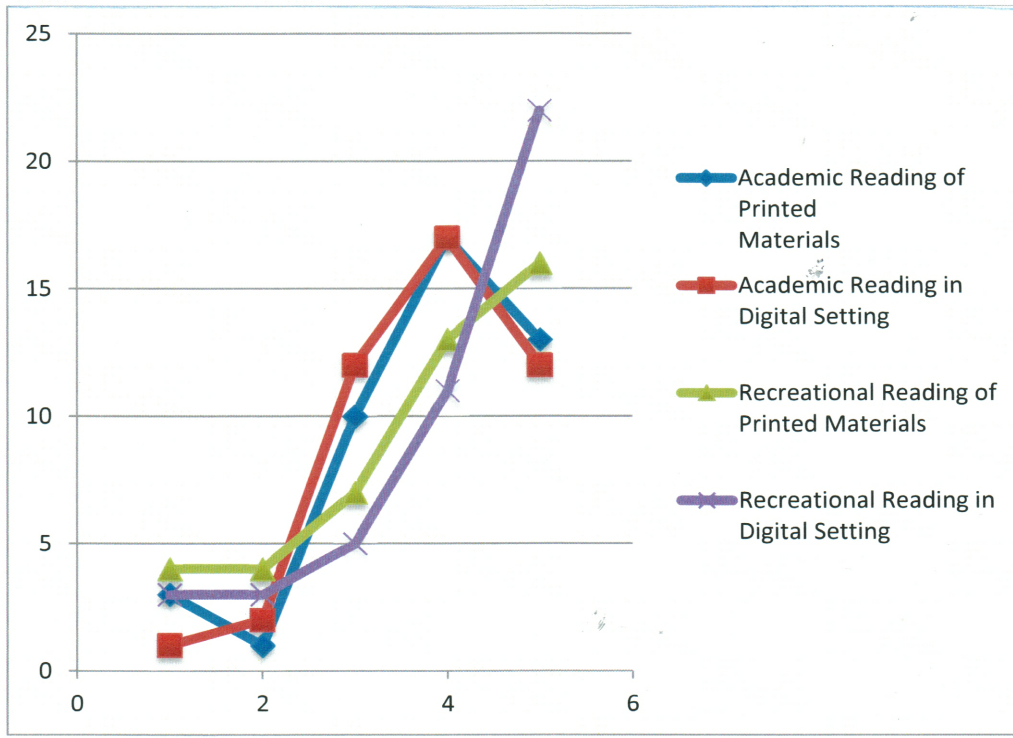
education, three people did not answer, one did not know yet, and one person simply wanted to succeed in the future.

Reading Attitude Survey Data

The reading attitudes analysis includes four subscales, consisting of academic reading of printed materials, academic reading in digital setting, recreational reading of printed materials, and recreational reading in digital setting. Each subscale has a mean value of all of the answers related to that subscale. The results were plotted in the reading attitudes sub scale chart (Figure 8). How highly the student's reading attitude was assessed is plotted against the horizontal axis, while the number of students rating themselves at each rating level it tallied up on the vertical axis. It showed that the participants generally considered themselves to be good readers with mean scores ranging from 4.35 to 4.80 on a scale of one to six, with a score of six being very good. Both the academic reading scores and the recreational reading scores were best understood by way of comparison. The two academic curves showed a peak or maximum point around four with less of the participants rating themselves at a five. However, the two recreational subscale curves for both printed and electronic settings were biased to the highest rating at five. Comparing the academic to recreational reading subscales, clearly the students favored reading for recreational purposes, either printed or digital, to the academic sources. Another way to describe this outcome is that the two academic curves have a downward concavity, whereas the two recreational curves have an upward concavity in addition to being biased to the high end of the scale. Significant to the conclusion of the preference for recreational reading is the shape of the curves in addition magnitudes or values. This suggests that a good way to reach student through reading is to provide reading material that is perceived

by the student as recreational. The raw data and mean subscale values supporting these plots can be found in Appendix K.

Reading Attitude Subscale Mean Value: Factor Selection Count vs. Self-Rating Level
 (Reading Attitude Scale: Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna, 2013)



Low Reading Attitude <-----> High Reading Attitude
 Respondent Counts vs. Reading Attitude Rating Level (n = 44)

Figure 8. Reading attitudes subscale self-assessments.

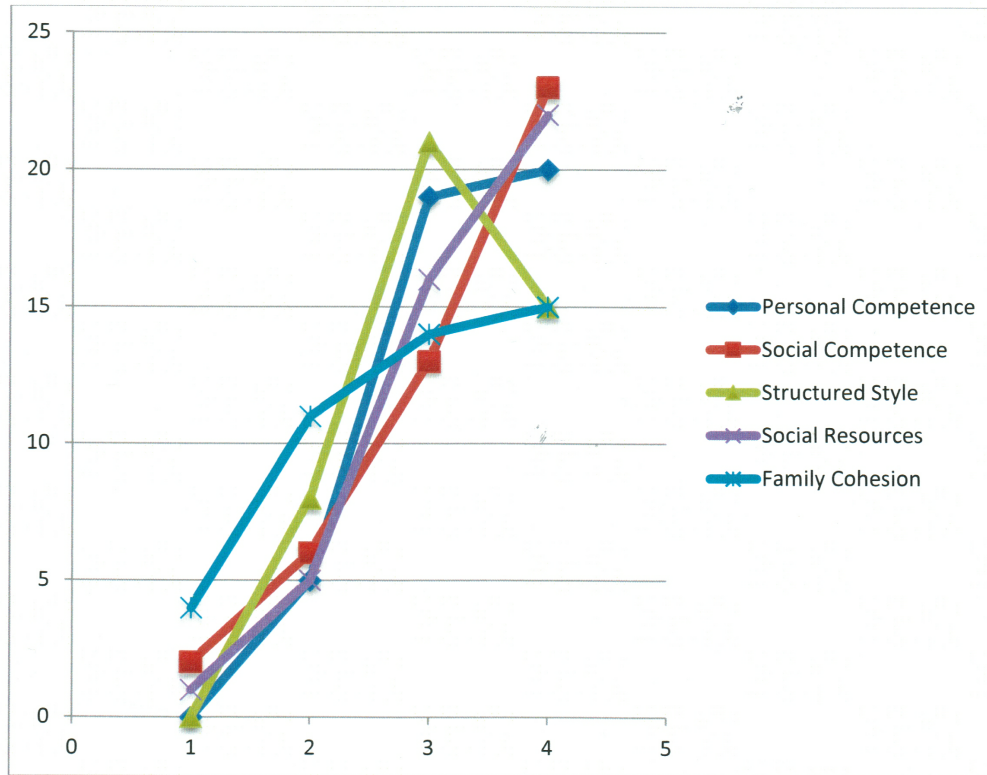
Resilience Survey Data

The resilience assessment survey consists of five subscales: personal competence (self-confidence, goals), social competence (social contact, empathy), structured style (goals, organization, planning), social resources (cohesion, support, appreciation), and family cohesion

(common positive outlook, support, shared activities) as developed by von Soest, Mossige, Stefansen, and Hjemdal (2010). The data for the means scores of each subscale for each respondent was detailed in Figure 9. These scores had a range of 1-5, with 5 being the highest rating. The participants showed the highest resiliency for the subscales of social competence and social resources with means scores of 4.0 and 3.9 respectively. These two subscales are the most significantly biased toward the highest resilience. Similarly, the personal competence mean score of 3.8 showed that it too was fairly high indicating the self-determination strength related to the participants. Structured style, representing organization in their lives, resulted in mean score of a 3.7. The greatest number of respondents rated this subscale in the 3-4 range with less rating it as high resilience. In other words, goals and organizational skills did not rate very high to these respondents. The students represented many dysfunctional aspects of their families and this was verified in how they rated this as the lowest indicator on the resilience scale of a 3.4 mean for this group. More significantly, the plot of this curve had a downward concavity over a broad range of the resilience scale. These students did not verify strong family connections. The raw data and mean subscale values supporting these plots can be found in Appendix L.

Resilience Subscale Factor Counts vs. Mean Assessment Range Level

(Resilience Scale for Adolescents: Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006)



Low Resilience <-----> High Resilience

Respondent Counts vs. Resilience Assessment Level (n = 44)

Figure 9. Resilience assessment subscale: resilience range counts.

Qualitative Outcomes

The emancipatory stance, used in the ethnographic interviews, goes beyond just the acknowledgement of a specific subjectivity or one that is “tamed.” It reports to the audience a bearing that is the framework for the interpretation, not one that is revealed through discovery.

Peshkin (1988, p. 17) remarked, “Whatever the subjectivity of one’s persuasions at a given point, one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed.” Geertz (1973, p.345-346) also was inclined to believe that for the ethnographer, “his personal relationship to the subject ...[was] inevitably problematic... you know in general what sort of thing he [the subject] is going to say...All ethnography is part philosophy and a good deal of the rest is confession.” The predilection of this researcher was to believe in the value and success of what each individual brings to the research, and focus on the revelations, not my epistemologies. The relaxed and positive stories of my participants were shared with purpose for the contribution of information so that others could follow in their footsteps. Knowing the researcher’s viewpoint strengthened their resolve to help others overcome roadblocks. It is also believed that this researcher’s attitude played a part in securing their trust during the interviews. A very serious objective stance would have resulted in less dialogue and perhaps a suspicion of being evaluated for deficiencies. The purpose is to gather information to take action and alter the landscape of adult basic education for which the GED program is often an entry point. The education dollars are scarce for students who need a second chance at gaining a high school credential and continuing with their education. Researching with a purpose tended to make the undertaking more sincere and seemed to draw more students to participate and even volunteer for an interview. As Peshkin (1988) related that all researchers must realize their biases and their own backgrounds from which influence their interpretations and conclusions, it was important to monitor my reactions to analyze the information and ask clarifying questions beyond my supportive nature. There was much to be learned from the painful stories that represented situations; such as the prospects of drug houses being raided, domestic violence, or the recidivism of parents in jail.

These students were very willing to share stories and engaged in lengthy interviews where they became involved in telling their lived experiences. Many harrowing tales were unraveled and the self-reflection of these students was amazing. The most notable aspect of these narratives was that common feeling that the students felt that people, especially teachers, did not listen to their needs. They were extremely thankful that someone wanted to ask them about their lives, cared to supportively listen, and validated their successes in overcoming roadblocks. The five students who finished their GEDs (ID numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7) were all connected to the program as returning mentors, while taking classes at the community college.

The collections of qualitative themes gleaned from the interviews (from Appendices I and J) are graphically summarized in Figure 10. These characterize the positive and negative influences of literacy, engagement, interests, resilience, home and family, school, and peers on each individual. Also included are the negative connections with issues pertaining to health, bullying, and poverty. Detailed summaries developed from the interviews of each of the eleven students who participated are found in the Qualitative Interview Profiles section that follows.

Qualitative Interview Transcript Summary Chart
(11 Volunteer Interviewees)

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT CHART					Literacy	Engagement	Interests	Resilience	Home & Family	Teachers	School Structure	School Staff & Administration	School Subjects/No or few credits	Peers	Bullying	Homeless/Poverty	Health										
ID	Code	Gender	Age	Race	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	-										
2	1FWFEY9	F	19	W	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	-										
3	3FMFEY8	F	38	H-W	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-										
4	2FWFEY0	F	20	W	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-										
5	3FWFEY4	F	34	W	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-										
7	3FWFEY5	F	35	W	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-										
16	2FMGEY3	F	23	M	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-										
18	1FAGEY9	F	19	B	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-										
19	1MBGUY8	M	18	B	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	-	-										
23	2FWGEY3	F	23	W	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-										
24	1MMGUY8	M	18	NA-W	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-										
31	1M#GUY9	M	19	AA	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-										
					----- TOTALS -----																						
					9	3	0	10	2	3	10	1	6	9	3	6	0	5	1	7	1	9	1	7	5	6	6

Figure 10. Qualitative interview transcript summary chart. Positive and negative influences of connections.

Qualitative Interview Profiles (11 Students)

Eleven students participated in the ethnographic interviews out of 44 total students in this study. All students were given number designations. Those who were interviewed are profiled here.

Student Two

A female Caucasian aged nineteen had a history of family dysfunction from her earliest childhood memories. While in Kindergarten, this student was in a family where the father beat up the mother, which landed him in prison. She had been shifted from school to school and had a strained relationship with her mother. At age thirteen she “came home one day and mom had moved out while I was at school.” The devastation of being abandoned and homeless led her to her twenty-year-old sister’s home. “It’s different than having a parent,” she recalled, and started skipping school, losing credits. Sis had a boyfriend and a child when they moved to a rural area. In this school she was bullied, after “four or five months...I just quit school altogether” during the tenth grade. She had a daughter in 2014 and decided to go back for a better job instead of working two lower paying jobs. She achieved her GED and wants to get her BA in business to start a coffee and medical marijuana shop. She is now a mentor in the current GED program.

Student Three

This student, a Hispanic of thirty-eight years, felt that literacy, resilience, and home and family life are her strengths. She stated that she had the perspective of age and could evaluate her circumstances. She was bullied in the eighth grade and it “made me not want to come to school.” Since she was good at school subjects, she said that she did not take school seriously and “there were plenty of times I dropped out.” She thought that she “had plenty of time.” Now that she is older, she sees how the divorce of her parents, along with the school troubles, really affected her. She had some very good teachers and some terrible teachers that were apathetic to

her concerns. She was dropped by the school at sixteen with middle school bullying and lost credits behind her. She had a good paying job at a local business for many years, even though they knew she did not graduate from high school. Her boss gave her increasing amounts of responsibility to become a manager and she received a good salary. The store went out of business and to land a job that could pay near her salary, she needed a GED. She also wanted “to be a good example to my son.” She wants to get a four-year degree in business and work with adult learners.

Student Four

This twenty-year-old White female is “really into carpentry and film.” Her ambitions will take her to a four-year college for a degree in one of those areas. She had a learning disability, but was not diagnosed until “the second semester of my senior year.” She had a good reading ability in high school, but received low grades because school was “difficult.” She reported that teachers bullied her and told her to “give up” on school. “I didn’t learn how to read through school...my mother taught me...school was so ineffective.” This student came up against roadblocks that included the school structure, staff, peers, homelessness, and poor health. As a GED completer and a mentor for the program, she has overcome many obstacles to attain her success.

Student Five

As a White female of thirty-four years, this student is currently proud of getting her GED, finishing her third therapy session, and on a work-study community college program. Overcoming the roadblocks in her life has been difficult for her. Gangs, drugs, guns, and various outside agitators who made it unsafe and not conducive for learning were located in a low-resourced high school in an urban area that was infiltrated by non-school attenders. We had “all

the bad kids at our school” so there was no support system at school. There was no support at home, either, for this student who was dealing with the severe emotional issues of childhood sexual abuse (age four by a cousin), open-heart surgery, and emotional problems. She felt that her family hated her and she had been “suicidal.” Therapy had helped this student since “my mom flat out told me she didn’t like me” and now says, “Oh, I’m not embarrassed of you any more.” This student gave credit to therapy to build her low self-esteem into self-confidence and a resolve to accomplish a zoology degree after the two-year associate’s degree at the community college.

Student Seven

Becoming a Ph.D. is the goal of this thirty-five year old finisher of the GED. She is a mentor who has overcome roadblocks that began in her childhood while living on a farm. In the third grade, she realized that her father was addicted to cocaine and began a pattern of staying home thinking “he would not be able to use” and “I could control him.” She recognized that it backfired on her, since she was the one that people blamed for “truancy” and since everything about the drugs was “a secret ...in a small town, you didn’t say anything.” This long juvenile court record did not protect her from being homeless when her dad and mom were incapacitated from drugs and “there wouldn’t be any food in the house...there would be no electricity” and she had to live with relatives during these times. This family dysfunction confused her; she spent her life trying to find ways to help her family, even now by becoming a social worker. She had given up on the farm and moved in with a friend who got her into a “burnout group” that drank excessively, even though she was closer to school and had hoped to attend. In her view, everyone was skipping, and “dropping out was very normalized.” She had three children with her boyfriend and was able to move in with him to “escape” her life. She was able to get a long-

term job with a business and become a manager; however when it closed, she knew she had to get a GED for her livelihood and as an example for her children. Once she was able to get her GED, “I did not have to lie anymore...on applications...at the PTA.” She was embarrassed, but now proud to have accomplished her goals with self-determination and hard work.

Student Sixteen

As a mixed race Persian and White woman of twenty-three years, this student has already had a long life of difficult circumstances. Her father was in and out of prison and her mother was a user who abandoned her and her brother frequently. When she was young her mother would take her two children into threatening areas “and leave her there...my uncle had to come and get us...she poured boiling water on me and it missed me and hit my brother...but I loved her.” When her dad was released from prison, he would set up a home, usually in the old “burned out drug house where they lived before.” However, he would return to jail and “so we ran out of food...some neighbors gave us canned goods.” This student had a very self-determined attitude and frequently could put bad things behind her by saying, “forget it” and move on. She wanted to “learn from their mistakes...I am going to make my own on the way and I’m okay with that.” This is a hard-working young lady who managed a gas station, worked at a hookah bar, and worked in various other service jobs to get by. She achieved an online diploma, which allowed her to get a CNA (certified nurse assistant) certificate with the Red Cross. She is now working at a senior citizens home while taking classes for her GED. She had no respect for the school structures that lost her credits and did not support her through her family crisis; but as with her parents, she holds no animosity against them. She is proud of her self-reliance admitted to living through family violence, drug abuse, scrounging for money through “junking” from dumpsters, and the humiliation of hearing the rumors of judgment

against the criminal activity in her family. “Everybody knew about it [at school] and I didn’t want to go back.”

Student Eighteen

This young African American lady, age 18, was very shy, and had kind brown eyes and an easy smile. Her situation revealed a student who was very social and spent her time at school with “the wrong crowd.” “I thought school was about...socializing.” She began skipping in high school. Her grades started to fall and she lost credits. By the time, she said she realized that school was important “it was too late.” Schools should realize that “not everyone learns at the same pace.” This seemed to contribute to her getting behind in her schoolwork. She reported that family problems led her to leave school, but in the personal interview, she gave no indication of family problems as a roadblock. In fact, she went out of her way to say emphatically that her mother was “100% behind her” in her educational journey, an apparent disconnect from the survey to the interview. She was on free & reduced lunch and said that she was from a poor neighborhood. She is in the GED program because she now realizes that she needed education to have more choices in life so that she can become an artist entrepreneur.

Student Nineteen

This nineteen-year-old African American male was concerned with his time schedule (his father repeatedly called him during our interview). While being very friendly, he reported a balance of positive and negative affects in his life. He said that his early years in school were good, but that he “wasn’t ready” for high school work. He said comprehension stifled his progress in many subject areas and it affected his participation on the football team, which happened sporadically. He shared that his family connection was complicated because he had no relationship with them, “I would just go to my room” and not communicate. However, he said

that he continued to live with both his parents to this day, but was somewhat embarrassed by this. He even said the phone calls with the angry person on the other end was “a friend that he was having trouble with,” but eventually after the third call, the student admitted it was his father ready to pick him up. He hated that his parents had forced him to attend school, but now “I force myself...so that I can get a job at Ford.” His father works for Ford and he believes that is where his future will be. His mantra was, “I have to make the choice [to go to school] every day.” The interview was cut short because the phone calls grew increasingly more heated and loud so that I could hear some of the remarks. He is working on being the self-reliant person that he wants to be and he thinks that it will be through a job after getting the GED.

Student Twenty-Three

This interview started with a large amount of information that the student gave as background so that I could understand the context of how much of a success that she was at this point. This self-determined twenty-three year old shared that she has kept a secret of abuse by a family member since she was a young girl. Even when her parents put her in therapy, she refused to say it and thought that it would damage her family. This student reported PTSD, bipolar disorder, serotonin deficiency, spina bifida, cutting herself so that she could “focus on something completely different than what was in my head,” and almost being raped in the high school pool. She was bullied, beaten, and placed in a counseling group from elementary school until high school—giving up her lunch free time all of those years. She said that at first, she did not understand why she was in that group and they had told her it was because “she wouldn’t talk to anyone.” She became passive aggressive and built a colorful world within herself as a protective shell. This student had very little opportunity to be successful in school with all of the issues that she listed and because she became estranged from her family. However, she believes

that her resilience has helped her deal with all of the disadvantages in her life that included living in a low-resourced urban area with free and reduced lunch. Her success in being in the GED program, a positive relationship with her boyfriend, a goal of becoming a forensic scientist, and even thinking about having a baby, despite health concerns, represented her focus on goals and personal achievement.

Student Twenty-Four

This was a student who went through some transformations during school. From his early years, peers about his weight bullied this eighteen-year-old Caucasian young man. “It was hard for me to fit in, so it caused me to have behavior problems in school...I was suspended a lot.” His family of origin had a “reputation for violence...where some people got killed,” and student twenty-four weighed “three hundred pounds” in middle school. “My mom, she left me when I was six years old and my father, he was an alcoholic and he...didn’t do a very good job taking care of me.” This student fended off peers’ insults. He was the bigger student and would physically strike back at the hurtful words and dominate others, which set him up as the bully, resulting in many suspensions for fighting. He never viewed himself as the aggressor, but did admit, “I retaliated a lot.” He found refuge in going to live with his grandmother. Since he was homeless and had no resources, she welcomed him. He mowed lawns and tried to supplement the meager pension that sustained his grandmother. Schools did not welcome him and he missed many classes. He did not feel that he was learning anything. “I just said...I can’t do it anymore, I just walked out of school...I never looked back.” The most important skill that this student valued was writing. His reading scores were good and he poured out his life onto paper. At the same time, he was determined to “better my life and say I did something I’m proud of” and started going to a gym, resulting in the student I interviewed who was of average weight and a

happy demeanor. His chance at the big time comes from a job to go on tour with a band this summer and being paid to sing the songs that he had created. He wants the GED as a backup plan if he does not become “the next Justin Bieber.”

Student Thirty-One

The African American student, who was nineteen years old, came from “the suburbs.” He claimed they had no gangs there, but declared the saying of his recently passed father, “If you want to join a gang, go join the world’s largest gang! The United States Military!” The circumstance of disadvantage for this student centered on a car accident where he was run over by a truck in his father’s trucking business. He had some health issues with hearing and speech at birth, but his age at the time of the accident was inconsistent in the interview. He would claim to be age four, then nine, then six. This could be directly related to his condition, which he called TBI or traumatic brain injury. He recounted all of the many problems in vision, hearing, headaches, seizures, and surgeries that occurred throughout the years since his accident. State teachers and tutors assisted him in his home; but each time that he tried to return to school, he was unable to follow the structure and sit for long periods of time. He has strong family ties, credits religion and hope for his optimism and generally is “grateful for being alive” since the truck tire had rolled over his head in the accident and he was not expected to live. He was still in mourning for his father, barely a month after he passed. Yet, this student, who had encountered so many health difficulties, truly wanted to share his story of resilience and perseverance to get his GED.

Student Voice Snapshots

The reflections given by the students (in Appendix J) who were interviewed are very compelling, and heartfelt. They speak of painful memories, constant struggles, seemingly impenetrable roadblocks, and illnesses. The following selections are representative of the students in this study. Their stories are not extraordinary; and in fact, are all too common for this disadvantaged population.

Student Seven: This student was brought up on a farm within a dysfunctional family with parents addicted to drugs. They lived next store to her grandparent's large original heritage farm. The hard work of running the farms superseded any concern for individual wants and needs. Here is her story:

As a girl, you were in the [farm] house to do things. And homework wasn't necessarily preached...you get the chores done.

I enjoyed school, only to third grade, which is when my father...I learned my father's addiction problem. [I told him] you have to take care of me, so I would say I was sick [and stay home from school [that's not] what ended up happening.

I was charged with truancy in both third and fifth grade...My dad had an addiction, but my mom...was an enabler. She eventually started to use later.

My dad would be...at his lowest points...[and] there were times when there wouldn't be food in the house...There would be no electricity and we had issues like that. I left home to live with a friend and her mother, closer to school. We got involved with drinking and skipping.

When I turned 16, I met my kids' father. And he was 28...He had an apartment and I totally saw that as my way out. My kids are not going to see the same shit I

saw...I missed my basic sophomore education, and my junior and senior year of learning...I am a [single] mom of three now, and I am part of the PTA...I don't want to tell you that I don't have a GED...That shames you...Coming through the program gave me pride in myself that I have never had before. And that was able to carry over to everything else. It was that first 'I can do it' step.

Student Twenty-Four: A family reputation for violence preceded this student as he entered elementary school. He reported that he handled bullying poorly and was often in trouble for fighting back due to his size over the original aggressors. He admitted anger issues that were not addressed by any counselors or staff at school. He had always written poetry about his life that he turned into songs and was offered a position in a traveling band, singing his songs, with a schedule to play in the Midwest. These are his words:

Starting out through elementary school, I was a bigger kid. I got made fun of a lot about my weight. It was hard for me to fit in, so it caused me to have behavior problems...It followed me all the way to middle school...Almost everybody bullied me because of my size. I weighed about 300 pounds...I was constantly being suspended.

I retaliated a lot...I got to high school. I just said, you know, I can't do it any more. And I just walked out of school. And I never turned back.

My mom, she left me when I was six years old. And my father, he was an alcoholic...So my grandmother basically raised me. And once it came to a point that I had to basically raise my grandmother. So it became hard for me.

I was unemployed. We were living off my grandmother's income, which was \$500 a month. And her house payment was \$500 a month. So I had to take back

bottles, you know...cut grass...to pay for the gas and water. You know what I'm saying? We didn't have TV like this. I never had that growing up. I never had a lot of things that other kids have had.

I went from having nothing... That's why I wanted to do this interview... to tell kids, you know, even though I'm in a GED program. Even if you have nothing you can do it, you can do it. You honestly can. But it's all up to you... You have to keep pushing for it. You cannot let nothing stop you. I am expecting to have my GED by fall of 2015.

Student Sixteen: This young woman had great resilience following all of the stressful situations, many odd jobs, dangerous contexts, and family strife. Even in the face of hardship and hard feelings, she had a sincere wish to sustain her connection to family. She shares her travails with us:

My dad is Persian...and my mom is Native American and Irish...my brother, he's Yemen and Puerto Rican. My older brother... he is Jordanian. So we are all just different. [One school] in [urban area] was half Mexican/half Black...so that would work. I would blend in a little more. But I am diverse. You know, I am friends with everyone...And so, I was there for a little while. But my mom took off.

When I was a little girl, my mom would take us to the worst places. And my uncle had to get us, you know, because she would leave us there... I just don't know where it comes from...It comes from drugs and the pills and all that, but then [that was] only the trigger...[to] wanting to throw hot milk on me.

Me and my brother lived together because my dad ended up getting locked up [for drugs] and my mom was gone...And then we were living in the abandoned house [after the drug raid]. So we stayed there for a while [after] he went back to prison ...We ran out of food...my brother started junking for food. We were responsible for getting ourselves to school every day. We were 15 and 16.

I was in five schools when my mother showed up [to change our schools - both urban and rural]. Going to different high schools, it's like they messed up my transcripts...I was in different classes going into whatever class and I just...it wasn't for me.

I can brush it off, you know. You know I have ...I've really seen worse.

Everything has been in front of me. I mean ...learn how to cook drugs when you are a kid?...You are not supposed to learn that. Your dad is not supposed to say I dropped the bag, can you go outside and find it? And you have to look through twenty acres to find where he dropped the bag. Come on though!
a GED. I need it to enroll ...right away into my nursing classes.

My advice to students thinking of dropping out?

Don't do it! Do not! It is a pain in the ass to go back and finish! What they need is a GED. Otherwise, you're going to be just looked at as someone who doesn't complete things. You are looked at as someone who doesn't have common sense...I understand... we all have our problems... always, keep going back, and trying. That's number one!

These are three of the eleven students who shared their stories and their own perspectives of how their roadblocks affected their lives. These students were able to be

resilient and use their literacy/academic skills to find a GED program so that they could reengage in learning for their own self-image and their economic and social well-being.

GED Staff Perspectives

The program director and teachers felt that the students benefited from the attention of a researcher who wanted to listen to their experiences. This emancipatory lens viewpoint spotlighted what was going well in the lives of these students. The students framed their experiences with reflections, shared their extreme difficulties, and demonstrated positive actionable choices for their futures.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis

The information gathered from the quantitative and qualitative data created a picture of students who overcame many roadblocks. They were not engaged in high school, fell behind in credits and academic tasks (even though they had the skills and needed to be at a ninth grade reading level for the GED program), and then sought out a GED program that would engage them. They reconnected and made a choice, through a determined mindset, to be personally and economically successful.

Correlation between Resilience and Reading Attitude Scores

The relationship of literacy, engagement, and resilience was an important part of this research and did not seem to be on the radar of any researchers. The resilience scale for adolescents was usually used for social-psychological testing. As a curious researcher, I wanted to see if there was a relationship between resilience and reading. There was indeed a correlation between the responses on the READ resilience scale and the SARA reading attitude survey. This is the most important finding in this study. This shows that the impact of promoting good reading skills with a variety of reading contexts and a positive reading attitude, all throughout the school years, will positively affect the student's resilience. The students will do what resilient students do, and that is *-achieve*. Since literacy is such a vital skill and resilience is essential for achievement, these two important factors, when data are statistically analyzed, can show indications of correlation. These two surveys were administered with two different numbered subscales: the Survey of Adolescent Reading Attitudes (SARA) uses a one to five rating and the Resilience Scale for Adolescents (READ) measures participant responses with a one to six rating. In this analysis, these are normalized to simplify comparison of their relationship. This was

accomplished by using linear algorithms for each survey to convert them to a 0-5 scale for easy visualization (Appendix M).

The data reveal a significant correlation between reading attitudes and resilience. The results are graphically shown in a scatter plot of normalized reading attitude and resilience values (Figure 11). This resulted in a Pearson's correlation coefficient r of 0.49 at a confidence level of $p < 0.01$. In other words, a person with a higher reading attitude is typically going to have a higher level of resilience. This shows a high confidence level of a positive relationship between the two surveys. Teachers can find this helpful in curriculum building around multi-media high interest literacy materials that boost reading attitudes and engagement, which can increase resilience. This will have a positive affect on the student's self-agency and ability to persevere with personal and social competence.

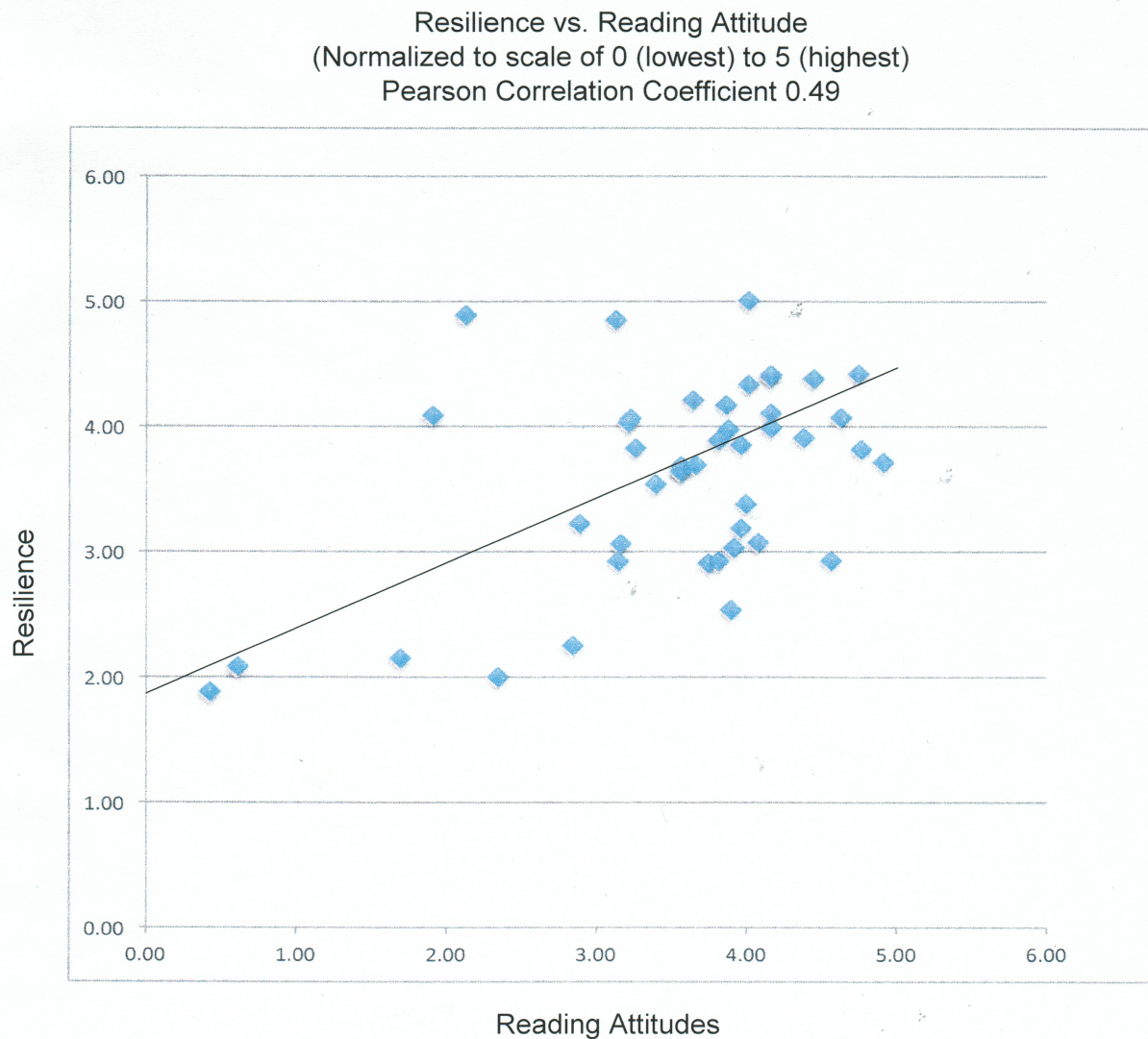


Figure 11. Resilience vs. reading attitude correlation (Normalized to 0 - 5 Scale).

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study included five elements: literacy, reading attitudes identified and related to engagement and resilience, relationship of low engagement causing action of dropping out, connection to school, and levels of motivating resilience. To analyze them and to find relationships, it is necessary to refer to the main data chart and the subsequent

information charts that show depictions of graphs and matrices. Three prominent outcomes came from the analysis of this research:

- Cognitive skills in literacy were an advantage to all but one of the students. They were able to traverse the subject material, but not in complex texts in high school. They considered their reading skills to be a factor they would need to return to get a GED, which all of them had set as a goal. This not only gave them the belief that they could have succeeded had they stayed in school, but also convinced them that they had the intelligence to pursue an alternative route, showing resilience.
- Noncognitive skills supported students in their efforts to get around the challenges of the roadblocks from family dysfunction and the demands of a traditional school structure. The social issues that pulled them away from completing the diploma left them isolated from those mentors and teachers that could help them. Engagement or lack thereof, caused them to avoid class and disassociate from traditional school functions and show negative peer behaviors that were antisocial. Resilience was a basic life skill for most during their high school years, but became more relevant as they became more independent of parental and school constraints.
- Students showed strength of resilience that went beyond “personal agency, problem solving, and positive life goals” (America’s Promise Alliance, 2014, p.37). These students showed *drive* (Pink, 2009) to go beyond roadblocks for their own inner or intrinsic sense of accomplishment. They revealed self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000), a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) that encouraged their perseverance even when navigating difficult obstacles, and showed grit or the will to overcome life’s hardships over a long duration (Duckworth et al, 2007). They accepted challenges,

navigated positive and negative situations, had relationships with adults and accepted help when necessary. Many students complained of inexplicable noninterest from schools that did not put a high priority on their education. This confirms the prejudice of the hidden curriculum of putting these students in lower tracks with few expectations for achievement and even less hope for graduation. However, they kept finding new solutions or options. They tried to reconcile with family (even when it was detrimental to their own personal safety), sought out and valued new relationships, and appreciated adult help without counting on it for the long run, since it was fraught with disappointments. These students sought their own counsel based on tough experiences and found answers that worked for them. The payoff for them was the pride in surviving the hardships and glow of success in striving and or reaching their educational goals. Most of all, they started to believe that they could become accomplished professionals in fields where they had interest. They could see themselves in the future being successful and *they never gave up!*

One of the first intents of this study was the hypothesis that students who dropped out had trouble with literacy. According to the self-reported data, this was true to the extent that they did not complete classes and lost credits. However, the vast majority of student survey responses and interview answers indicated that they felt that they possessed reading skills that were sufficient to pass the classes. This was also reminiscent of “The Silent Epidemic” by Bridgeland et al. (2006) and “Don’t Call Them Dropouts” (Zaff, 2014): Students generally felt that if roadblocks had not been holding them back, they could have been successful.

In the present study, the students at their dropout status points indicated that their abilities were good, but their grades were low, so the literacy skill alone did not translate into academic

achievement. While in high school, they reported low levels of engagement or emotional commitment to teachers, instruction, or school, which limited their ability to comprehend complex texts, vocabulary, and difficult lessons in school resulting in missing class. The high reading skills of these students are their own self-reported evaluations. The data collected here are not sufficient to prove the link between literacy abilities and dropping out because it focused on a limited part portion of the population that returned for a GED. Of the population that had interrupted enrollment, these students were more likely to have higher reading ability and resilience, since they remained in the program at the time of the study; whereas others had dropped out or had completed their GED program. Lacking in this research is a pool of people who had dropped out and stayed out, or those that came back for a GED but discontinued their lessons, thus there is no information within my research regarding these students. It is likely that the study participants responded to the survey and the interviews with answers that represented higher literacy skills because they were in a unique population of committed students still in the program at the time. This was a result of the narrow sample scope within the overall population of those who had dropped out.

Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris's (2007) book called *Is Literacy Enough?* made the case that foundational literacy at basic levels is not enough for the middle and high school tasks of analyzing, synthesizing, and creating new knowledge without continual reading instruction focused on content area material. When students who lack this training encounter texts that are more complex, especially with vocabulary-rich technical terms, they lack the instructional support in disciplinary literacy to process the informational text. In addition, students need to be aware that critical literacy is the hierarchy of language and power (Janks, 2010): "...literacy is

just one among many social ‘goods’ that are distributed. Where we sit in the social hierarchy ...affects our ability to access resources...” (p. 5). Critical literacy is powerful literacy.

The students in this study were aware that literacy helped them participate in school and knew of its links to society for jobs, but did not realize how missing classes put them behind academically; thus lacking the new literacy skills needed for academic challenges and the credits to graduate. They did not anticipate that the personal problems, non-accommodating schools, and absent mentors relegated them to the perceived outskirts of society. They felt powerless through the decisions their families and schools made and seemingly, felt the GED was the first step in their social justice. It is especially necessary to interpret the ethnographic profiles of this disadvantaged population in terms of their access to choices for personal power, which was extremely limited, but did increase over time as they saw opportunities for dropout recovery. Literacy, in practice and connection to the social, cultural, and environmental settings, was a center-point for understanding their choices and position in the world. Freire (2010) explains that literacy is liberating and that reading the *word* and reading the *world* should be one and the same. This understanding of language must be actionable and transformative for students from a personal situated context.

The second hypothesis stated that reading attitudinal factors could be identified and related to the other factors. This was completed with the application of the Reading Attitude Scale for Adolescents for all 44 students, as explained in the instrument section of methodology. The resulting data is graphically presented in Chapter 4, Results. All of the students were measured for their attitudes in academic reading in both printed and digital forms, along with their attitudes in recreational reading in printed and digital forms. It was concluded that individuals could find the area of their own expertise, the individual scores for each subscale

were identified, and a comparison for the group with all the subscales was found. Generally, the data showed that students preferred the recreational reading in digital form as the highest choice of satisfaction, with the recreational reading in printed form following close behind. This measurement can help teachers identify areas where students could become more engaged with lessons by supplementing related recreational literature in both digital and printed forms. The qualitative interviews directly asked students for their attitudes toward reading and the majority answered that reading was a pleasure that helped them take refuge during times of personal struggle. It also provided a means to return to school, already having the skills to take on a high school equivalency exam. Literacy was measured in reading attitudes and was found to be related to resilience and engagement. It was demonstrated in the correlation chart and the interest/participation or engagement in the forms of reading on the attitudes survey.

The third hypothesis stated that there is an identifiable a relationship between students that dropped out and low levels of engagement. Out of the 44 students surveyed, 28 indicated that they were connected to family, 26 reported a connection to friends, 12 connected to teachers, and only six reported a connection to school and one pointed to a job. This was somewhat misleading, because their self-reporting was sometimes not a positive connection. Family was often both a positive and negative connection. They held good feelings for the members, but did not always approve of their behaviors—such as drug use, abandonment, and neglect. In addition, many declared a connection to friends, but admitted that some friends pulled them in harmful directions. Engagement or disengagement was indeed an important element related to leaving school, but it was interpreted in many different ways that made it hard to simply quantify. The in-depth analysis of engagement in the qualitative section in this report gives more evidence of the complications and the importance of engagement.

The fourth hypothesis posed the question, if students can make connections to school, social, and family structures; then they will be more willing to attend, engage, and succeed in getting a GED. The previous hypothesis reported the number of connections that the students listed. In general, the results of connections being positive were mixed. As stated, it does not paint a clear picture. Many students reported that they had little or no connection to the teachers or to the school itself, and were most involved in the family dysfunction around them. What is clear is that students spend 80% of their time in non-school activities (Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003, p. 600). Extracurricular activities in groups, team sports, clubs, and community events are stimulating and engaging to produce intrinsic feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy (Zaff et al., 2003, p. 600; Putnam, 2015). These students did not report engagement in high school, however, this population showed extraordinary self-determination and motivation for their own personal success. This went beyond social activities for group enjoyment or shared interests. These students valued education as a life path and were very engaged in the platform of the GED program in the community college.

The final hypothesis was that students who dropped out of high school and returned to get a GED, or actually succeeded in completing it, have a high level of resilience that can be motivating for college classes and employment. The sample in this study, indeed, had a high resilience level as measured by the Resilience Scale for Adolescents. They look forward to the future with a positive outlook and plans for continuing their education with the community college. In comparing the resilience scale for adolescence (Hjemdal et al., 2006), which was based on the five resilience factors of personal competency, social competency, structured style, family cohesion, and social resources, it was clear that my research outcomes paralleled conclusions of Hjemdal et al (2006). The three factors of personal competency, structured style,

and family cohesion were negatively impacted by adversity; whereas, social competencies and social resources were independent of negative influence in both studies.

In the current study, the first three factors were based in the intrinsic needs of the individual and were internalized to make vulnerability an issue, thus indicating lower resilience scores. The students showed higher scores in social competencies and social resources. This population felt resilient in their ability to manage the social environment and find ways of successfully navigating their way back to their educational goals. As they gained maturity and the ability to make choices, they found their places in the social structures more easily.

Research Questions

Research question: Who are the dropout recovery students? This was detailed in a previous section in this dissertation. They are students who have been pushed out or dropped out due to attendance, behavior, or credits that have not been completed. These students are typically disadvantaged in social, community, family, economic, and even in health situations. They are often called disconnected youth who do not have an attachment to school or work. This is a population that has talents we have never seen, and with some assistance through support systems, we can help them join our communities. They are seeking education through various opportunities. Some are very resilient, while others need the assistance of caring educators.

Research question: What do they report about their levels of literacy, engagement, and resilience? This research shows that the literacy attitudes for those students reconnecting to the GED program in the study is fairly high. This is substantiated in that a high school reading level (grade 9) is a prerequisite to successfully completing all of the tests. Some have accessed Adult Basic Education (ABE) when their skills have not been high enough to boost their standing to enter a GED program. Most students reported that they were disengaged in school; in fact, only

six participants out of 44 stated that they were connected to school. Resilience was also strong in the areas of social competence (a mean of 4.0 out of 5), which meant that students were good at building relationships and comforting others, among other things. The second highest resilience score came from social resources (a mean of 3.9 out of 5): Students demonstrated resilience when it involved encouragement, cohesion, and support. This is remarkable for the students that have been disadvantaged, void of extra resources, or lacking attention from family that they needed. Tapping into these areas of resilience can unlock compassion and build strong relationships with others in communities.

The remainder, of the research questions identified at the beginning of this study, has been addressed in the various sections related to the topics. Please refer to those sections for a more detailed description of the outcomes as they appear in the study. The specific issues addressed are interrelated throughout the mixed methods process. For example, reading attitudes and resilience and their relationship can be easily found as listed in the contents. The discussion on engagement can be found in the Themes section below, and the data on the difficulties and successes of dropping out and returning are listed in the quantitative data section.

Themes

Overcoming Roadblocks

This population experienced many different life situations that imposed restrictions on simply going to school. Many had roadblocks with the school structure, but most dealt with a combination of family and health issues that precluded the chance to be successful in school. The desire to finish school was usually present, but many said that the perspective of age showed them that they valued solving the problems in their lives more than education at the time of high school. All of the respondents in the interviews felt that they had resilience to come back to

school, and nine out of eleven credited literacy as a benefit for them to handle the academic aspects of coming back to school. “It was hard, but getting the motivation to go back is what is even harder...and actually sticking to it.” The ability to overcome roadblocks was explained by listing the obstacles and sharing the exertion that was used to overcome them. The themes were repeated within this peer group. Nine students noted that they had family troubles and three said that they had support. The school structure, teachers, and administration were not popular in the favorable category with these students. Twenty-six times students reported dysfunction with school authorities from lost credits, unfair treatment, apathy, bullying, and even fears that school was unsafe. Social emotional and physical conditions stemming from negative peer groups, bullying, poor health, homelessness, and low resources were mentioned twenty-four times. The America’s Promise Alliance (2014, p. 17) surveys of interrupted-enrollment students highlighted similar disadvantages: Thirty percent of the students were abused, 22% were homeless, and 18% spent time in juvenile detention. In the present study, additional hardships affected the students both emotionally and physically pulling them away from any chance of participating in school, much less graduating. This was made more complicated because most reported a lack of family support, even as they tried to find positive connections to their loved ones.

Family

The family situations detailed in the lives of these students are overwhelming, especially because the difficulties come in multiples. One answer would not fix any given problem. The extent of dysfunction was centered in the parents’ behaviors that students had to observe, try to understand, and act to protect themselves. Most had no social safety nets, but were proud that they were innovative and took on responsibilities way beyond their years. The fact that the behaviors generally were kept as family secrets, the children had no recourse, but to really on the

kindness of relatives and neighbors. These students grew up quickly, took on responsibilities to simply exist, and were proud of their endeavors. Some realized the value of education, but most did not see a viable way to make that happen for themselves. It appeared to them that the school system, their parents, and even their friends “did not have their backs.” Without a network of family as a support system, these students had to put off the idea of a high school credential, “because I didn’t need it” or “I wasn’t ready” to be learn at school. Nine students reported negative relationships with their families, as they were growing up—from disinterest, to abandonment, and to abuse. In addition, these students did not benefit from a family that cheered for their successes and were there to support them through the tough times.

Peers & Bullies

Peers, as the age of high school students might indicate, have a large influence on the social milieu in school. Seven out of eleven participants in the study said that peers were a negative factor in their lives and five out of the eleven cited bullying as an intolerable situation with which they had to deal. In the situation of disengaging from school, through skipping and loss of credits, peers seem to coagulate into groups that reinforce behaviors. The participants found people that provided alternatives to the strict structure of school and even sought them out to escape the problems at home. “I had outside friends” [not from school], but those were “a terrible influence on me. We all just wanted to skip school and hang out instead of going to school.” This then typically evolved into a pattern that was hard to break. “I was connected to burnouts,” stated one student who wanted to escape school and the juvenile court system that was charging her with the status offence of truancy (meaning crimes that only cover juveniles).

Homelessness and Low Resources

Homelessness was overcome by working odd jobs, taking back bottles, living with friends and relatives, and accepting placement in classrooms after shuffling from one school to another, which often occurred “without credits transferring.” America’s Promise Alliance (2014) reported that 87% of the students who were homeless at some point, quit school. In this study, six out of eleven students said they were homeless, sometimes more than once in their young lives. The lack of resources, free and reduced lunch (six out of eleven), low-resourced schools, lack of money for extra-curricular clubs, and parents who abdicated their responsibilities—all cited in this research—contributed to the disadvantages and roadblocks that stalled students’ high school education. Cumming & Gloeckner (2012) wrote an article reporting that most homeless students keep this condition a secret from school officials and other people who could help to remedy the situation. This article also explained the McKinney-Vento Act, which was created to release federal monies in an effort to make sure that homeless children would not miss out on education. The students in this study strove to be self-reliant, moved in with relatives, or relied upon friends without involving the school. Such students could have benefitted from this funding. Remarkably, many school officials are not proactive about investigating situations where students might need intervention for unstable or absent safe living environments.

Teachers, School Staff, School Structure

Teachers have the power to intervene when students have difficult times and can take action to improve the environment in the classroom, as well as stand for fair treatment of individuals who are being bullied or for those who are being judged by school staff based on social issues, association with bad peer groups, or negative reputation. “My family had a reputation for violence,” recalled one student; he believed that when he was bullied, the teachers

would blame him. “I retaliated a lot...people stopped picking on me slowly. It wasn’t a good coping mechanism. I kept getting suspended and I wasn’t learning anything.” He did not blame teachers, but felt that they could have done better at “cracking down on bullying.” Schools need more intervention specialists and counselors that can support teachers and give wrap around services to students with behaviors that stem from school and home problems. Teachers have the opportunity to turn things around for students. “When a teacher takes an interest in you...suddenly, you feel like you have more value and you want to try harder.” Conversely, a student said that teachers are apathetic in public school and recounted the words, “If you don’t learn it, it’s okay, I still get paid.” These students are valuable citizens from every cultural and racial background that can contribute much to our society. When educated with powerful literacy skills they are able to bounce back, take interest, and take action for change. They will make the world a more welcome place for disadvantaged populations, like those who are undereducated. Educators must build rapport with students. They must become aware that knowledge that social aspects, family situations, and attitudes of students are necessary to foster participation in the process of education. “Good teaching...nearly always comes back to personal relationships” (Michie, 2005, p. 48). When students have lives that are chaotic at home, have health problems, or are having behavior issues that are wrapped around feelings of disengagement, the school must be a place of refuge, not a place that labels students at-risk of failure. The students encountered in this research were talented, thoughtful, and wanted to be part of the social fabric. The schools that lost them during their first chance at education will never benefit from their unique contributions to the adult conversations about life.

Leave School? What Should Change?

Since part of the research was to help students be empowered to overcome roadblocks, it seemed appropriate for them to offer suggestions on a few items. They were asked to give advice to students at the precipice of dropping out and to teachers and school staff on how to change the school to accommodate all students. The recommendations that they gave seemed very straight forward, for the most part. They wanted students in similar situations to stay in school, if possible; and they wanted the school staff to listen to students. Several said that it's "the school's responsibility to take care of [bullies]." The feeling of being safe at school was not taken seriously and these students wanted that to change.

To the students that were contemplating leaving school, the participants in this research wanted to share their feelings about how they felt in that situation, to commiserate with them. "Hated school and just stopped going," said one student and "I can't do anymore. I just walked out of school...I never looked back." These students felt that it had been a long road to get to the point that they could not tolerate the situation any longer. Another student said, "I just stopped doing the work, I was battling emotional problems." Others recited a long list of bad attendance, "low, low scores," and often they told stories of how "credits wouldn't transfer" or those of "missing transcripts." However, they wanted to leave a message of "hope." "I think that I just didn't value education at that moment of my life," were the wise words of a student who had gotten older and felt like she had missed opportunities. She believed that it had been tougher to "go back." One woman shouted, "I wouldn't give them any of that played-out, 'just believe in yourself' kind of stuff...tell them, 'listen, I know it's hard, and I know it hurts, and that you are sacrificing so much, but believe me, it does get better.'" Many had messages of "don't drop out," "it's never too late," "stick it out," and "don't do it! It's a pain in the ass to go back and finish!" Two made recommendations to make one's own choices and find out if school or a GED is the

way that is the best. These students supported the intent of this research, so that others “wouldn’t make the same mistakes” and they wanted to show people that they were being successful: “If I can do it, so can you!” This positive attitude reflected the caring that they had for others in similar situations. If you do not finish warned one student, “you’re going to be just looked at as someone who doesn’t complete things.” They are a remarkable group of students.

Much of the advice that the students had for school staff and administrators was directed predominately toward engagement. They wanted the teachers and staff to make things more interesting, and to be aware that extra-curricular activities “cost money and you didn’t have the expenses” to participate. Another wanted staff to know, “trust me...they don’t want to sit in that...school. [It] is like a dead cell.” The remedy he called for was “field trips! Yes for high schoolers!” The big picture message for school staff came from a soft-spoken young woman, “They need to engage the students more and care about each and every student.”

Engagement

The engagement aspect is touched upon in the surveys, but more readily discussed in the interviews. In the survey, the students rated personal engagement as low due to few connections, and difficulties while being in school because they had lack of interest, poor concentration, inability to focus, and reluctance to sit in “the seat for eight hours.” They represented their high personal engagement for their current GED student status (coming back to education) by indicating that they now valued education, found personal resilience, and a goal of determination to succeed for “myself” before they listed jobs. The intrinsic nature of their answers in my study was in resilience, similar to America’s Promise Alliance (2014), however, they did feel that they depended on themselves, their goals, their own interests, and self-determination – with a little credit to the fine GED program. This was a contrast the to America’s Promise Alliance (2014)

research which centered the return of students on external factors such as getting the GED for jobs, “someone encouraged me,” and “family support.” That report acknowledged that resilience required a “reaching up” helping hand for reengagement for the long term (p. 12). Several students remarked about their search for a high school credential through alternative methods, and about their arduous attempts to find a program with a good match (home school, online, adult education classes, etc.). For the students who had failed at more than one program, determination to find a way to get a GED was paramount. Once a choice was made, they realized that they needed help from caring adult teachers who offered it. The students were able to assess it as a benefit to further their goals. Some did indeed say they needed additional help. “I need somebody here to teach me. I just can’t teach myself.” This researcher is convinced that these students had a resolve that kept them going to find a way for schooling with or without help.

The interview participants were asked about their interests and motivations for their connections or disconnections to life issues. They were making choices that would determine the course of their lives. They had struggled with the social aspects of schooling and families until they became intolerable; and with the wisdom of age and a need for livelihood, they persevered. They were not able to see the high school diploma as an inherent benefit to themselves during the event of dropping out; and were not motivated by earning it as a reward for hard work. The schoolwork they were required to perform was difficult. They had little help or support from teachers or families, so the payoff was not as valuable as their autonomy.

Self-Determination Theory

During the qualitative data-gathering portion this research, it became apparent that the quality of self-determination had been a significant resilience factor on the part of these returning

students. Self-determination theory (SDT) explains how individuals are engaged or connected to their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For the GED students in this study, it significantly influenced their choices, which were based on what interested or disinterested them in their high school years. The learning environments encompassed their lives in and out of school; and their connectedness, or engagement to situations, was dependent on their interpretations of and reactions to negative stimuli. One student explained that home life was so intolerable that she left and went to live with a friend who was closer to school. However, the single mother heading that household was permissive of the teenage use of alcohol. This student had left a home where the parents were using drugs and she thought that drinking was less harmful. She recalled the negative environment like this: “when I was in the eighth grade I actually started to drink when I went to live with a girlfriend and her mom...I smoked pot, skipped [school].” She remembers that she “might be charged with truancy again” and left school during ninth grade to start working. This woman tried to make sustainable choices by working at a young age to give her the money she needed.

Self-determination theory is a macro-sociological approach to developmental and functioning motivation in human beings. Under this theory, behaviors are said to be either ornate or purposive. “Quality of motivation refers to the kind or type of motivation that underlies learning behavior” (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2010, p. 19). Intrinsically, motivated means that learning was undertaken for its inherent interest and enjoyment, as compared to extrinsically motivated behavior, which was done to attain an outcome or reward that is separable from the learning itself. “Autonomous motivation involves the experience of volition and choice, whereas controlled motivation involves the experience of being pressured or coerced” (p. 19). A young woman made the chilling remark, “I had nothing to do with parents taking care

of me at all for years...knew nothing of their whereabouts.” She had been homeless since age 15 and sporadically lived in places when her father was out of prison before being sent back. She asked, “What motivates me? To keep going...trying to get my-self together.” Simple survival and taking care of her brother often motivated her.

SDT theory, developed over the last thirty years, involves motivation and personality in human subjects. It was used to describe behaviors on various levels to evaluate functioning or achievement. From a research perspective on motivation, it includes intrinsic factors, inherent feelings of satisfaction, extrinsic factors, and impetus for behaviors responding to circumstances outside of oneself (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). Students in this research did not feel connected to the high school or the teachers and they responded to environmental circumstances regarding the restrictive structure and demands of school. They also felt that their relationships to their families were stronger than their relationship to the school, while they were somewhat connected to a few friends at school. A student in the research admonished schools for their strictness, “One thing you gotta stop doing is the rudimentary rules...like you can’t write in pen.” This, she continued, “made my grades plummet.”

Self-determination means that one has the ability to affect her or his future goals. If students are made to feel empowered and are shown successful academic choices, they become more engaged and determined to have positive outcomes. This is related to the resilience factors that the students reported on the surveys, which were scored as high. The resilience and determination represented in the pursuit of the GED for future goals was overwhelmingly supported by the data on the survey. Forty of the 44 participants reported the desire to continue education for specific jobs or future success. Sorting out the origins of these motivation factors helps the researcher determine which are the most influential on the student. The motivations

and interests revealed in the interviews showed that the students were not motivated by school and “they didn’t feel like they could do anything for me.” They had very few interests in school, but were connected to elderly relatives, reading, writing, and religion. Several said that there “was nothing” that interested them at school.

Intrinsic factors usually indicate a mastery goal orientation, driving the student to understand concepts for the benefit of overall knowledge. Performance goals are associated with *extrinsic* factors, and inspire students to have a level of knowledge to achieve a limited understanding of what can be demonstrated. These students returned to take the step toward an *intrinsic* goal for their future sustainability for themselves and their families. The impression was that the GED was certainly performance oriented—a pathway to get to the interest area to study in college for mastery in a specific field. It was interesting that the second largest reason to reengage with school was “for myself,” which confirmed that many students were intrinsically finding self-worth, even though they had been rejected by schools.

Self-determination theory also includes a social aspect and how students interpret and respond to the internal pressures of behavior and the external pressures of peer groups, adults, and other environmental factors. SDT regulates the student response to the social environment by determining whether processes should be controlled or responded to in the course of events. In the developmental process, it is important for teachers and students to be aware of all the mitigating factors involved in choices being made for specific goals. Research has found that learners need instructor support for autonomy, knowledge of specific social contexts, and positive affect (Walker & Greene, 2009). It appeared that they did not easily control the students’ responses to the school environment, difficult subjects, and family turmoil, since they felt that many things were beyond their control and the needed adult support was absent. All of the

students who were interviewed had overwhelming praise for their current GED program, its staff, and its teachers. They found success in a program where teachers and staff cared and believed in them.

It is important to note that self-determination is situated in a context of societal pressures and must be interrelated with the reality of the community and the conditions or limited resources in these communities where students live. Therefore, it is key to realize that no matter how self-determined these young people might be, the “reaching up” concept of support systems and people (America’s Promise Alliance, 2014) must be available for students to grasp. These students should be encouraged to realize goals, but they need to be made aware of and be offered support systems.

Bronfenbrenner (1989) worked on the ecological development, or learning environment, of the student and all of the belief systems, cultural aspects, and the realities of the environment in which the student resides. These ecological factors are ever changing across the lifespan of the individual. Franklin (2000) denotes that this space is the power area that should be “critically analyzed” beyond simple constructs to look for contributing factors to students’ lived experiences, so they are not fully responsible for the complete failure or the resounding resilience of their own results through life (p. 8). In fact, students have protective factors and risk factors, so the unique story of an individual’s life and how she appraises the outcome is found in the personal ethnographical profile. It appears that the condition of being resilient, or at risk, is a dynamic interplay of all of the factors encountered by the student and directly related to how the student perceives herself. Students in this study did report some support, intermittently, from the traditional entities. However, they believed that they had to find answers, survive the struggles, and accept help when it was available.

Disadvantages come in all shapes and sizes, but we will miss the contributions from these students to society, if we do not support and federally fund programs that reengage students. Pedro Noguera (2003) cautioned communities to not succumb in completely to the total personal responsibility without help. “Civil rights activists have understood for some time, it is a mistake to carry self-help initiatives too far” (p.155). Indeed, Franklin (2000) notes that society should not fall into “the bootstrap theory” (p. 11) whereby “if parents only do their jobs, poor and minority youth can overcome environment deficiency [this, then] ignores other important ecological influences...there are serious structural and economic challenges. The attention on resilient families...should not remove the focus from improving and revitalizing our neighborhoods, schools, and cities” (p. 11). There should be a balance between the personal goals that can be independently achieved and the socio-cultural framework of support for those who were mired in difficult circumstances.

Comparative Study Revisited

The current study adds more knowledge to the America’s Promise Alliance (2014) larger research that did include ideas and reasons for coming back to school and reengagement. There is a wealth of information that students coming back to school for a GED could give us if three scales (reading attitudes, resilience, and an engagement scale) were utilized in the reengagement programs reviewed by America’s Promise Alliance (2014). These programs are providing an important service for the population of disconnected youth and would be an informative population to survey. Adding the perspective of the inherent value of the GED and the personal self-worth students in this study felt in attaining this credential, the picture can be more fully painted for the returning GED student. There was a stronger connection to getting the credential than simply getting a job or because of the suggestion of others, as America’s Promise has

reported. More credit should be given to the returning student for their specific goals and purposeful behavior.

These students shared messages that promoted change and attention to areas that could be funded for wraparound school based programs to meet social, emotional, and physical needs of which, sometimes, the staff is not aware. This research was meant to generalize the situational context and the information to keep students in school and re-connect them to alternative programs for credentials when necessary.

Literacy, Engagement, Resilience, and Amelioration

The Rationale portion of this report began with the research of Heckman and Rubinstein (2001) that concluded that the cognitive abilities of high school graduates and GED certificate holders have similar levels of cognitive skills, while GED, graduates had insufficient levels of non-cognitive skills. Mainstream research had previously focused only on cognitive skills. Certainly, this continuum of pedagogic practice is supported with the ease of administering cognitive assessment and the unfamiliarity of newer noncognitive measurement instruments. With the growing body of research on non-cognitive skills, it is timely that the present research on the dropout issue includes not only the study of how literacy fits into the puzzle, but the roles of engagement and resilience in both the dropping out and the returning events. It is especially significant in light of the research mentioned earlier concluding that they support learning and are a necessary part of achieving success (Gibbs, Erickson, Dufur, & Miles, 2014). In that vein, the three amelioration factors of literacy, engagement, and resilience are encapsulated here:

- Literacy: Definitely, a positive force for students, a protective factor for those who left school as it provided hope in already acquired skills. Re-engagement was

supported by positive reading attitudes. Students wanted teachers to teach relevant or interesting reading material with experiential learning, proven to be motivational (Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007). Students in this research increased their critical literacy and were able to learn study skills to pass the tests for their high school equivalency credential (GED).

- **Engagement:** Must prevail for learning to take place (both student & teacher responsible (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Absence of school connections to teachers, counselors, and mentors, both in class time and extracurricular activities, were detrimental to achievement and to keeping up with classroom activities. Extracurricular supervised safe activities reduce juvenile crime, improve positive peer relationships, and increases achievement (Zaff et al., 2003). Students in this study lacked connections to high school, but built strong connections to their teachers and mentors in the GED program.
- **Resilience:** Manifested in self-determination or intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and demonstrated in this study. Related to grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), the motivation to keep trying in the face of difficulty was an internal drive that brought personal satisfaction. Disengagement from school was not related to these students on a resilience level, since their own personal and structural school, roadblocks limited them from opportunities to reveal the levels of resilience that they had for their educational goal on their own terms. Because of their toxic environments, they were confined from exercising their resilience.

It is clear from the study that these students did find that literacy was a necessary ability for learning and when combined with purposeful engagement and determined resilience they

could accomplish their goals. They equally understood that their circumstances would have been made better if they had the opportunity to activate their cognitive skills, had the time and situations to commit and engage with their schools, and had the support and the chance to use their resilience in concert with educational goals. The students in this study had the will to act on their intrinsic goals for their own accomplishment and purposes, toward mastery of careers and economic stability, and the grit to find resilience after following many paths. It is clear that family, relationships, and the community all contribute to what success ultimately looks like. Cognitive abilities like critical literacy and the noncognitive character skills of engagement (emotional commitment and active participation), and resilience (the relentless drive of self-determination toward a goal) are needed for student achievement. When all three factors were actualized by the student, she/he was able to return to school for dropout recovery. These students revealed that literacy was essential, engagement kept them interested, and personal resilience kept them striving toward their goals.

Chapter 6

Recommendations

This section is extremely important to follow through on the perspective of the emancipatory lens. To revisit the process in the methodology, there are three parts to the use of the emancipatory lens. One must consider a disadvantaged group for research, then represent the concerns of that group with a supportive role due to the inherent underrepresentation, and finally, recommend actions that can bring about positive change for the group. Recommendations are limited to making larger scale replications of the study and an a set of Action Proposals to recommend interventions that can enhance the educational journeys of students who are thinking of leaving school and those interested in returning for a high school credential.

This research study would benefit from a replication with a larger population and the addition of a valid engagement survey to correlate with the reading attitudes and resilience surveys used here. Measuring engagement in this study was performed subjectively so that the students would not be overwhelmed by too many surveys. The quantitative data was reliable for the areas of reading attitude and resilience, but an engagement measurement was not quantified in this study. However, in the survey, students reported “connections” and in the interviews, they went more thoroughly into the relationships that they had with people, situations, and the institutions of education. It was apparent that these students had no connection to anything related to high school and the connections they did have with their families and communities were negative. Reconnecting with a new GED program seemed to bring out the best aspects of their literacy, engagement, and resilience. This was, according to the students, directly related to the quality of the program, the empathic staff, and the availability of a program that fit their schedules and ability to commute. In retrospect, the use of a reliable engagement instrument

would be advantageous in giving a more detailed picture of the areas where levels of engagement could be measured. In any case, the collection of the engagement factor data through the qualitative methods enabled a great depth of understanding for this important contribution to understanding student success.

As this research was performed with a limited scope and sample size, the expansion of both can lead to a broader understanding of literacy, engagement, and resilience for dropouts and those who are returning to continue their education. It is a logical recommendation to engage a larger sample size while expanding to the use of many GED programs and add to the sample students who are not currently in a program (those who have not returned). It should be stated that the sample was of limited size and focused on the students who remained in the program or had completed it. If a larger sample of the whole population had been investigated and scheduled to be at the beginning of a program session, then finding more students with lower reading attitude and resilience scores would likely have been found. Additionally, it was unfortunate that there was not sufficient time to interview all twenty-five students for the qualitative interviews. It was, however, extraordinary that so many wanted to share their success stories, a finding that was unexpected. In a broader study, bringing on a few research assistants could have accommodated a larger sample. Qualitative research genuinely captures the lived experiences and the nuanced details presented with emotion to the researcher, so it is valuable and contribute to the richness of the study. The qualitative interviews were extremely informative and presented a wealth of details that the open-ended questions could not. Therefore, the qualitative section of a larger mixed methods explanatory sequential study of a similar design is highly recommended.

More research is needed to consider this population for support, community connections, and funding. By including the scope of the study to include other venues where adult education and GED preparation/ testing was taking place, both students and staff would be encouraged and valued for their efforts. Students and staff in this research were happy to be included in a study that found the positive strengths in the program and the efforts of all of the stakeholders. Other research venues should include inner city urban area programs, rural areas, and even incarceration centers where students taking GED classes would have experiences unique to that population. AmeriCorps or other federally funded programs might benefit from these survey combinations to tailor their intervention for specific children.

Action Proposals

This research was meant to uncover the stories of disengagement and reengagement of high school dropouts that had been disadvantaged in their youth. The study was undertaken with an emancipatory or liberation perspective that would yield possible solutions that might benefit future students in the same disaffected situations with hope for amelioration. The Action Proposals presented in this section contribute some measure of fulfillment for ways to overcome similar roadblocks to education.

With the recent improvement to an 81.4% graduation rate in 2013, it is believed that the United States is considered to be on course to meet its 90% graduation by the year 2020 (Powell & Powell, 2014). However, given the issues of declining reading levels and the drop in the relative ranking of skills of American high school students in the globalized economy, a course adjustment is needed for the education system in this nation. International competitive forces are expanding at an ever-accelerating pace and threaten the futures of low skilled high school graduates and non-graduates in the advancing world market scene. Focusing on the dropout

issue is but one piece of a large national puzzle, but doing so can have a significant impact on the lives of those with interrupted enrollment and their contributions to our society. Given a better understanding of how literacy, engagement, and resilience are such important components of high school success, five recommended action proposals are recommended. These include funding, monitoring, programs, social awareness, and pedagogy.

Action Proposal 1: Funding

Funding for student programs that support education need to be sustained and increased for the serious conditions in which students are living today. Data on poverty show that now a majority of the 50 million students in the U.S. lives at a low-income level as measured by the free and reduced-price lunch programs. This is data comes from The Southern Education Foundation (2015), which focuses on concerns for improved education in the southern region of the U.S. It evaluated the National Center for Education Statistics information for 2013 in its research bulletin, “A New Majority: Low Income Students Now a Majority In the Nation’s Public Schools” (Southern Education Foundation, 2015). The Foundation concludes that funding to fight poverty must be increased to fend off the negative ramifications for families, neighborhoods, and children, in every grade, who need basic resources for schooling. Poverty highly affects student achievement and the noncognitive character traits when student and family goals are on their basic needs, rather than the pursuit of education. In fact, education may be a luxury when a sustainable job is the first priority to contribute to the family income as some students reported in this study. Students in the present research contributed to family and personal income by working in odd jobs, service jobs, and even “junking” or taking scrap metal from abandoned areas. One student in this study reported not being able to afford to join the Girl Scouts and found that other extracurricular activities were too expensive for low-income students

to participate. This contributed to her resentment against the school. Government funding for this population does not seem to be reaching students at the local level.

Community leaders and educators have lobbied to reallocate some of the Federal Title I money to poverty areas, based on the numbers of students with free and reduced lunch status. Funding should arguably be shifted to include wraparound services for neighborhood schools that need them, since in practice, these programs help to reduce the ravages of poverty and support both academic and non-academic needs. By allowing the flexibility to work within the communities to develop the answers to specific problems, communities of low resources can manage these concerns best at a local level. Education Week validated the importance of this flexibility in managing funding in an article entitled “Poverty Data Signal Urgency for Schools” (Blad, 2015). Title II monies for adult education directly affects the high school dropouts and recovery students. Educators and the adult education population have been waiting for 14 years for the reissuance and update of the Workforce Innovations Act, which has now been replaced by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (Bird, 2014).

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP, 2013) has long been concerned about funding and social justice. Its website describes it as a foundation “that develops and advocates for federal, state, and local policies to strengthen families and create pathways to education and work” (www.clasp.org). It researches many concerns about funding for low-income families whose members are looking for work and for educational opportunities. This organization has been highly regarded across the political spectrum for its continued efforts to promote change in policies that are legacies of structural inequality.

Education is needed for jobs and jobs are needed to reduce poverty. In addition, low resources from poor jobs have an effect on poverty: “85% of children whose parents had less

than a high school education and 60% of children whose parents had a high school degree but no post-secondary education lived in poverty, in comparison to 25% of children whose parents had some college” (CLASP, 2013).

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act H.R.803 (WIOA, 2014) has continued funding for low income and vulnerable youth, which the administration estimates to be 6.7 million disconnected youth ages 16-24 in 2014; and welcomed monies from Health and Human Resources for youth that struggle with roadblocks (Bird, 2014, p. 1). The WIOA expands services to vulnerable workers, improves education and training for those who are low skilled, provides employment for those who are underprivileged or unemployed and pursuing educational endeavors, and coordinates the activities of core programs. A summary of its key provisions of the WIOA (Bird, Foster, & Ganzglass, 2014) can be found in Appendix N. The Workforce Innovation Fund finds an increase from \$47.3 million in 2014 to \$60 million and there are several initiatives to coordinate interagency monitoring, Data Quality Initiative, and a Youth Data Pilot program (Bird, 2014, p. 2). There is an added focus on the workforce, monitoring, interagency correspondence, and alternative education programs (p. 2). The High School Graduation Initiative is being eliminated; however, \$74.8 million is redirected to the College Pathways and Accelerated Learning competitions (p. 3).

Additionally, WIOA has broadened the definition of services to young adults and has redefined many avenues for careers and job acquisition. The targeted adult in the WIOA is changed to include people needing academic service who are below the post-secondary school level. It also includes funds programs for youth age 16 and above not enrolled, lacking basic skills or an English Language Learner (ELL). This is a benefit to our disaffected youth. However, the distributions to each state and their prerequisite determination of moneys to

programs are still under state political control (WIOA, 2014). Essentially, actions taking place at the federal level are replicated in the State legislatures, which are allowed the latitude to control how the funds are assigned within the federal provisions. The local providers of adult basic education must advocate on behalf of getting the promised funding in lieu of other pressing state expenditures.

The WIOA promotes Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate courses, and dual college and high school enrollment (Bird, 2014). There is an increased interest for work and training programs. Funding expands for temporary jobs programs, such as AmeriCorps and the Social Innovation Fund or Pay For Success projects, and summer programs. With the success of the higher graduation rate, perhaps lawmakers are now turning their attention to alternative youth programs. An example of this is the proposal to offer each student two free years at a community college by President Obama proposed in his State of the Union Address in January 2015. More work has to be done at the individual community, school, and family level to help disadvantaged students get to the stage where they could even consider taking advantage of the offer.

Action Proposal 2: Monitoring

Monitoring, here, means a sincere concern for overseeing the best educational and life choices for each student. The most important aspect of monitoring comes from an early warning system to notify students, parents, and teachers about the possibility of dropping out. The early warning system called the “ABCs of Dropping Out” (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog; 2007; Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009) must be utilized in all middle and high schools. This means that all stakeholders must be aware of attendance, behaviors that distract from schooling, and credits that

have a low grade or are missing. By monitoring these three aspects, all concerned will have advance notice that intervention is immediately necessary.

A sincere effort to ensure accountability should be made to create and follow the educational plan and status for each student—for the student’s best interest, not for political or economic interests. Keeping track of student achievement records, attendance, illnesses, moves, personal crisis, and transfers to other schools, should be followed up by regular conferences with counselors with real remedies and resources. Class records, evaluation of credits, and a way of giving students input to appropriate classes should be a high priority. Students in my study reported that records were lost, they were not accurately told of credits and credit recovery, were told that they had no choice in classes, and were given little guidance about their future or information on alternatives when they were not successful.

Rate-free school clubs for all interest areas should foment a place to build community based on achievement, communication, and shared interests. Small group meetings would raise awareness of essential needs that are not being met, including peer-to-peer counseling or mentor groups. School staff should be available and willing to consult about family problems, homelessness, bullying, bigotry, disengagement, truancy, cultural bias, and other issues that are serious roadblocks for students that might cause disruption in school and life. Many schools already have wraparound services, sign-in counseling sessions, and support groups for students while they keep vigilant about social issues. In that case, the need may be to circulate information that can give students knowledge and access to necessary support systems.

Action Proposal 3: Programs

Creating beneficial programs that reduce occurrences of dropping out, promote academic achievement, and support the social emotional or noncognitive aspects of learning are essential.

The family and the community (with state and federal contributions) are where action can begin to bring support to students. Programs centered in the families with the support of schools and the community are described in Sanders & Herting's (2000) research, *Schooling Students Placed at Risk: Research, Policy, and practice in the education of Poor and Minority Adolescents*. The authors expand upon Epstein's "theory of overlapping spheres of influence" (p. 143-147). In this plan, a combination of influence from the family, church, and school weaves socialization to improve self-esteem, academic achievement, behaviors, and attitudes that benefit students' life choices. This community response supporting the family while mentoring the children is similar to the Putnam's (2015) calls for shared responsibility for neighborhood children in his book *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. In addition, Mac Iver and Mac Iver (2009, p. 12) proposed a three-tiered school-wide model of reform with comprehensive services, including an early warning system, transitioning to targeted interventions, and the tertiary level of intensive interventions in specialized programs. These authors focus on strong family communication with a stable environment, high quality instruction, and individualized learning plans. The community with wrap-around school services should support students who have serious roadblocks so that they will have recourse in a network of adult mentors. Adults have a special place in the lives of youth. They are community volunteers, coaches, mentors, tutors, and business people offering job-shadowing connections at an early age to show that adults care about a student's future place in the world. The students from the present study revealed that their disappointment began in the home with parents and relatives who were distracted and dysfunctional. It continued to the school where they were treated with low priority; and the sentiment from the community, as perceived by the students, was ambivalent.

Schools have a unique opportunity to coordinate services creating partnerships with families and other stakeholders to make a bond with the community and to create an active center for enrichment. Schools with longer hours of operation, sharing of building privileges with other civic groups, and year round access to academic, social, and sports programs can make a school a hub of positive activity. Communities in Schools (Milliken, 2007) is a unique program that takes up residence inside the school, offering services and mentors who take a personal interest in each student. Many public and private donors who invest in the future generation support this program. Many of the mentors in the program are racially and culturally representative of the students in the school and thus have specific insight into the social emotional needs, as well as promoting academic achievement for all students of all abilities and backgrounds.

Some of the students who had participated in the qualitative portion of this study indicated that an important factor in their pursuing the GED credential was the ability to find a program that was a right fit for them. Quality of fit, as reported by these individuals, included caring instructors and counselors with whom they could make trusted connections. The venue was also an important factor in enabling their participation. Some expressed discomfort in prior attempts to attend in high school settings, which were likely to be situated in their locale. Those who had indicated these concerns felt a stronger sense of belonging in GED programs that were held in the community college where this research was conducted. They attended their GED classes in a building where they felt like they fit in with the college students with whom they shared the commons areas and food service areas. They would not have to feel uncomfortable about seeing friends or younger siblings of friends spotting them in the classroom where the dropouts go to catch up. They could see artifacts with the community college that help them

visualize their own potential next steps. So, community colleges should be prime locations for GED programs for those who can commute to them.

Schools must also have programs available for intervention both academically and socially. Explicit information on accessing programs for credit recovery, accelerated programs, health plans for stressful situations, GED programs, or alternative high schools (including online schooling) should be easily available to students who have dropped out, or are near that point. Students in the present study often reported that they were not given information on alternative schooling, how credits are gained or lost, or how transcripts travel to new schools. A student who is released from school may not know what choices are obtainable. An accessible education center, where information on options for education credentials, funding, work, and training, should be available for students 16 to 24 years old who are not in school or working.

Action Proposal 4: Social Awareness

Since it has been established that minority students lag behind their white counterparts in graduating from high school, teachers must engage and motivate them to keep them in school. Special high school recovery or reenrollment must also meet the needs of minority and disadvantaged students. This is a process of installing culturally competent teachers, who are aware of specific issues of underrepresented populations, and the adversity students experienced both socially and institutionally. All adults, including families, mentors, and coaches, should be aware that students from poverty and disadvantaged groups need intervention by building strong relationships that will provide an avenue for the connectedness. The teachers must have knowledge of both urban and rural issues and the resources to address problems such as racism, poverty, homelessness, irregular attendance, gangs, etc.

Students in this study often remarked that they had no problems with different races, but they did have problems with the school's lack of empathy and reluctance to mediate conflicts. Ladson-Billings (1994) noted that culturally relevant teachers should be aware of student voices declaring inequity, cultural disparagement, and institutional restrictions that are baseless. She wanted teachers to observe models of culturally competent teaching, a period of immersion in African-American culture, and wiliness to challenge the status quo, which often has low expectations for minority students. Students must also be socially aware to take an active part in their own education and in their communities. Well-trained counselors in sufficient numbers should address mental health issues concerning stress, depression, and suicidal tendencies with a 24-hour open door policy to students. Community connections, interventionists, and opportunities to be in support groups will provide a safe place for personal discussions.

There should be school-wide opportunities to share culture through multi media presentations like art shows, guest speakers, and concerts, to name a few, that are student initiated and organized. Student representation in all aspects of school governance and extra-curricular activities shares the responsibility of the school identity and mission. Connections to community leaders give the school internships, inputs to political action, and a familiarity of understanding that can grow through collaborative projects. Social awareness is one of those noncognitive essential skills that should be practiced by all stakeholders. A supportive network connected to the school would have been beneficial to the students in this study. To promote engagement, educators should teach about racial identity for majority and minority students to foster an understanding of social process and community building (Quaye & Harper, 2015).

Action Proposal 5: Pedagogy

Since there was a correlation between reading attitudes and resilience in this research, the most important recommendation for teachers is to raise the interest in reading. The digital aspects of reading in this research for both recreation and academics were scored higher in interest than the printed versions for those two categories. Reading digitally can be interspersed with the regular printed versions to motivate students.

Teachers must teach powerful, critical literacy. Disciplinary literacy in the content areas must be explicitly taught in classes for all students to learn for active participation at the highest levels in their lives. All students must learn the vocabulary and the necessary thinking in the disciplines to undertake tasks that demand analysis and synthesis of information. This practice should begin in earnest in late elementary school and continue through high school, so that skills beyond functional literacy can be developed. There should be none of Anyon's hidden curriculum (1980) of education for established class designation and student interest, ability, and choice should be at the forefront for learning.

Teachers must teach with student engagement in mind. Lessons should be authentic, allow for collaborative learning, and include an ample dose of student choices (Parsons, Nuland, & Parsons, (2014). Pedagogy should target active learning, where students attach new knowledge to established schema to construct new ideas. Teaching with active learning will increase engagement and comprehension on higher, more complex levels. Planning hands-on activities can engage students working on problem solving. They should be conducted in both small and large groups for collaborative learning and bonding as a class unit identity. Attachment and common experiences by working together builds an emotional commitment to the project and to teammates across diverse backgrounds and ability levels (Conderman,

Bresnahan, & Hedin, 2012). Engagement occurs during participation using multiple sensory inputs, unique strategies, and creating various learning experiences that are memorable.

The movement toward more inclusion of all of the aspects that contribute to learning is exemplified in Moje's (2015) heuristic in which she interweaves that which is natural in apprenticeship of a discipline with learning or purpose. Her model formulates a rubric that connects to problem-based inquiry. It predicates the action of teaching disciplinary practices with engagement, engineering/eliciting, examination, and evaluation, which she refers to as the "4Es" (p. 262). Her model includes aspects of curiosity, imagination, and relevant problem solving in order to encourage engagement, thus leading to student achievement. She explains, "The framework I propose allows teachers to attend to the emotion and imagination—the humanity—of disciplinary work with adolescent students, even as they teach the literacy and disciplinary concepts and practices necessary for navigating through school and life." The epistemology of educators influences their pedagogy and the practical application of new knowledge extends comprehension.

By realizing the importance of the extension of disciplines into the relevancy of work in society, teachers can collaborate with students toward purposeful inquiry. This engagement by teachers motivates students, and learning becomes the "Ah-ha!" moment, which in turn engages students. The multiple opportunities to test a hypothesis in the classroom with the guidance of a professional can build a growth mindset that fosters resilience. This natural learning pattern shows how powerful literacy through the disciplines prepares students to critically think and analyze the complex aspects of their environment. This researcher finds that Moje's new model demonstrates the relationship of literacy, engagement, and resilience in the construct of a

framework of discovery, interrogatives, and speculations about the purpose of disciplines beyond the technical vocabulary.

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A stronger resilience can strengthen student resolve to stay in school and graduate, or promote a sense of a strong ability to reengage in a recovery program. Dweck (2006) has shown in her research that a growth mindset, or an understanding that one's abilities and intelligence are not fixed, but can be developed. This is an optimistic perspective that students can embrace that overrides the fixed mindset of limitations on abilities. A growth mindset fosters the resilience toward mastery to learn knowledge incrementally. Teachers can undertake strategies that encourage students to take on challenges, use setbacks for new learning, and strive for higher achievement as they self-analyze, take criticism, and learn from others. Students demonstrated resilience in this study as they kept attempting to reconnect to gain a high school credential. The roadblocks were learning points of what to avoid, whether an unsupportive teacher or a

restrictive program. The observations in this study showed that the students were stronger after encountering the roadblocks.

By narrowing in on the three aspects of literacy, engagement, and resilience in this research, it was possible to find overlapping information from the students who are not typically consulted for their opinions. This research focused on areas of pedagogy that are not universally prevalent in high school. Engagement is needed for learning to take place. One strategy that can be used is to teach students how to engage themselves in learning by finding connections to their personal lives or something that is interesting. Hold student interest by giving more choices, using inquiry, or adding the arts. Students need to be actively participating in the learning process instead of repeated lectures. Recognize and promote resilience by motivating students to follow their self-determination tendencies and by encouraging personal goal setting. Teachers could raise resilience by teaching incremental learning and goal setting through the growth mind set (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). If teachers teach powerful reading skills, it will increase reading attitudes, which will in turn, increase resilience levels. Essentially, our goal should be to generate a love of learning that motivates more education that leads to more life-long options.

Conclusion

There is hope for reducing the dropout rate and reconnecting students to educational programs like a GED to prepare them for successful, sustainable lives. Nevertheless, we must not forget to make opportunities and funding available for those who need a second chance at education. The institutions must be set up for dropout recovery and it appears that the best venue is the community college, where older students are respected, can be offered support, and use wraparound services that answer some of the social monetary, and physical needs. Opening community college classes for high school students in the summer or the new idea of double

enrollment in high school and college helps strengthen ties to schools and within some funding sources for disadvantaged students. .

Our society's current dependence on testing and achievement scores certainly pushes the cognitive theory of success where I.Q. score secures one's place in the world. However, there is now more research to support noncognitive or social emotional factors like character, which can manifest in success for the individual in school, society, and business. Many businesses want educators to promote the soft skills or skills that help workers persevere, collaborate, and know socially appropriate ways of interacting with others (Hooker & Brand, 2010). Shifting emphasis to find merit in the noncognitive skills in conjunction with student achievement will help teachers instruct students with a wide variety of strategies that can promote strengths in areas that were not previously measured or valued. These strengths are needed for workforce skills that can make a difference in teamwork and successful business outcomes.

Educational reform for all students is centered on critical literacy for communication and higher order thinking skills and must be included in the list of essential instruction. Knowing that there is a correlation between higher reading attitudes and resilience, educators can incorporate the methods of reading—academic and recreational both printed and digital, into the curriculum to produce students that will persevere and employ literacy for sustainability and active participation in the world. The practice of teaching is changing and a concentrated focus on teaching 21st century skills is growing. These skills—literacy, engagement through collaboration, creativity, personal investment, relevancy, and technology, to name a few—are necessary to reach every learner. Teachers need to be aware of aspects of resilience to foster the attitudes of possibility and help students bounce back from small disappointments to avoid the larger ones.

Funding for secondary, post-secondary, second chances, and job skills must be incorporated into our government budgets for the benefit of the individual, the community, and the country. We should support work force bills and education bills that direct funds into narrow allocations for these students. Too often, the funds are dispersed into a larger pot that may be distributed into general education funds and thus are at the whim of administrators that may find other pressing needs. Taking action by sharing this research with legislative bodies may shine a light on students that would take advantage of second chances offered to them.

The overview of this researcher's prior study and a close look at the benefits and drawbacks of the methods undertaken have laid the foundation of motivation to integrate both quantitative and qualitative processes into this research. The quantitative research can consider the overarching "etic" perspective of how all participants are situated in the world. Qualitative research provides an "emic" or insider's viewpoint of the topic under consideration. Both methods independently informed my study. Consequently, a mixed methods approach was the best course of action to answer my research questions. The three conditions of literacy, engagement, and resilience and how a student operates within these domains, at her or his level, are important for self-agency and for educators. This research has shown that the higher positive levels of these three factors can ameliorate or make better the chance for achievement in the situational context and negotiate the educational system to garner a high school diploma or return for an alternative credential.

This research, grounded in an emancipatory lens, explored why students dropped out of high school, why they returned, and what role literacy, engagement, and resilience played. It is my belief that an emancipatory perspective served very well as an excellent tool in collecting and analyzing the nexus of these factors and the histories of the high school recovery student. The

transition from dropout student to credentialed adult reduces the negative feelings of marginalization within dominant social structures. Working class students, minorities, and students from poverty or stressful environments must have avenues to access the higher curriculum where analytical and critical thinking skills are valued and used in professional jobs. A more relevant curriculum centered on student choice and interest and not solely on perceived skills, socioeconomic class, race, and parental occupations would be more engaging and keep students wanting to learn.

Culturally competent teachers would help students feel strength in expressing personal identity and could help them develop shared interests with peers. Students would then feel more connected to the school, perhaps through social service groups or themed clubs. Students building relationships with staff and peers helps to build community within the school and it becomes a welcome haven for support to overcome realistic hardships. The research was geared to discover the situation of disadvantaged youth and help them transcend the circumstances of hardship or restrictions from dysfunctional families, stressful environments, and lack of access to high-powered curricula. All stakeholders who help students navigate their educational journey must be facilitators in the network of support such as the action proposals suggested here. This transformative emancipatory mixed methods approach is considered the best way to merge post-positivism and constructionist views in this research, while finding openings to encourage persistence and ameliorate the conditions of the students who struggle to stay, or eventually leave school. The integrated suggestions for change are based on the analysis of the data and the ethnographic interviews.

The disadvantaged students who participated in this study are people with potential who have already achieved some measure of success by making the decision to seek the credential.

The dropout and recovery path is a roughly traveled road for many students. However, finding the influence of the key factors of literacy, engagement, and resilience can ameliorate some of the difficulties that students encounter. The perspective of the returning non-graduate filled with promise will diminish the negative social construct of the high school dropout. The use of this information by educators, families, and communities will strengthen the bonds that will not only keep students in school or help them return, but will also focus all actors on the need for a sustainable life path in a globalized world. It can inspire activism to lobby legislators to provide educational programs for disadvantaged youth who still strive for a high school credential and a promising future. Society must fairly distribute educational opportunities to students to even the playing field of social and academic membership while enriching the fabric of our schools, families, and communities. When instituted in an adult education program for returning dropouts, this coalescence reconnects with students in new ways for purposeful learning toward career and college.

The data from the surveys became real in the stories of extreme struggle from the disadvantaged students. The details of the journeys were not told in sorrow, but with joy in the triumph of overcoming the travails. They had their own personal action plans. These students see themselves as winners and we should see them that way as well. Our society and their personal lives will all benefit from their success. The most important value will come from the fact that these individuals will realize their own self-worth and will pass on the value of education to their children.

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Appendix A

Adolescent Motivation to Read Survey (Voss, 2009)

School _____ Teacher _____ Grade _____

Male _____ Female _____ Age _____ Ethnicity _____ Class _____

Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Score _____ Today's Date _____

1 I like to read for fun.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

2 I like to read for school work.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

3 How much time do you spend reading for fun?

1. 0 to 14 minutes
2. 15 Minutes to 30 Minutes
3. 31 Minutes to One Hour
4. One to Two hours
5. Two or more hours

4 How much time do you spend reading for homework?

1. 0 to 14 minutes
2. 15 Minutes to 30 Minutes
3. 31 Minutes to One Hour
4. One to Two hours
5. Two or more hours

6 How much time do you spend playing games on computers?

1. 0 to 14 minutes
2. 15 Minutes to 30 Minutes
3. 31 Minutes to One Hour
4. One to Two hours
5. Two or more hours

7 How many working TVs do you have at home?

1. None
2. One
3. Two
4. Three or Four
5. Five or More

8 How much time do you spend watching TV every day?

1. 0 to 14 minutes
2. 15 Minutes to 30 Minutes
3. 31 Minutes to One Hour
4. One to Two hours
5. Two or more hours

9 I would be more interested in doing my class work if I could do all of it on my computer.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

5 How much time do you spend reading information on computers?

1. 0 to 14 minutes
2. 15 Minutes to 30 Minutes
3. 31 Minutes to One Hour
4. One to Two hours
5. Two or more hours

11 I would be motivated to read if I had a good reason to read.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

12 I would be more interested in reading if I could choose what to read.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

13 I would read more if my friends decided to read more.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

14 I would like to read more if I had good books to read at home.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

15 I have a lot of books at home.

10 I would like to have more time to read.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

17 I read enough already and I don't want to read any more than I do now.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

18 I think that good reading skills will help me with a job when I am an adult.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

19 I need to be a good reader to be successful in life.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

20 I would read more if my parent(s) or guardian(s) encouraged me to read at home.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

21 I would read more if my teachers encouraged me to read in school.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

16 I have a working computer that I can use at home.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

22 I would like reading more if the reading materials were interesting.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

23 I have the power to be a good reader on my own.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

29 I would like to read in small groups with my classmates to do my work in school.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

24 I feel great after I have completed my reading schoolwork.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

30 I am more interested in learning from books than I am learning from friends.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

25 I never feel like I did my best after I completed my reading schoolwork.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

31 I like it when people in my group are as good at reading as I am.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

- 26 I don't usually complete my reading schoolwork.**
1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Undecided
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
- 27 If I am interested in my schoolwork, it does not matter if it takes a short time or a long time.**
1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Undecided
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
- 28 It is easier to finish my reading schoolwork if I promise myself to do something fun later.**
1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Undecided
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
- 32 I like it when we have good students along with the slower students in my reading group.**
1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Undecided
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
- 33 My friends think that I am a good reader.**
1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Undecided
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
- 34 I would rate my reading ability as:**
1. Bad
 2. Not too good
 3. OK
 4. Good
 5. Great

Appendix B

Flier for participant recruitment.

GED STUDENTS AND GED GRADUATES!

Congratulations on coming back to get your GED and continuing onward toward future success!

Every sunrise provides new possibilities and new paths to follow.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO FILL OUT A RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study! It will be completely anonymous, so that your name will not be used. We want to know about how you look at schooling in general and what part did reading/writing, connections to school, and your own will to succeed, play in your life.

You will be asked general information about your background and experiences in school, answer some questions about your attitude toward reading, and take a survey on how you were able to “bounce back” to return to school for a GED. This should take approximately 30 minutes.

In addition, you may volunteer to have a personal interview where you can tell more about your schooling and how you were able to get over the roadblocks in your life. This will encourage other young people, in difficult situations, to continue to work toward education and careers.

Abraham Lincoln’s life was a disaster: he lost his first love to typhoid, was defeated in eight elections, couldn’t get into law school, and went bankrupt, but in the end he succeeded in winning the presidential election of 1860 and became one of our greatest presidents. (Wagnild, 2011)

Just by being here, you are goal oriented and are working hard! Your input to this research is valued and appreciated!

Janice M. Voss Ph.D. Candidate Educational Studies, Eastern Michigan University, phone: 734-717-3407
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Linda Lewis-White; Professor, Reading Education, Eastern Michigan University, phone 734-487-3260

Appendix C

Participant Consent Form
Research Project: Students Returning to School for a GED

I agree to participate in answering general questions about my background and two short surveys. In addition, I may meet for an in-person interview(s), if I request one. Janice Voss is conducting the study to learn about people at community colleges in programs that lead to meeting high school graduation requirements in the form of a General Educational Development (GED) credential, and how to support students who return to complete a high school diploma or a GED credential.

The surveys will be read to me and last approximately 30 minutes. If I choose to also participate in an interview, it may be 30 minutes at a later arrangement. The interview will focus on my perceptions and experiences in school. I will be asked questions about leaving school, returning for a GED, reading, engagement (interest or connection to school), and my personal resilience (ability to overcome roadblocks) and any other facts about this topic I may want to discuss.

My participation in answering the surveys and the interview is completely voluntary; and that I may choose not to answer certain questions, and that I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time with no negative consequences, no penalties, nor loss of benefits. There are no costs or payments associated with my participation. There are only minimal risks of potentially remembering unpleasant situations.

I am informed that my identity and confidentiality will be protected at all times and that a fictitious name or code will be assigned to me after the interview(s) is completed, and that any identifying characteristics about my family or me will be deleted. The transcripts of the recordings will be assigned a numerical code and kept in a locked filing cabinet in a private office in the researcher's home in Ann Arbor, Michigan and in a password protected computer file. If I decide at any point after responding in the surveys and the interview(s) that I do not wish to participate, I will contact the researcher by the phone number listed below and my recordings and transcripts will be destroyed, and no material will be used from the interview.

I agree to allow these confidential research findings from my interview(s) to be anonymously disseminated with my confidentiality fully protected at all times, in Eastern Michigan University presentations and/or disseminated in future publications, conferences, and professional settings.

Participant's Printed Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: I have explained the research to the participant, answered all of his/her questions, and provided my contact information for any further questions or concerns.

Janice Voss Signature: _____ Date: _____

For further questions or concerns, please contact:

Doctoral Researcher:

Janice Voss, PhD Candidate

Educational Studies: Urban Ed & Literacy

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This research protocol and informed consent document has been reviewed and approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC) for use from Dec. 15, 2014 to April 30, 2015. If you have questions about the approval process, please contact the UHSRC at human.subjects@emich.edu or call 734-487-0042.

Appendix D

GED Research Study: School Information Form

Please provide one or more answers in the spaces below. Thank you for taking part in this study!

Female _____ Male _____ Age _____ Time in this program _____

Race _____ GED program _____ Finished GED _____

Employed _____ Unemployed _____

The grade level when I left school _____

I left school because _____

I had free or reduced lunch at school Yes _____ No _____

I had difficulty with _____

My reading ability is: Good _____ Average _____ Low _____

I can use a computer for _____

When I left school my grades were: Good _____ Average _____ Low _____ Incomplete _____

I felt connected to: Friends _____ School _____ Teachers _____ Family _____

Other _____

I returned to school because _____

I plan to _____

Would you agree to an in-person interview about your successful return to school?

Yes _____ Made-up name _____ No Thank you _____

Phone number _____

Appendix E

Survey of Adolescent Reading Attitudes

1	How do you feel about reading news online for class?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
2	How do you feel about reading a book in your free time?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
3	How do you feel about doing research using encyclopedias (or other books) for a class?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
4	How do you feel about texting or emailing friends in your free time?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
5	How do you feel about reading online for a class?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
6	How do you feel about reading a textbook?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
7	How do you feel about reading a book online for a class?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
8	How do you feel about talking with friends about something you've been reading in your spare time?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
9	How do you feel about getting a book or a magazine for a present?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
10	How do you feel about texting friends in your free time?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
11	How do you feel about reading a book for fun on a rainy Saturday?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
12	How do you feel about working on an internet project with classmates?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
13	How do you feel about reading anything printed (book, magazine, comic books, etc.) in your free time?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
14	How do you feel about using a dictionary for class?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
15	How do you feel about using social media (like Facebook or Twitter) in your free time?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
16	How do you feel about looking up information online for a class?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
17	How do you feel about reading a newspaper or a magazine for a class?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad
18	How do you feel about reading a novel for a class?	Very Good	6	5	4	3	2	1	Very Bad

(Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna, 2013)

(Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna 2013)

Appendix F

Resilience Scale Form – GED Research Study

Please think about how the last month has been for you – your thoughts and how you have felt about yourself and important people in your life. Please mark the option that best describes your thoughts and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers.

Made-up Name: _____ Today’s Date: _____
 Age: _____ Gender (M/F): _____

	Totally agree	Agree	Average	Disagree	Totally disagree
1. I reach my goals if I work hard	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I am at my best when I have clear aims and objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I have some friends/family members that usually encourage me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I am satisfied with my life up to now	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. In my family, we share views of what is important in life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I easily make others feel comfortable around me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I know how to reach my goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I always make a plan before I start something new	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. My friends always stick together	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I feel comfortable with my family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I easily find new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. When it is impossible for me to change certain things, I stop worrying about them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. I am good at organizing my time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, Rosenvinge, 2006)

Totally Agree Average Disagree Totally

	Agree			disagree	
14. I have some close friends/family members that really care about me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. In my family, we agree on most things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. I am good at talking to new people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. I feel competent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. In my family, we have rules that simplify everyday life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. I always have someone that can help me when I need it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. When I have to choose between several options, I almost always know what will be right for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. My family views the future as positive, even when very sad things happen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. I always find something fun to talk about	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. My belief in myself gets me through difficult times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. In my family, we support each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. I always find something comforting to say to others when they are sad	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. When things go badly, I have a tendency to find something good that can come out of it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. In my family, we like to do things together	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. I have some close friends/family members that value my qualities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, Rosenvinge, 2006)

Appendix G

Qualitative Research

Framework for Open-Ended Questions in Personal Interviews

1. Can you tell me about your educational experiences from elementary school through high school?
2. What were your experiences with learning to read and using that skill to learn other subjects?
3. How connected were you with the activities, people at school, and your family?
4. What held your interest and motivated you to participate?
5. Can you explain the circumstances of why you left school? When did you leave?
6. What were some difficulties or roadblocks that you overcame?
7. Can you describe how you made the decision to return to school?
8. How do reading, your interests, and your ability to stick with school affect you now?
9. What are some successes in your life today?
10. What are your future plans?

Appendix H

School Information Form Data

ID	Code	School Info							
		Gender	Age	Race	Time in Prog.	Finished or still in GED?	Emp-loyed?	Grade when Left School	Left School Because
		Population:400-450 old (2013-2014) GED test program; New GED test program 187 (2014-2015); 77 Currently participating; 44 took part in this survey.							
1	3FBGUN7	F	37	B	10	G	U	11	Single Parent
2	1FWFEY9	F	19	W	3 Mo	F	E	10	Family issues; Freq. moving
3	3FMFEY8	F	38	H-W	3 Mo	F	E	8	Behind; Divorce; Bullying
4	2FWFEY0	F	20	W	1 Mo	F	E	12	Instructed to "Give up"
5	3FWFEY4	F	34	W	3 Mo	F	E	11	Guns; Poor School; Few electives; No books
6	2F#GUN0	F	20	W	3 Mo	G	U	11	High pressure; Felt physically ill; behind; stressed
7	3FWFEY5	F	35	W	3 Mo	F	E	10	Feeling of not belonging; Behind in classwork
8	2FBGEY0	F	20	B	3 Mo	G	E	12	Started working
9	1FMGEN9	F	19	M	3 Mo	G	E	12	I got kicked out twice
10	2FBGEN3	F	23	B	#	G	E	11	Had a baby
11	3FMGUN4	F	34	M	1	G	U	12	Became a parent
12	2M#GEY1	M	21	W	#	G	E	6	I was pulled out by my family
13	2FWGEN0	F	20	W	#	G	E	12	Not paying atten.; Turned 18; Didn't care to continue
14	1FBGEY9	F	19	B	3	G	E	10	Home issues
15	1MMGUY9	M	20	M	3 Mo	G	U	11	It was too much; Couldn't learn; Too immature
16	2FMGEY3	F	23	M	#	G	E	11	Mom left/Dad in prison
17	1FWGUY9	F	19	W	4	G	U	12	Not enough credit; Returned, but "age timed out"
18	1FAGEY9	F	19	B	3 Mo	G	E	12	Problems at home
19	1MBGUY8	M	18	B	2 Mo	G	U	12	I was not going to finish
20	2MBGEY3	M	23	B	3 Mo	G	E	11	Moved around a lot; Family problems
21	5MBGU#4	M	54	B	3 Mo	G	U	12	Working
22	2FWGEY9	F	29	W	3 Mo	G	E	10	Placed in classes I couldn't handle; No help
23	2FWGEY3	F	23	W	3 Mo	G	E	11	Was bullied;threatened, Transferred - lost credits
24	1MMGUY8	M	18	NA-W	3 Mo	G	U	10	I didn't like waking up early and bullying
25	1FWGUY8	F	18	W	6 Mo	G	U	12	Depression; Family; Drugs; Raising my neice
26	2MMGEN4	M	24	H-W	10Mo	G	U	9	Stress; Wrong priorities; Health
27	2MWGUY0	M	20	W	#	G	U	10	Medical issues
28	2MWGEN1	M	21	W	3 Mo	G	E	10	I felt graduating wasn't that important
29	3FWGEN5	F	35	W	6 Mp	G	E	12	I hung out with the wrong crowd
30	1MWGEN9	M	19	W	#	G	E	11	Students distracted me; I was young & dumb
31	1M#GUY9	M	19	AA	3 Mo	G	U	11	I was sick - Trumatic Brain Injury
32	1FWGEY9	F	19	W	4 yrs	G	E	8	Christian school closed; so home schooled
33	#FAGE##	F	25	AA	#	G	E	11	I was more focused on at home problem
34	2MArGUY6	M	26	Arab	#	G	U	10	Language skills
35	1MIGEY9	M	19	Indian	3 Mo	G	E	12	I got Visa for U.S.A.; couldn't complete in India
36	5MWGUN3	M	53	W	6 Mo	G	U	11	Had problems with math; Left for a married woman
37	2MWGUN0	M	20	W	3 Mo	G	U	11	Didn't show up for class and fights
38	1MWGUY9	M	19	W	3 Mo	G	U	10	Ride and Injuries
39	2FAGEY0	F	20	AA	3 Mo	G	E	11	It was hard for me
40	4FAs#UN6	F	46	Asian	#	G	U	8	Got married after grade 8...
41	5MBGUN9	M	59	AA	#	G	U	11	Personal reasons; Bullying me about acne
42	5MBGUY3	M	53	B	#	G	U	12	Problems at home and school
43	4M#GUY5	M	45	Arab	2 Mo	G	U	12	War; From Iraq; Desert Storm in his country
44	3MHGU#1	M	31	Hisp	3 Mo	G	U	11	Moved; Alone/homeless

ID	Code	Family	School	Engagement	Moving	Health	Peers	Free/Red Lunch at School?	Had Difficulty With:	Difficulties	Family	School	Engagement	Math	Science	Reading	Peers	Addiction	Attendance
1	3FBGUN7	x						Y	Math/science; fear/shy	Sch/SciMth/Pr	x	x	x	x					x
2	1FWFEY9	x			x			Y	Socializing; Studying; Family support	F/Pr/Eng	x	x							x
3	3FMFEY8	x	x				x	Y	Bullying	Pr									x
4	2FWFEY0	x						N	Teachers that bullied	Sch		x							
5	3FWFEY4	x					x	N	8 hours sitting in class	Sch/Eng		x	x						
6	2F#GUN0	x			x			Y	Math; Advanced science; Literature	Sci/Mth/Rdg/Sch	x	x	x	x					
7	3FWFEY5	x						N	Outside factors; Parents; Addiction; Family support	F/Drg	x								x
8	2FBGEY0	x						Y	Math	Mth/Sch		x	x						
9	1FMGEN9		x					Y	Nothing	#									
10	2FBGEN3	x						Y	Understanding; Asked - could not get answers	Eng/Sch/Rdg	x	x	x						
11	3FMGUN4	x						Y	#	#									
12	2M#GEY1	x						N	None	#									
13	2FWGEN0		x	x				Y	Paying attention	Eng/Sch/Rdg		x	x			x			
14	1FBGEY9	x						Y	Math, chemistry	Mth/Sci		x	x	x					
15	1MMGUY9	x	x					Y	Teachers; School environment; Structure	Sch		x							
16	2FMGEY3	x						Y	Transportation; Unstable household	F		x							
17	1FWGUY9		x					N	Lost Father; Didn't care about school/nothing	F/Eng	x	x							
18	1FAGEY9	x						Y	Focusing	Sch/Eng		x	x						
19	1MBGUY8		x					Y	Everything	Sch/Eng		x	x						
20	2MBGEY3	x			x			Y	Reading and writing	Sch/Rdg		x	x						
21	5MBGU#4	x						N	Conflicting hours (working)	F/Sch		x	x						
22	2FWGEY9		x	x				Y	AP classes with no prior relevant instruction	Sch		x							
23	2FWGEY3		x	x		x		Y	Staying in school, being around, negativity	Sch/Eng		x	x						
24	1MMGUY8			x		x		Y	Learning; Fitting in with peers; Behavior	Eng/Pr			x						x
25	1FWGUY8	x						N	Attendance; School was second in my life	F/Att		x							
26	2MMGEN4	x			x	x		Y	Math & social studies	Mth/SocSt/Sch		x	x						
27	2MWGUY0					x		Y	Math, Other students	Mth/Pr/Schl		x	x						x
28	2MWGEN1		x	x				Y	Math; Science	Mth/Sci/Sch		x	x	x					
29	3FWGEN5					x		N	Reading & Math	Rdg/Mth/Sch		x	x		x				
30	1MWGEN9			x		x		N	Almost every subject	Rdg/Mth/Sci/Sch		x	x	x	x				
31	1M#GUY9					x		Y	Speaking	Sch		x							
32	1FWGEY9	x						N	Math	Math/Sch		x	x						
33	#FAGE##	x						Y	Just staying focused and interested	Eng/Sch		x	x						
34	2M#GUY6		x					Y	Focus/Concentration	Eng/Sch		x	x						
35	1MIGEY9		x					#	Math	Math/Sch		x	x						
36	5MWGUN3	x	x					N	Math	Math/Sch		x	x						
37	2MWGUN0				x		x	Y	Math; Showing up to class	Mth/Sch/Att		x	x						x
38	1MWGUY9	x				x		Y	Dealing with stupidity and ignorance	Eng/Sch		x	x						
39	2FAGEY0		x	x				Y	Reading; Understanding	Rdg/Sch		x				x			
40	4FAs#UN6	x						N	Comprehension	Rdg/Sch		x				x			
41	5MBGUN9						x	Y	Other people belittle me about acne problem	Pr									x
42	5MBGUY3	x	x					Y	Everything in going to school	Eng/Sch		x	x						
43	4M#GUY5		x					#	Comprehension	Rdg/Sch		x				x			
44	3MHGU#1	x					x	Y	Reading; Writing; Gangs; Drugs; Alcohol...	Rdg/Pr/Drugs							x	x	x

21 19 8 3 5 10

7 # # # 5 8 7 2 1

ID	Code	My Reading Ability	Can Use a Computer For:	Report Card Grades	Connections	Friends	School	Teachers	Family	Other	Total Connections
1	3FBGUN7	Good	Research Recipes Jobs Housing	Low/Incl	#						0
2	1FWFEY9	Good	MS Word, Studying, Everything	Low/Incl	Friends	x					1
3	3FMFEY8	Good	Work; School; Recreation	Incompl	Family				x		1
4	2FWFEY0	Good	Almost anything	Low/Incl	Friends	x					1
5	3FWFEY4	Good	Everything	Low/Incl	None						0
6	2F#GUN0	Good	Digital art; Writing; Self teaching; Streaming?	Low	Friends	x					1
7	3FWFEY5	Good	Work, school, social media	Low/Incl	Friends	x					1
8	2FBGEY0	Good	Homework, Job search; Direction; etc.	Average	Family				x		1
9	1FMGEN9	Good	Everything	Good	All	x	x	x	x		4
10	2FBGEN3	Good	Everything	Average	Frnd/Fam	x			x		2
11	3FMGUN4	Good	Anything	Good	All	x	x	x	x		4
12	2M#GEY1	Average	Searching; Writing	Average	Family				x		1
13	2FWGEN0	Good	Anything and everything	Low/Incl	Friends	x					1
14	1FBGEY9	Average	Typing and otherwise	Low	Frnd/Tchr	x		x			2
15	1MMGUY9	Average	Anything	Average	Frnd/Fam	x			x		2
16	2FMGEY3	Average	Internet; PowerPoint; Microsoft Word	Average	Work					x	1
17	1FWGUY9	Average	School	Low/Incl	Fam/Tchr			x	x		2
18	1FAGEY9	Average	Research/online help	Low	Friends	x					1
19	1MBGUY8	Good	Everything	Low/Incl	Frnd/Fam	x			x		2
20	2MBGEY3	Average	Research	Average	Fr/Sch/Fam	x	x		x		3
21	5MBGU#4	Good	Internet	Avg/Incl	Family				x		1
22	2FWGEY9	Good	Work, personal, CAD, Build a Computer, Photoshop	Low/Incl	Friends	x					1
23	2FWGEY3	Good	CAD, Photoshop, MS Office; not programming	Average	Frnd/Fam	x			x		2
24	1MMGUY8	Average	Basic things	Good	Frnd/Tchr	x		x			2
25	1FWGUY8	Good	Editing pictures; Facebook; Email; Research	Gd/Incl	#						0
26	2MMGEN4	Good	Any basic use	Incl	Family				x		1
27	2MWGUY0	Good	Everything	Average	Family				x		1
28	2MWGEN1	Good	Many things	Low	Frnd/Fam	x			x		2
29	3FWGEN5	Average	Work	Average	Friends	x					1
30	1MWGEN9	Low	Finding	Low	"Nothing"						0
31	1M#GUY9	Average	Facebook	Average	Tchr/Fam			x	x		2
32	1FWGEY9	Good	School; Facebook	Good	SchFrFam	x	x		x		3
33	#FAGE##	Good	Basically, everything	Low	Family				x		1
34	2MArGUY6	Average	I don't own a PC	Low	Frnd/Fam	x			x		2
35	1MIGEY9	Good	Anything, where I can get help	Good	Fr/Tch/Fam	x	x	x	x		3
36	5MWGUN3	Good	Job search	Low	Friends	x					1
37	2MWGUN0	Good	Almost Everything	Good	Friends	x					1
38	1MWGUY9	Average	Do not have one	Incompl	FrScTchFam	x	x	x	x		4
39	2FAGEY0	Average	Everything	Average	Friends	x					1
40	4FAs#UN6	Good	#	Average	FrScTchFam	x	x	x	x		4
41	5MBGUN9	Average	Still need computer help	Average	Tchr/Fam			x	x		2
42	5MBGUY3	Average	N/A	Av/Lw/Inc	Family				x		1
43	4M#GUY5	Low	Reading	Low	FrTchFam	x		x	x		3
44	3MHGU#1	Low	YouTube	Good	FrTchFam	x		x	x		3
						28	6	12	26	1	⊗

ID	Code	Why Returned to School?	Education/Value	Jobs	For Myself/Self Worth	Family	Goals/Achievement	Other
1	3FBGUN7	Children, Education	x		x			
2	1FWFEY9	Had a daughter; Get life together			x	x		
3	3FMFEY8	Better Job; Good example for son		x		x		
4	2FWFEY0	Go to college; Get away from everything	x		x			
5	3FWFEY4	Wanted zoology degree; rescue animals		x			x	
6	2F#GUN0	Escape family; Better & supportive learning, relaxed classes			x	x		
7	3FWFEY5	Role model for daughters; wanted employment skills		x		x		
8	2FBGEY0	Get GED and start cosmetology school	x				x	
9	1FMGEN9	I had my son				x		
10	2FBGEN3	To become something			x			
11	3FMGUN4	Improve education; show my children you shouldn't give up	x		x	x		
12	2M#GEY1	#						
13	2FWGEN0	Better opportunities inside the work environment		x				
14	1FBGEY9	It's time fo focus on education	x					
15	1MMGUY9	Didn't like school but wanted diploma; I am not a quitter!	x		x			
16	2FMGEY3	Further education; Better job.	x	x				
17	1FWGUY9	For myself and my Dad b/c that was his wish for me			x	x		
18	1FAGEY9	Realized it was finally time to go back to school	x					
19	1MBGUY8	I need something for a job		x				
20	2MBGEY3	Want to do better; want good job; go to art school		x	x	x		
21	5MBGU#4	Get better employment; Finish a goal		x			x	
22	2FWGEY9	Want to help others; Want to have the knowledge to do so		x			x	
23	2FWGEY3	Further education; better job, be more proud of myself.	x	x	x			
24	1MMGUY8	Better life; Do something I'm proud of			x		x	
25	1FWGUY8	...my life made it difficult to continue with traditional school	x					
26	2MMGEN4	To better myself			x			
27	2MWGUY0	You can't get a good job without an education		x				
28	2MWGEN1	...so I can complete my goals					x	
29	3FWGEN5	I wanted to improve my job & my life as an adult		x	x			
30	1MWGEN9	Better myself; Get GED so I can get a better job		x	x			
31	1M#GUY9	because "of me"			x			
32	1FWGEY9	I want to get my GED and pass the compass test	x					
33	#FAGE##	I'm ready for a better life			x			
34	2MArGUY6	Joining the military					x	
35	1MIGEY9	Was unable to complete half 12th India	x					
36	5MWGUN3	My job of 17 years closed; I need a GED to get a job		x				
37	2MWGUN0	I need an education	x					
38	1MWGUY9	I wanna make something of myself			x			
39	2FAGEY0	#						
40	4FAs#UN6	"my second husband help me"					x	
41	5MBGUN9	Times have changed; I'm trying to get my GED	x					
42	5MBGUY3	The law and the need to learn GED.	x				x	
43	4M#GUY5	I want to get my education	x					
44	3MHGU#1	Lawyer told me to. DACA Program from USCIS	x					x

17 14 16 9 8 2

ID	Code	Future Plans	Interview?
1	3FBGUN7	Be an RN	N
2	1FWFEY9	Degree; Good life for daughter	Transcript
3	3FMFEY8	Degree; Continue work	Transcript
4	2FWFEY0	Degree; Live life happy	Transcript
5	3FWFEY4	New Mexico degree; Wildlife rehab	Transcript
6	2F#GUN0	#	N
7	3FWFEY5	Employment; complete college	Transcript
8	2FBGEY0	Go to cosmetology school	Y
9	1FMGEN9	Own restaurant; become a chef	N
10	2FBGEN3	Go to college	N
11	3FMGUN4	Go to college	N
12	2M#GEY1	#	Y
13	2FWGEN0	College, criminology/psychology	N
14	1FBGEY9	Go to college	Y
15	1MMGUY9	GED; Degree in music production	Y
16	2FMGEY3	Nursing degree; Stable life	Transcript
17	1FWGUY9	Graduate; start college immediately	Interview
18	1FAGEY9	Graduate; start college	Transcript
19	1MBGUY8	Going to college	Transcript
20	2MBGEY3	Get GED; Go to WCC	Y
21	5MBGU#4	College; Study logistics	#
22	2FWGEY9	Bcome a nurse	Interview
23	2FWGEY3	To to college; be forensic scientist	Transcript
24	1MMGUY8	Haven't decided yet	Transcript
25	1FWGUY8	GED; Steady job; Continue school	Y
26	2MMGEN4	Get my GED and go to college	N
27	2MWGUY0	Own my own business	#
28	2MWGEN1	Earn my GED/ accomplish goals	N
29	3FWGEN5	Be a radiologist tech	N
30	1MWGEN9	GED; Go to WCC for automotive	N
31	1M#GUY9	Get done with my GED	Transcript
32	1FWGEY9	Be a DNR officer	Interview
33	#FAGE##	Administrative Assistant	#
34	2MArGUY6	#	Y
35	1MIGEY9	Complete GED; College; IT job	#
36	5MWGUN3	Get GED; Move on	N
37	2MWGUN0	Degree in welding; Underbody design	N
38	1MWGUY9	Go to college, not sure what for	Y
39	2FAGEY0	Graduate; Get GED; Go to college	Y
40	4FAs#UN6	Finish GED; Go to college	N
41	5MBGUN9	Keep trying to succeed	N
42	5MBGUY3	Stay in school	Y
43	4M#GUY5	Go to college	Y
44	3MHGU#1	Get degree in automotive engineering	#

Appendix I

Qualitative Interview Field Notes - 11 Subjects

- Educational Experiences: Elementary through High School
- Reading: Experiences and Using to Learn Other Subjects
- Connections: School, Family, Other
- Interests: Motivation to Participate
- Circumstances and When Left School
- Difficulties and Roadblocks Overcame
- Decision to Return to School
- Reading, Interest, and Ability to Stick With It: Current Effects
- Successes in Life Today
- Future Plans
- Advice to Students Dropping Out
- How to Change the Schools
- Roadblocks
- Other Notes
- Other Notes (additional)

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Educational Experiences: Elementary thorough High School
2	F	19	White	Kindergarten a few weeks then Dad "beat up mom" and went to prison. Moved different schools, grade levels, okay in school up to 7th grade. "Came home one day and mom had moved out when I was at school" - 13yrs. Homeless, sis 20 Skipped, fun with friends move -new hs
3	F	38	Hisp/Wh	Elem. Grade easy then got harder and Left school in 8th grade bullying "made me not want to come to school" "And there were plenty of times that I dropped out." And I really didn't take school that seriously. I didn't think it was really that important. I thought, "Oh, I have plenty of time
4	F	20	White	In elementary and middle school, they had been suspecting that I had a learning disability , but they didn't catch it until the second semester of my senior year. That made all of school difficult. Survey- teachers bullied me and told her to "give up" reported good reading ability, low/incomplete grades connected to friends & family- to be happy
5	F	34	White	No problems in elementary school, just high school- two schools merged. Poor resourced urban school, lack of books, structure, curriculum. Guns, all bad kids at our school. Hard to learn & sit in lectures - school was "party time". homeless & had to work 11th gr/abused/suicidal
7	F	35	White	I enjoyed school only third grade which is when I learned my father's addiction problem. That was the first time I was charged for truancy, then in 5th I missed probably 68 days and it was because I thought that I could control what my dad did...if I didn't go to school like he would not be able to use if I stayed home... You have to take care of me, so I would say I was sick
16	F	23	Persian/W	Elem changed schools constantly, middle school good friends with brother, So friends are like an escape to make you smile 5 th grade, dad in and out of prison, mom used drugs and left/returned unstable Survey- average reading ability, average grades, no transportation/homeless 15yr
18	F	19	Black	Liked elem., fun, middle sch. started with friends talking, hs socializing more, skipping, wrong crowd, "what I thought school was about...you know, socializing. "Survey-problems at home, average reading ability, low grades, connected to friends
19	M	18	Black	Elem -good, mid- problems, "high sch. it was way off" high sch. - "was not ready & not taught how to do, more responsibilities with age" Survey - Left in 12th gr- difficulty "with everything" "was not going to finish" connected to school and family to be happy
23	F	23	White	Got all As in elem. but in 3rd they put her in an "I Care" group she did not understand why she had to go to a lunchtime group for "because of my deficiencies in everything" "for counseling And I was in that from fourth-grade until 12 grade! Bullied, beaten-10th health, PTSD, many "bad things" happened to her
24	M	18	NatAm/Wh	Elem - "I was a bigger kid. I got made fun of a lot about my weight. It was hard for me to fit in. so it caused me to have behavior problems in school. So I was suspended a lot. It followed me all the way to middle school. I was bullied a lot in school. I weighed about 300 pounds"
31	M	19	Af. Amer	Special ed in elem. school, hearing problems in both ears and speech impediment, at age 9 he was run over by a truck "that ripped part of my face off" The traumatic brain injury caused him to have be out with tutors for 4 years, then in and out of school TBI diagnosed at 12yr

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Reading: Experiences and Using to Learn Other Subjects
2	F	19	White	I'm good at reading. I'm excellent at writing. Helped with other subjects but family problems and switching schools did not help
3	F	38	Hisp/W	Reading was easy and it helped with other subjects - "Things came easy for me... I really didn't think that I needed it...an education." Survey- good reading ability
4	F	20	White	I didn't learn how to read through the school... I learned to read through my mother because the school was so ineffective at teaching me how to read that they wanted to put me in a special class but then my mother taught me
5	F	34	White	Reading was easy up to 5th grade think that is what saved me...that early instruction and development and I wouldn't be able to come back around like I decided to come back to college so I think that played a big role Survey good reading ability, low/income grades, Left 11th grade no math
7	F	35	White	Rural schools, farming a priority schoolwork came second to her stopping parents from drugs - never told authorities just took blame for truancy. Labeled as a struggling student by 5th grade- I always loved reading - "If you show up you do well"
16	F	23	Persian/W/Wh	So like, I am more like a hand's-on learning , like I need somebody here to teach me. I just can't teach myself. Trouble with math Learn science etc. in running gas station She says she learned from all of her jobs waitressing in a hookah bar, maid, gas station manager, service jobs She likes and learns from people . She is half Persian and values diversity as a learning experience
18	F	19	Black	I remember like...having like a tutor or someone to help me read. 8th grade- Because like... I like have dyslexia... in...you know...certain words, like backwards. When I was little, I used to write my "B's" like "D's." I remember having help to read- everything involves reading
19	M	18	Black	I remember...reading tests in elementary school" I enjoyed it. I just had a lot of trouble, personally, with comprehension It gave me a lot more trouble because ...like, multiple choice. It was like having to read something, and...trouble with all that I just read. Like, I wasn't ready
23	F	23	White	Oh, I absolutely love reading. It helps me understand things better. Like reading it, I'm more of a thinker and a visualist. So if I can see if I can read it and I can actually think about, it because my mind is very vivid... I can actually really use it...I can mold the picture to see what I'm reading
24	M	18	NatAm/W	I was always in the special ed program. So I mean, I learned how to read pretty quickly. I learned just as quick as all of the other kids. It became a problem with like learning more towards middle school when harder work started to come. But loved writing
31	M	19	Af. Am	I did not like learning to read. Great-grandmother was a fifth grade English teacher" She was very strict. He gives various memories of state teachers helping him, yet they are jumbled. Accident happened at 9 now he says 6yr. TBI affects his memory, language, sequence of thoughts, but does not diminish his spirit

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Connections: School, Family, Other
2	F	19	White	none to parents after years and when dad got out of prison mom goes back to live with him she is alcoholic- no contact even today want to keep my daughter away. Sis tried, had a bond but "it's different than having a parent... I skipped school a lot. I have like one really close friend
2	F	38	Hisp/W	Good connections to family despite divorce- glee cub for a while- 3 girls bullying in 6th, 7th, 8th grade had outside friends, but those were "a terrible influence on me" . We all just wanted to skip school and hang out instead of going to school.
3	F	20	White	Just friends Teachers were terrible Going to school was really difficult for me and I started skipping , as I was getting older because it was so frustrating... kind of painful. I mean I had teachers that were being really awful to me in the class in front of everybody... as if they got off on humiliating kids, you know.
4	F	34	White	No connections to football/cheerleading only options, Home was hard "There was a lot of arguing It was very broken." Forced to go to church. Dysfunction no connection. Survey - no connections to anything
7	F	35	White	Juvenile Ct/Family Ct Went through "whole court system" troubles in 3rd, 5th, 7th, grades Did not graduate 5th grade ceremony. Got me back into school and then connected to "burnouts", had a court advocate. Not interested in living in rural area, worried about parents drug use,
16	F	23	Persian/W	My brother- "me and my brother really looked out each other while we were growing up. So that was the best part about growing up right there. I had to help, so, you know, if I had not had him, I would be alone". It is just... to take care of myself, you know.
18	F	19	Bla	Friends, hung out starting skipping, with them and then grades and credits slipping and "it was too late"
19	M	18	Black	No connection to family " I went to my room "Throughout high school, I actually had depression issues when I became a sophomore. And I didn't talk to my family at all. close to the counselor from my sophomore year to my senior year until we moved away" - friends, football
23	F	23	White	Family...I was disconnected mostly, because my grandmother passed away my parents are fighting a lot. But...and I was going through a lot of emotional traumas myself because when I would sleep, I remember things that happened when I was younger and it would scare me and I didn't want to talk anybody about it.
24	M	18	NatAm/W	"I loved writing." Great writing teacher motivated him. "My mom, she left me when I was six years old and my father, he was an alcoholic and he... didn't do a very good job of taking care of me. So my grandmother... raised me, and...it came to a point that I had to basically raise [her]"
31	M	19	Af. Am	Father- very close relationship-passed away in March 2015 Mom left him and then passed. His stepmom is very close to him. Support system important for him to get through school

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Interests: Motivation to Participate
2	F	19	Whi	Interests in reading, even for fun. Nothing really, except an auto class, but I quit
3	F	38	Hisp/White	I tried to spend as little time at school as I could. Some teachers took interest "When a teacher takes an interest in you, suddenly, you feel like you have more value, and you want to try harder." public school " teachers that would tell me "if you don't learn it, it's okay, I still get paid."
4	F	20	White	No extracurriculars Nothing- negative motivation-my friend died and I remember a counselor screaming "What are you doing? What do you want to do with your life? Suck it up!" -while I cried, because things are so hard I couldn't make it. I just walked out-started crying in the bathroom.
5	F	34	Whi	School was not important at that time. And they didn't feel like they could do anything for me
7	F	35	White	Despite problems, loved family & gmother, but tried to understand situation- later interested in social work- could then interpret her family/ own life. Spent much time trying to figure out life. Working, independence- At 16 went to live with older 28 yr boyfriend- had 3 kids never got married.
16	F	23	Persian/W	Motivated by herself and the will to support herself & brother Parents out of the picture." I had nothing to do with parents taking care of me at all for years. So I ...knew nothing about their whereabouts, and didn't speak to them What motivates me? To keep going... trying to get my-self together
18	F	19	Black	Liked to go to school for friends, liked teachers and their caring about her absences, but said that she let schooling slip by her and did not realize that time was running out. Did report that school got harder in high school
19	M	18	Black	Nothing [slight laugh]...because I was forced to - forced. And not even for football? No. Yeah. That's why I tried [laughs]...you know where it got... My parents ...forcing me to go to school. And the, like, being school. Forced to learn. I had no interest in it at all
23	F	23	Whit	Reading, colorful creative clothes & objects, musical - plays clarinet and base guitar
24	M	18	NaAm/W	Writing poetry and turned them into song- singer got interested in healthy eating and motivated himself to get to the gym- lost all of his weight to normal range- trainer would call his home to get him to the gym when he missed self- determined to change
31	M	19	Af. Am	Religion, hope, gratefulness of being alive after all of the surgeries etc. I love my family! My family is...if you have a dream, my family will back behind your dream. If you wanted to be a congressman, they would say, "Be the best congressman that you could be."

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Circumstances and When Left School
2	F	19	White	Move to rural high school with sister "and I did get bullied and had like one friend. I was there probably like four or five months. And then, I just completely quit school altogether in tenth grade." Few credits, skipping
3	F	38	Hisp/White	I had a lot of kids that would...especially in eighth grade...girls who bullied me every day-made me not want to come to school. Survey-Left school in 8th grade Incomplete grades, way behind, parents divorce, bullying connected to family" I think that I just didn't value education at that moment of my life"
4	F	20	White	Hated school , stopped going only liked one teacher. Learning disability put her behind on credits , started staying home. That period of time when I got bitten by the brown recluse spider. Sickness was a roadblock and "I knew I was not going back to that high school.
5	F	34	White	" School system was really bad, wasn't a lot of learning... No point in going " "I left in the 11th grade. I knew I would be staying back again because I didn't have enough attendance, and I just stopped doing the work... I was battling some emotional problems" parents did not care & signed papers
7	F	35	White	when I was in the eighth grade I actually started to drink friends- went to live with a girlfriend, who drank often, lived in a negative environment closer to school smoked pot, skipped I had low, low scores" job at 14, 9th grade few credits rec alt school, might be charge with truancy again, left to go to work.
16	F	23	Persia	Non attendance and missing transcripts from five schools and being homeless left her working- she kept trying to get educated- got a home school online diploma which got her a CNA job, but more college needs a real GED
18	F	19	Black	Did not share family problems. In Survey student reported this was main reason she left school. The hallway was a less private area to do interview, but no info about father/family Lack of attendance, credits, & focus made her leave in 12th
19	M	18	Black	Why I left school? I just wasn't ... I just didn't have the credits . I didn't have the credits at all. Some teachers cared, knew about GED tried to help. Left school in 12th grade connected to friends, family
23	F	23	White	Left at 11th grade, still had good reading ability and average grades, but the fighting, bullies, being tormented by peers, social problems her "passive aggressive" nature- conflicts where peers physically hurt her. Wanted to go to an "alternative school, but my credits didn't transfer"
24	M	18	NatAm/W	I retaliated a lot. I found that that helped me a lot...because people stopped picking on me slowly...it wasn't a good coping mechanism...I kept getting suspended and I wasn't learning anything-high school, I just said...I can't do anymore, I just walked out of school...I never looked back.
31	M	19	Af. Am.	Health was just a huge issue with continual pain and suffering from injury- sporadic attendance he left school in 11th grade

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Difficulties and Roadblocks Overcame
2	F	19	White	Homeless, family issues, disinterest in school from moving and lack of family support I skipped school a lot. Bullies catalyst for final decision to leave. Yeah, my life's circumstance...it was hard, but getting the motivation to go back is what is even harder And actually sticking to it
3	F	38	Hisp/White	Bullying Family situation with divorce. Then tried many GED programs. But quit because "mostly, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to do it. I would fail." In the 8th grade I was 16, and the school dropped me. They said, "You're not coming...you're sixteen years old...we're done."
4	F	20	White	ADD ADHD, typical teenage problems, school structure, subjects, family not getting along at that time Had a difficult time paying attention. Had to transfer a lot of times and went to different schools. "Wouldn't give credits" to transfer
5	F	34	White	Did not want to sit in classes for hours a day in terrible school Math - big roadblock, lack of attendance, credits, no interest. Family dysfunction, We didn't have a good relationship. We didn't talk about things like that, [graduating] health and emotional outcomes of sexual abuse debilitating
7	F	35	White	And so my dad would be... at his lowest points, we would actually stay with my grandparents for weeks at a time...just because there were times when there wouldn't be food in the house...there would be no electricity , and we had issues like that. Dad used cocaine, mom too.
16	F	23	Persian/Wh	Dad sold drugs, did cocaine, in and out of prison- mom was a user. "When I was a little girl, you know, my mom would take us to the worst places. And my uncle had to go get us, you know, because she would leave us there." "She tried to pour boiling milk on me. It missed me and it hit my brother" but "I loved her."
18	F	19	Black	Said mother was "100% behind her but no mention of her father. Mother was working during days student stayed home, wasn't happy. Had helped student with reading by getting tutor. The family issues reported on survey for cause to leave changed to lack of attendance and focus.
19	M	18	Black	Disinterest in school , family dysfunction , during interview father on the phone yelling at student to come get picked up, even after telling him he was working with a teacher. Father kept calling student tried to placate but he told me it was a friend and he was "mad at him" didn't calm down
23	F	23	White	"they had me seek out somebody... I wasn't speaking at all and I wouldn't socialize with people that were my friends and I wouldn't leave the house... And they thought it was unhealthy. They knew something was wrong. We still know something is wrong."
24	M	18	Nat/Am/W	"...hurt my feelings , because it was hard for me to learn because I was so worried about the next person... to call me fat." "Or you know the next person that was going to get me so angry to the point where I would just snap and I was going to do something that I was going to regret."
31	M	19	Black	Speaking and seeing from the accident and hearing problems were very difficult, especially to go back into school and then leave each time due to health issues

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Decision to Return to School
2	F	19	White	"I just been working. And in 2013, I got pregnant, had my daughter in 2014 ... I had her like a month or two later, I got a job again, and now I have two jobs." "I'm in college. I got my GED. I went back and started the classes for the GED last October...she was born last January- pretty exciting."
3	F	38	Hisp/Wh	Good job at a local business for many years moved up to business manager they knew no GED but knew capabilities- they went out of business. Couldn't get a well-paying job to equal that one without GED Survey – " be a good example to my son "
4	F	20	White	"I didn't really have any self-worth. I was just working, and it was hard...I'd been saving up because I always wanted to go to college. I knew I had to take my GED because I knew I wasn't going to go back to high school... first time that I could ask questions and not be called stupid."
5	F	34	White	"It only took years and years of trying and find my own path. Before, what I was doing wasn't working so I know I have to get back in school...because it's like in a circle... it's going nowhere I was working and I wanted to do animal rescue." "Need a degree to get paid."
7	F	35	White	Wanted to be a role model for 3 daughters and needed money from a better paying job than a manager at a food business. Very embarrassed at PTA with no GED. " I didn't have faith in myself, but I didn't think that I was stupid. " Looked into many programs found this a good fit
16	F	23	Persian/Wh	Worked and managed many businesses, especially gas stations Always felt that education was important to bet a good job and not work so many long hours. School was always on her mind "And I still kept trying. It wasn't like I didn't want to."
18	F	19	Black	Biggest roadblock she overcame to return to school was "motivating myself." Her decision "was already made" to come back for a GED. Her mom was in the same GED program and wanted her to try it. Close relationship to mom, but not mentioned on her survey.
19	M	18	Black	To get a good job at Ford. Need it to get a good job- a GED or high school diploma. The student was distracted by the father on phone and did not want me to know of tension, he is smiling but very stressed. "I needed it for the job. But I'm trying to be at Ford."
23	F	23	White	"It's mostly just my perseverance really. Mainly I didn't want to disappoint my parents because none of my siblings graduated because they decided that having children and having sex and drugs was more...I guess, adequate. I thought it was a failed life..."
24	M	18	NatAm/W	Wanted to have an education for job choices if singing career does not work out. Wanted to overcome fitting in with peers and handle his behavior to show people he can be successful not following rep of family "I wanted to better my life and say I did something I'm proud of" (from survey)
31	M	19	Black	"I knew my dad said was that if you look for the easy road in life, then you will always be looking for the easy road in life. 'You are a slacker, you will always be a slacker in life.' So one reason I would return for the GED is I do want to move ahead. Like I did want to go and finish Heard of GED"

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Reading, Interest, and Ability to Stick With It: Current Effects
2	F	19	White	Those skills really helped with getting GED, reading the books studying – “No one taught me how to study.” “I thought that getting my GED would be like really the first step to the rest of my life...” Tried other programs, no car to come here, but finally got \$\$ and license at 20yr- goal to stick with program for daughter.
3	F	38	Hisp/Whit	“I was really ashamed throughout my life...not having my GED or any kind of education, because I had been friends who were really intelligent, so I would try to hide it...so that no one would know.” Now went back and got GED with no problems, grad with high honors, fear of failure was "completely unfounded."
4	F	20	White	History: likes to read about it and motivates more interest in subject and more reading. “I didn’t have much of anybody or anything. And I didn’t have much hope either. I mean if you’re told that you’re not good for so long you believe it. That was a class-conditioning kind of thing. Overcoming that was a challenge.”
5	F	34	White	Moving from an urban environment as a young adult on her own to an area that has resources. Found a support community built around education, "no support back home" Used reading ability to get GED after finding a job. Encouraged by staff and realized with age value of GED
7	F	35	White	Had lied on applications repeatedly to get jobs yes to GED- this wore heavily on her conscience- a main reason to get GED, Realized that even a "scary test" was not so scary with study and support. Self determination to make a better life for her family through education
16	F	23	Persian/Wh	Able to use reading and analytic skills, self-determination to get an online diploma and then work in nursing homes after garage work. Ability to read, be a manager, toughness, and her own sustainability helped her move up to an activities manager at a new nursing home
18	F	19	Black	Her interests of becoming an artist or going into business motivated her to go back for GED. Her motivation is "hope" for the future
19	M	18	Black	"Reading is good, now. I still have comprehension problems. But I think that I will always have that problem. And..."I go slower. It’s better than it was in high school. I’m not as forced...I still have to try that choice every day...if I want to go or not.
23	F	23	White	Reading has been a refuge for this student. She is excelling with the personalized teaching of the college embedded GED program with caring teachers. Strong willed and loves family to the extent that she will protect them from devastating news of betrayal of trust.
24	M	18	NatAm/W	Writing his own songs from his poetry, Attitude "Abraham Lincoln. ...wasn’t dealt a perfect hand. But it is up to you on how you play it. It really is.
31	M	19	Black	Now in this GED program. "They keep interest in it. That’s what I am saying. Like they lit the boiler and they haven’t let the flame go out. They keep the water nice and warm...not too hot, but nice and warm. Because I don’t like hot water. I like <i>warm</i> water." He is determined

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Successes in Life Today
2	F	19	White	"I guess it's just no one in my family has actually graduated...I didn't want to turn out like them. But at some point, I felt that I really didn't have a choice, because I didn't have the strict rules that I should have had...like all of the other students had, like you have to get up and go to school from their parents... I wish someone made me go to school. But I'm still proud because I now have my GED. I am now in college, and no one else in my family has done that."
3	F	38	Hisp/Wh	GED graduation "it was one of the best moments of my life...aside from giving birth to my son." Mentor on GED program, work study I tell students they can do it "passionate about it" Love reading "wish I could read more recreationally." Assoc. Degree in liberal arts
4	F	20	White	"I have two jobs, going to college, working as a GED mentor." "I just made it through, clenching my teeth the whole time that I made it through."
5	F	34	White	"...getting my GED is a huge one. It's been one of the biggest steppingstones that branches you to be able to do other things. Finishing my third... actually graduating my therapy session." Work study at community college as mentor
7	F	35	White	Three children, mentor, college student graduating from university with bachelor's degree after GED Advocate for children- social worker
16	F	23	Persian/Wh	Activities manager at nursing home CNA certificate, GED program Each time she would say "Forget it!" and move on to the next challenge in her life. "I can brush it off." Over and over that was how she was able to keep going- by leaving the past and forgiving those she loved for bad life decisions.
18	F	19	Black	"Getting up every day and going" to class. Having goal of GED
19	M	18	Black	Getting up to go to class and being self-motivated, it is a choice for him now. Said he is "doing good here."
23	F	23	White	Determined to complete GED to go on to a 4 yr degree Talks of a supportive boyfriend and thinking about a family in a healthy way
24	M	18	NatAm/W	GED program - likes teachers and counselors. Going on tour with a band and will sing his self-written songs will be paid 15k.
31	M	19	Black	GED program, hope for a future with less health issues. He is successful because "of me" and has the will to complete the GED program.

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Future Plans
2	F	19	White	Now mentor, job, "It's been tough. But it's getting better every day, you know. Especially because...I cannot wait to get my life started with my daughter. And just, you know, be her support that I didn't have. I'm so excited!" Get a BA in business, start a coffee shop & med marijuana
3	F	38	Hisp/Wh	Will enroll at a university for 4yr. Business Administration degree and work with adult learners.
4	F	20	White	Liberal arts assoc. degree and transfer to a university for a 4 yr. degree. "To be honest, I've really been into carpentry, and film."
5	F	34	White	Transferring to another state and "...taking zoology courses there. So I can do wildlife rehabilitation." Plans to complete associates degree at community college and plans to get bachelor's degree about two years- looked up the program already.
7	F	35	White	"I would actually like to do something like when I go for my PhD, like testing for a GED, as opposed to graduating from high school..." This is her goal to work with GED students - likes being a mentor.
16	F	23	Persian/Wh	"I wanted to be okay in life. I didn't want to do what they did. I want to learn from their mistakes. And of course I'm going to make my own on the way... I'm okay with that."
18	F	19	Black	"My future plans are becoming a artist, and becoming like a entrepreneur. You know, like owning my own business."
19	M	18	Black	Interview shortened to help him get to his dad. Future seems to be influenced by mother pushing Ford and Dad who "works for Ford". Not certain what job he can get at Ford. Seems to measure success like his father to work at Ford. Survey- plans to go to college.
23	F	23	White	College with a degree in forensic science.
24	M	18	NatAm/W	"I am expecting to have my GED by fall of 2015. So by October of this year I should have my GED. And then I was possibly thinking of going to college. But if my music career goes off, I won't go to college. But I was thinking about going to college and becoming a mechanical engineer."
31	M	19	Black	He likes this GED program because "when it's in a college, it makes you feel better about it, in a way." He wants to go to college and have a credential that gives him choices. His dad said you need it for everything. "I want to become a federal field agent, or a federal probation officer."

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Advice to Students Dropping Out
2	F	19	White	“Don’t drop out! I really...I dropped out...I guess I didn’t drop out, but I quit. [15]. And I was out of school for like five years... I think that it was one of the biggest mistakes that I have ever made. And, you know, with persistence, and... You can do it!” Self determination, self -reliance
3	F	38	Hisp/Whit	“It’s never too late! I was ready to drop out, but they dropped me before I dropped out” if I could have some way of motivating GED students to finish, I could figure out how to motivate him [my son], too.”
4	F	20	White	“I wouldn’t give them any of that played-out, ‘Just believe in yourself!’ kind of stuff...because that’s all that was shoved down my throat... tell them is, ‘Listen, I know it’s hard, and I know it hurts, and that you are sacrificing so much. But believe me, it does get better.’ ”
5	F	34	White	"It’s really a hard thing because they need to find it in themselves- they have to want it. And have someone talk to you, I hope you realize that it is possible." Accept help, "That was a big problem for me too. I didn’t want to accept anything. “oh, I can do it!” No, I can’t do it myself.
7	F	35	White	This student gives advice for functional, successful families - Don't "claim on the money aspect...what is going into it?" Overcome roadblocks with good decisions and a belief in self as capable of finishing school and making a successful life.
16	F	23	Persian/Wh	“Don’t do it!” [Laughs]. ‘Do not! Oh my God, is it a pain in the ass to go back and finish!’ Let them know! Use extra quotation marks if you have to! [Laughter]. ‘Because you just got to go back and do it.’ [To] administrators/teachers, I would say ‘definitely keep learning interesting and fun.’”
18	F	19	Black	“After you have completed you GED. And you can motivate yourself easily by knowing what you want to do. And like your goals...like your favorite thing to do, like turn that and make it into like, you know, a career.”
19	M	18	Black	We did not get to this question due to time constraints. Student was insistent that he did not "talk" to his family during high school and does not talk to them now but lived with them, moved with them, is transported by them and is very influenced by their desires for his future. He seems to see this as negative, but accepts the help
23	F	23	White	“Make your own choices”
24	M	18	NatAm/W	“I never had a lot of things that other kids have had.... I’m...very very very grateful and blessed about what I have now. You know. I never had nothing, growing up. ‘Stick it out!’”
31	M	19	Black	“If I had the choice to do it all over again, I probably would stay if I could.” He says that either a diploma or a GED is important to get- so get one or the other, "your choice."

ID	Gender	Age	Race	How to Change the Schools
2	F	19	White	"...find ways to get the kids more like...active in like, discussions, and group stuff. Because, you know, you didn't have the expenses. Activities cost money."
3	F	38	Hisp/White	It's "the school's responsibility to take care of them [bullies].I do know that kids get bullied a lot in a lot more sophisticated ways these days. Like online and stuff like that, and children will kill themselves over it...things like that and it's really sad" Said she told school but felt that it made the bullying worse over time."
4	F	20	White	"One thing that you <i>gotta stop doing</i> is the rudimentary rules...like you can't write in pen. 'I can't accept your homework,' made my grades plummet."
5	F	34	White	Support systems built into every place Find the way to connect students to education
7	F	35	White	Changing environment in the family-gonna change the socioeconomic class... "It's like the hardest thing that you will ever do. But you can also change the things that surround it. I have changed the way we live...changed the parenting style. So I feel like that gives my kids... the better opportunity to do better than I did. So I think that like people claim on that money aspect of it...but what is going into it that's not helping move up in the class."
16	F	23	Persian/Wh	"Places require the GED now, I mean, to... If you have any type of education, this is what they need, is a GED. Otherwise, you're going to be just looked at as someone who doesn't complete things. You are looked at as someone who doesn't even have common sense, than get your GED or anything like that. I mean, you know, I understand...we all have our problems."
18	F	19	Black	"I think the high schools should fix...like the way they interact with students. Like, everybody doesn't learn at the same pace. Like they need to engage the students more and care about each and every student, They need to care about their students."
19	M	18	Black	
23	F	23	White	Structure, listen to students. Protect students
24	M	18	NatAm/W	Crack down on bullying - "Teachers need to connect more"
31	M	19	Black	"Trust me. High schoolers talk about field trips. They don't want to sit in that...the school is like a dead cell."

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Roadblocks
2	F	19	White	"My family grew up with no money. And you have to pay all this much to join Girl Scouts. You've got to do this and this. And there's a lot of families that can't afford that. That's a way to get kids like more participate, and make friends. Because with friends, like being social...it's weird to be at school."
3	F	38	Hisp/Wh	Parents disappointed, disadvantaged area, lack of resources at 16, peer bullying stopped when school pushed her out for lack of attendance, negative peer group outside of school- moved with spilt up of parents angry at situation Lack of self-confidence .
4	F	20	White	Problems with others judging her from teachers, counselors, parent, "semi-relative" who lived with family- all tore her down Raised by a single mom who was a nurse with nurse hours not enough time to be with her.
5	F	34	White	Disadvantaged school, neighborhood, sexually abused as a child, health problems, open heart surgery. "I needed therapy. I mean I hit rock-bottom I was like suicidal, and 'okay, am I going to die, or change?'" Low self-esteem - felt like family hated her- outcast.
7	F	35	White	Parents, family dysfunction, truancy, drinking, boyfriend, moved out of house needed to sustain self at young age, children at 18, lack of support, negative peer influence - Self determination to get GED, role model for kids, contribute to society fight for those who need support
16	F	23	Persian/Wh	"So we ran out of food. My brother right around the corner did not help. We had some neighbors give us some canned foods, and stuff like that." Changing schools, non-attendance no transcripts, tried online schools, kept working any jobs proud not to be pregnant - proud to be self-reliant determined to live a stable life and get a GED.
18	F	19	Black	Friends, skipping, losing credits, following rules, no drugs or gangs - This student reported "home problems" as major reason for leaving school- yet did not report anything in the interview.
19	M	18	Black	Family and his own disinterest in education. Wants to be happy, but does not articulate what that is. "Being at Ford" seems like the only choice he is considering. That might be a roadblock if he has no backup plan.
23	F	23	White	Student has many health and emotional issues, Has a serotonin deficiency, labeled bi-polar, PTSD (from a serious childhood trauma appears to be sexual abuse by a family member and she kept it secret "it would break my family apart") Cutting herself, spina bifida- docs/therapy
24	M	18	NatAm/W	"I was unemployed. We were living off from my grandmother's income, which was \$500 a month. And our house payment was \$500 a month. So I had to take back bottles, you know... Cut grass for the people on my street and in my neighborhood to pay for the gas and the water..."
31	M	19	Black	Attendance to school due to health/injuries - Traumatic Brain Injury

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Other Notes
2	F	19	White	"I think that reading does help a lot, because it is...now that I am in college classes, really you have to read to keep up. And, you know, you constantly have to have that independence to know to check for your assignments online. And you have to buy textbooks...huge textbooks. And if you want to pass, you have to do it."
3	F	38	Hispanic/Wh	"It was this program in particular that you come here and you feel that...people actually care about whether or not you are doing well, and if you are going to finish."
4	F	20	White	Age and experience are her bounce back factor, she doesn't want to look back Age "It's just stepping stones. It's like stairs, you know, and each step is a year. And some of them are rickety and break out from under you, and some of them are nice and strong."
5	F	34	White	" My mom flat out told me she didn't like me. [Laughs] So, I mean, it's only changing now because I'm in college. And she says, "Oh, I'm not embarrassed of you any more," and that kind of thing. [Draws deep breath] Yeah, she's a winner [Laughs]. But that helped..."
7	F	35	White	"As a girl, you were in the house to do things. And homework wasn't necessarily preached. If you get the chores done... it was like homework was an option...because those things had to get done. That's how we lived. I worked to feed the farmhands, so you did big meals. And Grandma didn't do it alone."
16	F	23	Persian/W	"Junking... A lot of people do it. In the cities, they take scrap metal... what ever they find in dumpsters and all that, and they turn it in and they sell it. That way your truck and that they collect to scrap metal at the scrap yards." Mom passed away during last year.
18	F	19	Black	Family problems that caused her to drop out, but this student only said positive things about mother and nothing about father or any other family member. With dyslexia and focusing problems, she says that she was just off-track. Reported free lunch program - possibly low resources?
19	M	18	Black	Family issues are of great concern to this student, but he does not want to admit that they influence him. He does not appear to want a job at Ford and is unclear of a career path.
23	F	23	White	Very bright , articulate student with many interesting views. Trying to deal with many personal issues. Told of sharing all of the secrets with her grandmother who passed away soon after. Has fears about having a child due to concerns of SIDS an outcome of the serotonin deficiency
24	M	18	NatAm/W	Survey: average reading ability good grades when left in 9th grade
31	M	19	Black	"...[Laughs]. Like my dad told me, "If you want to join a gang, go join the world's largest gang! United States Military!"

ID	Gender	Age	Race	Other Notes
2	F	19	White	"You just got to push through and... I don't know. I just makes me sad, really. I wouldn't have quite if I didn't feel that I really had to, you know. If I wasn't going through what I was. I don't know...just need to get through life's struggles." Free & reduced lunch - low resources
3	F	38	Hisp/White	Free & reduced lunch - low resources in neighborhood skipped school often with friends that skipped. "I already was living in a disadvantaged area, so my choices were already limited. Of course at sixteen, you can't recognize that."
4	F	20	White	"I wasn't really involved in any extracurriculars or anything like that because we were really strapped for cash. We didn't have money to heat our house and it was cold in Michigan in the winter. You have to get woodstove."
5	F	34	White	"...a big thing on my self-confidence and how I was worth it. Often I didn't feel like I was worth it. You know. So going to therapy and rebuilding those blocks that I never had growing up...sexually abused by cousin at 4years." Had a younger sister they kept away from her.
7	F	35	White	"I mean it was just... I think that when you are that age, you are susceptible to what others are doing. making things look glamorous or not... okay my boyfriend, my brother dropped out, my friends weren't going to school. Very Normalized. It didn't seem like a big deal."
16	F	23	Persian/Wh	Free lunch & reduced lunch, homeless at 15 - living in the burned out drug raided house with a fireplace and some warm water; had to find ways to sustain themselves. Cousin was shot, house was raided for drugs and everyone at school knew it - did not want to go back.
18	F	19	Black	Free & reduced lunch - low resources in neighborhood, did not go to class, got way behind, no credits.
19	M	18	Black	Free & reduced lunch - low resources in neighborhood, did not go to class, got way behind, no credits.
23	F	23	White	Free & reduced lunch Fights in school, bullied, almost raped in pool in 9th grade Emotional concerns from manic bi-polar disorder. This student had been estranged from her family after they insisted on therapy, but were frustrated that she didn't cooperate.
24	M	18	NatAm/W	Free & reduced lunch- Disadvantaged neighborhood, "family had a reputation for violence." Had to mow lawns and take back bottles to sustain himself and grandmother.
31	M	19	Black	His father owned a trucking company and they lived in the suburbs, so the student was thankful that they had enough money for his health and education. Glad to be without some of the problems of living in urban areas.

Appendix J**Complete Ethnographic Interview Transcripts – 11 Subjects****Student Number Two**

Can you tell me about your educational experience from elementary school through high school? Just in general, what were your impressions?

You know, I only went to kindergarten for a few weeks. I have had like a lot of family issues, and so, like, my parents fighting. My dad abused my mom. My dad went to prison and we had to get up and move. And then like the next year, I still went to the first grade. I don't know why. But anyway...and um...schooling went really well, up until about seventh grade. I just...you know, like one day, my mom moved away while I was at school. I came home; there was no one home...not even joking you. And after that, it just went down hill. I moved in with my sister...in the seventh grade, I was like 13 or 14...I moved in with my 20 year old sister and her boyfriend. And I lived with them for four or five years. And you know, when you live with your sister, it's different than living with your parents because there's not like such strict rules...

That must have been really hard for you, though, to come home, and she left? Did you...

Well, you know, she just...she up and moved...just...I didn't know why she didn't say anything, she went back to my father who just got out of prison at the time. And he went to prison for beating her. Like, it didn't make sense to me. But, you know, and so I don't talk to her or my father much.

So do you think that she didn't want to put you in that situation?

I'm not...I'm not sure. Just...we've never really talked about it. I see her a couple of times a year.

So there's not really a connection there any more...

No.

No, so they are alcoholics and I choose...I have a young daughter. And she is not to put her around that. And I don't want to be around it, you know. And...

That's a lot of roadblocks, early.

Oh yeah. And especially like in middle school, I was living with my sister...this skipping school, you know, just having fun with my friends. And then high school...well, I got switched to a new school...to ##### High School. And it's really...

Still staying with your sister?

Yeah. And that was like my sophomore year. And it's difficult trying to make friends in high school, especially when you grew up in one town most of your life, you know.

Did you just say #####?

#####.

That's sort of rural, isn't it?

Yeah.

Um, yeah, and I went there and I did get bullied and had like one friend. I was there probably like four or five months. And then, I just completely quit school altogether in tenth grade.

That's one of my questions down here...when did you leave...tenth grade?

Yup.

So how about...so we will probably get into more details about that. But what were your experiences with learning to read and using that skill to learn other subjects?

You know, I've never had a problem with reading. I've always been really good at it. And I've actually enjoyed it. Well, besides the last couple of years, after I quit school, I just pretty much stopped reading altogether. Like I just picked up a book to read for fun for the first time in like a couple of months ago. So, enjoyed that. I'm good at reading. I'm excellent at writing.

Oh, that's good to know.

That's like my two strengths.

And then, you...how did you use those things for other subjects?

You know, mainly in this GED program, I read a lot from the book, and...because you know you really don't get all the one-on-one times. So you really do have to teach yourself a lot of it and read the book a lot. And I think it really helped me a lot, there. And it helped me in my jobs, too, definitely...I worked in a tire shop...seems weird, but, you know, and so I did like research about tires, because I didn't know anything about them...like the tire sizes...what the numbers mean, and...

Yeah, I don't know anything about them.

Yeah, I had to figure that out. And I guess reading helped me there. So my working and this program, and now in college.

Excellent! How connected were you with the people and the activities at your high school and your family at that time? So connected...like that engagement part?

Yeah, like I really...I skipped school a lot. I have like one really close friend. And she is pretty much the only person that I talk to. The only person that I hung out with. My sister and I had a bond. But none of my other siblings...I didn't have a bond with my parents or anything. So it was just pretty much my sister, my couple of friends that I had, my nephew.

And that's her son?

Mm-hmm. He was just an infant at the time.

And how about any teachers at school, or any clubs, or was there anything that you thought really, you know, "I'm gonna go because I don't want to miss this?"

No, I don't think so.

Could there have been anything that you could have wanted to see?

Um...actually, no, I...there was one class that I did take which was the one that I quit. I took an auto class. And I really enjoyed that...I met a couple of cool people in there. My teachers were pretty awesome. I was like one of the only girls in the class. But, yeah, I enjoyed that.

And what held your interests and motivated you to participate? Like you stayed until tenth grade. And so what did you do to motivate yourself to actually go?

I guess it's just no one in my family has actually graduated. And I...you know I didn't want to turn out like them. But at some point, I felt that I really didn't have a choice, because I didn't have the strict rules that I should have had...like all of the other students had, like you have to get up and go to school from their parents, you know. And, you know, I wish then that I would have more strict rules. And like someone that would of like made me go to school. But I'm still proud because I now have my GED. I am now in college, and no one else in my family has done that.

Ah! And did your sister...are you inspiring your sister?

Yeah. She is pregnant right now, but she is planning on going back to school this fall, which I am happy about that. But my other brother and my other sister, they're just...

They're younger?

No, they are older. I am the youngest of six.

Oh wow! Okay. Can you explain the circumstances of why you left school, and then it says, "When did you leave?" So it was tenth grade.

Yup. Um, Why I left because...you know because I skipped school a lot. And obviously, I was failing.

In credits, not enough credits?

Yup. Yup. And, you know, I think what really triggered that is I was always a sophomore and I was in a freshman class. It was a freshman science class and one of the boys spit in my water, and I was out of the room, going to the office or something. And I came back and another girl came up to me and told me that after I drank out of my water. She said, "He spit in it." And the kid was like calling me a little boy and everything, because I have short hair. And after that day, I never went back to school.

Wow!

You know, I...it just takes one person...

Was it a bully, do you think? Were you bullied?

Um, I would consider it bullying, but you know it happened just that one time. But...

So it was just that one?

Yeah.

So all of those other things just led up to it and this was the one person?

Yeah.

Did they tell you that he spit in your water?

Yeah. Another girl that I talked to in the class is the one that came up to me and told me.

Wow. And that was tenth grade. Was that like in the middle of tenth grade, or...

Yeah, I want to say that it was October or November. So really, it wasn't very long after it started.

Okay. So what were some of the difficulties and roadblocks that you overcame? So obviously, you had said your parents, you know...

Yeah, like not being forced to go to school. Not having that discipline. You know, not...I guess I didn't have the support of people to help me study and help me with the homework that I needed help on. And...you know, how to motivate me to study. So I can't do good. Yeah, I know a lot of students do have that. Their parents make them do their homework. And I never did homework. I never did any of that. Just because that I just wasn't forced to. I probably would have had a better way up, too, you know.

At the time, did you see that the school itself was a roadblock to you in your life? Or did you think it was something that you needed?

You know, I knew that I needed it, but I guess I didn't want it at the time because...you know, I'm a teenager. There's better things to do...more fun things to do than sit in school and learn stuff.

So in order for you to overcome the roadblocks of you leaving, right, so you left in tenth grade...

Yeah.

...so then what did you do?

Um...I got a job. I started working at a tire shop. And I picked up a second job when I was working at #####. And since then, I just been working. And in 2013, I got pregnant, had my daughter in 2014. And I didn't work any of that time that I was pregnant. And as soon as I had her like a month or two later, I got a job again, and now I have two jobs. I'm in college. I got my GED. I went back and started the classes for the GED and last October...she was born last January...so that was pretty exciting. And I didn't get my license until just about a year ago. I'll be 20 years old in like 18 days. But yeah, I got my license after I had my daughter.

Your driver's license?

Yeah. And that's what really helped me go back to school, because, you know, not having that family support, and...I didn't have anyone to take me anywhere. So I'm thankful for that. Because if I didn't have a license or a car, I couldn't have made it all the way out here. I have been all over an hour drive here every day.

Wow! Wow! That's amazing! So that's your decision to return to school was after your daughter...

My daughter, yeah.

Yeah. And then your driver's license.

Yep.

And then, did you see getting a GED as another step, or where is that going to lead you?

I thought that getting my GED would be like really the first step to the rest of my life, because I tried doing some online things to get diploma because everyone's told me like, "Oh no! You're cheating. It's not even comparable to a diploma. A diploma was better. But...

So what happened with that? You tried to go online and...

Yeah, I was going to do the K-12 schooling. And you know we got it all set up and I was going to start. And then, one day they called me and they told me like, "Look, it will take you a little over two years to complete this. But in a year, whenever you turn 20, you are going to age out. You can't finish it. So you will have to get your GED anyway."

Oh...

So I...they still wanted me to do the program for a year and I felt like that was a waste of my time. So I didn't do that. And that's when I decided to look into coming here. Because I've always wanted to come here, but it's just...without a car, it's a long, like, drive. And do you know how to get here three days a week...but...

Do they have anything closer to you?

No. No. I live out in #####. It's on the other side of ##### area. So...

So there's not really community colleges or anything. And this is a pretty big one, isn't it?

Yeah. This one is the closest. I mean, there's #####, but that is the same distance away in #####.

Okay.

And ##### Because I'm like in the middle of them all [Laughter].

That town is literally a gas station and a grocery store...

Wow...did you check out all three, then?

No, I didn't. Because I was actually recommended this one. I heard that...was it #####...no...it was either #####...I heard that they had a GED program. I went there to talk to their Principal, and he said like "No, that's not what we have. Like, "Check out #####." And he gave me the numbers up here and...So he's the one that really got me to look in to it.

So it looks like you really were pursuing this.

Yeah.

You really...for going after that...that's called "resilience." Bouncing back. Like, "Okay, what can I do next?" So you really went after it and pursued lots of different avenues in order to do this.

Yeah.

That's impressive!

Well, thank you!

It's really impressive...

It's been tough. But it's getting better every day, you know. Especially because...I cannot wait to get my life started with my daughter. And just, you know, be her support that I didn't have. I'm so excited!

That's wonderful that you get to be that...everything that you wanted for yourself...

Yeah.

...which is a wonderful feeling! Just great! So, how do reading, your interest, and your ability to stick with school affect you now?

Um...ask the question again...I'm sorry.

How do reading, your interest, and your ability to stick with school affect you now?

Well, you know, I think that reading does help a lot, because it is...now that I am in college classes, really you have to read to keep up. And, you know, you constantly have to have that independence to know to check for your assignments online. And you have to buy textbooks...huge text books. And if you want to pass, you have to do it.

So you have to be self-reliant. And you have to be able to figure the whole thing out.

Oh yeah.

So how about your interests? What are your interests now? What motivates you to drive an hour? What is it that you are connected to here?

You know...just giving my daughter a very good life. That's my number one, like, priority. And she's my number one motivation right now. And...you know, I have great teachers here. I love them. And the opportunity to have this job...I've been having all the help that I got from here. The ##### community...I just...I got so much help, and...you know, and I have never had that before. And I love all of the people that I have met here. They're so great!

Oh, that's wonderful to hear. I've been working with them for several years myself.

They're great!

They are! So what are your successes today? Did you say that you are a mentor?

Yup.

Okay, so you are one of the mentors as well. I am a mentor.

And you did get your GED already.

I got my GED. I am majoring in Business Management right now.

Is that an associates that you were going to get, in Business Management?

Yes. Yup. And then I do plan on transferring to ##### [intelligible] getting a bachelors. I might even move out of state. I don't know. My plans are just still up in the air.

But you are going to transfer to get your BA?

Yeah.

And probably in business?

Yup.

And is that affected because of some of the businesses that you had worked in? Did you get interested that way?

Yeah, you know, I worked at ##### and just...it made me like...probably because I realized...that I love coffee! And you know, I just...I always had like my own business ideas. And I really want to open up a coffee shop. I have some awesome ideas. And I know, like...I really can't talk about it much, because you are recording. And I don't want to hear...

Actually no one will hear. This recording is...is for me to type down. Because when I do research, I have to say like verbatim, like quote, "This person said..." like "I'm motivated for my daughter. So it doesn't say your name or anything.

Okay.

So no one is going to see this except me typing up my own notes. So no one will ever see this.

Well yeah, I just...I have...some good business ideas because I really believe that all the money right now is in medical marijuana. Because there's so many people that...you know that...

In #####?

I wouldn't say in #####. Just all over the country...the statistics say that 80 percent of Americans use it in some way. So I really believe that that is where the money is at right now. So you know I want to do something like...kind of combine that with a coffee shop. Like that's an Amsterdam style coffee shop. But there is going to be more to it.

Sounds really, really cool. So it says here, "What are your future plans?" You said you were going to make your coffee shop.

Yeah. Yeah.

And I was going to ask you if like, you know, if you could run the high school, what would tell them to do?

Well...if I could run the high school, what would I tell them to do? I never thought about that. I guess...find ways to get the kids more like...active in like, discussions, and group stuff. Because, you know, you didn't have...you know, the expenses. My family grew up with no money. And you have to pay all this much to join Girl Scouts. You've got to do this and this. And there's a lot of families that can't afford that. That's a way to get kids like more participant, and make friends. Because with friends, like being social...it's weird to be at school.

So groups should be more accessible to everyone, no matter if they...

Yeah.

...they have the money to join or not.

Yeah.

If you could say...you could tell students who are thinking about dropping out or coming back...

What would I say to them?

Yes. If you could tell them something, what would you say?

Um...well, don't drop out! I really...I dropped out...I guess I didn't drop out, but I quit. And I was out of school for like five years. About five years, and I think that it was one of the biggest mistakes that I have ever made. Yeah, my life's circumstances...I really...it was hard, but getting the motivation to go back is what is even harder. And actually sticking to it. And, you know, with persistence, and...You can do it! You just got to push through and...I don't know. I just makes me sad, really. I wouldn't have quite if I didn't feel that I really had to, you know. If I wasn't going through what I was. I don't know...just need to get through life's struggles and...

Were you 16 when you quit?

I was 15 or...almost 15. Let me think. I quit in 2010. So yeah, I was 15.

What's the difference between quitting and dropping out?

Well dropping out, you know you actually...you sign the papers. You are not going back to high school. Quitting...you just don't show up any more.

Oh.

Because to legally drop out, you have to like fill out forms, and actually drop out of high school. And you cannot go back to high school.

Oh, I see. Okay. And so that's why you really thought there were some ways that you could do it online...

Yeah.

...and so forth. So because of that...just by not going.

Yeah.

And so was the credits. And you were going to try to get the credits...

Yeah.

...to finish the diploma. Okay. That makes sense, because I know that sometimes they say like "pushed out" or "dropped out." Like the school gives you a paper and says, "Okay, you are not coming any more because you skipped too much, or you don't have enough credits. But there's a difference you are telling me that is...

Yeah.

...if you decide just not to go, do they inquire? Do they send you a letter?

You know, I never got a letter...I thought that they did, and they usually bring in like...what's it called...like whenever you have missed a lot of days of school, like even when you are younger, they will...like they can take you to court.

Like a truant officer or something?

Yeah, kind of. Like usually, they'll send you like papers and your parents can get like in trouble for it.

Oh yeah.

But, you know, I never got any of those papers. I never...the school never tried contacting me or anything.

Did they ever work with your sister? Was she your legal guardian, then?

She was my legal guardian. And I don't think that they ever got a hold of her, either, or anything, like...because I never heard of them getting a hold of her if they did. And we never got in trouble with...she could have gotten in a lot of trouble for me just not going.

Because I think that the law is 16, in #####?

I think so.

That's what I was wondering, too. Okay, Wow! You have overcome so many roadblocks, and congratulations on your daughter! That's so exciting!

Thank you!

What's her name?

Her name is #####.

Oh, what a nice name! That won't go on here, either. But that's really wonderful. And it seems that you have a wonderful... Oh, you have a picture?

Yes...I have tons of pictures of her. I got her Easter picture...That's her in her Easter dress!

[Sharing pictures]

Oh, wow! She's beautiful! Really really beautiful! And if there's ever a motivator, that sure is.

It sure is!

And that's so wonderful for you to see that, you know, not to...you know, sometimes people say...

They see their child as a roadblock. I know people that do that, like "Oh, I can't go to school...I got a kid."

And you are celebrating her, not as a roadblock, but a motivator!...

Yeah.

And to have your own fresh new beginning. And make your own history with your own daughter! That's just a wonderful, wonderful thing.

Thank you for sharing your story!

Student Number Three

Tell me about your educational experience, elementary through high school

School was usually pretty easy for me, most of the time. It became a little more challenging for me in middle school. Elementary school was pretty easy for me. I had a lot of teachers that I liked. I didn't actually make it to high school. I dropped out in the eighth grade. I had a lot of kids that would...especially in eighth grade...girls who bullied me every day...made me not want to come to school. And I really didn't take school that seriously. I didn't think it was really that important. At the time, I thought, "Oh, I have plenty of time." And of course, as I got older, I realized that I didn't have plenty of time. And there were plenty of times that I dropped out. And, after dropping out of middle school, there were plenty of times that I joined the GED program and then dropped out again, because of whatever excuse. And that was mostly because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to do it. I would fail.

So from that, you're feeling that you set yourself up in a pattern?

Yeah, definitely.

Was that really pulling you down?

The fear that I would fail? Yeah, and I was really ashamed throughout my life...not having my GED or any kind of education, because I had been friends who were really intelligent, so I would try to hide it...so that no one would know.

What were your experiences with learning to read and using that skill to learn other subjects?

Learning to read? I don't really remember learning to read. I always read well since kindergarten, and I always enjoyed reading. So, does it help you...to learn other subjects? Sure. If you understand, you can comprehend what you are reading. Even in math, it helps.

So at that point, that wasn't a big factor for you?

No. Literacy has never been an issue for me.

How connected were you with the activities with people at school and your family?

With my family, we've always been pretty connected, though mine would work a lot and were going through a divorce. With school, there was a brief time I was in glee club, and I probably felt connected, then. But other than that, not really. I had friends outside school. And, like I said, I had these three girls that were constantly bullying me throughout 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. So I tried to spend as little time at school as I could.

So your outside friends, do you think, influenced you? Do you think they...

Oh yeah, they were a terrible influence on me.

And so did they drop out?

Mm-Hmm [yes].

So do feel like because you were hanging out with them that value...

I think that I just didn't value education at that moment of my life. I don't know that they would have had any impact on that at all, really. We all just wanted to skip school and hang out instead of going to school.

What held your interest and motivated you to participate?

In school?

Yeah. Like when you were in school...

Like I said, the glee club, that was...teachers that take an interest in you. When a teacher takes an interest in you, suddenly, you feel like you have more value, and you want to try harder.

Was there a certain subject teacher that you liked?

I had an English teacher that she...took an interest in me and some other students. And we enjoyed...we were on a school newspaper for a while.

And how did that come to an end? Because of the bullying?

Yeah, I think it was too much. Those girls just ridiculous. An no matter how many times I talked to a counselor about it, they didn't stop. And then when I finally dropped out of school, they said, "Oh, we want to be your friend...we're sorry that you dropped out of school." And I was like, "No, you don't." [Laughs]

So the lack of response, you think, mostly from counselors, not necessarily from teachers?

Well, they tried, but they can only do so much. They can't really protect you outside of school...

So then, during school and like before and after school, there was a lot of that going on?

Yeah.

Can you explain the circumstances...why you left school and when did you leave?

In the 8th grade I was 16, and the school dropped me. They said, "You're not coming...you're sixteen years old...we're done." That was the #####.

Lack of attendance, then?

Yup.

And how did you feel about that?

I had mixed feelings at the time. I thought, "Well, at least I don't have to go to school any more." But the at the same time, I could see that my parents were very disappointed. They had a lot of dreams for me that they thought wouldn't come true now.

Like lack of choices?

Mm-Hmm...And I already was living in a disadvantaged area, so my choices were already limited. Of course at sixteen, you can't recognize that.

Did your parents graduate from high school?

Yes...well, my mother did; my father got his GED. And I didn't find that out until well after I got mine. He went to Vietnam. He was a marine, and got his GED. And they both went on to college.

Oh, that's excellent...OK...So what were the difficulties or roadblocks that you overcame?

Like, how did you overcome this bullying issue, for yourself? How did you...

Well, I just stopped going to school.

OK, so like, location, basically, right?

So they weren't there any more. And they left me alone, after I dropped out.

Were they in your neighborhood?

Yeah. And then we moved. My mom and dad split up and we moved to a different neighborhood in the same city. Um, we lived in #####

And you felt that...How did you feel about the idea that some other people impacted your life so much?

I was angry with them. I felt they didn't care about whether or not I got an education. They just cared about teasing me...bullying me. And at the time, I didn't think that it was that important...to actually finish school. I would enroll in a program just to appease my mother and then I would just not go.

So, another GED program?

Mm-Hmm. And then I eventually, you know, would really work just not great jobs...waitress, or dishwasher, or something like that. But everything always came easy to me. I really didn't think that I needed it...an education.

That's really interesting that you felt that you were smart enough to handle things without the credential. OK. So can you describe how you made the decision to return to school?

A friend of mine...I used to work for #####. I was a clerk there. And it's a family business. And when their father died, they split their business. She took ##### and he took the #####. And she needed someone to manage her store. She was the owner and I was the manager. So she knew I didn't have my GED, but that didn't matter because I worked for her for years, and she knew that I was capable, and she gave me that chance. And we were in business, and I was the manager, bookkeeper, and buyer for four years. And then the economy and the fact that they can buy their music on line...we ended up going out of business. After that, I'd had a job that paid much better than other jobs, and I had the experience of knowing that I was more valuable than in some job that wasn't going anywhere. And so that's when I decided that...since I had unemployment at the time, I could go back to school. And that's when I ended up here.

So when you looked at it, did you feel that the credential was the way that you could go farther?

Yeah.

Did you think it was really a roadblock itself by not having it?

Yeah. It was a roadblock to further education and to self-confidence. Because, like I said, I was always hiding for the years that I didn't have my GED or a high school diploma...because I didn't want people to know. But then when I finally did, now, I'm proud to say that I have my GED. And it wasn't difficult for me to do, either...the whole fear that I wouldn't do well was completely unfounded...because I passed with no problem in one semester with high honors.

Excellent...excellent! That must have been really something wonderful...

It really is...it was one of the best moments of my life...aside from giving birth to my son. It was definitely one of the best moments of my life. And I spoke at graduation and shared that. It was not just, um, that I was ready, it was this program in particular that you come here and you feel that...people actually care about whether or not you are doing well, and if you are going to finish; whereas I was a public schools student and had teachers that would tell me "if you don't learn it, it's okay, I still get paid. So leaving that atmosphere, and then coming to one where people would actually do care...and you have someone who sticks by you. And they have. I went on to become a mentor, and work-study, and now I work for the program. And it's something I can do that I believe in.

That's wonderful!

And I feel passionate about it. And I can tell other students that if they think they can't do it, they definitely can.

So you can understand why I'm looking at it as...this is to free you up...to do whatever you want to do...You have the confidence and you know that if you can conquer that, you can do anything else.

That's excellent. How do reading, your interests, and your ability to stick with school affect you now?

Well, reading, like I said, has never been an issue for me – I enjoy reading...sometimes, when I'm having class, I wish I could read for recreation. You're stuck with a lot of textbooks. I enjoy learning. I love learning new things, and going to classes, I took the civil war history class, because I wanted to learn more about it. I feel like there are a lot of gaps in my education because I dropped out in the 8th grade. So there are things that I missed out on that I would have got in high school that I didn't...So it makes me want to learn more.

And plus your ability to stick with school now...does it come easier? Because you have conquered that?

Yeah, well, I'm an honor student here, and that makes a big difference to me... to keep that going.

Does that give you more choices in your life?

Yeah.

What are some of the successes in your life today, that you have already said that you are a mentor...you graduated with honors...

Yup. And I'm an honor student currently. I'm about to graduate...

And what's your degree going to be?

Liberal Arts...and then since I have been a full time employee here at the college, I get free tuition, so I'm going to pursue a Business Administration degree.

Nice!

...an associates degree so before I move on to a university, I can take with free tuition.

And so is it an associates degree in liberal arts, the first one?

Yeah.

Excellent! And so what are your future plans?

I would like to continue to work with the adult learners. It's been very fulfilling for me. I don't know what capacity that would be, but it's definitely something that I feel passionately about.

Excellent! And is there anything else that you would like to share...that you think your message to people that have dropped out...to have them come back? What message would you give those people?

That you really just have to work hard, and do anything; and it's never too late. I'm almost forty, so...I have a lot of fifty year olds that will call and say, "Is it weird that I'm fifty?" And I say "No, it's definitely not."

Well, you are very optimistic!

[Laughs]. Probably helps me a lot, too!

Yes! Well, thank you so much. It's been really interesting talking to you...you have so much insight and sometimes I wonder...do you think people have more of a perspective of age on that whole issue of high school? Do you think that really changes your opinion about it?

Yup. Yeah, definitely. Because when you are that age and you aren't really interested...My son is a high school student, currently. He's not doing so great. And I keep telling him it's so important that I, you know, our program is great, but I don't want him to get his GED. I want him to finish and go to college. And not have to work in jobs that you really hate forever before he finally gets to the point where, you know...I could have...I had focus and applied myself, I could have been so much more by now. You know. I try not to look back and think about that. I try to move on to my future. But there have been times in my life where I'd say, "Gosh, I could have graduated high school in my twenties...or college in my twenties! I'd be somewhere else in my life by now."

So do you think that your experience, rather than regretting it, actually gives you the power and the knowledge to help your son?

Yeah. I'm just hoping that he listens to me. [Laughter] You know he's fourteen [laughter] You know I say if I could have some way of motivating GED students to finish, I could figure out how to motivate him, too.

Yeah. And that's kind of what I am looking for...what is it that people...what would have made a difference for you during that time? Having someone step in and take care of the bullies?

Maybe my parents not working so much and they would be there...there were a few times when they weren't there. But they had to work. When you are a kid, you don't necessarily understand that. I mean the definitely wanted me to finish school, and I never felt like I came from a dumb family, or anything like...pretty intelligent. You know, they were busy.

So whose responsibility was it to take care of the bullies?

I would say that it was the school's responsibility to take care of them.

And, did you report it to the school?

Yeah.

And they...

They tried their best. But, I mean, you know, you can only complain so much and then it just gets worse, right? Yeah.

So, are you noticing that there are a lot of programs now about bullies in school?

I haven't had a lot of experience with it now that I am an adult and my son doesn't have any issues. So I don't really know what they have available for kids in school for...

They actually have more now than they have ever had before. They are actually noticing that.

And I do know that kids get bullied a lot in a lot more sophisticated ways these days. Like online and stuff like that, and children will kill themselves over it...things like that and it's really sad. I'm just thankful that my son doesn't have to deal with that.

Yeah. Yeah. So it looks like you are steering him through all these different things.

Yeah. Well he is...he deals with that on his own. He is a good kid, and he is popular all by himself. He doesn't need me to help him with that.

Do you think that...or you said that the school pushed you out. Do you think that the age of sixteen...having students know that they can drop out at sixteen in ####...do you think that it has any effect on...

I think it's a bad idea, because then students might be close to sixteen and decide that they are going to stop trying.

Okay. And you didn't think that made much difference to you?

I was close to sixteen. And, you know, eventually, I could just drop out.

So was it...they told you not to come? Or at the same point, maybe, "Forget you?" or...

I was ready to drop out, but they dropped me before I dropped out.

Okay...

And then I talked to my father about it...he was very disappointed. Of course now he's not...but then he was!

Yeah. Yeah. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it...

Student Number Four

Hello!

Hi. I'm going to ask you some more questions about how you felt about leaving School and coming back and literacy, engagement, resilience. Can you tell me about your educational experience from elementary school to high school?

What happened, a lot of times, was I had to transfer to a few different schools but they wouldn't take the credit from those schools because they were in different counties. So they would make me into a freshman if I was a senior. And in elementary and middle school, they had been suspecting that I had a learning disability, but they didn't catch it until the second semester of my senior year. So that could've helped a lot. And of course I had a lot of problems. I didn't learn how to read through the school...I learned to read through my mother because the school was so ineffective at teaching me how to read that they wanted to put me in a special class but then my mother taught me and they wanted to skip me ahead two grades. So I stayed in the same grade obviously, but it was often ineffective. They're not really...don't really care about you. That's what I don't get in every school. They don't really care about you.

So it's really interesting because the next question I was going to ask last how did you learn to read and do you think that skill really effective of the things that you did?

I think learning how to read affected everything that I did. I learn how to read somewhat late and the same time that I learned how to tell time, actually, because they weren't teaching me that either. If I had to read as well as I am able to, probably would not be here right now. I would not have needed to take the GED test in the first place, because I can't imagine growing older and not being able to read well. It's really painful. It's really hard. For most people, math is difficult for them. So it must be extraordinarily horrible to not know how to read well, because the feeling you get when you can't understand a question or a problem, or no one is really helping you, or tell you how to help you... or anything. Multiply that by 10 and it's really shameful. I've known people who were almost illiterate, because they were very dyslexic and stuff. And they didn't want to fill out job applications or resumes because they felt embarrassed, like by their own handwriting and everything... that you could tell that they weren't a very good reader by their handwriting... they felt like everyone could see it because of something that we use often.

So do you credit your mom with teaching you to read?

Yeah.

So after she taught you how to read during elementary and middle school did she support you with study skills, helping with homework, how does it work

She couldn't much. She's a single mom who had two kids. My older sister got in trouble a lot when I was in middle and elementary school just because teenagers. And she had to work a lot she is a nurse, so, I mean, she had to be altered to be able to earn for us in the first place. It's not

like deciding between “I want a promotion” or “if I want to go to my kid’s recital,”...it’s you have to go to work to support because it was to afford the recital in the first place. So I wasn’t really involved in any extracurriculars or anything like that because we were really strapped for cash. We didn’t have money to heat our house and it was cold in ##### in the winter. You have to get a woodstove.

How connected were you with the activities at school and your family? So it’s about the engagement part... how connected do you feel to people? What is it that made you go to school in the first place, because it looks like you got all the way to your senior year.

Yeah. Going to school was really difficult for me and I started skipping, as I was getting older because it was so frustrating and, you know, kind of painful. I mean I had teachers that were being really awful to me in the class in front of everybody, like... as if they got off on humiliating kids, you know. Like that was their fun time. A couple of them were extremely unqualified. A couple of high schools we had some standards that are just bad, you know. There was one teacher I had who, when I was a junior, I had a friend who was in the special part... but it was just because he had a lateral lisp. The teacher...the math teacher...she would hit the special ed. kids. And it was distracting in the first place, you know, I’m easily distracted to begin with. And it was awful, like the whole class was like, “Why are they so mean to him?” Like she wouldn’t hit him back hand or punch him, but she would like grab them, yanked them around, kind of; and be like “No, get out!” You know, like (I just tipped the chair a little bit), like that, but she swatted then and only then because she knew they were easy victims in her eyes. But it ended because one of the students had some kind of high function autism. But he just had a hard time, you know, not raising his hand too fast, and like “Oh!” He wouldn’t blurt anything but he was just excited. They would pull him into the hallway and yell at him. And all that, and he had some bruises where his arms were held so hard when they grabbed him, and everything, and he came home and his mom saw them and thought, “was a ticket on the bus, you know, huh? Why don’t you tell me?” It took a long time for her to get it out of him... “My teacher, Miss (God, I don’t know, I’m not gonna...). So she actually came in there and yelled at her, the teacher cried, kind of showing off who she really is, because...she became a teacher because she really didn’t want to leave school because it was kind of like the prime of her life, and she was really...um... a mean girls kind of way.

Wow!

Yeah. She told me to give up on life twice in class. I

The teacher said, “give up on life?”

Yeah. She told me to doodle an exam because I wasn’t going to make it.

What grade was that?

The first time, I was a freshman. So I was 14. And the second time I was a junior.

Same teacher?

Yeah. Same teacher.

Oh, gosh!

And then, I remember a counselor screaming at me while I cried in the bathroom, because things are so hard I couldn't make it. I just walked out of the class started crying in the bathroom. The counselor came in and started yelling at me. "What are you doing? What do you want to do with your life? Suck it up!" She used more graphic language than that.

Wow! So you really don't think that you were connected to your school at all?

I have some friends.

Okay. Did you have any...you said no extracurriculars, so there wasn't any club...

Well, I worked backstage briefly on some drama productions. But then our budget got cut severely because they wanted to have a new football field.

Hmm! Wow! And as far as connecting to your family, how about your sister, your mom... do you feel connected to them? Was it...

Now...

Then at the time...it was difficult?

Yeah, it's difficult with any teenager. It's difficult with anybody. Especially when it's like... you're struggling hard, and then you just feel like you got a problem, you know. Nobody has time for this, to begin with.

So you had mentioned that you... and your senior year, they found that you had a learning disability.

Uh-huh.

Can you talk a little bit about that?

Yeah. I have adult ADD, and ADHD, as well. And it's really amazing that they didn't catch it sooner, in my opinion, because I remember where one time in biology, I was laying on the desk pretending to be singing Ya-di-la-di Ya-di-loo, like that. And I had asked to borrow a piece of paper earlier from a friend, and she was like, "here's your paper." And I was like [unintelligible], like that. And I was doing... I sent back down, or something... I don't know. I had a really difficult time focusing at all. I had a lot of friends, though.

What helped your interest and motivated you to participate at all?

To participate at all? In high school?

In high school.

Nothing. Except one teacher who was really cool. She let me borrow Mystery Theater 3000 and she was a history teacher. I like her a lot because I like history and a good reading so that helped with that a lot too and she was down to earth and did not like the other teachers and stuff. She was like, "I'm the only one qualified to be in here, to be honest." You know. She was cool. I liked her.

Did you think that your own reading ability improved because you read more...

Yeah.

Did improve because I read more personally, because before, I mean, it was just what I saw and felt... not... what I could see in my mind when I read. And it helped me to understand a lot of things a lot more. Like, I hear people talk about history because history is one of my favorite subjects. And they don't know who Rasputin was. You know, they don't know what Hitler's goal was...you know, or where he was from. They...some people, like, "How many people died in the Holocaust, again?" And I was like, "Three million." And they're like, "Really? I thought it was only like thousands, like 911 or something!" like that. And it was kind of difficult to hear them talk because...they don't know what Vietnam was...or a lot of really basic things. And they change it for each school. Some schools don't learn about Russia, they learned about China. Some schools don't learn about China at all.

Good point.

And that could really affect you as a person. Especially when it's like, "Oh, we don't have to learn this part of the textbook, but I'm going to read it anyways." It's actually interesting... for the help book, or whatever.

So your interest in history really made you read more, did you think?

Mm-hmm. I'd say that, exactly, yeah.

So that's really great to hear. Can you explain the circumstances of why you left school and when did you leave?

I don't remember exactly when I left because up to that point I started skipping so much because I couldn't stand to be there. I'm not sure.

Did you get a letter that says you, or you are done, or did you just stop going, or...

I just stopped going, and ended up signing up for the GED program instead because there was a period of time when I got bitten by the brown recluse spider. And it made me really sick and I could not afford to go to the doctor at the time. And...

How did you know that it was the brown recluse spider?

Because I saw them in my house and when you know that it's...you know it's the brown recluse. Nothing takes a chunk out of you like that.

Wow, that's scary!

Yeah, I almost died. I actually felt like I was about my body for a minute like that I was not inside it. And I didn't want to go inside. It was painful. You know.

Yeah. So did this happen in your senior year?

Uh huh.

So you feel like if you had to say when you left, it would've been your senior year?

Senior year, yeah.

Okay. And the circumstances, group you were in-you just skipped and then you...?

Stop going altogether and then I just didn't want to go. And I got too sick to go.

And then you got sick. Did you...at the time did you think...like what were the difficulties and roadblocks are you overcame? Did you think that being sick was roadblock at that time?

That was a roadblock. Pretty much my life at the time was a roadblock. I didn't have much of anybody or anything. And I didn't have much hope either. I mean if you're told that you're not good for so long you believe it. That was a class-conditioning kind of thing.

You're very smart.

Thank you. [Long pause.] I didn't know it.

So at that point, how did you decide that you were worth it? How did you get hope?

I didn't, really. Ah...I didn't feel that it was of thing of, "I'm worth it or not." I didn't really have any self-worth. I was just working, and it was hard. And I already had a fund for college that I'd been saving up for a long time because I always wanted to go to college. I knew I had to take my GED because I knew I wasn't going to go back to high school. And this was the first time that I could ask questions and not be called stupid.

So, can you describe how you made the decision to return to school? So...you had to make that decision for yourself. How did you to that?

I thought about it and I really didn't want to go back to high school, because that wasn't a good education, and it would take me way too long. I'd still be in high school right now...because of how they messed up my credits. And I felt like a GED would help me because...if I'm able to get into a college with a GED, then that's what I need. And so I took the class and that was before the standards change. So, I got to take it and I finished it after like two weeks, and took my test and got to walk with the class before me.

So that's before the new test came out?

Uh-huh, before the new test.

Oh, Okay.

The class, literally, like, directly before that.

Wow...wow!

Yeah.

So the reason that you returned to get the GED was specifically to go to college?

It was to go to college and to stop being ridiculed by this person that was living with us at the time, too. She was ah...well, she was a sociopath.

This is a boarder...a relative?

A semi-relative. She's like my fifth cousin. She's sixty and refused to get a job and stuff. She even tried to manipulate my mother and me against each other. And tried to break me up with my boyfriend, who I'm still with. Just tried to cause a lot of issues and stuff because she was bored with her own life. I kind of looked at that and said, "I never want to be like that, ever. I want to have a job. I want to have an education. I don't want to be like this scum-bag that's trying to ridicule me."

So, sort of a reverse role model.

Sort of.

So how long was that person in your family unit?

About a year.

Okay...

She just wouldn't move out.

So, that just sort of...along the way, things were troubled...Mom was absent working, and you were missing school but realizing that it was an important part of what you needed for the future.

Yeah. But I knew I wasn't getting it at that school.

And so did you know about GED programs?

Yeah. At school – they actually had so many dropouts and pregnancies, they had to talk about the GED in health class. If you get pregnant, which I've never been pregnant, but rather than teaching just abstinence, only.

So, its interesting that the GED is only talked about in health class?

Yeah, only briefly, though. You had the option of look it up yourself, you know, if you wanted to, or not.

How do reading, you interests, and your ability to stick with school affect you now?

Very well. I'm able to stick with school now, and I also got treatment for my learning disorder at the same time. And reading is such a basic part of life, I can't imaging living without it.

Your interests...how do your interests right now...in other words, engagement...what are you connected to now that...like we talked about before when you said you didn't feel connected much in high school...but do you feel like that makes a difference now? Do you feel connected to people or to your GED program...

Yeah, absolutely. I feel connected to the program. I feel connected to anything else, like I actually gave a couple of speeches at the board of commerce. And that's how I landed this job, because I started doing speeches regularly, there. And promoting this program got us a grant. It was in the paper but I didn't...

So you were helpful in getting that grant.

It was in the paper, but I didn't let them use my name, you know, because I don't like that.

And I think that you are very self-analytical, knowing how all of these pieces are coming together. You can take sort of an activist role in doing speeches so that other people will be able to get grants...will be able to participate in communities. And that goes beyond yourself. How did you do it?"

Through blood, sweat, and tears.

That's perfect.

I just made it through, clenching my teeth the whole time that I made it through.

And that's what I want to know. How...what is it...

Literal...blood, sweat, and tears!

Literal...so the successes in your life today are speech, are you...do you have associates? Are you working on that?

I'm going to college right now. I have two jobs. One's working here, and one's working at another place. And I'm taking a couple of classes right now. I'm registering for my summer...spring/summer, whatever, today. And...oh yeah, I got all A's on everything. And I've been invited to join an honors society sorority. And I'm going to do that as soon as I have the money. Because it's a \$90 one time fee. And the deadline is April 19th. But I'll have my ninety dollars by next week.

Is that Phi Kappa Phi?

Mm-hmm.

Excellent! That's excellent! So your associates degree, that you are working on right now...

Liberal arts transfer.

Liberal arts transfer, okay...And then you are going to transfer to another school to get a BA?

Mm-hmm.

Sounds like it's obvious from what you have been telling me. It sounds like you have definite plans? What are your definite plans?

Well, ah, at first, it was gonna be going to #####, but my mom actually told me "You know, you don't have to go to #####." And I'm thinking that she wants me to go to a crappier school, or something. And she goes, "With your grades, you could probably go #####, you know. So, it might be #####.

Excellent! Mom is supporting you! And they have a transfer at ## from here...

I think so.

...which would also boost your confidence...

Yeah.

...which would be a wonderful thing! What is your area, do you think...you really liked history, right? Are you...what kind of a job prospect are you thinking of?

To be honest, I've really been into carpentry, and film. Because I'm only into carpentry because I've always been having to do with what I've got. And film, I've always like because...that's an escape for when things are too overwhelming or bad. And I really didn't have anything other than that to escape to. So...but looking at things now, it might be something like criminal justice or whatever the world's going to [unintelligible] so that I can pick and choose. Because I'd be good at a lot of things, or at least the [unintelligible] tests like that.

It sounds like it! Yeah, it sound like it...

Maybe a lobbyist...I don't know.

How about...you are good at giving speeches.

Yeah!

So if you were going to give a speech, what would you say to people to have them come back and overcome their roadblocks? What would you say?

I wouldn't give them any of that played-out, you know, "Just believe in yourself!" kind of stuff right there, because that's all that was shoved down my throat. What I would tell them is, "Listen, I know it's hard, and I know it hurts, and that you are sacrificing so much. But believe me, it does get better. And if you don't, then chances are, you are probably going to end up like...[sighs]...one of the people that I see from before I got my GED who is drinking, you know, shots of vodka at eleven o'clock in the morning...an ounce, they say like "I'm down for drinking an ounce if you are." And I'm like, "No, I'm not." And they are thirty years old, still living with your parents...can't make do for themselves. If you want independence and, you know, the world [unintelligible], then you've got to strive for it and you've got to do it.

So that it gets better. Would you say that it is worth it...

It gets better. Yeah, it gets better. And It's hard to hear something like, "You're worth it," because most of the time, you don't believe it any more.

So how would you convince someone that they are worth it?

By showing them that they are worth it. Showing them what they've done. Showing what they've worked hard for. And that they are even taking the initiative to start this is...

...to ask questions about it?

Yeah. Showing it like...they're not there to be judged for their past. They are there to build their future.

And do think that's what you put in your speeches? That kind of realism?

Yeah. Realism. Because I guess I'm a realist. But I feel like it's not crude to be real with people. It's refreshing. Because nobody wants to be talked to like a little kid.

But certainly different than the counselor that said, "Suck it up!"

Yeah. Much different. Much different. That's not realism. That's just crude. That's just crass. You know. That's brash and obnoxious. Realism is telling someone, "I know it's been hard, and I can understand...I can relate to you with that. But you've got to understand that if I could do it, [then repeats in a different voice] if I could do it, you can too!"

So it's with empathy.

Yeah. You can be realistic and have empathy. Like, stop thinking about necessarily just your way and being very bull-headed about it. And try to think about what this person may have been through. So what these people may have been through and that...

Overcoming roadblocks...

Yeah, overcoming these roadblocks and stuff is different for everybody because everybody's roadblocks are different. And some may seem minute and some may seem impossible, but in the end, it's just that – a roadblock. And you overcome it and you keep going down the path that you want to go down.

Which makes a huge difference...?

You have a choice.

And that's why breaking free from some of the old stuff made a difference for you?

Yeah.

So you see a big difference between a high school education and GED...?

Oh...God!

...or college or community college education?

Yeah.

So what would you say to people who are running high schools?

Who are running high schools...the thing is...I'm not a superintendent or a teacher or a principal, necessarily. I'm just a mentor. But, one thing that you *gotta stop doing* is the rudimentary rules...like you can't write in pen. "I can't accept your homework," therefore...a lot of those made my grades go...just plummeted.

So not the traditional structure of doing what teachers tell you to do?

Some kids need to do what they are told to do. But if you are running a school and everything, don't get angry at these kids and start yelling at them...or, you know, stop caring about your job, and everything. And if you have a violent student, then reprimand them, but [sighs],...other than that, take a second to think about this and what it's like to be a student. I know it's hard to be a teacher...Oh my God...but to be a student, you are surrounded by thirty people who hate you every day in each class. It might be thirty people who love you...it might be thirty people who hate you, but either way, there is a lot of pressure and...to pressure these kids, you know. Too much or to just not care about them at all, there needs to be a little bit of...there needs to be a little less of extremism on both sides...where you either are pressuring them extremely, or just don't care if they live or die.

Oh, that's powerful.

It needs to be. More personal and smaller classes...things like that.

Do you make a distinction between the teachers and the counselors?

The teachers and the counselors? What was the question?

Do you make a distinction between the two?

Yeah, because the counselors, they usually work one on one with each student every time they come in. It's not like there is going to be a group of people, you know, thirty people in front of the counselor...

Well, other than that one that said that to you, were there others that were helpful?

There were a few that were helpful. Mostly at the college. I had one counselor that was helpful, but she kind of wanted to just get you in and out, which I guess is what you are supposed to do as a counselor, but she wasn't really there for a lot of emotional availability, like when my friends died, and stuff.

And that happened during school?

Yeah, I got the message during school...that my best friend died in a car accident. And it was really upsetting because I was like, "What?" and it was "Yup, that sucks, yo!" Like that. And I didn't believe it, and I got up from where I was sitting and I went onto the computer without asking permissions or anything, and looked it up. And I had just driven by her house the night before...

Were you a junior at the time?

I was a senior. And I had just driven by her house the night before and saw her boyfriend's car leave the driveway. And then I went down the other way, the highway, and she went the other

way. And the next day, I saw that car wrapped around a tree. It happened within ten minutes after I had left.

Hmm...

I only drove by her house. And...she got bullied a lot. They um...nobody ever treated her very well.

So there were a lot of issues at your school that affected a lot of people?

Well, I dealt with a lot of grief. I dealt with a lot of death. I was near death, ah...experiences myself. I dealt with having to move. I dealt with a lot of devastation. Things...I can't even list them. And...

And how did you feel about being at this point here in your life, after all of that?

A lot better. Seems a lot easier. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. I don't know if it really makes you strong, but I think it makes you less sensitive.

What about the perspective of age?

The perspective of age? Well, when you are young, everything is really epic, because you haven't experienced anything yet. But I feel like even with age, I think I experienced a bit more than most in my teenage and younger years and stuff.

So at this age that you are now, do you think you feel that you've got sort of a more resources to handle things? So when you are looking back, looking at school, if you were close, would have it been a benefit to try and stick it out and to stay? Or do you think you made the right sources in the way things played out?

I don't bother looking back at it like that because either way, it's not gonna change what has or what is. So I don't think that I should spend time squabbling to myself you know, "What if...what if...because...yeah, what if? Nothing. It didn't happen that way.

So your perspective of age is that "Okay, this was one section of my life. Now I'm in a new section?"

Yeah. It's just stepping stones. It's like stairs, you know, and each step is a year. And some of them are rickety and break out from under you, and some of them are nice and strong.

So you know now, though, that you are capable, and that you can overcome roadblocks, and that you can be successful.

Yeah.

You know, because, do you anticipate other roadblocks in your life...

I imagine there are going to be some! It's not like it's always going to be smooth sailing!

Right!

It's just what you need and you get what you need.

So do you see that resilience in yourself, that, you know whatever is coming along, I can handle it? Because I already did?

Kind of. I think of it more in the terms of like the things we fear the most have already happened to us. "I don't want to get an F." I don't want those spiders in my house. No, I kind of feel like if you got your car broken into once, then you are probably going to lock it a lot more, and you are going to be more paranoid about it than somebody who has never been carjacked.

So your experience protects you? Makes you make different choices in order to...

Yeah.

...keep going to avoid more roadblocks.

Exactly. To avoid conflict.

Excellent. I really enjoyed talking to you. You are very self-aware...

Thank you!

...and you are very perceptive. I really appreciate your contribution to helping me figure out all about how people bounce back...using literacy and their connections to people.

Well, connections to people, um, friends change. I don't have the same friends I had when I took the program, you know, like two years ago.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

It's a good thing. Some of them are whatever. Like they are not necessarily my best friends, or we had falling outs.

Were there any people making different choices or not?

They were making different choices, a lot of them.

Were you with a crowd of people that didn't want to graduate, or...

I knew a couple of people that did. Actually, after taking my GED, I got my friend to take his. You know?

Excellent! Helped...

Helped out a few people that way. And I feel like maybe I can be a kind of example of sorts. But one that's real and not a poster, because I feel like a lot of the times, people are like, "Oh, you need to be an example, or so and so needs to be an example," and it's like...they're not real, though. They are fake. Fake people. If you show someone who really is down to earth, and can relate to you on a level where it's like "Yeah, we're both people. I'm not an image. I am a person."

Mm-hmm.

Then that is a lot more useful. And they will be taken a lot more seriously than people who...

So they can relate...

Yeah. So you can relate. So you can let your guard down. You know? Because I mean after like a lot of the stuff that's happened to me and everything, it's like I have my guard up around some people because I know that a lot of people just don't understand. Some won't be able to...can't fathom it. And things like that. And I know there's like a million kids coming to these classes who feel the same way I did, where it's like... "You wouldn't understand."

I just wanted to say thank you so very much! I don't want to take any more of your time. I just truly appreciate what you just shared and everything. It is, of course, confidential...

Student Number Five

Can you call me about your educational experiences from elementary school through high school?

Elementary school was easy. I never really had any problems learning, per se, but getting to high school, I went to a really poor high school, and then they merged schools. And there were not enough books, and like all the bad kids went to our school. It was guns being brought in. We didn't have any electives, not enough seats. It was just like party all the time. It's like nothing ever going on. It was really hard to learn and I have a hard time sitting for eight hours. I was listening to lectures...it didn't work for me. So those two things combined and I have not really had a good home life and the support wasn't there and I became homeless, and I started working. School was not important at that time. And they didn't feel like they could do anything for me. That's kind of how that went.

The high school was in #####?

No, #####.

What was your experience with learning to read and using that skill to learn other subjects?

Reading was easy for me to learn. In grammar school, I got A's up in the fifth grade. And then after that, that's when things really started to change. I had no problem...when I want to learn something back then you know we had encyclopedias...we really didn't have Internet... I had encyclopedias and I would look them up and I still would do the same thing if I didn't know about...go read about it. So I really didn't have much of a problem doing that.

And you feel like you learned early in elementary school?

Yeah I think that is what saved me...that early instruction and development and I wouldn't be able to come back around like I decided to come back to college so I think that played a big role because I didn't have to start from scratch. I was advanced in the sense of like comprehension.

And for other subjects as well...

Mm-Hmm.

Other subjects, math?

Math? No! It's not quite reading. That's another whole language that is not easy for me. We did not have good math classes early on, I remember. Our second grade teacher never taught us Math. Then I went into third grade and I was already behind. That's probably played a role.

Okay. You thought that reading was pretty important.

Yeah.

And it laid sort of a foundation for you.

Yeah. I would...if I had to break it down, I would say how I learned to read well and comprehend at an early age, it would be much more difficult for me .

Okay, so that certainly was a strength for you.

Yeah.

Great. How connected were you to the activities with people at school and your family?

There were no activities in school, I mean, it was like football. It was like football or cheerleading. I wasn't interested in that, either. Home when you weren't that close. There was a lot of arguing. It was very broken. So...and we were forced to do certain family events and to, you know, like church...something like that. But, there wasn't many things for me to do.

Okay. So you so you didn't feel connected to your school or your family at that time?

No, not at all.

Okay. Then any of the people at school...teachers, anybody that...

There's a few teachers that I liked a lot. I liked...they taught to me the interesting...but the school system was really bad. They didn't have the books half of the time, or seats and...the teachers were more like trying to settle students down versus teaching. There wasn't a lot of learning.

That must have been really hard for you.

Yeah. I mean that's why I said that there is no point in going.

What did hold your interest and motivate you to participate? Was there anything that you found worthwhile?

Just any friendships that I made...if someone was involved in something, you know, I felt more inclined to stick around and do something.

Can you explain the circumstances of why you left school and when did you leave?

I left in the 11th grade. I knew I would be staying back again because I didn't have enough attendance, and I just stopped doing the work. I didn't really like it there. I was battling some emotional problems, as well, and it just wasn't on the top of my list to even care about. I didn't think that they could help me.

So there is no useful outcome.

Yeah. In my eyes at that time it was none.

Okay. So you left in the 11th grade and was it lack of attendance or lack of credits?

Mm-Hmm.

So you would say that it was your decision to go?

Yeah. Basically. My mom signed off on it. She didn't really seem to care too much about it.

Was that disappointing to you?

Now it is. Then, I don't think I really cared what she thought. But now, I'm like, "why would she just let me do that?" You know, but I think she just didn't see... like I wasn't going anywhere. It was pointless. And I just want to work anyway.

And so did your parents graduate from high school?

Yeah. They did.

Okay. So did that affect you graduating?

We didn't have a good relationship. We didn't talk about things like that, you know.

And do you have any siblings as well?

I have a sister. Yeah. She graduated on time.

Okay so what were some of the difficulties and roadblocks that you overcame yourself?

I think I was just feeling like I deserved that, you know. Growing up in a community that was poor...there's really not a support system for it...they don't ever tell you that you can do it, you know. I didn't think that I could...I wasn't worth it, and so having the self-confidence to do that, you know, really...it was really hard. It took lots of therapy [laughs] to go through, and build myself up, and get over any other, like, emotional issues that I had to deal with.

Do you think that the emotional issues were a big factor for you just dropping out?

Yeah. I mean I could go into more detail if you want...

I don't want you to be disturbed in any way.

No, no, no...

I was just curious as to how you viewed it, did you resent your sister going on and when you had your troubles?

Not my sister. Well let me give you a kind of back-story so that you can understand. I was born with a lot of health defects. I had open-heart surgery at a young age. And shortly after that, I was sexually abused by my cousin at four.

Oh....

So, in a way... and my sister is about four years younger than me...so in a way I felt like they were trying again with my sister.

So they were trying not to make the same mistakes.

Yeah.

Did they know about this, the abuse?...

Yeah.

Did they protect you or say anything to stand up for you?

They did...I remember being uncomfortable...my mom doesn't...we don't talk about sex...sort of like old...you don't talk about relationships, but it was very uncomfortable. I remember a lot of court and...talking by strangers...

You said it was your cousin or your uncle?

My cousin. He was 10 years older than me. So I was subjected to a bunch of negative feelings very early. And my parents never knew how to support that, which I really don't blame them for, because...who is prepared for that? But I kind of also felt like they just kind of pushed me aside. They didn't let my sister and I be friends. They separated us.

Oh, that's interesting. Why do you think?

My mom flat out told me she didn't like me. [Laughs] so, I mean, it's only changing now because I'm in college. And she says, "Oh, I'm not embarrassed of you any more," and that kind of thing. [Draws deep breath.] Yeah, she's a winner [Laughs]. But that helped...a big thing on my self-confidence and how I was worth it. Often I didn't feel like I was worth it. You know. So going to therapy and rebuilding those blocks that I never had growing up...

And you had access to therapy and you felt good to be there?

That was as an adult, just before I started working here. I mean I've been in therapy in and out my whole life. I guess when you don't have a reason to go and don't mind it's really not worth it. When you have like a goal, like to fix this, and you know what to work on and do you have that

conviction to do so. But it only took years and years of trying and find my own path. Before, what I was doing wasn't working so I know I have to get back in school, I have to re-evaluate everything, and do what I want to do; because it's like in a circle...it's going nowhere, so... to

So you felt that you were worth it?

Yeah, after a while. I mean I hit rock-bottom I was like suicidal, and "okay, am I going to die, or change?"

Wow!

And it came to like making that decision.

I'm glad you picked that one.

Yeah [laughs].

My gosh! So, then, can you describe the decision... I guess you just kind of did...the decision to return to school...

You know I was working and I wanted to do animal rescue.

Oh!

And though you can do that without a degree, you will not get paid for it. It's volunteer. So being able to do quick like, you know, surgery on animals or know the environment you're in, like having a zoology degree will make a huge difference in what kind of job I can get. I kept running into these jobs [volunteer] and jobs like a pet sitter, which is nice, but it doesn't pay that great, and you know I wanted to advance more than pet sitting.

Oh, that's excellent! And how do reading, your interests, and your ability to stick with school affect you now?

Oh, I'm a completely different person. Like if you're going to talk to me 10 years ago, I wouldn't have been talking to anyone; and... because I didn't know. I didn't know what I was capable of, and me moving out here helped too. It was kind of a culture shock.

So you moved from ##### on your own?

Yeah. I just got away from everything. I mean I still talk to my mom and I have a good relationship with my dad and sister now, but I knew that where I was in a bad city I was going nowhere. And I was... you know I just didn't resonate with that.

Why did you pick #####?

It was like throwing a dart. You know it was...I just kind of talked with these people and this was the first place that I found an apartment and a job and I was like "Alright, then let's go!" I just went and I think that it's because this community is buildup around schooling. And it's like in my face here. It's like, "Oh, I can do this, you know." There's a lot of support systems here for that.

I like that! "I can do this."

Because there's no support system back home. I'm not really in that neighborhood, so I don't care, you know. It's just kind of like less barren. So seeing that there are different levels that could actually start from what I do, and there was, like, support, you know...I tried a different program before this one. It was free and it was like, "here's a book, and read... the test is in like three weeks." And I'm like..."I haven't been to school in like 15 years" [laughs]. "I really don't know what I'm doing." So talking to everyone *here* to have like guidelines, you know there's someone you can talk to, to help teach you what you need...really I didn't think that I was going to be able to do it in four months. Everything the first time. So I'm like, "I'm smarter than I thought it was!" So within two weeks I was enrolled in college and I'm working here. It's really good.

And so what are some of the successes in your life today?

Well, getting my GED is a huge one. It's been one of the biggest steppingstones that branches you to be able to do other things. Finishing my third... actually graduating my therapy session. So those two things combined really just kind of shocked me in... it's like I'm going full force, now.

And did you say you are a mentor as well?

Mm-Hmm...

For the GED program?

Yeah.

Excellent! And are you full-time, then? Are you full-time working for ###?

No it's a work-study program, where you only do a certain amount of hours, whatever the financial aid allows. So what's part-time now.

Okay excellent! And what are your future plans? You said something about zoology.

I plan on transferring to ####, and taking zoology courses there. So I can do wildlife rehabilitation.

So today have a program? Did you look it up?

They have zoology. I have it printed out. I have all the classes that I need. I have everything planned.

Is that for a bachelors?

Yeah.

A bachelors in zoology!

Yeah.

That sounds so nice!

I am so excited! [laughs]

And so when might that happen?

Well, it would probably be about two years because I'm getting part-time classes so that I can work.

So you will get your associates here first?

Mm-Hmm.

And what would your associates be in?

Liberal arts...

And that just transfers over to get that BA?

Mm-hmm, Yeah.

And you already checked that it matches with #####?

Yeah. Mm-Hmm. I have a folder in the other room. It has like everything.

...all your plans and everything!

Yeah.

That's wonderful. That's truly wonderful. I just...the idea that you overcame so many things of the idea that you believe in yourself...

I think that's actually a big thing for everybody I think...thinking that you can't do it, because you can. So, you know...

You can do it. But how did you do it?...You think the number one thing is...?

You have to want nothing else. You have to want...I was working and coming here and I don't have a car. It was during winter. I came in ice. Came in negative 12 degrees weather. I have snow pants. Like, I... if you want it, you have to want it. Like...

And what would you say to people who have difficulties what would you say that to get them to come back?

You know it's really a hard thing because they need to find it in themselves. And I don't mind being that person to help them find that because I know what that is like. But they have to want it. And have someone talk to you I hope you realize that it is possible and maybe you don't have a car right here...this is what I did...or maybe you don't have any bus money let me show you the resources I have. I think a lot of them don't think that there are people who are willing to help them - and accept the help because it's okay.

To accept help...

That was a big problem for me too. I didn't want to accept anything. "Oh, I can do it!" No, I can't do it myself. So...

That's wonderful! So thank you so much! I really appreciate you sharing your story!

I appreciate you too!

It's an amazing wonderful story!

...I don't mind being an advocate... it sometimes takes hitting rock bottom to make a decision unfortunately. But if there's something you can do to prevent that, it would be really good.

You have any ideas about preventing it?

Yeah, I mean it's really hard to do. People have to look for help...you know what I mean? I mean you just can't be like "Oh you need help," and then like no I don't need any help, you know? By making it more aware of like the services and different paths that people can take might make it easier for them if they are searching on the Internet, different things that you can do. Not everyone wants government help, but you know there's like ##### that will help you. I mean, is just need to be able to open up and talk to people.

That's wonderful! Thank you so much!

You're welcome! Good luck with everything!

Thank you!

Student Number 7

The first question I'm asking is can you tell me about your educational experiences elementary school through high school?

I enjoyed school only third grade which is when my father...I learned my father's addiction problem. That was the first time I was charged for truancy. I missed probably 68 days and it was because I thought that I could control what my dad did...if I didn't go to school like he would not be able to use if I stayed home... You have to take care of me, so I would say I was sick. He would then have to be there to take care of me, which was not the result of what ended up happening but I thought that I had control of it. Then after missing so much school I would go back and be so far behind that then I would not want to be there. And I would say I was sick again and my parents would let me stay home...

And that's your middle school, maybe?

That was through fifth grade really badly. I was charged with truancy in both third and fifth grade so that I was dealing with that.

Was that done through the court system?

Yeah. That was one of the first times that I had an advocate and her name was ##### in the system. And I still remember her to this day because of that. Again in school, they never had red flagged me for anything even though I miss the days they didn't talk to us, really, in school. I never remember a meeting with the social worker or a principal or a counselor. I just really remember clearly they must have had conversations with my parents about me missing school. And then it was I remember an incident the police actually came and wanted to talk to me...

Was that 5th grade?

I was in 5th grade. And they took me to the police department, and were trying go and tell me about how I would get in trouble if I didn't go to school. I believe it was like a scare factor. And I was like, "Okay, I'll go." And at that, point I mean I was really far behind and I had a really awesome teacher in fourth grade and didn't miss barely any school in fourth grade. And then the fact that they didn't catch either... Now I look back I'm like, "Wow I don't remember third grade." I missed a crap load of days, but because of my supportive teacher in fourth grade I went to school. And that, again, was never red flagged, either. And I remember her, and I looked her up on Facebook and she's not there...[laughter]. But they took me to the police department and they told me you know...I was charged if I didn't go, and I had parents who didn't make me go. And if I said I was sick...if I missed the bus they wouldn't take me in.

And you said your dad had an addiction? What about your mom?

My dad had an addiction. But my mom, basically, was an enabler. She eventually started to use...later.

What is it that they used?

My dad shot up cocaine and then started to use heroine, and then now, he's just a crack cocaine addict. And so my mom is actually currently stopped using...she had a brain tumor removed in 2007 and that was when she decided to not use anymore. So she has the mentality of a 12 to 15 year old at this point. And my dad takes care of her, supposedly, but she always worked part-time jobs. And because lived on a farm as well. My grandfather was very controlling over my dad even as where he did a lot of work on the farm. And I feel like a lot of my dad's issues, now that I look back at them from a social work perspective, I think that I can say to you why he has issues. But I thought that I could stop those from happening. And when I dealt with the police, I tried to...and again I was very protective of my parents. I never ever spoke with their addiction while I was going through the court system.

And you sound forgiving now...

I think it becomes to a point where you have to forgive, or it hurts you. And my dad had a stroke in 2009...2010, actually. And they weren't sure he was going to make it. And I had to forgive him at that point because I couldn't let him die. I couldn't hold bad I couldn't have that for myself. He did stay sober for nine months which is amazing to me, but unfortunately he did go back to using. He did go back, which I suppose...

...some victory,...

Some, I suppose, but yeah, so we can only do we can do and I can't control that. I've learned over years and years that I have no control over anybody but myself. And so I just now have to separate myself from them when I know he's using.

Which maybe that's what that question was about [on the survey]

Yes.

...that it is what you're doing if you can't change it, to stop worrying about it or at least protect yourself from hurting any more.

Yes. Yes. And I mean that I still worry about it.

[unintelligible] protect you?

Yes, and how the impacts had on my children.

Do they have a relationship with you?

No. Not a grandparent relationship, which is sad for me because their dad's parents passed away very young, so they don't have grandparents involved in their life. And for me, that's been difficult when my grandma passed away 93, because she was very instrumental in family that

was her grandmother figure to them because my parents just...and it's not their fault. I mean it's not. They're better grandparents than they were parents. But that still doesn't allow what everything they did to be okay.

Yeah. Yeah. So as you got to...so you were actually working on the farm too?

We had to do, like I was saying, we were in house. As a girl, you were in the house to do things. And homework wasn't necessarily preached. If you get the chores done inside the house it was like homework was an option that you'd do afterword, because those things had to get done. That's how we lived. And you also worked to feed the farmhands, so you did big meals. And Grandma didn't do it alone. this is, so this was...by the time I was even born, my grandma was in her 60s

Oh!

Yeah, because she had my dad when she was in her 40s. Yeah, so she was like 41 when she had my dad.

How many kids did she have?

Three. But my dad was bad. You see that I look back and that they were ready for the retirement was at that point. And then they had this new baby and it changed things. And when got to be 10, they shipped him off to boarding school, even though they never did that with the older two.

Oh!

And so my aunt was already having a kid when my dad was in boarding school. And so you know, his sister was already having kids...and he was like 12. And so his whole life was just...I mean...

Not expected?

Yeah...kind of...from my social work perspective, it seemed like he was always pushed off to other aspects. And he was never loved. Like the people he got attention from were the people at the military school. When he came back from military school got a lot of trouble because he was trying to get attention. He was trying to be noticed. And yearning for that. And they were already going to Florida for, you know, their winters. And they were...but they also had great values that I feel like I mean it wasn't necessarily all of them...because you know my aunt and my uncle were very different than my dad. And my grandparents they were very strict with us. Like when I came into the household but I can imagine my dad doing some things he did because there was no way I would get away with those. So now it's hard for me to look back and I try to, like, break it all down, and sometimes I just think I have to let that aspect of it go, because they've passed. And so I can't have this blame, or keep pondering on. And I know that he regrets so many things and choices that he made over the last 20 years with his parents. And the addiction, and what that did to his parents...so that's been interesting. But we were

required...I mean like both me and my brother both had our chores on the farm had to get done as we lived 4 miles from my grandparents

Were the farms merged? Or...

My grandfather had the main Farm, and we were just at the house down the road. It was like we actually worked the farm that they worked on. And so my dad would be...and at his lowest points, we would actually stay with my grandparents for weeks at a time...just because there were times when there wouldn't food in the house...there would be no electricity, and we had issues like that. So my grandpa #####, and you wouldn't want this to get out at all. But this is your family. It was very protective. And so they would pick up the slack of that and that was...until, like, I got until about third-grade and that's what I thought that I can try to stop it more because I didn't like being bustled around. And it was hard to go to this family.

And this is a lot of strength on your part at third-grade to make a decision to do something for your dad and for people to label it as a little kid not wanting to go?

Yeah.

You must have been really resentful for people not to recognize...

Yeah, but I didn't realize it was like that. I mean I think now I look back I don't get it or don't understand why I never disclosed anything. I mean they told us clearly like they did give us the scare factors, like everything you know if you tell people that you could be put into foster care, and I did hate them for that because I had to go to therapy for a year because of the court. And so I would sit in therapy for a year...

And not tell?

And not tell. And so I would do these other...

In retrospect, do you think that if you had just said something, something might have changed?

You know, so coming from, now, a social worker to the bad aspects of what can happen and how to give ruin family. But I also see the benefits of sometimes what it could do. But knowing my dad's addiction problem, had we been taken away...would have been able to sober him up? I don't know.

Because if you said something, they would've taken court action...

Most likely, most likely.

So you still had to protect...the family unit.

Yes. And as a kid, you don't want to be the one that ruins anything you're anything because I get love them. It was never that I didn't love them and you know about horrible things that do

happen as individuals. I wasn't being beaten and I wasn't being raped. And if I needed to be fed, I could go to my grandparents. So I didn't feel like I had horrible...I just felt like I needed to stop him because I knew what happened when he did get high. And I didn't know. You know, that he did feel sick afterward and so it's...If I'm here, it's me. And that's something too, because if I have something in between it, it's like I have these great memories of them where I was such a tomboy and I did all these farm activities with them and so there's these other aspects of...it's hard to get some of the memories out. But it's a balance of who I have become. And it helps me in the social work field where if I deal with somebody from substance abuse, I don't automatically assume that there're no good lazy individual and if they don't have the greatest heart and if they don't want to stop because I do know that that's not the factual but if it's disease - substance-abuse is a disease. And it's very, very hard to stop it's not like some of the other ones where you can take a pill and it just goes away or you know alcoholism you can still live without I mean, you know, drinking. But you have passed all of these stores, and those are constant triggers. It's in most people's households. When you go out with individual...it's a trigger. And an even though my dad wouldn't...he doesn't call it drinking, those things to him...it's like a social thing to him. He's very...he doesn't see it to the point where that even still like after all these years that's why if I would've said something back and I'm not sure it would have made a big difference.

So, he does it with a group...still...

Well, his social viewing is...that's how he started and...and that's what it was. And people would drink at home, right, people can go home and have a drink and nobody says anything to them.

So that's the rationale for...

Yes, Yes.

Oh, okay.

I can come home and do this, and that's fine. I even as a kid sometimes you don't realize how bad it is. And I didn't think it was that bad until DARE actually came into the school that I realized the fact that it was this shameful horrible thing and then those are also conflicting things too. because you're coming into the school telling the kids like DARE and dare to stay off drugs and you know anybody on drugs and they're showing it vision the people on drugs.

And even the outcomes?

Yeah. And you're like, "well that's not what I see though, that's not my experience. I think that that again

[a cell phone beeps, and there is a pause in the discussion]

And so how did that involved into high school? So you are older now, and have more perspective with age and then now you're looking at maybe ninth grade? Did you have credits enough to be in ninth grade?

I, while in fifth grade, because I went through that whole court system and they had me get back in. So the deal they would move me to sixth grade if I showed up for so many days, because they were trying to flunk me and I had big issues with that. I already was struggling, I already was labeled and I didn't want to continue that. I didn't want to not go on with my friends...I actually did like the whole "I didn't graduate the fifth grade..." Remember how where you were at #####, and you didn't graduate the fifth grade. So they wouldn't let me graduate to fifth grade but they passed me on to the sixth-grade. And then in sixth grade, I did okay and probably missed more days than I should have. But I didn't get in trouble because I wasn't missing that many days because I knew. In seventh grade, I started to like school because I had a different Group of friends. And so I turned to basically with what they would say "with the burnout group..." is that you were considering in middle school...

That's friends? Seventh grade friends were...?

Right. It was like my seventh and eighth grade year pretty much spent hanging out and attending school with them and I mean you're not necessarily looking great grades but I wasn't feeling out of anything.

Were your friends getting grades, or...

You know, I was I was probably doing better than a lot of...I when my friends would like go to special classes for the extra reading help, or educational...not so it wasn't special education... but when they would pull you out to go do something with somebody. Not like they would call like a para-pro, or whatever. So some of them did have that, but I really think that I was just, I mean, just bringing a lot of us on the same average we just...we would get by. We didn't put a lot into it either. Like I wasn't going home and doing extra homework. I would just do what I needed to do. Because I did realize what was going to happen if I didn't attend at that point.

So you were looking as if you were going to graduate?

Well I was in middle school at that point, and that's what people do, right? You go to school and you graduate. I never thought that my life would be like...even the truants never thought that would be what it was so when I to go through that experience and realized, "wow, I can get in trouble for not going to school. I don't want to do that again." So, in seventh and eighth grade I started hanging out with...when I was in the eighth grade I actually started to drink with all my friends. I was definitely not the only one.

Like, during school hours?

Yeah, actually so...one time, ##### had found a bottle of orange juice and vodka in my locker and I was in trouble for that. And that's when it started again. So, in eighth grade I started in trouble and ##### was not at all helpful.

Was he a counselor?

No, it was #####. He was the middle school principal. Our assistant principal was Mr. #####...and that's who you met with. You never met with the principal. And so there was like several times when he would like give us in-school detention. Me and four of my friends in detention at the same time. Like, "Come on, really?"

So it was like for breakfast club, or something?

Yes, seriously, and so it was their conference room in the old middle school office...

Okay...

And that's where it was. And they separated you. Like there was each of you at each end of the table and the middle of the table; like you still weren't going to be in there...and so it just continue to spiral like that like I was getting in small troubles, like I was "Seriously?" I'm not even doing anything wrong. I'm coming to school now and now this is a big deal.

And did you feel like you can handle it because your dad could handle his stuff...Did you feel any of that?

You know, really, I thought that a lot of it was at that point that I was getting away from my parents and so we lived far in the country like going towards ##### actually stayed, so they wouldn't bring us to ##### with our friends and so I literally almost lived with one of my friends at her parents in #####. So they literally let us stay there. It wasn't positive. They let us drink alcohol all day. We would go to the village party store and people would buy us anything that we wanted.

And so instead of an escape, living with a friend, and...

It wasn't an escape. But it was not necessarily a positive...I mean there were things that were positive outlook it...that I would not change. And I still actually speak to them all...that particular family. And I had an older boyfriend. My boyfriend was already in high school. And so there were some incidents with him where her mom protected me very much from that situation and so I went back and just told them, "That's my boyfriend! Don't run him off." And now I look back and think "Thank God that you did those things for me." So I can't say it was a negative and a positive that definitely gave me a different view of life, because they did struggle as well. She was a single mom struggling to take care of her kids am so... again not having the drug use that was in my house... the alcoholism in this house not seen didn't seem to be problematic to me, because I mean like, she was passing out in the shower.

What you thought was socially acceptable at the time?

Yes, like to me it seems like her mom went to work on a daily basis and paid the bills and was taking care of her kids on her own. And that was very respectable and their house is clean and

she let us hang out they. An so for me it was... like for my parents, we didn't have friends over. I didn't invite people to my house. They didn't take me places. So it was...when you were home with that environment, that's what it was. And it might have, like he worked at Ford, and that's what protected him for so long. Because they were unionized, so he was very able to hide his addiction but then when he was missing so many days, he got technically fired and the union fought for his job back. So when I saw my dad get high and then not be able to function the next day...that's where I would do... like her mom get a little trashed, and talk shit with us as teenagers and then go to bed and get up and go to work, though. It did didn't keep her from being able to do her job. And so we would just get up and go to school too, and that's what we did! And then it was learning to walk away from the school. And there was a dead-end, right across from the middle school! And we would...we were able to mosey right over there. And there would be some pot over there. And guess what... after you've smoked a little bit of pot, you don't want to go back into the school. Send you mosey up to #####. Then you find somebody's house to go hang out at! And then I did end up successfully finishing from eighth grade. With probably low, low scores. But so then in my freshman year, was absolutely hard as well. I barely went. I was on the teetering of being charged again. But that also was when something was kind of saying you should go to the alternative school. That's where the alternative program cut put in. And that is when I just kind of slipped out.

Did you go to that?

I did not want to. No, I thought really hard to not go there.

#####

No, it wasn't #####. They did it out of the ##### school. The alternative program that they wanted you to come to. But at that point, all the people were in the alternative program were like really from my aspect, like bad individuals. Like they were...“I didn't put myself with them! Are you serious?” Like no... I wasn't committing crimes. I didn't need to be there. And so then again I always hung out with older people.

So in ninth grade, when you said you weren't going to the alternative school, what did they say?

It became like that when you met with your guidance counselor and you go back and forth about what you are going to do. So they gave me that last chance thing. So I wasn't going to have enough credits, but they would've placed me as a sophomore. But I would've had to take the summer classes. So I qualified as a 10th-grader. And then I went to the summer program. I never went back for my 10th grade year. But I was labeled a 10th-grader on paper. And that was again because I had so many better things to do than go to school at that point.

And did you get a job at that point?

Oh yeah. I had always worked. I started working at the hardware store and ##### when I was 14... again because my parents didn't spend money on us. So you wanted school clothes, or you wanted anything extra, that's why worked at the hardware store...where ##### was. On #####. And it was ##### Hardware. I started working at the ##### part-time as well, because each

place would only hire you only for so much. And then I stayed with my friends at #####. And that's while I was staying with them.

Then you could manage to get...

Yes I could walk back and forth because we were right behind ##### so you could walk up to the woods, actually. And at that point it was the first time that I started the lying, because they couldn't know that you had two different jobs. Because as a teenager, you could only work so many hours. And I was only 15 at that point. So I had to work around the two...and I would just lie. I was saying, "No I'm not working anywhere else. I was just working here." Then when I turned 16, I met my kids' father. And he was 28. So he was 12 years older than me. And he worked at the #####. He had an apartment, and I totally saw that as my way out... and a totally different atmosphere, at a totally different community. He was African American, and I totally was just out. I was ready to go. I needed something new. Then that's where my life just went up. I had kids, and I found a job, and I became A manager at a #####. I worked for them for 10 years, and...

And so you marry him?

No. No... we did not marry. But all three of my children...

So you didn't have benefits from...

Well no, no...

And so you still had to work.

And so I had my youngest... my two oldest, I mean, my parents insurance...because I was a teenager. And then she worked for the University. And I did the affidavit of parentship, so he signed the birth certificates. But we were never married, or did he have custody. Though, because that was just to protect them. If you did that through St. Joe, you can do that.

Oh...

But it also kept him from easily being able to insure them. So my parents have them as riders [on insurance] until I turned 20. And that I had to get off from their insurance. And that they were going to keep them as riders, that became that refund money. And then the argument with that, like we were going to claim, but we keep the refund. And so I would claim [unintelligible] "and screw that." And then they were on state insurance with me working. And then that's when he walked. His mom got really sick and she had bone cancer. So it was actually between my first one and my second one. You were 14 months apart so she actually passed away between the births of the two of them.

Oh...

And so their dad actually started using during that point. And he lost his job at the #####. And then, I mean he always worked. Like cooking jobs and odd jobs. He always had self-esteem so we could live, and I was always working too. And then it did become, "I'm working and you are making just as much money as me. You should be paying for just as much as I am." And then we ended up splitting up. Because I figured if I am paying for everything anyway, what is the point of this?" On top of I'm not going to deal with the same shit. My kids are not going to see the same shit that I saw. So that was a big thing for me as well. And then he decided...he did get clean. And we decided to try to get back together, which was like two years later. And we always had a decent relationship. So we are able to maintain friends, because when you are with someone from 16 for a long time...

What was your first child born?

When I was 18.

So you will be a grandmother!

Well hopefully not [laughter]. I'm actually...oldest said she was not having any kids as of right now. And then my middle one, she's going to law school. And she has time to do that, right? That's what's happening right now. And then my youngest one...Lord knows, she's in everything and everywhere. And so we will see. I'm hoping at least that I can make it to fifty [laughter]...considering I told them they had to be thirty to date [laughter].

Oh good! [Laughter.]

Yeah, you know, thirty is a good dating age! So you are fine until then. Then so I had my second one fourteen months later. And then, like I said, we broke up. And then I was living in ##### in an apartment with them. And he always was involved in their lives. And then we got back together for a while and that's when I got pregnant with my eight year old. And in between this, obviously, it was...so I had decided I needed to do something and I worked at #####. And I was going to go back, that's what I went to the ##### not the ##### program, but the #####...

That...

Yes and you know it was in the back of their school with a door that said, like "GED," and it was a classroom.

I know where that is.

Yes! And I was just...I didn't feel comfortable there at all. I didn't think it was going to be anything but "come in, and if you want to do your homework here..." and those were my memories of school. And so when I was behind in school no one was like "Hey, I come in for extra time. You came in. I don't know if you know some of the teachers...Mr. #####, he was the marketing teacher. And I was...

No, I don't...

He is also my cousin. And so he had this reputation of, he had the marketing room that looked out into the parking lot. And so when we would be sneaking out into the parking lot, he would climb out the window and try to chase us down. So then he would be calling my aunt and my grandparents. So that was the other like thing. So I was like, "Screw it, if you are going to find out about all of the horrible things I did to school, I'm just not even going to go." So that also left to like me leaving. I forgot about that!

Wow!

So when you are telling the story you start remembering.

It does!

"Oh yeah, we used to climb out the window and end up chase after us." And we would like, "Go! Go!"

Do you see him now? To he see how successful you are?

Again, since he is from that family that wants to hold on to who I was when I was 16, I really don't go around that much since my grandma passed. We don't do any family Christmas. No Family Easter. We used to, for years. We would all get together. Not necessarily that they would even talk to me, some of them would. It was very... we would like to do it at the UAW hall. And it would be like my aunt's family would be at this table my family would be at this table. So even though we were there, the family still set as families at the tables, which... we were there for my grandma, which we came for. We were all in the room. We were able to get the picture taken altogether for her. And the memories from my kids...and my eight years old, she was so attached to her before she passed that...but just those memories. So she got to have like my grandmother to meet her great grandchild and just spent quality time and have sleepovers with her. Like that's something that you can just never replace. My eight year old was like, "I just wish grandmother was here. I just met grandmother one time. Don't you wish you could go see grandma one more time." "I sure do." "And you know you can always talk to her though." And so you know we do have that.

And then so you...so one of the things, just to go back a little bit...I wanted to ask you as was reading teacher, what were your experiences you had with learning to read and using that skill to learn other subjects? Do you remember when you learned how to read? How did it affect you even, deciding to go to class? Was that a struggle?

Yeah. I mean I always loved reading, I think, which was always...because I was ever bad in school, like they would always say, "If you show up, you do well." It's just when you don't show up, you are missing all of that stuff. So I mean like you are not moving on. So I can like the books that we read and how they went like the Bear's Balloons... I still remember those! And how it was such a cool thing because when you're finished *this* one, you got to be in *this* group and you got to read *this* book. Am you wanted to finish...and I see it in my

daughter, too, she's crushing those little leaflet books now that you get. She is like crushing through them so she can get to the next one. And it is so funny, like they get to mark charts. And you know it's all about those stars on the chart. But they... actually enter school when they read the book, they have to use a Chrome Pad, and they have to answer questions about the book that are for comprehension, to make sure that they are not like flying...

She must be an accelerated reader "AR?"

She is. And so she has to answer the questions she has to make sure she is getting the [unintelligible] and she is having cause and effect issues, actually. She is working on how to get that better. So that was like the lowest thing she grades for, it was like cause and effect she was still having issues with that.

Used real life examples...

[long discussion about cause and effect, and how to teach to this issue]

You know, I always read. And I always loved to read. Even those years when I was out of school like I never felt inferior or stupid like I know and that's the word A lot of students will use when they are just like, "I just felt stupid." I never had...like I never got why it took me so long I would come back to the thinking that I would feel all of the time the last one was I know the large one. I was so afraid that if I went ##### the test and paid \$150 for the test that I wouldn't go back again. Because it's just discouraging.

It's like Abraham Lincoln...

Yes!

...losing eight times.

Why would you keep going back! Why? And so I was. Not that I didn't ever try to tell myself that I can do that. Never did I try the pretest. To tell myself that I would do that. And I had... and so my mom's sister...my mom is the oldest of her family, separate from my dad; my mom is the age...well they are the same age, but because my grandparents started with her young, and she's the oldest, like her youngest sister is the age of my dad's niece. So I guess that makes sense. So they both graduated in 85...it was my aunt and my cousin...so I got, was the difference. She was 12 when I was born. And she is like one of my absolute best friend. She was a teenager and really couldn't do anything...once I was 16, 17, she was the one that kind of stepped in and was the parenting role, and...when I was 16 she wouldn't let me be in her wedding because it was...that I had to enroll back in school or I couldn't be in her wedding. So for me I thought it was the most deceitful thing ever. I thought it was bullshit, and I can't stand you, and why would you do that to me? I'm supposedly the most important person to you but I can't be in your wedding when you already know. And again when we talk about it now, she's that, she couldn't understand where I was coming from about how long I am out, and how it wasn't just as simple as going back. So I didn't talk to her for here after that, because...well, I did go to the wedding and everything. But in the pictures it was like I didn't go to the wedding.

Outfits...I was there even though there was pictures of us and I was still up there with a lot of the wedding party, it just wasn't the same and I was irritated. I was pissed off. I was 16 and I was pissed off. She didn't like my boyfriend, and I felt like she didn't like him because he was black. And she was... he was her age! You know, and I was like, "whatever!" So from that it was just one of those...situations. That when I was 18, I remember for Christmas she got me a GED study book. And I was like, "#####ing serious?" And so, you know..."Really?" [Laughter] "did I ask for that shit?" And I knew it was expensive, like it wasn't a cheap thing. Like a have a computer disk and everything. And it was..."Really?" and again, I was offended, because they didn't know where my mindset was with it. And I got that she was doing this all...and we can both see each other's side. And she was doing it just for me. She knew what my life would be without having the education. She graduated ##### when she was 34, as well. And you know it was very...that she wasn't pushing, she knew. I took at the opposite way. I took it very offensively. And now it's like very interesting... I graduated. And she's like, "I'm flying home!" So that's all been really cool. So coming from the GED program, I realize how everybody in the program something, right? If I didn't have faith in myself, but I didn't think that I was stupid. And I didn't think though...I got a GED, I didn't think that I could just come to college. I didn't think it was that simple. You just don't get your GED and then transfer into college, right? Because you on your GED. So then through that process also it was like eye-opening for me that I should have done this so long ago.

So it wasn't as big of a roadblock as you thought?

No, like that test is scary. That test is scary as hell.

The new one or the old one or both?

The thought of the test. Thought of "Wow, I've been out of school for so long." In my head, I thought that I had lost three years of school already. Like at the top I missed three years I missed my basic sophomore education, and my junior and senior year of learning. So that's a lot of stuff that's going to be on the test. It would be huge. Now that is been 10 years since I had gone to school, so it first it was like five years. Five years of high school..."I don't remember math and stuff. I don't remember half of that stuff. I don't know." So you psych yourself...about and they're telling you. Like if you go online, to tell you like a test that surveys you from ##### to graduation all in one and it's equivalent to the high school graduation...that's all of the information they have to know and you're reading all this and you're like, "really, really?" And they are telling you how long it is? And you think I stressed over a 45 minute testing class. You're telling me I got to take this two hours for this one an hour and something for this one. "Really?" It's overwhelming. And that's what did it. Like I psyched myself out without even ever trying. It and it just kept me from doing that...

So you looked into it?

Oh yeah. Like I, said I had gone when I was really young up to the #####. And I had planned to do it. She gave me the little booklet I went home and read information and right there the information they handed me is like... "Wow!" I looked it up online. And again the information scared me. And what I was finding at these times they weren't programs like here. It was just

the GED, like come and take your GED. Go to a couple classes and get your GED. Then when I was Googling it one time, again when I was hitting 30 because I preached to my kids about this. And you don't like...I can just go back. And I found that it was here on campus. I'm like okay so it's in a college. So that's got to be good, right? That will push you to go there. I wouldn't stick out. I wouldn't look like I was this old individual going into this GED class. Would look like I was going to the college. People don't have to know to this. I'm going to ##### It's during the day so I don't have to take these night classes that look shady. And have to tell people in my life. Because again, I'm a mom, now, of three. And a have them going to schools. And I'm part of the PTA. And I'm part of the fundraising committees for the athletic...I don't want to tell you that I don't have a GED. No! So that again...is that other thing that shames you. Like there is nothing wrong with me for that like I was still that same person. I still was there totally for my kids, and because of these other people, again, your like coming from a young mom standing next to an individual who may be a lawyer, or an individual who may be an account specialist somewhere who's in her late 40s who is very very top of it with her kids. And everything is so...you know...happy, and go-go rah-rah in her life. And I'm standing here completely opposite. Like when I'm going to get rent next month. But that's not where I was there for, so I was there to find raise money for my child that's what I did. So then coming back here It was. I mean for the orientation...I was scared to death. I mean don't remember the first time I spoke with ##### on the phone. And she is a...classes weren't enrolling yet. And I have to call back. And I was really disappointed because I remember my birthday was in April and I wanted to be in the classes before I turned 30 but she was "They start in April."

Oh!...

For summer classes start back up in April.

Is this the earlier exam?

It was 2010

So that wasn't the new one. it was the old one...

The old one, yeah. And so I remember talking to her, and she was like, "You know like the orientations will run into the last week of April. Classes begin in the first week of May." And I was like, "I wasn't even sure if they wanted to do it because I thought that I wanted to do it by the time I turned 30 that was the reason I was coming right? So I looked into a couple of other places that just go and test. Then again, I didn't think about it. I was like, "whatever!" And she called me, and said "Oh, we are signing up for orientations, now. And do you want to sign-up?" And I was like, "Yes!" And I signed up for the orientation and on the first day coming in, was like...it was the college feeling. I had never walked in there before. I never talked to the college before. So I came and it was very cool. But so, and then going up there, sitting in the classroom, it was seeing all the different people who were, there and realizing it wasn't what I thought it would be. Like I thought, "Okay these kids are all going to be 18, and I am going to be the only 30-year-old in here this is going to be awkward." And it wasn't. There was a 60-year-old man class. There was another 30-year-old and there were some younger individuals, but it was a large mix. Those racially mixed. It was, you know, not what I thought. ##### spoke,

then she introduced #####, and ##### spoke. Then ##### did the orientation. Was like “Okay, yeah I think that I can do this.” And then you left with your book that day. And it was two things about that. We actually had these conversations when I became a mentor. Like one was really overwhelming. It was like...in 12 weeks, like I was supposed to do this book. And you got out of school for 10 years, it was like anxiety, anxiety, anxiety. But then I started to go home and do the pretest in each section and *did well*. I’m like, “Hmm! Hmm! Okay, well, Wow, maybe I can do this.” When you walked here, you signed up for like your class, you picked your teacher. I knew that I would be here on Thursdays during the day. And that was before we tried to...So was just...Tuesday Wednesday Thursday for class from 10 to 12 or whatever it was, and from 10 to 1. I would come to my class, and realize that I would do well. “Okay, you can take a practice test now because you’ve done this. Is going to take a practice test and get a 500, then you can...” and the first time I was actually able to sign up for too tests...and then I did well on that...and then I put off math...and I put off math...and I put off math...and ##### is like, “No #####, I’m going to sign you up for math.” And that’s how it happened...and so it was like “Monday, you are taking the test. And if you don’t do well, take it again. You’ve already passed the other one, so you won’t...” because that was the thing – if you don’t pass, the you have to take the rest of them before you retry...it’s like if you don’t get enough points. They say, “Take all of the rest of them then you can come back to the one you didn’t.” So she said, “You’ve already taken the rest of them, so you don’t, you will get a second opportunity to take your math. You’ll be fine. And you’ll know what you need to work on.” So I went home and I worked on that math section like I was crazy. I worked on all of the extra problems ##### had given me.

And he’s good at that too!

Yeah, So I went in. Math was my lowest out of all of them but it was still way over... it was 520 or 530 or something like that, which shocked me because I was like, “if I get a 410 that I’m happy.” All I needed was the minimum. I had enough from all the other ones. “All you need is a 410, and you can do that.” And that was the thing too, that she was in class telling me, “You can do this.”

And so that is what motivated you?

Oh yes! I would say like from them, I have gotten more motivation from them that I had gotten from my parents and my whole education before that. Seriously, they were sooooo helpful. And it wasn’t like if you had other concerns that related to the program, they were willing to help you with that...Get you a resource that you need. Like at that point, I was on unemployment because I had lost my job... and I was at that point where unemployment was ending, and they were talking to me about the options...and #####was like, “These places are hiring.” And I would go places that she said were hiring if I knew of them. Those were things that she just didn’t have to do, and I recognize that. Because she wasn’t even my teacher. She was the counselor to come in and help us sign up for testing. That’s how her job was explained to us. She was can help me sign up for testing. And then when you are ready to transfer into college, to help you with all that. They didn’t say that they would become a support system. And that even #####, she was such an advocate, and even her coming into the classroom and just talking and giving her experiences, and like the real... she did not sugarcoat it. Things aren’t going to be easy. She let

us know this is the way it is. And also so did #####. And I had ##### but #####, because she was so much better with like the writing and reading. She was like, “if you want to, just come over” because they taught next to each other at that point. And I would go to her for the writing section and then just her, and her supportiveness... she didn’t have to do any of that. Yet when you’d see them if you’d be walking in on that next Tuesday after the test, and it was like, “How did you think you did? And they weren’t even your teachers. So it was just that. Like it really became a family. And for me like it was just the next step was to just move on with them... Like at that point they would talk about college so much and get it to your head for the program that it doesn’t become that scary thing anymore. Like I don’t even know where it happened in there. I came in there that first day and I was like “GED... I’m going to go and get a job.” And at the end of the class – and like I said, I was done in six weeks and it was two weeks to open up testing, and I tested in four weeks, and so six weeks total that I did it. I knew I was staying because I was getting ready for my compass. And because I was becoming a student that fall. Because they talked to you... “Did you get your application filled out? You already applied, right?” It’s not like they’re questioning or telling you like you should be doing it. They are like telling you, “You’ve done it, right? You are going to be a college student.” And that, like the wording of how they said it, that was just amazing to me because it was never the doubt. It was never “if you want to” or “if you do...” because they were like everybody should fill out their application... just get it done. Then if you decide to come, it’s in there. But then with that, it’s like “Okay, go do this...”

“...So what are your interests?”

Yeah. Like, “Let’s go take a tour of some of the classes.” Like, “let’s go look in the English class, and see what it’s like.” And I even remember that. And they also will help you with meeting with the professor here. She got her GED and she is very open with talking about it. And for me that... she also became my faculty mentor just from other things because I did take her.

That’s great!

And so like all my things are coming together and I’m going to have the little robe thing right now. But that’s the frosting you know. It’s this stuff that I’m doing that’s the real issue.

Yes, we did the work before that ceremony, so...and #####, and our writing department, shit is big in other writing. And she got her GED.

Wow!

Yeah. And that is them relating it to us. ##### here, he got his GED. So don’t limit that like meaning. So just her talking to me, and she was 19, and had her first two kids, and also ended up in a divorce. And having to go back to school, she is in respiratory therapy, not thinking that she could do it either after she got her GED. And learning, “You know, I like to teach. I like teaching.” And she just kept going back and ended up getting a PhD. And those are the amazing stories that I like to see. And I’m telling you like, “I was where you are. I may have been a little bit younger when I started the process, but I didn’t know I wanted to go, like I worked in

respiratory therapy for 15 years, before decided that I should not be doing that. Like my heart was really somewhere else. And so like saying that though, and having these inspirational people right in front of you while you are going to the process...because people put down...like, "Oh, you got a GED?" No, but it is exactly the same. If anything, we worked harder for it. In high school you are never asked to take a test to graduate. You are never asked to take a test that will tell us blatantly everything that you know.

I think that they will get to that, though.

And I would actually like to do something like when I go for my PhD, like testing for a GED, as opposed to graduating from high school...

Are you going for a PhD?

That's my plan!

Because it says, "What are your future plans?"

Yes! Definitely! You know I would really like to be a professor! Like that would be one of my ultimate goals. But I'm really need a policy and procedure. So I stopped going to the macro social work program, so I could work on the policies and procedures. And pregnant parenting students are my focus so actually at #####, I am on the parenting student initiative. I work at the women's resource Center. Oh yes...#####...she has given us pre-budget, but nothing is finalized. But I have different proposals for expectant mother parking and lactation rooms on campus that are actually adequate, because we do have seven...yes. Okay because #####, who I work with, and so I went in for my placement... I really wasn't sure where I wanted to go other than saying that I have a macro focus. And I knew that ##### didn't really meet some of the macro focus. So they said "Okay well, let us look." The system in ##### was like, "Talk to #####, and ##### was like, "I really need a self-starting student. An MSW student would be great." But I am a parenting student. So they brought me into it. And after meeting with them, they're like, "...so the woman's center has never had a social worker. Let's see how it goes." So they placed me in the women's center... and to start these things. We were supposed to have our first drop off... drop in childcare center start in the IM Rec. We were supposed to have started this winter semester, but due to funding, it did not. Oh, I'd love [unintelligible]. And I also work with #####, to, because she was helping...when I did the family day...the parent student day...Family day is coming up on April 18. So it will be my third and final event before I'm done. And I know I was planning this the week before graduation, but, that's okay! It will be like my sign off. And so that's where my focus is, because, again, I also, with kids, didn't understand that the support that could be given when you return to school. I'm like I kept putting it off, I kept getting older...I'll return...That's something that I will think about when I'm older. I didn't realize that there was so much support along the way. Even when you look up Title IX, it doesn't tell you the protections of that...like I had a student in one of my classes that we're graduating April 26, she was having her baby, she was born just two days ago...I'm so excited! She was coming to class and the professor was telling her, "Well, you have already missed your two days. I'm going to have to start marking you down for those points if you are going to be here the last three weeks. Actually, you know what, Title IX is going to protect you on that. Let me get to the

paperwork. Sure enough, last week, the teacher let her present early, and she was due last Thursday and still came to class!

It just boggles my mind. Why would you not support somebody?...

Absolutely!

...as a teacher...

Yes!

...support them?

And it was a female teacher, as well! So, yes, those were the little things that I've come into contact with a lot. Like where they thought they would not be there for finals week...the professor was not willing to move the final for them. And so we do have protections for them. And there is also like financial aid. You could apply for additional money for childcare loans if you need them. People don't realize until...yes it is an additional loan. You have to pay back. But it does support you at the time that you need it.

That is just excellent! These questions seem so insignificant. I mean, basically, you answered it like...maybe we should put a couple of words down. How connected we're you to the activities at school and your family during the high school years?

It was really friends and outside activities that we're not in the school...outside activities...

And then, what held your interests and motivated you to participate so I put down "Friends, working, and get off the farm." ...Mm-hmm. Yes and basically get out.

And then, you pretty much explained the circumstances why you left. You were skipping classes, and you relocated...

My girlfriend wanted [intelligible].

You went to a friend's house, and then didn't want to continue in the structure.

It just became...that just became just not important. Became more important to survive. And also when you make money, it's really hard to go back. Because when I started waitressing at like 17, and the money was good every day, and it just becomes too easy not to go back. Which is what I tell people now, like don't wait to come back, because you wait to come back bitches becomes easy to not. And you are like why don't you wait a year for your masters, and start working full-time again and get a paycheck, and start paying back loans. I can't promise you that I would want to go back again. I just can't like us already spent a lot of time. Like I know what happens when you're not at school.

That's so smart. And then we have talked about roadblocks in life, parents...drinking...

Lack of support.

...lack of support, a negative group...

Yes. I mean, none of them really did. It wasn't like I was the only one that staying in school. A large group of us just didn't go.

With a roadblock also be that you also had a Child at a young age, do you think?

I think that kept me from coming back, because I had them I mean I would have been pregnant my senior year but...it wouldn't have really... at that point I was already out of school. Once I dropped out when I was 16, I never thought about going back to school. Like never even returning to high school. It was never really the option at that point. I was always just thinking about it GED. Which is interesting, too, like I never...

GED was just the next step...

Yes, it was never... and that's what my brother did. My brother dropped out as soon as he turned 16. And when he turned 18, he got his GED. And he went to the ##### ... and that's why I didn't think that I could never do it because he did it... but then he didn't have the truancy issues because he played sports. And so...

Oh, and so you have to, for sports...

Yeah. So we have to go to school and have to be there. So I think that that's what kind of what helped him, too. But even when he got his GED, it was right about the time that I was leaving and dropping out. Because I think that it was just in my head, you know, "That's just what I will do too, when I turn 18, that's what I will do." And then when you're 18, you're like, "Oh shit! I haven't been in school for so long." And that's when those other ideals of keeping you going...

So you don't have to finish high school.

Yes.

But if you are not good at that structure...

Yes...at a certain point I like became who I was at like 15, 16. I can't even see myself surrounding the people like at ##### School. In fact I had nothing in common with them. They couldn't understand where I was coming from. Even if they didn't have struggles themselves, because we didn't share it in #####, you didn't know. Like I can look at it...I'm trying to find an example of a school that has like different programs for children to be involved that aren't just sports, or grades. Like at #####, it was orchestra, Band, or sports. It's like, that's what you did. If you didn't fall into one of those things, so I did the FHA for a while because clearly, you were supposed to. And FHA and all things. So I did not do my time in those things. But I also feel like I didn't go along with them. I didn't want to work on and the farm. That's what my first

boyfriend was – A farmer. And so like when I dated him, it would be like yeah so like we will be a farmed family. This is what I have been ##### for. Great like he owns a farm... We'll take over the farmhouse. We will live in that farmhouse. So I will have kids. That's what's going to happen. And then you know...

And at some point, you said...

Yes and so you know ... that was probably one of the turning factors. Because living with him, he also was just a partier. He dropped out of high school.

So your boyfriend might have been...

A roadblock at that point...

I think, yeah.

I mean it was just... I think that when you are that age, you are susceptible to what others are doing. And if they are making things look glamorous or not... so the issue is like... okay my boyfriend dropped out, my brother dropped out, my friends weren't going to school. Very normalized. It didn't seem like a big deal. Like that was sort of the next thing. Like I got...

And they were doing fine, so...

And I mean like yeah, like my brother worked at the car dealership. He was doing well. He was with his girlfriend. And they were paying for rent. In retrospect, *no!* Like they were paycheck to paycheck. They were struggling. You know what I mean? They were making it, but they weren't necessarily happy struggling. And like he was just lucky to get little jobs. He did like mechanical job at #####, which is what saved him. And like it helped him like grow with his career. And he decided to go back and to #####. Even that took him years, to do it. And he did it because his job offered reimbursement and so you know... when I talk to him sometimes now, because I am Facebook friends with my first boyfriend, and I am like we had discussions before, and you know I'm just like... like one time I told him like my regret just to be funny. And he said like, "Seriously? Really?" And I'm like, "Well, you know, life took two turns. And I'm not saying I wouldn't have gone the same way. But it sure was easier to follow suit when you had that bad boyfriend and you have... you play up. I mean, it was a big deal. And like I started dating him when I was 14. So it was like 14 to 16 when I was dating him. I was like...

Do you feel like you grow a lot during that age?

I do. I feel like I rushed it, so now when I have kids, and I realized that I lost my virginity at 14 and... and the guy is like 14 and 15 year old, and "#####, I can't believe you are doing half of the same shit that I was doing... like seriously?" Like I would turn in to my grandma! Like I would! Like I would forget and I would go pick a switch, and I would say come in here and let's talk about this! But again, it's just different parenting that my kids don't even have that mindset at all. Like... at all. They are very big into sports, and academics, and though, I realize that it

wasn't necessarily age, or that was how...your just...accustomed, and then...nature versus nurture, and how that works, and how...

Your environment?

Yes, and it really can change things. Like I know people say that...gonna change the socioeconomic class...it's like the harder thing that you will ever do. But you can also change the things that surround it. Not necessarily like I didn't make as much money that my parents did, because my dad worked in the factory. So apparently, I don't make more than him. My goal is to definitely surpass where he is at, and ever was; even as, you know, prime day. But I have changed the way we live. And I have changed the parenting style. So I feel like that gives my kids such the better opportunity to do better than I did. So I think that like people claim on that money aspect of it...but what is going into it? that's not helping move up in the class.

That's really profound.

You're sitting in...in my research of the community,

...the culture of the family...

That's my goal. I mean, because it was and I get it. For my dad, it was like being on the farm. That's what he was supposed to do. So like getting a job at a factory was a good thing! You weren't on the farm. So he did, like he bettered himself. It wasn't though education. It wasn't something permanent. He was just lucky he was able to retire through them. And it protected him like it did.

Did they both get their high school diplomas?

They did. They both have high school diplomas. Yup. But they never...like my mom never attended college. Like they never enrolled. They never did...but also, like, my dad's siblings both earned their college degrees. And My mom's siblings both earned their college degrees...which I found interesting, as well that...like my mom's sisters both...like her second middle sister like education...like she is a teacher. She is all English teacher. Like English teacher one hundred percent correcting every Facebook post that...I

[Laughter] Like when you start posting, you think how...

Yeah. You're going to rate this one?

Can you go in and edit someone else's?

Oh no, but she will comment. Like...you mean...or like re-write it and I would have to go in and edit it. And then...just to make her feel better.

[Laughter]

She was like, "I taught you better than that!" And so that was the thing, too, because they were younger. So when I was growing up, I think that they also hold some blame, because they feel like, you know, they would have been able to step in. Because they did know my dad's addiction. And so my mom's parents lived directly next door to us until we were six. And...but that's another reason, I think, it had impacted a certain age, too, because, we were always able to escape next door, so you wouldn't see as much going inside my household. And my grandparents like fed us there, so we didn't realize that we weren't being fed at home. And then, he owned a business and it went bankrupt. And so he had to move away. My grandparents did. It was like my aunts always lived next door, and they were at that point, like teenagers. And they spoiled us for Christmas. And I was like...and this isn't educational-wise, but I remember a Christmas that my dad had like no money, because he was using. And my aunt purchased everything for Christmas. And he had, like, Santa had come. And I remember the conversation of my dad yelling at her and screaming in the kitchen for #####, because he was the one that was supposed to be getting, and if he couldn't provide it, they would...

And this happened on Christmas?

It happened on Christmas day. But that also was...I mean those are little things for me that...like just holidays just...I think that holidays to me are just not special. And I try to make them overly special for my kids sometimes, which then causes me...like I'm spending too much money. And I'm trying to make this too much because...if it's anything, it's my dad because he ruined every holiday there ever was. I mean I can't remember like a happy holiday. You know it's like this horrible thing. But like I try to remember, and you know what, I don't remember, even when I would have everybody over for Thanksgiving, like how he started like a small argument. And I don't know if it's just now...he's used to doing it, or he doesn't mean to, or...I know people say our personalities are a lot. And I can't stand when I hear that [small laugh].

It might be just the fact that it's a holiday, and everyone has great family love, and all these perfect things on holidays. And sometimes it's too much pressure...

That's true.

...to be a happy holiday-...

Yeah.

...feeling person...

So now all of those memories all come back to him...

Yeah. And I see like how he was, and at the boarding school, they didn't bring him home all those holidays. Like he only came home for the holidays if they were actually closed, or things like that. And things were I have, because again, like he was really sick like I had tried to figure it out, and I tried to, and...

Does it hurt less when you figure it out?

I mean, for me, it helped me make sense. Like at the same time, I want to help him. And even now, I don't want to say, "You're 60 and you'll never be able to be clean." And I just don't believe that. Like I believe anybody has the ability to change if they want to. And I don't want to give up on that fact ever. Can I spend my whole days trying to convince him to change? No. But like I found out the boarding school he went to – I actually did research and found out like during the years he was there, there was a crap load of sexual abuse. And so, I tried to bring it up to him and ask him. And you know my grandma said, "No, it wasn't like that. I have all these notes that he wrote me. And I read through them. And so a couple of things were like off to...my dad couldn't write a check now to save his life. Like he needs you to write the check out for him. Like, now like ## and stuff like that, you do it electronically. But I remember that being a kid, and you're going into Bushes, and I would have to write "Bushes," like one hundred and fifteen dollars. Like my dad just couldn't do that. Well, like these letters were like full of perfect grammar, perfect English. Like, really, I totally understand why you couldn't come to visit me this weekend. And they repeated that. I don't really understand why you weren't able to visit. And "Oh, it's okay that you didn't come this week end." So pretty much, every letter was making his parents feel better for not coming to visit him...which I found red flags there...and like it was...

He could have been influenced by teachers saying...

Oh yes. I believe that they were probably programmed of what he was supposed to do. But I also believe that that could show some of the abuses that he was educationally smart when he went there, but reverted once he came back. So I feel like some of that, too, like he just stopped trying to learn, even. It's like that. So when I started to look into it I wondered that he was sexually abused there. And that's when my grandma said, like, "Oh, I got all these letters." And it was like parent day. Like they didn't go up for parent day weekend. And he was like, "That's okay. I understand that you couldn't come for parent weekend because ##### is expected to have her baby any time now." That's his sister. And, "But I went out with...and he named the parents that he went out with. They took him to dinner with, like you know, Johnny, or whomever, there was like, over and over. It was never like, "Thanks for coming to see me. I was so glad for you to see me." There was never...

She was proud of the letters?

She was proud of the letters because, I mean, he was at military school. They were doing good by him. He got into a little bit of trouble when he was twelve, so we sent him to military school to shape him up. Because, again, we're fifty at this point, and we don't have time to deal with it.

Wow!

And so like I started to say, like...

[Interruption from someone outside]

Is this your son?

Oh no, it's my kid's father, because they're off today.

Because he's with him? For Good Friday

For Good Friday, yeah...but we are supposed to go shopping for them today, because they were getting their Easter dresses. And so...we are actually able to maintain this relationship. We are able to do things. Because, I mean now, "I've known you for more than half of my life. It's not that you are just my kid's dad any more. I mean we're...you've seen me grow up completely. You've become the person who..."

Has he grown too?

In ways. I think that's part of why our relationship just couldn't grow because he was there. He was at 30. He was...He's who he was...who he was gonna be. And me, I was just sixteen. I was just formatting who I would be, and where I wanted to go. And a lot of it didn't hit until I was like 29 and figuring out where I wanted to go. And even then, it was like...getting into ##### and figuring out "Wow, maybe I would be like a counselor," or something like that or even teach. I was like, "I like this social work aspect." And then taking the classes in Psychology, and Sociology and Anthro, and it was like, "Wow, there's so many things that need to be changed. And I'm politically driven. And that bores the shit out of him. I mean like I talk to him about half of my interests, and so like...those are other gigs that just... Like if I start talking about politics, he's like...I can see it cut off. Like I know like instantly now, I'm just talking even though [becomes excited/animated] *I keep going for a good 20 minutes! I won't shut off because I like being myself! If I'm into it, I'm like totally passionate about what I am talking about. So I'm going to continue talking to you about it.* Sorry.

[Laughter]

[JV] "...and you have to be a supportive listener!"

Yes! I mean, so we do. We do...well at that, and for the kids because...again, so my mom should have left years and years ago. And we remember...me and my brother both remember asking her to leave, and she wouldn't. And so for me, it was a big deal not to stay in a relationship that wasn't positive because I did know the residual effects on his children. And then when I realized how we could do it, and how we could get along... Like at first, it wasn't always like that. You know, it was, "I hate you!" and the relationship ended. It never ends. Two people don't typically decide when their relationship ends, so it was me, deciding more that...I had grown differently. And although I didn't... "I was no longer in love with you...I still loved you." And there was the difference, though. And I needed to see who I was. And not be attached...

Because you never had that...

No

... and you met someone at sixteen, right

And yes. And yes.

So there is a big chunk of time where you hadn't figured out who you were.

And I went from raising my parents, basically. And I mean like we made the grocery list. We made the store to shop. He got his paycheck. Because if we didn't do it right away, we wouldn't eat. And we had to help with the bills eventually. And, well that's how it got, then...so... Then I moved in with him...and to where then like, you know, the family thing. And you take care of it and his mom was sick, and I became like helping her with things and driving her to places. And then, right to having kids. And...and I would never change any part of that now, because...one, because every single experience I've had to go through, and now my three kids...I just...they are like everything that I want to be. I mean my...and they don't get it. They say that my daughter will be like, "Mom, you are such a role model to me." Like she will write one of her little things about me at school, like they want to know. And she's like, "I know what you do." And I'm like, you know...she'll say something smart later about how I don't do enough. So...I'm waiting until she gets the whole full effect. She'll say something, and I'm like, "You know what I am doing this, right? I'm doing this because of you guys. Because I want you to see that you have all this ability in you." I'm like, she's so smart in math, now, like I tell her, "I could never do the things that you do." I mean you are taking AP history courses as a sophomore...

Encourage her to become an engineer, because that, for women, is a really good place to be.

Yes!

And they have scholarships...

The STEM! STEM is amazing right now, for them. Actually, right now, she is looking at forensic psychology is where she is looking right now, which scares me. But she is looking into the med field and that type of thing. But...and so you know...she plays travel soccer, she plays her school soccer. So I'm like, she's always doing something. Like yesterday, she had a game and she got hurt. She didn't want to come out because she is a starter. And she is like, "You know, I have not come out a minute of any game yet this season, mom. I didn't want to come out." But she recognized that it was so bad that she had to come out. And so like...and you know like she was, though she was devastated, she was like, "I save the ball, mom...the week that we didn't get a goal and they didn't touch...like how bad would that have been if they would have...I would have hurt myself, and they would have scored! [laughter] And seeing things like that about being so positive, and the teamwork...

So all of the stuff that you are saying really is stuff that you want not only your children to know, but other children to know

Oh, yes!

So what would you say to high school students if they were thinking of dropping out? What do you think?

I would have them totally consider it...consider all the options...what happens, and... What would be your plan, then? Would is your plan on dropping out, what is your plan?

So not just to stay in, but actually consider other options...

I think that I would ask them what their plan would be. Like what were they thinking about it? Like what were their other...like what other options are you thinking that you have? Are you thinking about just dropping out to drop out? Because I think that telling somebody to do something never works. So I would never go in and tell somebody to stay in school because I know what happens when you are directed to do something. And if somebody would have told me, "Take your ass back to school and get your GED," I probably still wouldn't have done it...just because people were telling you. But like when people were telling me, I didn't want to do it. It took my own time to find when it was a good time for me.

So you are saying to find it in yourself.

Yeah, I mean I would try to keep...I mean I would definitely try to give them support to try to keep them in school and find out, like what were the reasons that they wanted to leave. Even though...and that's just, again, a social work thing, trying to find out the reasons of what was leading them to want to drop out.

So this one for, I think, can you describe how you made the decision to return to school, because you said your aunt gave you a GED book?

Mm-hmm. [laughs]

But you refused it, essentially.

Yeah.

But then how did you motivate yourself? What was it?

Well, I think...I mean, one of it was losing my job. And actually being put in to that predicament of facing it.

Oh, not wanting to check the box in the application.

Yeah. Because you can tell yourself, like, it got to a point where, you just don't think about it anymore. I didn't think about it on a daily basis that I didn't have a GED. You know that I think that I was less than having a GED. So I think that that would have been just in my own head, kind of like positive spinning it. That's why I should have been more worried about not having it.

So did you find that you have to motivate yourself no matter what...people gave you books, or people said, "Go to school."

Yeah,

That's why you are saying, "Don't just tell them to go?"

Yeah. I don't...

So you had to find it somewhere inside yourself, somehow?

Yeah. Absolutely. And when you are ready because...like I said, I walked into the #####. I did that. Like I was there. Like I had talked myself into it. Like I was there. But it wasn't my time. Like I just...I don't know what it was particularly at that moment that did it. But I know this time...I mean this time, it was part of the support of the system here. When I came to orientation, it changed. It wasn't walking into one of those other GED rooms. Like, so...I mean like...I mean it was my mid-life crisis, maybe. I was about to turn 30. I was unemployed. I had three kids. I was telling them that school was super important. I felt like the biggest hypocrite ever.

So what you are say really is that one of the biggest things is that it felt like you could be here...

Yes!

...not just some program in some elementary school...

Yes!

...on a Friday night.

In a locked door that said "GED" that labeled me who I was, that was obvious to everybody what I was doing.

So this is more exciting

Absolutely!

Dynamic...

Yes!

...for you to be part of something.

Absolutely.

And that connected to other possibilities?

Yes. Oh, yes. I mean like...and that wasn't even the intention when I got here. Like I said, I didn't realize that that would be all of the aspects of it. Those were just...those were just glorified bonuses. Because people weren't telling me, like I wasn't growing, saying "You are going to college" in the first couple of years, when I was doing well. When I was getting into trouble, nobody was telling me when I was charged in school and I was going to get charged with truancy, and I "needed to go to college." Like, that wasn't a part of it. If you needed to go to school so you don't get your ass in trouble. Like that's what you need to go to school for. You don't have any of these fucking people coming to my house any more. That's what you can't be doing.

Yeah...yeah...

So that's what it was.

So "Don't interrupt or make life difficult, but there are no long range plans."

Yes! It wasn't like college, so like in my house, with somebody saying, "college, college, college."

So that's why you said to say to somebody, "what is your long range plan?"

Yes. Like, what are you thinking? I mean, what do you want to do?

And to have somebody to have you saying it to your kids, "college, college, college."

Yes.

So do you think that people, generally...if you came from a family that said college is standard, not just "Let's just celebrate the high school. And you're done, and we don't have to worry about you any more..."

Yeah.

...but the people that say "college, college, college," that there is a continuum that point...

I do think so. I think if like anything, you are started over and over, preaching to you that you remember certain things. Then...comments from my grandmother that will never just go away. But not a single one of them has any influence on education. Like I can tell you how to cook your macaroni and cheese with the best of them, but she never was like, "College is super-important." You know?

So do you think it's because they were on the farm and that was a way of life? Or it was because they just didn't see college as useful? Because, isn't college part of farming, too.

Well, I mean, and I guess where my confusion was, was that you think it had partly to do with where dad was. Because like his older sister, who was odd for, you know, my aunt ##### is...she

is close to my grandma, my other side. So she's going to be in her late sixties, early seventies. And she has a college degree. And that wasn't really all that common back then, for women to go to college and get degrees. And especially ##### ended up getting a masters, which wasn't a known thing. And my uncle, who ran a tire store, but he even went and got like his bachelor's degree, I think from ####. And so...and then their kids all went to college, except for my youngest cousin...the boy on that side of the family. I don't exactly know why, but...so I did think that it was odd that they never preached college to us, because I didn't understand like how my aunt and my uncle would have gotten it.

Yeah...

And so that was the way, I mean I looked back at that and thought about that, like that was really interesting. And I don't know it was just because my dad didn't and they just...felt like he did get a job at the factory and he was doing well. I mean because for a while, like my dad finding actual paycheck-wise, was doing just as well as his brother, who had a college degree. And so I'm not sure if they just assumed, like...that's what a lot of people did, and working at #####s was prestigious back then. It was a nice thing to do. It's...I'm not sure if they, like, negated that. Like we would be fine and we could be factory workers, and we could still live. And that was the path we were taking.

Huh!

And even like for my mom's family, my mom was the one that didn't go to school, though her other sisters did. And I wonder if the difference there was they saw what happened with my mom, and really started preaching that...education and college going first, there, because my mom got married first. She was planning her wedding her senior year. She graduated in June and was married... She graduated like June 11, and was married like June 21.

Wow!

And so...and again, like my grandfather, her dad, sold farm equipment. She married a farmer. So then I think that maybe that had a lot to do with it. For my aunt ####, once she had been...she had always been in band, and she was always involved in more stuff than my mom ever had been in school. But it was not...I think she came right to ####. She went right to #### and got her early elementary degree, and then went to#### and got her next degree. Then she went back and got her masters. And then she went back to ####, and... So she constantly has been educated.

Mm-hmm...

And then my other aunt, like she didn't...she was a partier. So she didn't sign her time card even when she got me the GED book. And so that was the other thing too. Like when she was giving it to me, and I was like, "Look, you dealt with your bullshit, too. I remember we were seeing you messed up. I remember some of the stuff that my mom would do for you again," because my mom was always bad. If they called her older sister for alcohol...she would purchase it! Like I was there! I remember this! And my mom was just...she never wants to

ruffle anybody's feathers. She always been just a people pleaser. And like...and I get that. So it is like so hard sometimes when I do like a lot of I Like I do have a lot of blame. And I was upset that she didn't leave, and a lot of things that she did. But also, she just wanted everybody to be happy. And she wanted it so...that's what she wanted. Like that was really her job, to try to make everything seem happy. And that just became out of her control. And then she just had to maintain herself. And that was difficult enough. And so...

So you are dealing with a lot of this stuff now...

Yeah. I mean, and being in the social work has really helped a lot.

But it really is like now, and you need to talk to them about it...And have these conversations but my mom doesn't remember. She had the brain tumor and she can tell me about her fifth-grade experiences but she doesn't remember me being in fifth grade. So that conversation can ever take place to where being honest, like I can tell you 100% how I feel...that she can have a better conversation with my 15 year old daughter than with me. And I get frustrated and irritated because she acts like a 15-year-old. And I'm like...

Yeah.

And sometimes, because I have separated from my dad quite a bit, but I don't want my kids to miss out on my mom. So I bring her to my house for like two days at a time, and by the end of the second day I am ready to like rip my hair out, because she has the mentality of my 15-year-old. But she is my mother, and she knows she is an adult.

So it is very hard, I am sure.

[Telling my mom when she stays with me] "So I just want to go to your bedroom right now! That is all that I want! Go to bed right now!" You can't cuss at your mother! And so with my dad, like I have had, when he was in his sober stage and we had a lot of conversations, which is when he started using, it with harder for me again. And that's why I think but I'm now like sounding like I am holding on to a lot of resentment because I gave a lot of it up and "I forgave you for so much that you had done during my childhood, and I was watching you die..." and I was the one telling the doctors that he was going through withdrawal of having some symptoms, like mixing the medication, and had a stroke in surgery, and so I had to, like, be the one that... "Okay, this is what I think..." and my mom, she's just sitting there and doing crossword puzzles, because she doesn't understand about having to work...

...I gave up a lot of my life. And He had to go to physical therapy and speech therapy, and I was the one driving him. Like, I had to give up a lot of my own to take of him. Like, I was doing their billing. I was doing everything, because he was in the hospital for six weeks and mom couldn't do it. So I was making sure everything was done. And I had to let go of a lot of it. So when we had these talks about how I felt, and what I was doing, and how I was starting over and fresh for him to go back... that was when I was really offended...and I don't know how to deal

with that at this moment. And so I'm just going to...do what I have to...see you when I need to...other than that though, I don't discuss it with him...

It's a good thing you know that it is a disease...

Yeah absolutely.

And at least, so that gives you at some comfort...

Yeah.

That it's not something that you didn't try hard enough.

Yeah.

What do you say to the high schools what to change?

I think that it is important that schools realize that students are not standardized. And that testing is not always an example of the child. I think that that is way too often used, that this is the weight that they performed on a test... and they want to stick on that, rather than how they actually perform in the classroom... how do they interact. And that, too, teachers need to be taught to focus on the little things and cues that kids give. For me, it was a big thing that third grade and fourth grade we're so horrible, and fourth grade was so wonderful, yet nobody...and I couldn't even particularly tell you about what changed it, but it was just...I wasn't really big friends with a lot of people. She didn't make me go to recess. She's let me stay in the classroom with her and I could read during recess rather than go out. It was just little things like that. I don't think that she made me feel important, like she asked me questions, talked to me...and sometimes I think that she may have had cues of what was happening at home because...not saying anything, or say that she knew.

So would you say that teachers... are you telling me that she's listen to you?

She tried. Like she actually went out of her way to try, because she noticed that something was wrong.

So you said they should pick up cues and listen.

Yeah, like I know that they are not social workers and counselors, but I believe that they spend a large majority of time with the children that you can notice when things are happening or not happening. And I think that... like now, schools have gotten a lot better...like I said, I was ever sent to a social worker. I was ever sent to the counselor. I never spoke with anybody inside school about anything like that, because now I think that they are using social workers die [unintelligible] like that...and sometimes and a little too much...over-diagnosing certain things. But I think that to even like...sometimes that it is not learning issue...

That's a good thing. They say, sometimes it's not a learning issue.

Yeah it's not. There are so many things that go into it; that if you're hungry, you can't focus on school.

I think that's really imported.

Yeah.

And someone needs to see that.

So you think things are changing...

I do! It has to be recognized. Like, we would not have all the fight for the free lunch program. On paper, we wouldn't have qualified. Did we need it? Yes. And those are the things that the system can't fix, necessarily.

... without a lot of information coming from the people who don't want to give information.

And the kids don't tell... so I think that it isn't working to remember the confidentiality with kids. Like I work at ##### in the kids room and for me that's been really instrumental.

...so the cycle of abuse continues in families.

...like if their mind was on, you know as my mom would say...bulling at school, that's not a learning issue.

No, it's not.

...and what could we do to end the cycle, and stop returning [to an abusive relationship] seven times. So what can we do?

...I don't think that I wasn't educated enough to handle anything that happened at school. But there is so much that is going on, the school became the least of what I was focused on. And then again, just not being there. I think that not being there for long periods of time made it so much harder to go.

And that's what they say. There's the ABC's of dropping out. Attendance, behavior and credits lost...loss of credits.

Yes.

How is it that you thought you had that resilience? What is it about your resilience that it said to you, "You're worth it?"

You know, I don't even know if when it first started coming back, if I realized that I was worth it. I realized that I thought my kids were worth it!

Alright

Yeah.

The biggest motivator was your kids.

Yeah. Because I think it even... I know in one of my letters that I wrote, that coming through the program, gave me pride in myself that I have never had before. And that was able to carry over to everything else. It was that first "I can do it" step. "Wow, I can do that easily! Let's try this next one!"

Wow, I like it... the "I can do it" step.

And you know I credit ##### and #####. You know they say that I cannot credit them as much as I do, but I think that there was a lack of something, but I just did not have. You know, I think that I should. I mean that support system... I believe that that is what needs to be into school. There needs to be a better support system. And I know that we say that teachers don't care anymore, and that's not true...I think that they are overwhelmed, that they have to many kids to try to care about everybody. But I think that it is just also what you put out. Like ##### came into the room and gave out the same thing about me being successful and [unintelligible] hundred students that were in the program. And it's really about how you are going to take it and what you are willing to do with it. I mean...##### couldn't force us to be here more...and I sat in with people who are still coming to the program trying to this day.

They would just keep coming back.

Thank you! You are so amazing! Thank you so much...

Student Number Sixteen

Reading, resilience and engagement

Thinking about elementary, middle, and high school; can you start with elementary and tell me what did you remember about school and general in those three sections?

Elementary school, I remember I went to a couple of the country schools. So, you know, different schools constantly... kind of... you don't even worry about it. Kids in school... meaner. I guess when you are young, you are mean [Slight laugh]. But I didn't really like to talk to anybody because they were really mean. You know, I just really stay to myself, or my brother and his friends. We always had a ball. We just you know, fool around and have fun. But I had some cool teachers. I mean, when teacher was he was really into animals. Like animals, like the Jungle Book. So he would do the craziest of things in class and it made a funny. So it made learning a little bit funny so I like going to his class. But I remember a lot from elementary. You know I stay to myself and my brother's friends. But I really didn't do too much.

So how about middle school?

Middle school...I went to one middle school. I made good friends, friends that I am still with today. Actually, my brother is married to one of them. So, they've been married, or they've been together since we all met in sixth grade...in middle school. So they have been together that long. And then...so we...it just...with fun actually. And the teachers were really cool. I'm done one of them have a tattoo, and he said we had to wait until the end of the school year for him to show them, the arm. So we were really nice. That was really good school. So. Middle school was fun.

So you got good grades in school?

Yeah, I got pretty good grades in middle school. It was...I wouldn't say like the best grades, because friends keep you preoccupied and you are not really...you are not really caring about...and you have got stuff going on at home. So friends are like an escape to make you smile. So you kind of just stuck to that and ignored everything else.

So how about high school.

High school...I had fun when I was in high school. But from going to different high schools, it's like they messed up my transcripts, or something like that. And every different high school that I went in to just...I was in different classes going into whatever class and I just...it wasn't for me. I just get into what was going on.

How many different high schools were you in?

I was in five. I tried to keep going back. I had family issues going. To try to keep going. But it didn't work out. I went through a homeschooling program to get a diploma. But it's not

accepted here. So I got to do the GED that way. I am able to...everyplace accept it. I don't have a problem no more. So... just to get it out of the way.

But you got the homeschool diploma, was there a test or something.

Yeah. They gave us...they sent us a Scantron after we studied and we were ready for it. So they sent us a Scantron. They sent us some questions and we were supposed to fill in the bubbles. In the mail it back to them in the envelope that they gave to us. So I mailed it back to them, and then once we completed, we sent him the additional \$45 and they would send our certificate and everything on a plaque and all that. So we did that. And I ended up getting it, you know. We paid for it and I worked when I was 16 as a waitress and I paid for it, you know, month by month payments to it...so I paid that that I got my diploma. And then every time I was trying to get into the colleges, they always needed my mom's information, my dad's information; and I wasn't with neither of them. They wouldn't understand that. They were in different cities. I wasn't really talking to them a lot. My mom, wherever she might be; my dad was locked up. I don't have the information. So I had to prolong it. They said you had to be married, 24, with a kid, in order to not need your parent information, like tax information and stuff. Unfortunately I am neither. I am 23 right now. So I'm not 24 yet. I don't have children. I don't think that I should be penalized because I do not have children. And I thought that was kind of a good thing. But they kind of just not...and so I'm not going to get married just to... it sounds like, "God!"

It's easier getting a GED probably!

It's easier just getting a GED! So then that way I can. But I'm still going to have to use my dad's information for my college for when it comes to financial aid. I'm still going to have to have his information because I'm still not 24 married with a kid!

Wow! That's the first time that I've ever heard that.

Really?

Yeah.

That's what they told me in #####. So I'm here, I am...I haven't been able to get pass the GED part. To get to that point, you know what I mean?

Yeah.

So I don't know. It is just...to take care of myself, you know. I had nothing to do with parents taking care of me at all for years. So I knew nothing about their whereabouts, and didn't speak to them. So to need the information, because a couple schools do accept my diploma. They do. But I'm not going to drive all the way over there for them. So... and I have a good job out here as a certified nurse's assistant and an activities assistant. So you know I make decent money. I am able to pay all of my bills, my cards, stuff like that. But I cannot find the time to just run to all schools that are far away. So that's why I am just...I've got to get on.

So you have been on your own since 15?

Yeah. Me and my brother, yeah.

And is he older or younger?

He is 11 months older. So I cannot let him have the full year yet. We're just the same age for 10 days. So they call us to twins of the family. So when I turn 24, and we are going to be 24 together for 10 days. And then he will turn to 25.

Wow!

So he is my twin. What me and my brother really looked out each other while we were growing up. So that was the best part about growing up right there. I had to help, so, you know, if I had not had him, I would be alone. But he was, especially because we were so close in age, you know because I have an older sister, two older brothers...they [the older brother and sister] didn't bother. My sister moved to #####. My brother actually lived right around the corner from us. We lived off from ##### we lived off from ##### over in #####.

So do you and your other brother live together?

Yes me and my brother live together because my dad ended up getting locked up and my mom was gone. And then we were in the custody of my sister. So then I ended up leaving my sister's house. And then...because my dad had got out of jail. And then we were living in the abandoned house that we were just previously at before that. It was a big mess. The doors blown open [drug raid]. So he patched up the door and everything when he got out of jail and then...so we stayed there for a while, while he went back to prison and then so we stayed there. We had a fireplace for heat. We had warm water. So it worked. We were responsible for getting ourselves to school every day. We were 15 and 16. So you know it's kind of...so then my mom finally came back into the picture. So we went to look with my mom, which we really didn't want to because she would leave again and we would be stuck by ourselves. So we came...you know we were both back in with my mom. She was okay for a little while, but then she took off. She tried to enroll me in the ##### high school...this is a school in Detroit. The worst part about that was that it was an all-black school, so...and I'm not racist or anything like that, but...you, know my sister is married to a black man. And my boyfriend is black. So you know I mean...but the girls...

You were a sophomore?

I stand out more. So you know one of the girls, hi mom accidentally bumped her with her purse, and the girl turned around and cussed my mom out, "You are a white bitch!" ...this and that.

Oh...

So you know, I turned around and there's three more girls like ready to pounce on me. So my mom is like, "No, you are not going to the school." "Okay, well thank you!" because I was

like...already made friends! [i.e., enemies]. So she didn't send me to that school because she knew that I would get jumped the first day. They would be waiting for me. So she's like, "No, you are not going to the school." So she enrolled me in a school in #####. She enrolled me in a half Mexican/half black school, so that would work. I would blend in a little more. But I am diverse. You know I am Friends with everyone, and you know, all grown up. My friends... my brother, he's Yemen and Puerto Rican. My other brother, he is Jordanian. And then we are Persian. So we are all just different. So we tried that school but she had took off. And you know I liked the school. And made some really good friends...the kind of friends that make you forget about all the stuff that's going on at home. And so I was there for a little while. But my mom took off. And I ended up dating a boy from there. So I ended up staying with his family. So I ended up staying with the Mexican family in ##### so that I could continue to go to school. So me and him would ride to school together and go home together.

So his parents were pretty nice, too?

Oh. his mom was amazing! You know, she talked me how to do the girl, you know, the heels... she made me walk in heels!

Oh...

It was hard but I learned it. She made me start carrying around a purse. So she was the girl right there for me... "This is what you're supposed to do." So she would do my hair for me if we went out to like [unintelligible], anything like that. So she was really a nice lady. I like her. But it did not work out with me and her son, so me and her son just stayed friends, and you know me, I wasn't going to stay there anymore. So go back home... mom is still not there.

So did she have that house that she was paying for?

My mom?

Yeah.

Yeah, we still had it. That was only because my brother... I mean the reason he didn't go back to school with me was because he was making money for us. He was junking.

What is junking?

Junking...A lot of people do it. In the cities, they take scrap metal...whatever they find in dumpsters and all that, and they turn it in and they sell it. That way your truck and that they collect to scrap metal at the scrap yards, and, you know, you get money for it. So my brother found this way with my mom's boyfriend. He was Cuban...really nice guy...thought of us like his own kids. So he was a nice guy. He taught my brother how to do it. So that is how he made money for us. You know, sometimes you find stuff...sometimes you didn't. So my dad had previously bought us iPods a couple of years before that. So we ran out of food. My brother right around the corner did not help. We had some neighbors give us some canned foods, and stuff like that. So we ran out of food. We even sold our iPods so that we could eat. His

girlfriend happened to be pregnant. So we had to make sure that she ate. And then my mom would come back, and she would leave again and come back. You know it was just a lot. So that's... Then you know, my dad finally got out. And then when my dad got out, he ended up getting a house. So we got a house in #####, a small house. Brought this all back.

Where there any safety issues that you were worried about, what the reason that he was in jail? Anything that might... that you might have feared... people, whatever, met his friends?

Well, I mean it really sucked going back to school after what he did up north with selling the drugs and stuff, and the house got raided. We were the big talk up north. Everybody knew what happened. Everybody in school knew what happened. So it's kind of like the thing where you just don't even want to be there. People ask you, "What happened! Are you okay?" You don't even want to... the fact that they even knew, sucks. You know, because how do you go to school and show your face? Your house just got kicked in, you know, that night. So you know, you just don't even bother with it. So I didn't go. I mean, I skipped. And that's when they ended up sending me to an alternative school. So it was going to be my third high school. They sent me to an alternative school.

So one of my questions is, can you explain the circumstances on leaving school? So you had five schools but then after the third, you went to an alternative school, right?

The third school was an alternative school.

Okay.

And that was up north.

What is up north?

Of north is... I went to ##### high school, and I went to ##### high school. And that is in #####.

We call it up north because now we live down over here. I started actually going to middle school there. And then in 10th grade, that's when everything started going downhill. And it was the beginning of 10th grade. So when I went to another school, they put me back in 10th grade. And I went to another school... I am a junior all of the sudden. And it was just... I was switching grades. And they didn't even know what grade I am in. They can't decide. So I was just... it was just too much, like to have to deal with everything at home, you cannot even think about a future because you're dealing with everything right now.

So your dad came back and he got a house. And so did he ever get the job, then?

At a gas station, yeah. Because I understand that it got too much for my mom, because he got... he tried to help my mom because she had a drug problem, so him trying to get her everything that she wanted, he thought that that would make her stay... and it wasn't. It wouldn't. You know, she would still have to leave and come back... like leave and come back. So he got the house, and he ended up selling the drugs because he needed the extra money. He is taking care of

me, my brothers and sister, I mean he actually literally only has three of us kids. But he is taking care of my mom's other two kids. And then her brothers and sisters who come home to our house...they are all drug addicts, so he takes care of them, and tries to get them help and other feet. You know, they take advantage, and they run around. I mean, it's just hard to take care of yourself, nowadays. And now days, in a blanket to income household.

Mm-hmm.

I mean, and he was doing it all by himself...taking care of everybody that my mom brought in. So, you know, it got to be too much for him. So I don't blame him for anything. I understand that he was trying to keep his head above water, you know, so to speak. And so I don't think of her anything. But I just...we warned him. And it just...

And so after that, the gas station job...

He got the gas station job...him and my mom were separated. She was staying in #####. I was working.

So things were calm down a little bit?

It was calming down a little bit, but...

That's the beginning of the ninth grade?

Yeah. I mean, it's been going on since I was a little kid. When I was a little girl, you know, my mom would take us to the worst places. And my uncle had to go get us, you know, because she would leave us there. You know, it's been going on for a while. But when he got out, it was like we thought, "Okay, good." We thought it was going to go back to normal. Not really so much. He ended up wanting to move out here. Out by #####. So he got a place out here. I was working, trying to get my stuff together. I wasn't concerned with family anymore. Me and my mom...loved her! Loved her to death. But then as I got older, she started really targeting me for fights. You know, that I would come home and she would have all of my stuff smashed in my room, just because of an addiction. And she would come at us in rage. You know, she tried to pour boiling milk on me. It missed me and it hit my brother. Burned his whole back.

Mmm!

So she took the pot and she swung it and hit me in the ankle. My ankle was swollen for three days. And this is...I just don't know where it comes from. It comes from the drugs and the pills and all that, but then only the trigger...her wanting to throw hot milk on me was I reached over her to get a bowl for some popcorn for my nephew. We were watching a movie. And she was just so messed up off her pills...she was wanting more...she would target us. So I kind of just did not want to be around. I didn't want to stay with family. I didn't want to stay with mom and dad. Loved them...at a distance, though. That's how me and my sister saw it...love them from a distance.

So that shows your resilience, then, right?

Yeah.

You are bouncing back...on your own.

Yeah. So I was working. I already had to give up school. So I was like "Forget it!" So afterward, we moved from up there down to #####.

#####, and then #####, right?

Yup.

So for up north, then back to #####, and then #####. And then so they came out here. They were out here. My mom begged me to come out here. I came out here for a little while. That' when she started with me, you know, she just...wanted me because she misplaced her pills, and she wanted them so bad and tried to, you know, pushing me and choking me up. My sister in law had to break us up because I never want to hit my mom, but when she is attacking you, what do you do, you know what I mean?

Yeah...

It just got to be too much. I was like, "Forget it!" So I got a job offering to manage my dad's gas station. I said, "Yeah, I can do that, because it was going down." He wanted me to bring it back up. The girls that he had were stealing from him, so...he had me go in. He fired them, stuck me in there, and, you know, I was working crazy shifts. I was trying to get schooling from #####, it was a college...and um...

So you still did schooling online, then?

Yeah,

Wow!

And I still kept trying. It wasn't like I didn't want to.

That shows resilience!

And I am still paying off ##### even though I didn't finish.

Wow!

And so that's the only thing that I have left to pay off, then my credit is completely clean, is my #####.

Wow.

But I started working such crazy hours, and I couldn't even have access to a computer because I am stuck in a little cubicle gas station all day. So I was just like, "Forget it!" So...and I really wanted to go to a campus school. You know, I wanted to get up and go. Like, trying to find time when I am at work, and to have to sit there and read your stuff, and get a customer...it's just hard to concentrate.

Even have people to ask questions...

Right

So like, I am more like a hand's-on learning, like I need somebody here to teach me. I just can't teach myself.

But so it sounds like you kept trying.

I did, but while I was in ##### and ##### like when we moved on...

I should say ##### and #####, right?

#####. Yeah, because my dad got us from up north over to #####, and we went from ##### over to #####...not far from our cousin...he got shot, you know right in front of our house...our cousin...dead, so... He was like, "We got to get out of here." So we got out of there, a couple of blocks, you know...it was right there on the border of #####. He passed the border to go over to be considered #####. So if you are in #####, I could go to a ##### school. So that is how I went to ##### [high school].

Did you like #####?

I did like #####. Some of it was okay. My math teacher spoke Arabic. I don't speak Arabic.

Oh, so that must have been hard to understand.

Yes. Same thing when I went to #####, went I went to the half Mexican/half Black School. Of lot of the teachers were from Africa or Jamaica. They had this accent and how they talked...I just couldn't understand it. And like I said, they're throwing me into a class, and everything I come hearing is like gibberish, already. So add an accent on, and I can't understand anything. So I understand my dad's accent, but I am used to that one. But I could not understand, it when I got to ##### that's when I had an Arabic math teacher would speak to the class in Arabic. I mean I, like, don't...

All in Arabic?

I guess a lot of the things that she wanted to say, she did not know how to say it in English, so she set it in Arabic.

And we're many of the students Arabic?

Oh, yeah. The whole class was Arabic. Yeah. I mean, the majority of the whole school is Arabic.

Oh, okay.

So, I mean,

And there is a lot of Arabic in the center...

Yeah, it's right there. I mean it would be a couple of Mexican, a couple of Black...I mean, barely any, at all. So it was like a barely mixed school.

So you...

I am very diverse!

So you are! You must have learned some Arabic as well, huh?

Oh yeah. I learned a little bit of Arabic. [Laughter]. And so when I went to school in #####, it was right off the rez., so I was around all the native Americans all the time. And so I was around everywhere. Just everywhere. And that is why I am such a diverse person because I got a little bit of everything...which I don't really hate it. You know, everything happens for a reason, you know what I mean?

Yeah. Yeah.

All the experiences of stuff. But I tried to do the ##### and couldn't even do that. So...

How did you even hear about that one?

My mom. My mom told me about it. She said to accept our diploma. And she says we can go. And it's online and it's through the mail. You can do it all on your own time. And I am like, you know I really need that. But I couldn't teach myself. That was the only thing. So you don't like I was, "Forget it!" I want to go to a campus. That's when I went to try to go to...because the gas station I was working at was over in ##### in ##### So we called by the street names, because I worked in the one out by the #####, and my brother worked in the one in #####

Wow!

So, you know, he was running that one, I was running mine. The idea was to lease it from my dad friend, and then it would become mine. But I didn't want to stay all of the hours in. I couldn't do it. You know he had me in there since he fired the other two girls. I was there from five in the morning until 11 at night. I don't want to do that no more. That's my dad's kind of schedule. Yeah, I didn't want to do it.

And your brother also was in charge of one of them?

Yeah.

... which is better than chucking them, right?

Yeah. Yeah. Well my brother is doing excellent now. He has opened up his own company. It's called ##### Testing. Though he calibrating and stuff for the gas pumps.

So, I mean, it's all chemistry, and Science and everything...

So did he get a GED then too?

He didn't get a GED. He has the same diploma as me and he's getting certified. First he got his...fortune drive trucks so he got a CD. And then he gotta...you know, he just kept going for certifications. Oh, you know, he likes gas stations, but he doesn't like to be in one. Like me. When you're growing up and, because I was seven and we have both been in it. You just don't want to sit in it and where it drives you crazy. He calls me all the time of my day off, and I finally get a day off. "##### please come here and sit here with me..." and I'm, "Nooooo! I finally got somebody to work for me. No!" Because I told my dad's friend but I wanted to go to school. "You need to have someone in here to help me." So he only brought one girl. She was only there for one day out of the week. I'll take it though – at least I will get a break. So I thought maybe she would work her way up to get more days. No, even on my day off I decided to go in and fix something to help her turn on all of the pumps. So I had to turn them off. So I mean that's when I tried to go to #####. I thought that I could do my nursing program there.

Like ##### College?

Yeah, ##### College. And they told me...married, 24, with a kid; I don't have their information...I don't talk to my mom or my dad. I don't need their information. I'm here, living in another city, taking care of myself. So I didn't need their information. There is no way I could get it. My mom took off again. I didn't speak to my dad for a while after...everything that happened, we kind of went...to speak. Where just now speaking. And the only thing was because after I left ##### I went back to#####. So I started working in a hookah lounge end I was going to try to go to #####

What is a hookah lounge?

A hookah lounge is a...

How do you spell that?

H O O K A.

Is that one of those things with the bubbly...

And it's got this long hose and you smoke out with it. And it has like flavored tobacco.

Is it legal?

Yeah. It's flavored tobacco. Though...I mean you still got to be 18 to do it. It's flavored tobacco. It's not like...nothing harmful.

Oh, that's good.

But...so I did that for a while and I was waitressing, you know, with it. So you know, bring out the hookahs and bring out the food and drinks. And I did that for a while, and it was really good money, because the Arabic – they love a Persian. They are like, “oh my God! You're a Persian! They are so rare in #####!” So they say they are mainly over in #####. So I don't know though. But you know, so I had my regulars. And it made really good money. And I thought, okay I could stay here, work, make good money...because one table, I got a \$40 tip just for bringing two guys a cup of coffee. I had it made, you know. “Okay, I'm good. So I could go to school and, you know, because I worked night shift over at work. I started at 6 PM to 4 AM. Because you know they smoke hookah all night. I don't know how they can do it. But they will do it. So especially around Ramadan season, it was busy. Because after the sun went down, everyone came to eat, because, you know, during the fasting. So I thought, “Okay, I can go to #####.” So I went to try that at ##### and I was in the process of getting in there, but my dad calls me and tells me my mom passed away.

Wow!

So he was like... after the funeral and all of the stuff that went on, he was like, “...I want you to come home. I hope you...just come home.”

Wow!

I was like, “Okay.” I was like, I was going to stop being stubborn. I'm going to start working my ass off, which I'm still working my ass off... [Laughter]. I cannot get away from work!

I don't think that there is any time that you didn't work during this whole thing!

I know! I have always worked. I can't help it. I have been into so many jobs, I mean from #####, working as the maid in a [hotel], and all of that. I've got it all. I like the experience though, just like all the different cultures and everything...I like the experiences. But so I started working. I've been in my job for about a year. At first, I started by managing ##### [fast food restaurant] in ##### and work my way up.

And was still in #####?

Yes, he was still in #####. He owns a gas station out there. So he, my dad does...

So he is doing really well out there, isn't he?

Yes, my dad is doing really good. His brother just got in trouble. So now, he is trying to take over all of the stuff that his brother was doing...his properties, his businesses, and all that stuff. So it's a lot of my dad, especially, after what he has been through so far. So that now he is just...he is just a wreck; he is losing his mind. And me and him don't talk still.

Aw...

We talk a little bit. He gives me my to do list and my grocery list for him. And that's what I do. So, and I helped him around the gas station. I Sweep, mop, stock the coolers, you know, so he can pray...so we still try to help each other out. But so I came home and then I was working, managing the [fast food restaurant] next to [Skipped content]. So I managed that for a little while. I got my CNA at American red cross in #####.

Okay, so that's a success in your life.

Yes. Yeah.

Got that certification, right?

Yes, certification for a nursing assistant. And they accepted my diploma so that I could get it. She was like, "How did you get it? You don't have a..." "Well, I have a diploma..."

A homeschooled diploma, so...

Yeah. So it still helped in some ways, I guess.

So who certify that? Was there a community college, or...

American Red Cross.

Oh, that's right!

That's through #####. ##### is the people that you have got to see to renew your license, that administer the license. And they do it through American Red Cross as well. And that was a three-week program, so it was quick and you know I made deal with my boss was managing, "Let me do this, and I will come back." And so I worked for her for a little bit, and then...I needed better things. I need to stop being tipped increase every night. So I started working at the nursing homes, getting a little bit of experience, that's from one. That's #####, and they are off from [names the streets]. And then, worked there for a little bit, and then I got call for the activities job. And I took it because it was paying more.

Where was that?

That's at ##### in #####.

Okay.

And there's a rehabilitation center there, too.

So activities director, is that what it's called?

Well I'm not the director, I have a boss for me, but I am an assistant. And then of course I am able to keep my license because I to the facility analysis, into all the games of them, I toilet people, I am able to jump on the floor and if they need it, I go on appointments with people. I am pulled to be receptionist. I mean they have had me pulled for medical Record filing. I meant they had me do it all. And I don't mind. I like it. And I really do. Because it keeps me busy. It keeps me always learning something different. So I am okay with it but...so I am working my way up there now.

So you have a lot of successes that you have right now, right?

Yeah!

So let me jump back or just a little bit. As you know as a reading teacher I want to know where how you learned how to read and how to draining effect...it seems like it really was something that you could do because you kept pursuing education...

Yeah.

So if you were doing that, I don't know if you would do it if you had troubles with reading.

No. I don't have any troubles with reading. I read pretty well. I mean if I'm not interested in it, but I might have to read it again real quick.

Okay.

To understand you know to really get it, because I am not...my mind is not focused on it. Because I have an incredible ability to tune anything out. You know, I will be just watching TV; my fiancé would be sitting and yelling, calling me, and I won't hear a darn thing! So I mean I have an amazing talent just to blurt it all out.

When you first learned to read, when was that?

I remember my first grade teacher. She was teaching us. And I remember she would go through the flashcards with us, and I always have to problem with the word "or." I could not get that out for some reason. I remember, but she taught me, so I got it.

The word "or," that's interesting. That's really interesting because a lot of people say "I don't how..."

My brother is really good at math, though.

And so maybe that was a roadblock. Math. Let's put math down as a roadblock.

When I first got out here, I want to say like a couple years ago, we were trying to get in at ##### College, and I couldn't because they had placement testing. They accepted the diplomas, but they did the placement testing and stuff. And I just couldn't get over the math. I just could not pass it. I got higher every time I went. But I just could not get it and I was like, "Forget it!" I was like I needed to get my GED...maybe it would refresh me for my math. So that's what I'm going for.

Well then, that's what I was going to say...have you heard of this one online? This Kahn Academy?

No.

...this is all free. And this guy wanted to teach his nephews math. So he made this online thing to make it fun to learn math. And they did. And then, their friends wanted to. And then, *their* friends wanted to. And then people said, "Hey, can you do science?" "Hey, can you do reading?" "Hey, can you do...?"

Right!

And now he is famous!

No kidding!

Is this trigonometry, or algebra, or geometry...

Yeah. Well, you see from bouncing around between all the high schools that I want to, I didn't just get tossed into any class to actually learn, you know what I mean. So I got all of my basics down. I can do some of it. But when it came to high school, we are doing...and especially with the sciences as well, like chemistry and physics and then like I said the teachers did not speak English. And I had no idea what they are saying. I need like they spoke English, but not all that great. And I just couldn't do it, so it was like, "Okay, never mind." And I don't even don't what they are saying.

Think of that... write that down for yourself, because that's one, you have...[then, to someone in another part of the office] don't you have...[Skipped content of discussion of available resources involving someone from the office]

But I recommend it, too.

Oh, okay.

This is one that you're thinking, "Okay I'm going to take this test...maybe I could do a little bit more..." it sounds like you're the kind of person that could do a little mouse starting or logo more information before I do this. That might help. And so this would be a real good option for you. And it was started in such a nice way, or you are like rooting for that guy...

So the kind of process that you have been going through is, "How can I learn more? How can I learn more?" It almost seems to be your theme.

Yeah.

That only, though, in academics, but in meeting new people and trying new things and trying new jobs...

Yeah. That's why I'm so diverse. I like everything, and it doesn't bother me. And I'm a Gemini too. I am adaptable. I can adapt to anything. So I know they say we got two personalities, but that is not the greatest. We are known as creativity and we adapt well and I like the idea of everything. Everything sounds amazing. I want to try everything.

Sometimes it's more than the label, you know, more than if you label it a certain month that you were born...

To keep going... trying to get my-self together... what motivated me?

Yeah.

I wanted to...I wanted to be okay in life. I didn't want to do what they did. I want to learn from their mistakes. And of course I'm going to make my own on the way...I'm okay with that. But you know as long as I learn from their mistakes, I can make my own mistakes. So I don't repeat everything. And I want to be able to...like my dad, I don't know how he would was able to take care of everyone and their mothers and everything,

... and still have trouble on the way.

Yeah, you know what I mean? Oh yeah, he had trouble! But for him just to keep his head above water, he has always been able to do that. And he has always told me especially my dad when we had our differences...

As he Persian too?

Yes, my dad is Persian. And my mom is Native American and Irish.

Oh!...

So I am mixed. So what do you call it...my mom's a little firecracker...of lady blond curly hair and his foot tall skinny Persian doesn't say anything...so kind a quiet so, it was funny though because they say opposites attract. But he is always instilled...I mean my mom didn't graduate

or nothing. She, actually, later on she did the same schooling as us. So she could. They say it's never too late.

Oh...! I agree.

That's what I learned from #####, my mom was trying to her college there. After she got done doing her diploma at ##### like we did.

But my mom grew up in a really bad place. I mean, that's why I do not blame her for anything that she has overdone. I look at my life, and oh gosh, I got nothing on people probably in this world. It's okay by me.

And did your dad...

My dad didn't graduate. He was actually here...he was here on his visa for school. You know he was a student. And, but he had a real bad language problem when he got here. Passing some of his classes. Little bit hard. So he wasn't able to attend anymore. He started working in the kitchen...first as a bus boy then he moved up the cook then he started learning English. Then his friend happened to be dating my aunt, which is my mom's sister. And then they started introducing them...my mom and dad. He was still trying to go to school while helping my mom with her first son, who wasn't his, but he was still around. And then he just didn't finish, and take out somehow into the gas station business. And he just started doing that. But my dad is very intelligent. He reads all day. He watches the news and everything. He's a health fanatic. No junk food or free radicals or anything like that...his food is from the meat market in Dearborn. And he is just an all-around health fanatic. I got to get his green onion, is garlic, is cabbage...when I was a kid, I never got call syrup. I got green onion and I got raw garlic. So you know...but you know it works. He is a healthy person, so...

So some of the difficulties and roadblocks where math, but you were also homeless, really.

Yeah. I didn't have a stable home. I do not have a place that was for permanent, you know, everything was just, you know, going to happen the next day. Everything happened so quick. You constantly turn around to different situations constantly. You know, mom took off... dad took off... dad is in prison... and he gets out and then he goes back. My mom took off again and then mom died. And everything just...everything keeps happening, over and over. And then you get to losing people you don't talk to anymore. I stop talking to my sister, but she...her fiancé...I mean they are married now...he was her boyfriend a the time, he hit on my when I was fifteen.

Hmm!

And that's when I was living with her...going to school.

At fifteen...so he just hit on you, or you...

Well, he used the internet first, he commented that he loved me but he didn't love me like I thought he loved me. Like I would say like, "Hey, big bro...my mom's gone, my dad is locked up. My brothers are gone...I don't know where." He was like a big brother type. He looked out for me and everything. But then, all of a sudden, I figured out why.

So he made as pass, or...

So he made as pass... That was just over the internet. And then, I just didn't say anything to him. I just kept quiet. I didn't tell my sister. I just minded my business. I didn't say anything. And then one night, he said, you know, "Come in here, let me talk to you." And he goes, "I hope that message didn't freak you out." I says, "Well, yeah! And dude, you are like my brother." You know what I mean? And he goes, "I'm sorry, I can never react on my feelings. But I wanted you to know that's how I really felt about you." And I'm fifteen years old. He's 25...26. You know what I mean?

And married to your sister.

Well, he wasn't married to her yet. They just had a boy together...a son, who I was looking after while she was at work and he was trying to make a pass at me.

Hmm! Things didn't make a lot of sense for you. I mean, all that stuff happening to you at once...

Everything. Everything. You know but I mean to... have to...

...to handle all of that,...

Well, you know, I'm...I can brush it off. You know what I mean?

It's called resilience.

[Laughter].

I can brush it off, you know. You know I have...I've really seen worse. Everything has been in front of me. I mean...learn how to cook drugs when you are a kid...You are not supposed to learn that. Your dad is not supposed to say, "I dropped the bag, can you go outside and find it?" And you have to look through 20 acres to find out where he dropped the bag. Come on, though! You know. So that's one of the smallest things that could possible happen. He came on to me So it didn't bother me any, but...I mean it bothered me because he was my brother [future brother in law], so, "Damn, you just ruined the relationship." So, that's really what bothered me the most, I think. And the fact that that is my sister.

And the trust factor.

You know, and then that's my sister. "What makes you think that I would do that to her? And I'm fifteen, you're twenty-something." So it kind of just caught me off guard.

Did she ever find out?

Well, I never told her because, knowing my sister, my brother had warned me about it, that she loved the guy too much. She wouldn't listen...she wouldn't care. So when my mom re-appeared, I told her about it. And she was a little mad. But I was just like, "Don't say anything." She actually didn't say anything to ##### [her sister] about it. So I was happy that she didn't, because that's one thing that she didn't do. But my sister called me...she was like, "Yeah, well this girl next door, she is underage, and she was saying that ##### was trying to make a pass at her, and I just I don't believe that, and this might be a lot of things, and he won't hit on an underage girl, and I just...[demonstrated holding her breath]. I was always a quiet person. I just didn't say anything to nobody. Like, no matter what was going on, I just kept quiet. You know, I didn't have an opinion. I didn't express any feelings. I just...I was quiet.

So at that point, did you say anything?

You know, I was at that point where I was just like...I kind of opened up my mouth about it...I was like, "No... actually he is like that. And this is why." And she was just stunned.

Did it help her, though?

No. Actually, me and her, we just stopped talking. And she married him and then had two more kids with him. And then, he lied about it the whole time. She said that I lied. She's not saying that he lied. But she don't know who to believe. "Oh, okay...that's how you feel, that's fine." But I would never lie about something like that. That's something that is off the wall...I mean, I loved him. I respected the guy. He was like my brother. Now, he's nothing. You know, he is just dirty. So it wasn't until just recently, he told her the truth. She wanted me to come over. She wanted me to come over and bring my boyfriend. He [sister's boyfriend] said, "Well, I don't know him. I don't want him around my daughter. And I was like, that's funny because I was like..." "You're one to talk about not wanting to be around someone's young daughter. Maybe my dad wouldn't want me to be around you." And so, my sister was like, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked you to come over." This and I said, "Listen, I'm not going to come over there for a visit." I was like, "No. He has the nerve,...I'm not going to talk about it" you know. So he finally came clean to her about it. And so she apologized, and she said every kind of sorry, and...Everything is fine, you know. And I was like, "You should know. You should know better." But he was saying really weird stuff to her, and she didn't say nothing. And so,

That's so sad!

You know, that's why it's better not to say anything. I was trying to explain that to my boyfriend right now. He was like, "Why don't you tell your brothers or your sister about this?" You can't. They'll hate you. My brother got into a fist fight over his girlfriend. She was calling me and my other sister-in-law whores, and this and that just because his ex-baby momma was going to be at a birthday party for a little kid. And she was so immature and young and I told her, "You need to shut up...this is about a little kid's birthday." And she complained to my brother

about it, and he got in my face and we got into a fist fight in my dad's gas station. My sister-in-law called the cops. And so we had to go through court, and that...

Oh my God!...

And so... This has been a lot. This has been a lot.

How old were you then?

This actually was just recently...21..22.

Wow!

So then we went through court. Of course they didn't believe anything he said. So...

They didn't believe him, but they did believe you?

Yeah, because my dad told them what happened. My other brother was there and my sister-in-law was there. They told them everything that happened. You know, "He was standing over her and he was hitting her" and stuff like that. And first he was like, "Repeat that." And I repeated myself. Once I got to age eighteen, I found I was going to start speaking up, you know. And I didn't like the way she was talking to us about a little girl's birthday party because she didn't like one of the girls that was going to be there. Let's act like adults here. You know, the girl is in the family. She has kids with him. So, sorry. You know that she is going to bring the kids. And she don't like it, so we got into a fight; well, not with her. He fought for her. I didn't press any charges or anything. #####. County picked it up. So they said that they deal with so many domestic violences, and they said that even though it's not domestic because of husband and wife, they said still, though...

It was family...

So, but they were really interested in his record, because my brother has a violent history. So they looked...he's not shot people, this and that, and they looked at his record and okay, he's a person that needs to be taught a lesson. So even he blamed me for getting him in trouble. But "It's your fault. I mean, you had the shitty record. They know your temper. I mean, It's your fault." I mean he was going through another case because he was at a baseball game, and he punched someone right in the face. They pressed charges on him. So, I mean, so I said, "It's your fault." I don't talk to him no more. Me and him used to be okay. I don't talk to him anymore.

Was your dad violent, too, when you were growing up?

No. My dad...he...not at all! He wouldn't even yell at us. He would just like, "You get away from me." And you would just have to go away. My mom, she wouldn't whoop us in any way, or anything like that. We didn't get no whooping's. We got no discipline, actually. So for us to be as good as we are, working, and taking care of business, you know, for not having any

discipline...Because like I said, they were never there, either. I mean, when I was there, it was just, "Get away! Go play."

Mmm...

And when my mom was there and she was locking herself in the room, and talked to guys on the internet that her cousin showed her how to do. So, you know, it was just...we were on our own, you know what I mean, so we just pretty much...we just learned from everyone else.

So I had one up here about when you were in these five different school, were there any activities that you liked...a drama club, a choir...was there anything that made you feel connected to anyone at the school?

I actually...I wanted to do track, really bad. My brother went into football...I wanted to do football so bad! Because I was a big tomboy growing up, because I grew up really close to him and his friends, in elementary and everything. So it's always been "us." So I wanted to do football with them, and I did soccer with them. But these were kind of like in-school kinds of things. Like we did soccer when we were in elementary school, but when it got to high school, I mean...parents not around...we didn't get rides to the afterschool projects. And like me and my fiancé grew up. He grew up completely different. He graduated high school...went to prom. He did all of the stuff that a kid was supposed to do. You know, got his license early and started to drive when he was sixteen/seventeen, something like that. I had to wait until I was eighteen because I had stopped going to the school. So I had to wait, you know. Everything for me, I just had to do. So we didn't get into those, like, extra activities. No dances. No school dances. No nothing. I think I went to only one school dance. It was homecoming when I was in ninth grade. And yeah, so that was just one dance that I ever went to. But you know, we just couldn't go to any of the activities, because I'm not being there, and where we lived, we lived right by #####, so we were in the middle of ##### and ##### was a 45 minute drive to our house. So they wasn't going to...we had to ride the bus. If we missed the bus, my sister was ready to choke me, because then she would have to come drive 45 minutes to get me. So we couldn't do no school activity.

So one of the questions down here is, "Can you describe how you made the decision to return to school? And it sound like...how about the decision to come to #####?"

It's right by my work. It seemed really convenient to me. I've been prolonging school. I mean, I've been trying, but prolonging at the same time. But I figured that I should have had this done like...my boyfriend's little brother is almost done with college. And he's littler than me - I'm like, "I know." And then we went into the middle to try to get, you know, a high school diploma over in #####. And middle-schoolers way bigger than me!

That's the adult ed. program over in #####.

Yeah. They had the adult ed. program there. So and that's when I found out about this one. They said that this class is three days a week, and you know, it's quicker, because...I think that that one over there was going to take longer, but I don't have for that, you know. I want to get

things going...rolling. I finally cleaned up my credit from the school bill. So, you know, I only got \$600 more to pay on it, and then, I'm done. And then...you know, I got my car, and I'm an establishing my credit. So right now. So you know my credit is really good now. Finally. So, I thought, once I worked, and I could establish my credit, and get a brand new car going; then I could, you know, run around with a brand new car and not have to worry about anything. So now that I finally got my new car, it was time for me to go to school. I just want to...I want to make more money. I don't want my time wasted.

Oh...so for your future plans, you would like to make more money,

Yeah, I mean if I'm going to be out there, and I'm going to be using my time; why not make it for more money, you know? So I already have to be there. I already have to work. I rather would just get more. That way, because like I said, nowadays, you do need a two income household most of the time, but if something were to happen, and this is based on growing up wise too, if something were to happen, say, me and my fiancé don't work out...

So your GED credential is going to give you that security?

Yeah. I'm going to be able to...It's been a roadblock for a while...getting the GED. I had the diploma, but needing the GED is the roadblock for me.

So that was a roadblock, here.

Because I can simply get into college and get my stuff going, but I need the GED to do it.

So what do you expect to do with your amazing new GED?

I want to enroll right away into my nursing classes. I mean, I'm going to go little by little, because I work a lot. And I just couldn't possibly afford to just not work right now. I really want to just finish getting the GED. That way, I can get right into my nursing and then you know, move up at work and become the nurse there. The RNs, because they have a lot of LPN needs for RNs. So they are phasing out LPNs.

Are LPNs higher or lower?

They are lower than an RN. LPN is a Licensed Practical Nurse.

Okay... Is that after CNA?

Yeah. Yeah. Or like after medical assistant, or... That's more of a "nurse nurse," because you have your...

...at least if I am an RN, I will be at least content with where I am at, at the moment.

Employable.

Yeah. Because the job is always in demand.

If you could be anything in the world, what would you be?

I want to own a restaurant. Being in the business field for a long time, I mean I still got properties in my name, because my mom, and my uncle, and...trying to get rid of those.

And that's a dream job!

I have been in a restaurant. When I was in ##### one I left the gas station, I was in...because I needed to go to school, I was like, "I'm sorry, I can't do the gas station no more." I started working a waitress. Then I moved my way up to the culinary assistant, and shift leader. So first, I had to work my way up to shift leading. So I arranged all of the shifts, and how it all would go. And then I moved up to culinary assistant, where I am actually back there with the cooks cooking. I loved it! I loved the cooking. And...

If you could say to a high school student who is leaving school, what would you say?

Say, "Don't do it!" [Laughs]. "Do not! Oh my God, is it a pain in the ass to go back and finish!"

Can I quote that?

Yes you can! Yes you can! Please do! Let them know! Use extra quotation marks if you have to! [Laughter]. Because you just got to go back and do it.

"Because a student said, 'Do it because it's a pain in the ass...'"

...to have to go back. Every place needs a GED. Places require the GED now, I mean, to... If you have any type of education, this is what they need, is a GED. Otherwise, you're going to be just looked at as someone who doesn't complete things. You are looked at as someone who doesn't even have common sense, than get your GED or anything like that. I mean, you know, I understand...we all have our problems on why we couldn't. So you are not able to, in certain situations, then that's understandable. But the fact is to always keep going back and keep trying. That's number one. If you are able to, and you just don't want to do it because you are lazy, believe me, you ain't going to want to do it later on! Do it while you are young and get it over with now because time flies when you are older and when you are doing it all at once. It's like, "Where did my days go?" Because you stay so busy. Because I'm working full time, trying to get my GED after work, and then I've got to run home and help at the gas station, or help with the kids, and...I think that it's a lot.

Yeah.

Too much. And then I've got to deal with going out to all of these different cities to go with the houses and the properties. It's just you just don't have time.

And what would you say to the high school administrators of the high schools? What should they do to make the schools better?

I would say definitely keep learning interesting and fun. If kids aren't having fun, then you're never going to get their attention. Especially, in the new day and age, the kids right now are more...more grown up than they should be! That's for darn sure! My six year old niece is acting like she is sixteen! And I don't want to [unintelligible] for one. Yeah, definitely try to make it more funner for them.

And what else in terms of the fact that they lost records, they had you in different...

I would say that, you know, make sure that the student...because, when they were sending me to all these classes, I was not aware of anything that was going on. Make sure the student is fully well aware of what is going on, and ask some questions. Don't just, I mean... My sister didn't care. They just threw me into the school. They put me wherever they wanted. You know, my sister didn't know what classes I needed. I didn't know. I mean, I was completely clueless as to all of it.

So the school *and the student* should be aware of student needs.

Yeah. If you are getting a student, and they're schooling is messed up, you don't know if I'm in tenth grade or eleventh grade...or twelfth grade, even...if you don't know if I belong in any of these grades, I don't even know what grade I'm supposed to be in. I didn't complete any, but you say I'm supposed to be a junior, when I only remember completing my tenth grade, and you are saying I'm a senior. And I didn't even complete the other two grades! I'm just confused at this point.

And did you tell anyone that you couldn't understand the Arabic? Did anybody listen?

No, I would raise my hand and she would go back to...I don't understand Arabic...and she would go back to English. But she would forget constantly about...You know, she just said, you know, it's so...you know how you are just speaking and the Arabic just comes out natural...it's their number one language. You know, so English is not their language. So even my dad does it sometimes. But he didn't teach us...you know, if he taught us Farsi, I still wouldn't be able to understand Arabic. It's different. So it was just, you know...I don't think she was aware. I mean, pretty much, all the kids in the class understood what she was saying. I just happened to be the one that was mix, and my dad is not Arabic. He's Persian.

So if that were the case, schools should do what about a situation like that? Should they be aware?

Yeah, maybe ask the students, maybe, then like how they did here, they had us take surveys about how is your teacher, and how was the class, and you know, stuff like that. And you know, I could have wrote down perfectly fine...make sure it's anonymous, too. Because nobody wants to know you are the one that said it.

So, feedback to the school, so they should listen to students?

Yeah. Absolutely. Because the students know what they need. I mean, who better to ask than the source itself?

That's exactly what I am doing with this!

Exactly!

Because kids are getting smarter now. They have their own...they know what they like and what they don't like. So with the fact that this new generation is getting so much more advanced, it's going to get harder to keep that kind of attention span. You know, like my niece, she is six years old...She just won't regular cartoons like I watched when I was a kid. She wants to watch the more teenage stuff now. Kids are more advanced. You've got to keep things going...

Like "Frozen" or something...

Well, she will watch Frozen. She likes Frozen. And you know, I could have watched Frozen when I was a kid too. You know, it's a cartoon. But she wants to watch "Jessie" where this girl comes out and the babysitter had to tell her go get back in the room, go change because she had on these short, short jean shorts and half a shirt on. And this is a girl that is supposed to be in middle school...middle school? That's not okay!

Yeah.

And I was talking to my brother, like, "Please don't let her watch this...if she is prancing around in these little short shorts..." "I wear basketball shorts! There's no reason why this little girl should think that short shorts are cute!" You know.

Yeah.

Because I wear baggy clothes all the time. I'm in these scrubs to work. But, I mean... They're just so much more advanced, but you can't...just put cartoons on there for her. It's just not going to catch her attention. Because she's just that much more advanced.

So that's that engagement part. What is going to hold their interests and motivate them.

Yeah, you have to see from them. I'm not them. I don't know what interests them. I mean, nothing ever interests me unless it has something to do with, you know, my future and making money, and I'm okay in life, you know. That's the only thing that I am focused on right now. Also, I wouldn't know what interests me. Everything does. So I'm okay with anything, but to really get their interests is the thing.

That's amazing! Thank you so much! You are so interesting!

Student Number Eighteen

We are doing an interview about your perceptions about why you left school and then about returning to school with interest to literacy, engagement, and resilience.

Yeah.

Okay, so the first question that I want to ask is can you tell me about your educational experiences from elementary school to high school.

Well, in elementary, I went to school every day. Like I had perfect attendance. And like outspoken. And I was like willing to learn. And then when I got to middle school, I started engagement and talking...like friends, and then when I got to high school, it became more social. And it made me not want to learn and just talk with friends. You know, that's what I thought school was about...you know, socializing. And then I had to learn too. Because the friends that you have, they're not going to be there, you know.

And the friends that you hung out with, were those the friends that were still going to school, too...

Yes.

...or were they kids that were starting not to go? [Short interruption by someone outside of the room].

The friends that you were hanging out with...were they interested in school or were they like people that were saying, "Let's not go to school?"

Yeah. They said, "Let's not go to school," or like, "Let's just talk," you know, or "...go somewhere else," like, "Let's skip." And like I was just gullible, you know. And that's like...my head wasn't in, like, focusing in on school.

And so for high school, that was really the changing point for you, that you were liking school up until that point?

Yeah, I was liking school, but like when I start like really [understanding] what school was about, it was like too late, you know. So...

Okay.

Because I...like I stopped going to school like the last 30 days of 12th grade.

Okay, that's one of my questions here – when did you leave. So it's really 12th grade, right?

Yeah.

...in the last 30 days. Wow. Okay. So you were kind of close.

Yeah.

Wow. Okay. So in that idea, you really kept going.

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

And did you have the credits and attendance marks...

No, my attendance was like, it was not good. Like, because I don't know why, because like, when I was in the smaller grades, I would have like perfect attendance. And I used to go to basketball games and everything. And like...it just started, slowly, you know...

Did the classes get harder?

No. I was just like being a kid, you know, like not [unintelligible]...talking to friends.

Okay, excellent... What were your experiences with learning to read and using that skill to learn other subjects?

Mmm...

Like do you remember learning how to read?

Like, when I was in kindergarten and stuff?

Yeah, early on...do you remember how that worked, or...did you wake up one day and say, "Wow, I can read!?"

Yeah! [Laughs].

People tell me that!

I remember like...having like a tutor or someone to help me read. Because like...I like have dyslexia...in...you know...certain words, like backwards. When I was little, I used to write my "B's" like "D's." That was the way I remember having help to read.

Okay. And then you feel that really helped a lot.

Yes.

Great...okay...and so when did you figure out that you had dyslexia? Did that affect other subjects in your school? Like when you went to your history class?

Yeah, because everything involves reading. So everything was like, you know, it was like ten times harder. But I realized that I had dyslexia in the 8th grade. And my mom, she told me...like she knew something was wrong, like when I was little, because I still wrote everything backwards and upside-down. But then she told me and then, like she went to go to the doctor. And they told us like what was wrong. And I started getting my extra help.

And did that help?

Yes.

Good. Good. And then how connected were you with the activities at school and your family during the time, like middle into high school? Did you feel like your family, parents, were behind you? Anyone else in your family? How did you feel about that?

I feel like when my mom, she was like 100 percent. She was like behind me. And when I used to slack and stay home from school, she was, "Get up," you know. "You need to learn. You need to be a better person. It's like to teach you to become a better adult and a person." And I was thinking that I was more, like, engaged like having fun instead of...don't like being at school.

Mm-hmm.

Like if I did go to school, I would just go for my friends. And not for like learning.

Did you have any teachers that encouraged you?

Yes.

Like, "I haven't seen you for a while. What are you doing?"

Yes.

And then what was your response?

It was like...you know like...you don't want to hear something until it is too late. So it's like, "Let me tell you..." like they might persist, and they might tell you like, "Go to class! You're late!" ...you know. Like, "Do your work!" And then like when it was too late, I was like...I should have listened. So it's like that's what pushed me to come here...you know, to take my GED. Because I know that they was right. And like, it's never too late to do anything.

Absolutely.

So you felt connected to your friends, but not necessarily to the school.

Yes.

Or the academic part of it. That's academics. Okay, and then, so what held your interests or motivated you to participate in things, like did you go to basketball games when you were in high school?

Not really.

Okay. Just basically, your friends were the motivators for you to get up in the morning

Yeah.

...because you could see your friends.

Yeah.

And was there any other aspect of being with this group? Was it a group made up of people who were...or had a certain desire to do something?

Like, our group was like eclectic. It was just...like everybody in one group. But it was more people that was like, you know, the [unintelligible] of the class, you know. Like just...skip, you know.

So was it based on drugs or gangs or anything like that?

[No].

Good. And that's...so just the pull of them all saying, "Let's break the rules?"

Yeah.

Did you think that the rules were too hard?

No. But every kid, or, you know, you just don't want to...like you don't like rules, so you try to break them as much as...yeah.

And what did your mom say when you left school? Like, can you explain the circumstances of why you left school at the time when you did?

I left school because I was just tired of getting up in the morning and, you know, I just wanted to sleep in. And she was like, "Get up for school." And, I'm like, "I don't want...I just don't want to go."

Did she know that you had been skipping school? Or skipping classes?

No.

Okay. So she thought that every day, you were going to school...you were doing everything you had to do.

Yes. But it's like I stayed home more than I went to school.

Was she working? Did she know if you were at school?

Yeah, she was working, but like she knew...when she was off work, she knew that I had stayed home.

And what did she say?

She was just trying to motivate me to do better, you know. She didn't like come down on me, like real hard and things. She was just like trying to motivate me. And like to this day, that's what I think motivates me to get my GED.

[No mention of her father or other family members, but survey said it was family problems that compelled her to leave school.]

It was her wish for you to do that.

Yeah.

Did she go to high school and college?

Yeah. She went to high school and college. But you know, she has her own circumstances and problems that she had. And she got *her* GED. And like, because I...she had like surgeries on her eyes because there was something that had happened to them. And like she couldn't continue... [She did not go into more detail about family difficulties]

Okay And then why did you leave within the last 30 days? Did you say, "I'm leaving," or did you not go, or did you get a letter? How did that work?

I just said like, "I'm leaving because it's too late." You know, my grades wasn't, you know, like...it wasn't right, you know...I had like 11 credits.

Credit problems? You had 11 that you needed, or 11 only?

Eleven only, because I missed so many days in school, and I couldn't catch up.

Was that for all of high school, or was that just senior year?

It started getting worse. But, like, 9th grade was okay because I was going...when I was learning. And then when I got to 10th grade, it was like, "Oh! Friends!" And when I got to the 11th grade, it's like, you know, I just don't want to be there. And I went to 12th grade and it got worse.

Okay. And then, what were some of the difficulties and roadblocks that you overcame to come back?

Difficulties...just like motivating myself.

That's a good one...

And know that whatever I'm trying to accomplish is going to be worth it.

So you felt that you sort of convinced yourself about the need?

Yeah.

...to do that?

Yes.

And so you give credit to yourself, then.

Mm-hmm.

And you give a little credit for your mom...

Yeah.

...and her wish. And then...any other roadblocks that you had that you felt that you...was it a long bus ride away? Or friends all started coming back to get a GED? Were any of those roadblocks?

It was just like...in a certain point in your life, you just realize, you know, that, "I need to be doing better than this. And I was out of school for like a whole year. And...

And that was after the 12th grade?

Yes. And then, like I started seeing like calling social networks... Oh, I'm going to college," and "this is my 12th year, I mean "I am in the 12th grade now..." Like it was the same things that I was seeing, like you know, I can do better than this. So I just got up one day and, you know, called, and everything.

So how did you decide on this program?

I heard about it and I heard my mom was in it.

Your mom was in this program?

Yeah.

Oh, that's neat!

And so that...I just...I did it. Because she told me about it. So, that's how...

So the structure and rules were solely on you.

Mm-hmm.

The rules that you didn't want to follow that someone else set?

Yeah.

You feel like you have set your own rules for yourself?

Yeah. Kind of.

Think about attendance, for example.

Mm-hmm.

So nobody says anything if you don't come. Is that right?

Mm-hmm.

And so only you have to...

Yeah.

...please yourself?

Yeah.

Is that what you are saying?

Mm-hmm.

Okay, good. And then, when you made that decision, was it a long time, or it was just a snap decision? Or, you realized that you could more out of life?

Yeah. I realized that I could get more out of life and like...I think the decision was already made, you know, because it's like, I've been unable to, you know, start school again. But it was something that was just like, you couldn't wait a whole lot longer. But then, I just started to overcome like waiting, you know. But if you wait, you're not going to achieve anything. So I just started to just do instead of wait.

I like that... “Just do instead of wait.” That’s really nice. And so, in terms of making a decision, you were at the point where...did you have the resources? You know, the money to pay for that. And were you working as well?

Yes.

Okay. And then, did you feel when you were working that you could get a higher paying job?

Yes...like where I am working now, like I can do better because it’s like, they need people with a high school diploma, or with a GED...and they get paid, like more.

They told you that, or is that in your paperwork?

No...it was just like... it was how much I...it was a blackboard [www.blackboard.com, an online jobsite] job...because I didn’t have my GED or I didn’t have my diploma. So I’m like, “I just need to do something now.”

Okay. Excellent! [Short interruption]. Okay, now we are back to, “Do you feel like your resilience...your ability to stick with it is stronger?”

Yes. I thought it gets stronger, because like...like I am more motivated. And it’s like...I didn’t really care. You know, this program is like...they care. They take their time with you. They give you your own, like, point of action. So it’s like...it’s like I feel like more motivated to do stuff.

And then how connected do you feel to the other students, or to the program, or even to #####. Do you feel like you are connected...

Yes. I fell like I am connected here at ##### and like the program. But with like the other students, I really don’t feel that connected. Like they don’t really engage. Like, they don’t really like work together. They, like, do, like, stuff by themselves. And now I’m like I would come up to someone and do like, “Do you want to work together?” or something. So I really don’t feel connected, but...it’s like I can feel more connected, you know, in certain things.

Do you wish that you had more friends as that they were working, like high school, or is that a good...

Well, it’s a good thing, because, like, I’m not distracted. You know. I just focus on everything that I need to focus on.

Okay. And then...What are some of the successes in your life today?

Well, I can get up every day.

And that’s important!

Yeah. And just...you know, just get up without thinking twice. I think like after this, like I can become so much more. So I think that's like really a success. So, yeah.

So you have hope?

Yes.

And that's that last questions is, "What are your future plans?"

My future plans are becoming an artist, and becoming like an entrepreneur. You know, like owning my own business. Yeah.

Wow, that's wonderful! Okay, so what would you say to the high schools? What should they fix?

I think the high schools should fix...like the way they interact with students. Like, everybody doesn't learn at the same pace. Like they need to engage the students more and care about each and every student, like...yeah. I think that's it.

And you said care?

Yeah. They need to care about their students. And then, what would you say to others that left school?

Like it's only a phone call away? A click away, like you can do it. Just get up and stop saying, "I'll wait." The next opportunity. And they got to motivate themselves to do better.

And how can they do that? How in yourself, how could you tell them from personal experience...how would you get them to say, "Well, how do I motivate myself?"

I think...well, like do something that you know you would like to do. And like, think about that. Like, as you are doing your GED, so you know...like that can be your next step after you have completed you GED. And you can motivate yourself easily by knowing what you want to do. And like your goals...like your favorite thing to do, like turn that and make it into like, you know, a career. So...

...so you have something to look forward to?

Yeah.

Excellent! Thank you so much! That was really, really great! Thank you !

Student Number Nineteen

So, can you tell me about your educational experiences from elementary school through high school?

Elementary was good. I felt like I was taught what I needed to know. Middle school became more of an issue for me where there were some things where I had trouble with this. And I had...and then when I got to high school, it was way off. It was just a lot more responsibilities that I was coming to have to deal with, as I got older. That I was not ready to do and that I wasn't taught how to do in high school.

Okay, What were your experiences with learning to read and using that skills to learn other subjects? Do you remember when you learned to read?

Ah, no. I remember taking reading tests in elementary school.

And did you like reading?

Yeah. I enjoyed reading. I just had a lot of trouble, personally, with comprehension.

Comprehension, okay. Did you find that reading other subjects was directly related to trouble with other subjects, like science, history, math...

Yeah.

So that was related?

So that gave you more trouble?

Yeah. It gave me a lot more trouble because I would have trouble with, like, multiple choice. It was like having to read something, and...trouble with all that I just read.

Okay...

Like, I wasn't ready.

Okay. And then, how connected were you with school activities and activities with your family? So one of the things I am doing, I am asking about literacy. I'm asking about engagement. How connected are you? And how did you bounce back? Right now, this one is asking how connected are you with the activities at school...were you in sports or clubs, or did you like the people or the teachers and how connected were you with your family and high school?

Throughout high school, I actually had depressed [depression] issues when I became a sophomore. And I didn't talk to my family at all. I talked to my friends. And my friends were about...

How about activities at school? Did you join any clubs, or...

Yeah, I did football every year.

Every year?

Yeah.

Okay. And then, some of the teachers? Did you like any of the teachers?

Yeah.

They were helping you, or...

Yeah. I became very close to the counselor that I had from my sophomore year to my senior year until we moved away. And then there were teachers that were...when I knew I was going to drop out and take my GED, there were some that...it was just like two...then other than that, no.

Okay. Then what was it that motivated you to get up and go to school every day?

Nothing [slight laugh]...because I was forced to.

...forced. And not even for football?

No.

Didn't you have to have certain grades to...

Yeah. That's why I tried [laughs]...you know where it got...

Okay. And can you explain the circumstances of why you left school and when did you leave...I think you said...you left 12th, right?

Yeah. 12th. 12th grade.

And the circumstances...did you say you moved?

Yeah, I moved. Wait, what? [slight laughter]. The circumstances?

Explain the circumstances of why you left school.

Why I left school? I just wasn't...I just didn't have the credits. I didn't have the credits at all.

Okay. And how did that happen with that moving? Did you move in your senior year?
No...yeah. I moved in my sophomore and freshman year.

So that was with your family?

Yeah.

So after that, you said that you didn't talk to them?

Yeah, I didn't really talk to them.

But you went to the school in that area?

Yeah, I still live with them. I did not talk to them.

Okay.

I just went...to my room.

And so you didn't have the credits. Is that what you are saying? That's why you left?

Yeah.

What were some of the roadblocks?

My parents...forcing me to go to school. And then, like, being in school. Forced to learn. I had no interest in it at all.

Okay. And can you describe how you made the decision to return to school?

I needed it for the job. But I'm trying to be at Ford.

And what was that last part?

At Ford. To get the job at #####

Oh, there's a job at #####...

Yeah.

And what job was that? They require a high school...

Yeah, they require a GED or high school diploma.

So those are good jobs there at #####, aren't they?

Yeah.

That's really good. How do reading, interests, and your ability to stick with school affect you now? Like how is your reading going for now?

Reading is good, now. I still have comprehension problems. But I think that I will always have that problem. And...

How are you handling that? Are you going slower, or...

I go slower...

...or getting help with tutors?

I go slower.

Okay. And your interests. How are you connected, or your interests of being here?

I am motivated to get my GED so I can get the job...so I can get money that will make me happy.

So you are motivating yourself. You are forcing yourself now.

Yeah.

Okay. And how is your ability to stick with school now?

It's better than it was in high school. I'm not as forced...I still have to try that choice every day...if I want to go or not.

So it's for you.

Yeah.

And then, what are some of your successes for today? In your life today? Like coming here?
Or...

Coming here. Doing good in here.

What other successes do you have in your life right now?

I'm about to be employed because I am in this program.

Quite soon?

Yeah.

How about...you were talking to your dad?

What...

On the phone...is that better now?

No. [Laughter].

Okay...I was hoping that it was! And you are talking to him!

No.

And what are your future plans? Your future plans are to go to #####?

Yes! Instead of ##### [Laughs]. I'm sorry, what? That was a friend. I am mad at him! [Laughs].

And what is the job at #####?

Ah...I don't know. [Laughs].

Is it a job on the line, or...

My mom...yeah, it's on the line. On the line. I know that for sure.

And that's what you aspire to...to your future...you can tell your kids, "Dad does..."

Yeah.

"...works for #####

Yeah.

Perfect. Thank you so much. [Finishing]. And take a snack. What snack do you think you would like?

[Laughs]...another question!"

Okay, there you go! [Student had father continually calling him during the interview, loud yelling on other end of the phone by person. Student claimed it was an angry friend, but later admitted it was dad to pick him up].

Student Number Twenty-three

Can you tell me about your educational experiences from elementary school through high school...

Well, in elementary, on I got all A's but by the time I was, I think, third grade, they had this "I Care" group. And basically kids that they thought couldn't be around other kids or kids that had things that were wrong with them...needed to be separated into a counseling group. So every time at lunchtime have to go to this group and I always ask, "Why am I here...why am I here?" but apparently it's because of my deficiencies in everything. I didn't understand it at the kid until...

And they never talked to you about anything...Did they give a label to you?

They basically said that I don't work well with other kids, because I'm really quiet I don't I never really socialized like that; and I just kind of kept to myself and got all A's.

But you didn't break the rules...

No. Never. [Laughter]. I was really good with the art classes and by the time I was like in fourth or the fifth grade, I was allowed to be a safety so then that was me branching out and trying to talk to more people, because the counseling group was basically like, "You need to start getting out there talking more people. And then I joined band. And I was in that from fourth-grade until 12 grade. But I was *in 12th grade*. And I just didn't finish, of course...

Yeah.

...and there's other kids that had really traumatic things happened to them. A lot of things happened me and my past too, which is why I have I have the PTSD. But I have grown around it. So I think about the fifth grade when this kid would always bully me and torment me. So it carried on through middle school and the middle schools my rebellion stage, where I didn't want to go to school. I didn't want anything to do with anybody. And I started getting more aggressive towards that area because I wasn't really passive aggressive anymore. And I really pitched like my morals are very strong and my empathy and apathy level was really high, even I get really aggressive at times when I get pushed and pushed and pushed. And my real buttons are pushed. It's like... just kind of lose myself this, I get hypertensive so when I get mad, I black out. And I can't remember anything. So he would always bug me and be mean to me. And I didn't want to go to school, and I didn't want to deal with anybody. High school came around and the same thing happened. All his friends...

Same guy?

Yeah, same guy.

And nobody at school did anything about it?

Nope. It was usually my fault. I “antagonized” him, I guess. You know, I didn’t speak to him. And he actually has his friends meet me a bathroom, and then they actually beat me unconscious. I told the principal. The principal said it was my fault...that I am tagged him in class when I was actually really sick that day and we had a test. So I went in, and it was actually the second time that I went back into the school try again.

What grade was that?

This was 10th grade. So that happened. My mom and dad got called up there, to try say that it was my fault. I told them I was never coming back again I was tired of everybody. And the substitute teacher literally watched those girls like throw stuff at me...call me names and she didn’t do nothing. So I told them I was done. I don’t do any more. I actually dropped out of school for a year and a half. And then I went back to a alternative school. And I was really well. Like the people there are really great. I actually met my best friend through there.

Was that in #####?

Mm-hmm. And then it was actually the ##### High School before they took it away from us and forced us to go back to ##### High School, the regular high school...

Wow!

...which...I don’t really...which shows really awkward in a way. So like some types of human interaction don’t make sense to me because I’m not used to being around it or I don’t get it...when people act a certain way I kind of stand back and I don’t understand you like...it’s kind of alien to me almost. So when people act out or they used improper English, or they are using Ebonic words... like I kind of just cannot like look at them funny, or I just don’t understand what you are talking about. I don’t get it...

...but very astute of you to even label it “Ebonic words.” I mean, it is...

I mean I just...It’s a very respectful way.

I think that that is very good on your part.

I am saying I’ve been I’ve been known by family and friends a lot that I’m very educated like I’m a very fun rounded person to be around. I have fun facts about everything. And usually I’m watching...I do watch cartoons and Disney shows to keep up with my niece and nephew. But I usually watch like documentaries, and certain TV shows. So I read like, I have a massive bookshelf schoolbooks!

So that was a...the next one was what were your experiences with learning to read and using that skill to learn other subjects. So you love reading.

Oh, I absolutely love reading.

Do you remember when you first learned how to read?

I do, actually. My mom was reading, I think it was One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish, Dr. Seuss.

As A reading teacher, I use that a lot. [Laughter].

I love Dr. Seuss, and I read that. And I've always been like a really quirky kid as well. My mom says I'm kind of witty...when I want to be. So I always think "Mom, let's read this! Mom, let's read this." And it's like my mom tells me it usually when she sees me, it looks like a Crayola threw up on me. [Laughter]. Because I am a very colorful person too, and very creative. And I think that certain things are awesome work as people are like that's an oddity. "Why would you..." it's a little weird. And I'm just like what's really cool. I'm fascinated by it.

Mm-hmm.

But I usually read a lot of novels. I'm actually reading Dexter. It's the serial killer that kill other serial killers.

Wow!

I watched the entire show and I liked it. And then I'm reading the books now because I just finished The Hunger Games. And my friends tell me about Insurgent. It's a book series. I have like a lot of different kinds of books on astronomy. I have some on...

So you like fiction and non-fiction...

The Interpretation of Dreams. I like a variety of everything. I like everything!

So that helps you do other subjects.

Mm-hmm. It helps me understand things better. Like reading it, I'm more of like a thinker and a visualist. So if I can see if I can read it and I can actually think about, it because my mind is very vivid. And I can actually really use it. And I can mold the picture to see what I'm reading. And makes it...

And so there's like a movie in your head?

Right. It makes it so much easier learning things, especially, because I make jewelry. And I bake and I cook, and like I do...I paint and do all types of like scrapbooking and whatnot. So I have to read and learn how to this. Reading different paragraphs on how to make this kind of skirt, or this is how you crochet this. So, I kind of...

Wow! That's excellent! And when you were in high school, how connected were you with activities and people at the school, and your family?

Family...I was disconnected mostly, because my grandmother passed away my parents are fighting a lot. But...and I was going through a lot of emotional traumas myself because when I would sleep, I remember things that happened when I was younger and it would scare me and I didn't want to talk anybody about it. And I still to this day have not spoken, or to certain family members about anything.

So that you had some incidents as a child...

I have.

...that really traumatized you. Okay. And in that way, do you think you...

I feel like it feel like it is part of the reason I distance myself from a lot of different kinds of people and...

I'm trying to think of the right question...

To me...

...without asking exactly what happened, ...we're looking at how you are dealing with it. Are you personally dealing with the situation and still recovering from it?

Mm-hmm. And persevering then.

So like the...I'm dealing with it now even to this day. I still deal with that I still try to persevere and push through, and break through it.

Were you able to therapy for it?

I did. I had therapy. I had a psychologist.

Dud your parents help you get therapy...were they supportive in any way?

Yes. They had me...they had me seek out somebody because I wasn't speaking at all and I wouldn't socialize with people that were my friends and I wouldn't leave the house. I'd rather stay inside and read a book or play video game, or like keep to myself. And they thought it was unhealthy. They knew something was wrong. We still know something is wrong.

But you never told them?

[No]

And why did you not tell them?

Because I felt like if I said something about what happened to break our family apart or I don't know...I just I have this really bad fear of outcome. So I'd rather just deal with it myself and keep it there.

That's a lot of responsibility!

Innocence. To keep their innocence from it and keep them away from it completely. I kind of...I'd rather be that person that literally puts a mask on and doesn't let anyone see behind it.

So in therapy, did they tell you that...

They told me I had to break it down. They told me I had to remove it. And they told me that I had to start speaking to people and that I had to start just to let it out.

Yeah.

So my boyfriend I've been dating for a most five years now, he knows everything that's going on. He's very supportive.

Good...good. Because doesn't it feel better just having somebody that you love know all of the answers.

Absolutely!

Oh, that's good! So you do have a great system there. So you were disconnected from your family at that time work...when did this situation happen along the continuum of elementary/middle...was it at the same time with the bully was...

I kind of...well, I mean, I was diagnosed with my serotonin deficiency was really young, so then after so many years, when I was 11, they diagnosed me with a manic depressant bipolar disorder. And they said that that this could lead to some kind of a problem. But I mean I did get into a lot of fights in school, but it was only because I was trying to protect myself. So fights in school...

During middle and high school?

Mm-hmm.

So that was hard for you, too.

Yeah. It made me not even want to try to even be in that situation because me dealing with of my personal drama and then going to school and worrying about someone literally trying to kill me or... There was this incident where I was in the 9th grade, I was almost raped in the pool. And the teacher didn't do anything about it. It's just...Well, then again, that school is no longer a school.

Oh, really?

Ah, ##### High School.

Oh, yeah. So and your estimation, it might have been because of those kind of incidents?

Yeah. There's a lot of different things that were happening in the school that principle was just allowing. And I claimed them to be racist, but now I just feel that ignorant. I can't really label someone that you don't really know who they are you can just tell them that they are ignorant for believing in certain things. But then again it's their belief. And you know there's nothing no one can do about it.

Except your [the school's] job is to protect the student.

Yeah.

So that doesn't quite make sense. So you were you saying that your personal trauma started around 11 years old?

Mm-hmm. That's when I started having really bad nightmares and trying to figure out the mean...

So this thing happened and then your parents knew that you were somehow different and then they took you for a health concern kind of appointment. And they came up with these things.

Mm-hmm.

So when you went to the doctor that first time, I'm assuming you don't say anything to the doctor either...

No, I was terrified. I didn't want to speak to them. But another reason that they knew something was wrong it's because I actually inflicted pain to myself to like not worry about what was going on so much my head because usually, and another reason that I have to take medicine when I go to bed, is for the insomnia and for my brain literally won't stop. Like I think about everything. I over-analyze a majority of life, so I kind of have a nonstop thought process so I thought that inflicting pain on myself would make it go away.

And how did you do that?

I use to cut the insides of my legs.

Okay...because I have heard of cuttings before.

It was never like to hurt myself, or any thing like that. I was literally trying to like focus on something completely different than what was in my head.

So, you have had *a lot* going on!

I had a lot of bad influences too that actually taught me to do that. There is girls I was hanging out with. That's what I meant earlier when I said I don't really socialize with many people any more. I kind of...my boyfriend calls it the Sherlock Holmes complex. But I literally...I can get to know somebody within the first probably half hour of knowing them.

Wow! I bet they can too...because you are so analytical, that you can honestly sort of perceive what the intention is.

Mm-hmm. And I'm really good body language too.

Like if they want to be friends with you, too if they want.

Something more if I get to know them a little bit more longer...like more and I realized that their qualities in the way they think of life and their judgments are wrong and I feel like they don't match the same morals as I have. Then I told them that I can no longer associate with them because...in fear of endangering my own well-meaning, my own health, and everything so I can just disconnect from those kind of people in my circle is kind of small. But it's a very nice warm circle.

Wow! And so these questions seem so inadequate after...[laughter] after...I mean, it says, "What held you're interested and motivated you to participate in school?"

I'm mostly just my perseverance really. Mainly I didn't want to disappoint my parents because none of my siblings graduated because they decided that having children and having sex and drugs was more...I guess, adequate. I thought it was a failed life...

Are they older?

Yeah.

And you are the youngest?

I'm actually innocent five.

Oh, five. Wow!

And both of my brothers are heroine addicts, and my oldest sister has the mind of a 12-year-old because she got into a really bad car accident. And it detached her retina from her the cord...from the retina.

Really!

So she's blind in her right eye. And my other sister is a full-time working mom. And actually, she was going to come to this program when she finally gets a car again, because her last car just took a poop. I actually am pushing her and tell her that for the children you need to do this for

your life, so you can better it, so they can say my mom is a wonderful person. She does this and this. And she does this for me. She works so hard because that's what I want I don't ever want to be a disappointment. I don't want to disappoint my children...my future children...I have done [laughs]. And I don't want them to say my mom works at #####...or my mom does this and she's always angry or fighting with this person. I want to be able to have my child say, "My moms of professional blah..." which actually, I want to be a forensic scientist.

I'm going to jump down...What are your future plans...a forensic scientist.

Mm-hmm. Specifically, an osteologist, though...the study of bone. They can tell decomposition.

Did I spell that right? Osteologist?

Yes.

Okay!

I believe so.

And they study bones...

Mm-hmm. Kind of like the TV show, "Bones." I think it was Amy. She's the one with the pigtailed and she is staring at the bones and putting them together.

Oh, I've never seen that. But I have seen the commercial for it.

It's really interesting.

That does sound interesting!

Ever seen CSI?

I don't really watch that one, either. But I've heard people say that they wanted to be CSI people. So that's wonderful. So, basically, in high school you just kept going...

And pushing through...

...to push through it.

So I wasn't really a disappointment to my parents or myself; which in the long run, after I got... forced to go back to ##### High School. None of our credit transferred. Close this one. None of our credits transferred. And they said, "Oh you'll have to come back next year to regain those credits but you'll be 20 years old so you can't come back."

Wow! So you would time out.

So I tried really hard. I even asked if I could go to their summer school, and that wouldn't be enough.

So did everybody lose their credits when they closed down? Wow!

I know about six people right now that still haven't got their GED because that happened in they had to start working and their parents didn't want to live in no more. They wanted to be able to live on their own.

Wow...wow. Okay, can you explain the circumstances of why you left school so you said you kind of went up to 11th grade. Did you start 12th, or...

I did. The main reason I left school last time was because I couldn't go anymore. But for the first three or four times...

Would that be from 10th on, right? From 10th for a year and a half? You had left, and then came back. And then you came back to ##### right? And then, your credits for 11th grade didn't transfer. So you started at ##### in 12th.

Mm-hmm.

Okay. Wow, what a journey! And you get to ##### and they say your credits don't transfer. And you say...

I got really depressed. I actually went into party mode...

Wow!

...which I never do. And I started drinking, started smoking pot, hanging out with the wrong crowd again. And then I realize I was losing myself. And I came back and this friend really smacked me back into shape. Because she moved to ##### like way up there, two and a half hours away, I think. And then when she came back, she found out I was doing that kind of stuff. And she literally slapped me back into shape. And then I actually met her brother after that. And that's who I'm dating, is her brother.

Wow! That's amazing!

And he went to ##### for, I think two years, for psychology.

Wow...so best friend saves the day.

Mm-hmm. Always! [Laughter]. Funny story...we actually...when she lived with me, and my parents...because we were still in high school at that point, and...we had the same doctors and the doctor said since we hadn't shared almost the same disorders, but she didn't have a deficiency, she was just severe bi-polar; if she was mad or if I was mad, we can literally leave class talk to each other and go back, as long as we like follow the rules.

Wow! And that was a support system.

Oh yeah. It literally calmed us down.

What a great idea!

And if it got worse and we couldn't call each other down, we literally had go sit in the counselors office...let the counselors know what's going on so we can find room or an area where we were going to sit in until we could like literally collect ourselves and be able to function.

Well, that was a pretty good support system at ##### then.

Mm-hmm. The teacher...or, the doctor had gotten touch with our teachers and with the principal and the secretaries and let them know what's going on.

So the doctor helped out. That's really good support. So even with that, you decided to quit.

Well, I quit school because they wouldn't let us back.

So you essentially timed out.

Yeah. I timed out.

Okay. Okay. So basically you timed out at twenty. And so that's why you couldn't finish there. So...but it sounded like it would have, maybe, worked.

Yep. It would have worked. It was working well. And you're getting really good grades together and everything. And then after I turned out could go back I just started working. And from there I been working ever since...40 and sometimes 50 hours a week.

And where do you work?

I used to work at #####s and I started this job a couple years...like almost 3 years ago now at ##### Bar, right in #####. It's a sports bar. And it's basically, like, eight TVs...different channels sports, different things going on. You have to serve people beer. You serve people alcohol...food, and make sure they're okay, and basically work off tips. Clean...scrub and mop floors, which is worse part of the job.

But you do get an hourly rate, don't you?

I think it's \$3.25...an hour. And then we work off tips.

Wow! That's low.

Oh yeah. Sometimes though, like it if I work a Friday morning or a Friday night, I can make 80 bucks or I can make 300.

Oh, that's good.

So it just really depends on what's going on.

Wow.

Like, Monday's opening day for the Tigers, so...

Oh!

So we should be pretty busy.

Oh! Good ideas! Okay, so then...

I was going to come actually last year to the program, but the car I had literally, during the snowstorm, I was driving and hit black ice, spun, and I went right into a ditch. And snow went up into...I don't know what it's called...it's like in the engine. It goes into, like, the zig-zag thing, and if it goes too far in there, water melts. It literally kills the engine completely.

Wow!

So that happens. I was driving my boyfriend car back and forth to work. And it would not work if I went to school now. So I ended up a car over the summer last year.

Wow...wow, that's great! So basically, we could the difficulties or roadblocks that you overcame to get the GED. So one of them...probably health?

Health, transportation, money, because I have dislocating hips...

Oh, like everything! Oh my goodness!

I know. I tell my boyfriend every day that every time that I go to the doctor...I really hate going there because there always something wrong every time I go.

Oh...

But I still...I still pushed through it just take it with a grain of salt. And, well, it's my life. It's my body. There is nothing I can do about, although I found out that my doctor misdiagnosed me when I was born. But since I was at Beyer Hospital, I was born there...after I was born there, like I think, six or eight months later, the hospital shutdown. And now it's the ##### residence.

I heard it closed!

So they were supposed to check me, because I had like a bump on my back still do... this, like right above my butt crack.

Oh my goodness!

And it's like almost in a fluid filled sac and in some cases that sack is even bigger and you have to get it removed and most cases people with spina bifida, you can't feel anything from the waist down. But I can. Like I just have a small hole in my spine, compared to everyone else that has it. They have really big really holes, and really bad complications. But mine hurts when I lift something over 30 pounds, or over-exert myself. Then, or if my hips pop out, because my hips don't like to stay in the same place that they are supposed to. So that was the complication.

Did you do any sports at all, that you recognized that there was...

I tried tennis and trying to go back and forth really fast made it clear that it was...

Wow! So you knew something was wrong then.

They always said when I was in high school was that I had dislocated hips because I was walking up the stairs my hip dislocated, and I fell. So they said, "Oh, You just dislocated your hips, so just do like different hip exercises, workout a little more and you should be okay." So I said, "Okay." And then I had really bad pain in my back to where I couldn't move and literally had to go to the hospital because I couldn't walk. I couldn't do without literally crying, because someone touched me. And they did an x-ray, and said, "Oh you're exerting yourself." Like my lower spine is really swollen and my back was swollen they said it's because you have this wrong with you...hip spring bifida. So if you over exert yourself, you're going to hurt yourself.

Oh, gosh!

So I said, "Oh, fabulous!"

Oh!

I didn't find that out until I was 21...that I had it. So they said "Wow, your doctor...if you could find them, you could sue them. And I said, "Well, it's not worth it." I mean, probably the money would be worth it, but why should I go ruin their life because mine is slightly complicated now.

Wow! You are an impressive person. And so we have health issues, transportation, money; there was...a childhood trauma...

That, and I couldn't watch...I love horror flicks now. But, I still, to this day, I can barely watch Freddie Kruger movies without like having severe nightmares. And I cannot go anywhere near that *Doll*, that Anima Trauma thing at Wal-Mart because I peed myself two years ago because I didn't know was there. And it just moved at me. And I was just like, "Ugh..." I couldn't help it.

Yeah.

My brothers and my older sisters used to...my dad had the Freddie doll, when it came out in the 80s, that talked...and they would put it by my bed when I was two, up until the time I was 14. They would pull the strings scare me with it. They would like put it in my face and tell me it was going to hurt me. And all kinds of stuff. And it comes alive...Chucky does.

Oh my goodness!

So they traumatized me with it.

Wow! So you have plural traumas, with more than one!

[Laughter]. Yup.

Gosh...Oh my goodness! So, then you also lost credits, so you had to overcome that. And family difficulties.

Yeah. There's a time where my parents actually split up and then he was dating her best friend. And then after two years they got back together.

So should we say family dysfunction at this point?

Yeah.

Okay. Holy goodness...okay. And I think you said how you made the decision to come back? Did you tell me that, that you wouldn't get transportation, but how did you make decision that you really did want the GED?...

I'd said about six months ago...seven months ago, I had a major mental breakdown and I was really questioning who I was...my life, where was going. I didn't know what I wanted doing life. And I was just really confused and I didn't want to talk anybody. I was like screaming at people all the time. I couldn't grasp the concept of my life. It was bad. So I literally sat down and thought about...literally wrote my list down and made it completely organized, and have little Post-It notes stuck to stuff. I figured out, you know, if I wanted to persevere and I want to do something good in my life; I need to get this first. And then I called Manpower. And manpower told me that they have so many opportunities and they give me #####'s number for here...for this program. And they said as soon as I'm done with this, they can help me further and they can give me a better job until I finish school and get the job that I want.

Okay great! So you had... you really brought yourself together. Is that right? That you kind of went like, "Oh my gosh, what's going on?" And then, "Okay, I'm going to pull myself together. I'm going to make lists. I'm going to organize a plan." Is that pretty much summing it up?

Yes.

And so that shows resilience, there. You know, you are bouncing back. All these different issues, and you're, "Okay, now, I got a plan." So the plan itself is motivating you. Is that right?

[Yes]

Okay. And so, how does reading...and your interest and your ability to stick with school *now*, affect you?

It's actually helped me see things more clear. It helps me really stay on track of my priorities. It helps me prioritize way better. It's keeping me want to schedule. It's giving me, like...I have to wake up at a certain time to be able to eat, to be able to just relax and just say "Ah..." for a minute and go to work and then do my day to day tasks...act like a wife, but I'm not. And clean, take care of the animals, do yard work, try to garden, try to do at least two or three hobbies I do have a day. And then three days of week school, and then...

And so for literacy, you are using all of that. Your literacy skills to do all the things you want to do. Your feeling of connectedness and interests are all supporting your interests, and your ideas if a happy life?

Mm-hmm.

Okay, and then...

I got a web [Laughs].

You have a web?

A web.

Describe that.

Like, basically, I keep myself in the center and I branch out everything that I have to do and everything that I want to do...everything that can happen after every all this gets done.

Excellent! And...

Sometimes, it overlaps and it's a little crazy and I have to spread things out a little bit more, but...

And so how do you plan to stick with it now?

I plan on just pushing through and continuing it on my path and not letting anything to deter me.

Okay. And then, what are your successes today?...

Being here is a success. This is one of my successes...building my credit – I've learned how to do that. Really cracking down on being an adult. That's something I've really been able to do...

And that's not easy.

...eating correctly, now...forcing myself to eat fruits, more fruits and vegetables...so I can maintain my health...

So health is a success now, because you are managing it. Okay that's good. That's a good one!

My education, my vocabulary actually has expanded more. I got told I'm using way too big words in conversation mostly a majority of the time, I should say! [laughter]. It's like I have to slow down and...

I love it!

...for them to wait for me.

That is a success, too. You are able to articulate things. That's wonderful. And your future plans are a forensic scientist, an Osteologist...

I plan on at some point to have a family but I'm not sure if I can or not. We've got to figure that one out.

Okay. So you have to balance maybe family and health.

...because, with the deficiency I have, I've done a lot of research...my doctor has done a lot of research with me and said that some...at some point when I do have children they potentially could be born with SIDS...the sudden death infant syndrome...

Really!

...because my deficiency.

Of the serotonin?

Mm-hmm.

That's one of the outcomes of having that deficiency. So if I do have a child, the first couple years I literally would probably have a curbside bed and monitor them...and make sure nothing happens.

Is there like a test they can do on you genetically to see if...or since you already have it, you already know that's an outcome.

They already know that it's an outcome, because I have it.

Wow! So that's got to be scary decision then, huh?

Yeah. So, it's really for...well, when I heard about it, it really deterred me even try to even think about having children and I didn't like children for the longest time. And I forced myself not to like children so that I wouldn't get the mother thing going. But my nieces and nephews are so adorable I can't help it. And every time I see a baby now I get fevers. But it still scares me.

Yeah.

Like I even told my boyfriend and said "What if this happens and we are happy and I'll suddenly you're a half into its life, we don't have it any more, and that would traumatize me more. And I don't want that to happen. Then that would make me feel bad because of that I would feel like it was my fault. But then, again, it really isn't my fault. It was just the way I was born and the way they were born.

Yeah. And I think that you know you found uses for therapy that were valuable, and...is that right?

Mm-hmm.

And so you know that is a support system for you...

Oh yeah.

...before, or when you decide, or if you decide, or after

They said I would be on certain kinds of medicines too...vitamins to help it.

Oh, good. So it's not a new thing something that they actually have information about that.

Mm-hmm.

So it's more of a possibility, then!

Yes [laughter].

So would you say that hope?

I have hope!

Okay.

I don't really have faith anymore, but I feel like my faith has been broke so many times throughout my life that I can't really have faith in something. But I have hope in it.

Well, that's good. And your faith, meaning your religion, like, let you down?

I feel like religion has let me down so much and since I'm like so into science and universe, and in my own opinion, it would be ignorant to believe that one thing made all of this. And that we were the only ones in the universe. When there's water on Mars, and there's bacteria. Bacteria is life, no matter how you look at it. So with questioning and believing that there once was someone like that and that they once were...I'm agnostic. Like, I can believe it once was, and I believe something but it's not exactly one God. It would have to be something greater something bigger or I question it. I have a lot of questions I need answering and I try to find them through science. Scientology is ignorant in itself, but I think...sorry, but being agnostic is good for me because I still have [pauses] we'll call it the fear of God. I still have that because I was raised Catholic and Catholicism was very strict...very straightforward straight-line don't [unintelligible] God...Oh God, it was a mess. It was scary but I'll I just can't believe that one person created everything I mean, I get the appeal and I understand it. And I can see how helps other people in their life. And it pushes them through. And it helps them better their entire existence. Like I get it. I get the appeal and everything. But it's not something that really...it doesn't say anything to me. It isn't...doesn't come to me, like that for me.

Are you waiting for it to come to you?

I don't know. I'm open to it. But, you know, I've got a very open mind. But I kind of question everything. Like I believe in aliens.

Thank you so much for doing this and I really think you're such an interesting and amazing person!

Student Number Twenty-four

Can you tell me about your experiences and early elementary and middle and high school as you look at going to school? What were your experiences?

Starting out through elementary school, I was a bigger kid. I got made fun of a lot about my weight. It was hard for me to fit in. so it caused me to have behavior problems in school. So I was suspended a lot. It followed me all the way to middle school.

Would you say that you were bullied?

Yes. Yes, I was bullied a lot in school.

By one or many?

By many classmates, actually. Almost everybody bullied me, because of my size. I weighed about 300 pounds and it followed me from elementary school all the way to middle school. And finally by eighth grade...like I said, I was constantly being suspended, all through elementary... all through middle school.

How did you feel about that? If you were the object of people bullying you, and then you get suspended, how do you feel about that?

It made me just give up on school period. I felt like nobody wanted to listen to my story and where I was coming from. And just kind of hurt my feelings, because it was hard for me to learn because I was so worried about the next person that was going to call me fat. Or you know the next person that was going to get me so angry to the point where I would just snap and I was going to do something that I was going to regret.

So do you find yourself fighting to defend yourself... to retaliate?

Yes, I retaliated a lot. I found that that helped me a lot and help the situation for me because people stopped picking on me slowly. But at the same time it wasn't a good coping mechanism because I kept getting suspended and I wasn't learning anything. And then finally when I got to high school, I just said you know, I can't do anymore. And I just walked out of school. And I never turned back and I never looked back.

And what grade was that?

This was...the beginning of high school.

And can you think back about what you first learned how to read and how that might have played in your schooling?

When I first...see, first, I was always in the special ed. program. So I mean, I learned how to read pretty quickly. I learned just as quick as all of the other kids. It became a problem with like

learning more towards middle school when harder work started to come. But other than that, Reading never portrayed in anything, um, I love to write that's one thing that kept me in school.

Ah, That's one of the things I wanted to ask. What interests and motivations did you have that actually kept you in school? So you are saying writing?

Yes, I loved writing. And my teacher...my writing teacher...he was just amazing. He helped me with everything and he encouraged me more and more. Now, I'm actually going on tour doing shows because I started writing poetry, and I turned to poetry into music.

Oh my gosh!

So now, I will be on tour next month.

Wow! So that's one of the successes in your life now.

Yes ma'am. Looking back, and now that I see that I am succeeding in life, so you know and know all the success, I could not be able to go far without a GED or a high school diploma. And then, so...

So for your goals, the GED is necessary.

Yes, it's very necessary. Very.

And then after you go on tour, what do you plan to do?

Well it depends on how the tour. If I have a great tour I'll more than likely be signed to a label, which is #####. And I will go on to be like the next Justin Bieber...

That is just so cool! Oh my gosh!

Hopefully you know this program so far is helping me out a lot it's helped me out, you know, with life. It's helped me out with so much as employment and I never realized how schooling could help people so much. And back in the day, I didn't realize that because we didn't interact with our teachers the way we do here. We didn't have that type of bond. You know, it was just, "Here's your lesson... here's your homework... have a nice night. See you tomorrow." And then in between it was the kids bullying, so it just maybe want to stay away. But now I know I need my GED and I need my diploma to get farther in life.

So when you said you just decided to walk out of the night grade, was it just one explosion or did you just slowly decide, "Ah, you know what, this is the day?"

Yeah it was slowly like...I was going to do it in middle school, honestly, in the seventh grade. I just walk out of school but I came back. And I think it was more so because I was afraid of my parents, you know, maybe getting into trouble for walking out of school. But ninth grade I couldn't take it no more.

Did you feel connected to your parents or anybody...school friends? What were you connected to?

I was connected more so to one teacher and a couple friends. My mom, she left me when I was six years old and my father, he was an alcoholic and he basically didn't do a very good job of taking care of me. So my grandmother basically raised me, and what's it came to a point that I had to basically raise my grandmother. So it became hard for me. And schooling wasn't an option plus all the bullying, so I just walked out and I helped my grandma. And not she's doing better, I think it's time for me to get my life together. I think is one of the greatest times and the best timing for me to get myself back in school and learned and get my education.

How about siblings? Do you have any siblings?

I have a brother. He is three years old. But he lives in #####

With your mom?

Yes. And my sister, she is maybe 26 or 27... I haven't seen her since I was about six or seven years old. She stays in ##### with her dad.

Do you have a great relationship with your grandmother?

Great relationship with my grandmother.

I'll put a star next to that.

Yeah.

And so she probably appreciates your help and things that you have been doing for her?

Grandma supports me.

Are there any people there that were saying anything negative to you that were...

No. Actually, that gym that I went to for fitness... it's in ##### on #####, it was the greatest people were there for me they helped me so much they would actually call me if I missed my day. They called me...my personal trainer actually pick me up from my house one day when I didn't want to go. But yeah, it took a lot. It took a lot. And now, I've got to push harder. I got to keep it going. I can't give up now. I put a lot of work into this and I'm to finish it.

So you are putting all that together...my body, my spirit...,you know as that as well coming together?

Yeah. Everything.

You must feel wonderful!

I do. I feel great! I feel a hundred percent. But there are a lot of roadblocks in life that are still happening. And you know, like I said, we just got to work through them. Nobody was talking helping hand.

Like when I said that about Abraham Lincoln [who kept trying to get elected after 8 elections failures and finally won]. Is that surprising?

It is. I didn't know that about Abraham Lincoln. You learned something new every day. Like I said but he wasn't dealt a perfect hand. But it is up to you on how you play it. It really is.

Play your hand. But you have to try, right?

Yeah, you weren't dealt perfect hand, so you've got to play your hand wisely. And you got to try your best.

So the people that you hang out with now, are they a better peer group?

You know, I honestly can tell you I have one friend. I have one. On Facebook, it says that I have maxed out friends, because you know, I am getting famous! But no, I have one true friend. She is in this building. She is the one that got me into this GED program, and she's the one who is pushed me to get where I am at today. And I'm actually thinking about marrying this girl.

Oh wow!

Yes.

That's really really nice.

And that's the only person in my life that, you know, I actually do care about besides my grandmother.

You will find that when things start going right for you, you'll still, have roadblocks but you will at least have the ability to pick good choices for yourself. You're taking care your grandmother and you apparently had a lot more trouble by not being in school during that time. You able to work that time?

I was unemployed. We were living off from my grandmother's income, which was \$500 a month. And our house payment was \$500 a month. So I had to take back bottles, you know... cut grass for the people on my street and in my neighborhood to pay for the gas and the water... you know what I am saying? We didn't have TV like this. I never had that, growing up. I never had a lot of things that other kids have had. And that's one of the things that, you know that I'm, also you know, very very very grateful and blessed about that I have now. You know. I never had nothing, growing up. Nothing. I didn't know what it was. I didn't need it. And now I know

what it is. And now it's like, "Aw, I need my phone! And I need my TV." But I didn't know what it was back then. I didn't need it back then.

So do you have a job now, other than doing this? Or...

Yes I am...now doing construction. I do renovating houses, foreclosed...I do roofing. And I'm actually starting another job. It's at ##### [landscaping company]. I will be building ##### which is...I'll be basically building from the ground up... riding all morning or working on tractors.

Wow!

So you are learning a lot of skills!

Yes. Actually, how I learned how to build lawnmowers with my grandpa.

He used to build them, and he taught me everything about them. So I went into that place and told them everything that I and even the job.

That's amazing!

I'm working two jobs. I make \$800 a week. And I'm going on tour next month. So this tour is a \$15,000 tour. So I will be getting \$15,000...

That's so wonderful!

And I'm going to take that \$15,000 and I'm going to buy my girlfriend, that is sitting in the room next to me, and right now as I am having this interview I am doing this, I'm going to take this 15,000 and I'm going to buy her a nice Rock for her finger.

Oh! That's beautiful!

I'm young but...

And I won't say a thing!

I'm young, but I'm going to marry that girl! I really am!

Oh, that's nice! Was at the nice young lady sitting next to you?

Yes.

...And I'm only 18 years old...and I went from having nothing...that's why I wanted to do this interview...that to tell kids, you know, even though I am in a GED program...I don't have my GED...you can still succeed. Even if you have nothing, you can do it. You honestly can, but it's all up to you.

And it's not easy.

It's really not. And even after, it's not going to be easy. It's going to be a bumpy road. But you got to get through it. You have to. You have to keep pushing for it. You cannot let nothing stop you.

So when do you get your GED?

I am expecting to have my GED by fall of 2015. So by October of this year I should have my GED. And then I was possibly thinking of going to college. But if my music career goes off, I won't go to college. But I was thinking about going to college and becoming a mechanical engineer.

That's a really good choice.

Yeah.

Wow, you already have this background. Will you can still do it on the side, at least... like isn't music sometimes up and down? Like sometimes you can get jobs and sometimes you don't, and once you take off,

Music is kind of based on, you know...people have shows, of course and it depends on, you know, what building...like, say I got big at Madison Square garden...you know, I was going to Madison Square Garden, and there wasn't one there, or there's always shows going on there, like at the Fox theater, there's always something going on there. Whenever there is a free day, and I have the funds,

[Interruption from outside the room].

If there's a free day...a free opening, and we have the funds to rent out that building for that night, we will rent it out for about a month in advance. We will have our ads out. We will have our tickets for sale. And then, we hope to make our money back for renting...and some.

Oh, I see.

You know what I'm saying?

Yeah.

And for the last year, ##### has been planning this tour. He has rented out...he has spent...

So he rented out all these places along the way?

Yes. I mean, he rented the place out of #####, probably about six months ago. And we are still waiting another month to even do the show there.

Wow.

So, yeah, that's basically how music goes. You have to plan it six months to a year in advance.

Yeah.

And once you go on the tour, once you get it done and you're on the stage, you are so proud that you did. And you're happy.

Well, I don't want to take any part of your time.

All you're fine.

Thank you so much! I so enjoyed meeting you, #####. You just have so much going for you, and as such an honor to meet someone who really brought it all, together, looked at it, figured out what to do, and then ran with it, you know. I'm just so impressed! You're such an impressive person!

Thank you so much! It really means a lot!

While, I just... that's why wanted to do this research, because...it will help someone.

Student Number Thirty-one

[Memo: His father passed away in March, 2015].

... can you tell me about your educational experiences starting with elementary school to high school. So like, start with elementary school.

Elementary school...I was in special-education because when I was born, I was born with hearing deprivation in both of my ears. And then, I began to have a speech impairment. So that was a problem with me. So that was one thing...ever since I was little, I've been getting tubes in both of my ears. And then as I got older, I was in an automobile accident that ripped part of my face off, and it caused even more damage to my ear.

And how old were you then?

I was nine, and then it turns 10.

So that's still elementary school to middle school?

Well, I was in a school that was kind of like both, you know.

Like K-8 School?

Yes, so...

And so, you're in a car crash and then you had...I think you look great!

Well, thanks!

[Laughter].

Yeah, I never would have...that's amazing! And so you had some tough times. Did it make your hearing worse?

It did. It impacted my hearing a lot. But you know, they say, God can break you out from anything. So, you know...I kind of figure, you know, if I sit with the Father... if I sit in the front of the class, you know, he and the teachers...my right side is better with hearing. That the reason that I got out of school was because of my accident, I started to have seizures.

Wow! So that's when... so this one is, "Can you explain the circumstances of when you left school."

Oh... so that's why when I see seizures, it was the traumatic brain injury. That's why I put "TBI."

Okay, Brain injury...that was called TBI. And that was the reason that you had to quit. And what age or grade was that?

I would say, It was technically four, then I was back in school again. And that's when the state started sending a teacher. And my father also had his own teacher that he sent. My father...we was blessed. Before, my father owned a trucking company...so I was blessed, you know. And the state also sent their own people out there making sure things are going well.

So you stayed in through eighth grade?

I went back in, I would say, sixth-grade and I stayed to eighth, all the way up to late ninth. And that's when I would say that things started to go back rough again. And then I had to get more plastic surgery. But then, I'd say, the 11th, I went back in at the middle of 10th. And I stayed in to the 11th, but that's when I said, "I'm done...I couldn't..." So I was in and out of school.

So when you left, it was about 11 grade. And you...

The middle of the 11th.

And would you say that it was because the work was difficult or attendance was?

It was attendance because I was in a hospital damned near every week, you know. I had got on...in 2013, attended class that I was taking. I was technically out in the summertime...at Christmas time I was already out. I was on life support up in the hospital.

Wow! So it just carried on, and this car crash affected your life for many years, then.

Yes, then, you know that's what they say, you know, a traumatic brain injury, you know, can... it can affect you without a lot of people knowing. You could look well on the outside but there could be a lot going on in the inside. They didn't find out that I had a traumatic brain injury, you know, until I was 12 years old.

Wow!

I have bleeding and all of my brain.

Wow! And then so you were nine, and then it wasn't until 12 years old and they found it. Wow! That's a long time to live with that.

Yes it was. I got a little scared when they went in... well I have a scar that goes all the way up, from my accident. But I have another little scar which they said was to open up my [intelligible], but God is very good to me. You know. I kind of wish that I didn't have this, but...you know... hey...I'm alive! So...but I lost my father on 17 March...this month.

No! Oh, I'm so sorry!

But you know...he was the one that stopped the bleeding out of my face.

He was with you at the car crash?

It was...it was one of his...he had just sold his truck to one of his friends. It was a lease truck that he turned over to his friend. They brought the truck over and it hit me...

Were you standing on the ground?

I had climbed up the truck, looking through the catwalk. Just like a catwalk. You walk in and it has a bunch of holes in it... a paper blew underneath it. So you could basically see a lot of paper underneath it, where I saw it go underneath it. So you could look through...trucks are pretty high up off the ground. And he moved...he saw the paper go underneath. I didn't know he seen it move. And he was already in first gear already... I didn't know. And he moved. And my dad was coming from the back and yelled, "Stop!" And was too late. I was already getting pulled underneath.

Oh God! Your poor dad! I mean, poor you, but, you know, so obviously...

I was my daddy's baby at that time.

Oh, gosh!...

I lost my birth mom...I was six, turning...I was five, turning six. But you know...I got a lot of siblings though.

And that you lost your dad just recently, right...

Yes ma'am. Has it been a month? No, it hasn't been a month yet...he was in the military for 18 and a half years...for the military. And they came [for the funeral] and they did him off good!

The guns...salute?

The 21 gun salute. Yeah, that was beautiful!

So let's go back to this one. What were your experiences with learning to read and learning that skill to learn other subjects? Do you remember when you learned how to read?

Yes, I actually do. I did not like learning to read.

Oh!...

Because my great-grandmother was a fifth grade English teacher.

Oh!...your great grandmother?

Mm-hmm.

Did she teach you?

Yeah, she helped teach me. We had...you know like we had a dry erase board. She went right, say, “‘flow’...alright, now, ‘floor...’”

But I was just a little kid, then.

Right...so that was helpful. What you didn't like it just because she was strict?

So strict. She could cook, though! [Laughter].

So the snacks were...snacks are always good!

She was blind. She was a blind woman, you know.

Wow!

She was a blind woman, grandma [unintelligible].

So you didn't like it, but you did learn to read.

I did learn to read.

And then you used that for other subjects, right?

Yes ma'am. [Demonstrates his reading ability] “##### Human Subject Review Committee H...UHSRC Participant...” um, what's ...“Consent Form Research .

Amazing! Very good! So you are using that skill to figure out other things other subjects and so forth. So you have to be able to do probably to read well if you are in the hospital a lot it was probably on you to do work and to read the directions...

Ah, I remember, because I would think that when I was in the hospital I did homework. They would come [with] packages... like, “I can't see. I can't open my eyes!” I was “I have like one eye I can open. I went, “Uh...” So, you know, thank the Lord, because I remember the doctor said to me, [speaking in third person] “He's going to be blind in one eye, if he ever does be able to open it.” I can see out of both eyes, and I can see pretty far, I think. Ugh!

Yeah.

My father, he rushed me to the hospital. When they rush me to the hospital, ##### Hospital...I have nothing against #####... it's a really good hospital. But when they put my face back on, that put it down here... “I think they need to go back to school,” because they put the corner of my

face down here. The corner of your eye is supposed to be up here. They took me out of children's and they put me in Ford. Ford has a really good plastic surgery team.

Oh, that's good. Well I think whoever...did really fine job. Truly!

Dr. #####.

Oh, wow!

[Skipped content].

And how old are you now?

Um, 19. I will be 20 years old this year.

So truly, you are blessed. This is really really amazing to be able to survive, to survive well, and to look good! You know...I mean, gee! That's just a miracle! So you did studies in the hospital, even. And you said they sent a teacher from the state, did you say?

Yes ma'am.

Okay, and then, how connected are you to the school, people at school, and your family? So that's the engagement part.

Engagement...

So what is it that brought you to school? What are you connected to when you... because it must have been difficult to keep going, right?

You know, at the beginning as a young child, especially, you know, children can be naive, you know, especially more focused on what people think. Now, I really... "Eh!" You say something to me... "Eh!" You know. I hardly even notice. I have...no time. And sometimes I forget, like, "What are you talking about? I wasn't...oh yeah, I *was* in a crash today!" [Laughter]. It's been like eight years, or something, now. I was about six when I had my accident. I did figure out how old I was, so...As a young child, I would be, you know, thick sunglasses, trying to hide, you know, my face. I would hide up to my eyebrow. It felt like I was hiding something. You know, my father, he would take my glasses off, and say, "Hey, What you doing? Take those off!" But, to me, it made me feel better. You know, so I would go to school, and now I'm older, you know, I have really close friends. Plus, dinners, I would go out to. It's like five or six of my cousins go in there, too. At first, I would be like really only hanging around with them. But they have friends that's already going there, so their friends are starting to hang out with me.

So you had lots of cousins. Any siblings?

Oh my God! I have fourteen siblings that I talk to.

Wow, really?

Mm-hmm.

Wow, that's amazing. Fourteen siblings!

I am the oldest in the house. My father has a 42 year old daughter, so...I am the oldest in the house, so my siblings...the closest in age I would say that is older than me is 29 or 28. So, yeah. So she was out of school for...I went with her to school ever since I was a little baby. I used to...she used to take me to school with her when I was a little baby.

Wow!

So now, it's me, my 15 year old brother my 14 year old sister, and my seven-year-old brother. Yeah.

Is that all at the same...?

No. Same dad.

So your mom is pretty much the 42-year-old sister, the 39-year-old sister, the 29-year-old sister...

So they all took care of you?

Mm-hmm. They was all my...but my dad, he has a lot of children [laughs].

Okay! Good thing he has been there for you for a long time, now. Right?

I'd say, [unintelligibly speaking with whispering and noises such as knocking on the table to be animated and funny].

Amazing...so you said he was in the military for...

Eighteen and a half years. I believe they rounded it up to nineteen. The military hates doing half years...

And what was it that he did in the military?

He was field artillery/infantry. Front lines. My uncle was...My dad had five brothers and four brothers were with him [mostly unintelligible, speaking quickly about uncles and other relatives]. And my dad said, "You're the first one to die of any of us!" [Short laugh].

Oh my gosh!

...because, you know, he's the front line...infantry and field artillery! They are the ones with the guns. They're part of the front line!

Yeah. My uncle #####... he was right under my dad...he was telecommunications. [Skipped content]

So when you were a kid, were you thinking about going into the military?

I still think about it. I think, they would have sent me by now! [Laughs].

[Skipped content].

And as you are looking at this, your support system is your family.

I love my family! My family is...if you have a dream, my family will back behind your dream. If you wanted to be a congressman, they would say, "Be the best congressman that you could be."

That's must amazing and great! That really is great!

They also say, "If you are going to be a congressman, make sure you are going to take a bath before you come over to my house, you know!" [Laughter].

Were you connected to any activities at school? Any clubs, or any groups, or...?

Um, I wasn't in a...I was in a counseling club, you know, like for kids that were struggling for things.

Oh, that's good to have. How about any teachers, or anybody at school that...

I liked some of my teachers. I liked Mr. #####, he was a nice teacher.

So the circumstances were just so that you had this medical issue and

Yeah.

Were people pretty accepting about that...the teachers and people...

Yeah, actually, I had a teacher, because I was rushed to the hospital from my school one time and I actually had my coach, because when you have an activity, you have a coach...I had a coach and two of my principles...because the school had like four principals...

Was that in high school, then?

Mm-hmm...[the two principals] came up to the hospital to see me. And then when I was a little kid, I was in school at the time, and the whole school and half of the school district from different schools wrote me all letters. It was like 40,000 and some letters that all came to the

hospital at ##### [Hospital]. Yeah. Actually, I did not read all of those letters. But I think my family did, like, write each school thank you cards. Because I was going to [unintelligible]. Because I was staying with my [unintelligible] ...my girl...she hate to be alone. She... *“Oh Jesus, I can’t be in this house by myself!*

Oh, my gosh! And your family support system...I’m going to put a star by that! And so what held your interests and motivated you to participate in school?

As I said, my brother...my father, he was married to a girl named ##### while my mother was alive. I wouldn’t call her “mother” because I want to stay with my father permanently when I was three years old. I would still go and see my mama every weekend. And back then, #####, my dad asked her to marry him. And my mom said, “when you fall, does ##### call you? Does she kiss your boo-boo’s?” I said, “Yes, mama.” She said, “Does ##### take you and enroll you in school and take you to school?” And as a little kid, I didn’t know what that means. I say, “Yes, mama.” She says, “When you are scared, does ##### come and give you hugs, and give you baths, and everything, and make sure you are all alright?” And I say, “Yes, mama!” And she was like, “Is ##### your mama, too?” I say, “Yes, mama!” And she say, “Well go give your other mama a hug.” So I ran over there and gave ##### a hug and kissed her...because ##### can’t have no kids of her own...

Oh....

So, still, even today, she still calls back...I still have to call her back like for ten minutes. So even when my mom died, ##### was still there. She is still there for my life every day. Like, my father is real good with that.

Oh...

So just so you know...

So she is sort of like a stepmom.

Mm-hmm. Even though my dad was divorced from #####, he divorced her when I was eight, right before my accident [memo: indicated the accident happened at age six earlier in the interview]. She went right to the hospital when I had my accident. She beat the ambulance there. So...what was I saying before this?

We were saying, but what’s with the chapter interests and kept you motivated in school.

Yeah, okay. Okay, good. So ##### is an architect. And you know, ##### would be like... when I was little, I was like, “Mama, can I work in a big building like this? She was like, “Yeah, but you have to go to school.” And my grandma, who I said was blind...that was #####’s grandmother... was like, “You have to listen to grandma and be like this...” “Oh, man! My mama works at a really nice architect building now.”

Wow! Wow, that’s nice.

And my dad, he was like, “Aw, you’re going to grow up and work like me!”

She is rooting for you too, right? ...to finish this. So the roadblocks you had were really health roadblocks and would you say doing schoolwork...not at school? That might have been a roadblock for you.

It actually, was you know. But my dad, with math, he was like, “When I was in the army, I could teach math to a rock if it would sit down and listen.” And I was like, How can you teach math to a rock? It has no ear!” But different parts of my family are really good at other things. So different homework with different ones, you know...helped me to get along.

So they help you, so was it not necessarily a roadblock?

In a way, because...

Because I was thinking if it was not math hour or science hour, it might be harder to get motivated to do it?

Because it was...you know they say that every teacher is not meant to be a teacher. Even bug you but could have it, you might not be good at teaching that though. Yeah, that’s how my dad was. “*I can teach it!*” [Laughter]. Like, “I don’t know how to military what you teach this stuff! You are better at talking about guns and things!” “Be quite!”

How about the teachers that were sent to help you? Were they good?

A lot of them were. They were [unintelligible], back where I understood better, but it was good. But whenever it was, like a boring or [unintelligible] teacher, like for higher grades to teach the class that they taught...higher grades, I could never really understand them. They didn’t have like that much patience, either.

So some of those teachers were roadblocks to getting what you needed getting. So what else did you think was a roadblock? Math was an issue. Health...just having to do schoolwork out of school...did you have any other, you know, problems with peers, or...

I would say, like I always wanted to do my work. I think if I always wanted to do my work, all the time, because when I was home, I wanted to be at school. Because there were some kids that weren’t like, “Come on, let’s go to school!”

Yeah.

If I was like more always willing to always to do my work, too. I think I was a roadblock in some ways. Like, *every now and then*, I would...lots of times I wanted to do my work, people was like *with me*.

But you were more willing to do your work than, say, probably the average kid?

Well, no!

The opposite?

Yeah. You say, like I'm the average kid, like you know, like some kid, it's not like, "Hey, let's go to school!"

So you were *not* like that.

Yep!

Okay.

Like I get myself to get up to come here every time I have to.

So, that is a success in your life today, this GED program, right?

Mm-hmm. Because, you know, I have my younger sister is looking up to me. And so, "If he can stop, how come I can't?"...you know...and my dad, you know, he went to this program. I told my dad that I was going to ##### to get my GED and everything, and he was happy. Not only did I want to make my dad proud, and I want to make myself proud, and my little brothers proud. And of course, I have got a little sister, too. But, like I said, I want to make myself proud. And I got my mom looking down on me, too. So...I'm my mother's son.

Wow! So you ...

I have a lot riding on me!

So how did you decide to get a GED?

I knew...I knew that they changed the program, which I knew was harder. One thing I knew my dad said was that if you look for the easy road in life, then you will always be looking for the easy road in life. You are a slacker, you will always be a slacker in life. So one reason I would return for the GED is I do want to move ahead. Like I did want to go and finish...what's that, two years in high school. I don't know...how long it will take me here. It might take me two years. It might take me three. Or it might take me, with the regular...with the hope...

Yeah.

...a couple of semesters, you know. But I want to finish this and go ahead and finish college, too, you know.

Oh, that's your future plans, to finish college...

Yeah.

And then what do you want to do in college?

I want to take up criminal justice.

Nice! Okay. And so you...and so your decision to go to ##### was that you heard about it...that it was in the college. So that it was kind of a cool place to go?

Mm-hmm. It was just a shade over, like you are placed in like a GED program. You are asking for...you are in a college already, but you are still, you know...

Yeah, so is it more respectful, then?

It is, actually. But I mean, there's nothing wrong with taking your GEDs, like when I was younger, I thought, "Ugh, I wasn't taking my GED...what's with that." But now, I see...I don't really see something wrong with it. You know. Kind of get over it. But when it's in a college, it makes you feel better about it, in a way. [Laughs].

And your decision to come back is to complete what you started?

Mm-hmm.

Why else did you decide to do that? What was the driving force?

Because, you know, like my dad said, "You can't go nowhere without even a high school diploma or a GED." And I have got other things working for me in life. We are kind of set off, but what if those things, you know, fail? I am going to need something to back me up. It's either going to be my high school diploma or my GED. And without that, I am screwed in life.

So you need that as a stepping stone? In order to do things that you want to do?

Yeah.

Your other choices. Okay. And how did you hear about this program?

I have people...like I have a friend that was coming before me, last semester. And he was telling me about it. Because at first, the way he was telling me about it was kind of the wrong way. He was... he wasn't putting no interest in it. And he didn't tell me that it was the #####. Like when I tell people about it, I put so much interest in it. Like, "It's the ##### program. And they are offering the GED classes. You know...that's cool. They have nice teachers." Everything. But I say "instructors," because if you say "teachers," it makes it sound like you are back in high school. Just like you have instructors in college, you have instructors here.

Yes.

If you say “teacher,” it makes it sound like you are back at high school.

So you make a distinction and it helps for you and for your friends. That’s really good. And how does your interest and your ability to stick with school affect you now...and reading. How does all that affect you now?

Well, it’s interesting here now, like you never see the same thing here. Like my counselor...she could make it interesting, like, I call her “a sassy counselor” because she could be real nice...*she’s always nice!* [Correcting himself to be more politically correct; laughter follows].

You looked over there to see if she was listening! [Laughter continues]. [Then, to the counselor across the room...] He said you are a sassy counselor! Did you hear that!” [A distant voice responds, “Is that what he said?”] Yeah! [More laughter and joking continues. The subject temporarily leaves the interview to go and joke with the counselor].

So your reading ability is helping you now in your class?

Yes...

And your interests and that you are being motivated and engaged in what you are doing. And then, how does your ability to stick with it...your...

They keep interest in it. That’s what I am saying. Like they lit the boiler and they haven’t let the flame go out. They keep the water nice and warm...not too hot, but nice and warm. Because I don’t like hot water. I like *warm* water. You know what I am saying? But keeping the interest, you know, it’s like...I don’t know if it’s every week or every other week, their keeping someone in here, you know, so, it’s not like it’s a dead class. You know. It’s an interesting class. You have interesting classmates. You know. It’s something interesting every day. And you know, when the tutors come in, you get to talk with them. They bring different books, or you might read on that book. But that book...it looks like a [unintelligible] book, but it’s a new subject, every time that you flip that page. You know you get to read about world history, or, you know, something else. It’s interesting. There’s something new every single day. You might go back to something that you read and find out something that you missed.

Oh, yeah.

You know.

And that’s excellent, because that makes it great. I like how you say they keep the boiler warm and don’t let the light go out. I like that. Okay, I’m going to ask you two more questions. What would you say to high school students right now thinking about

Leaving high school?

Leaving high school.

Well, I don't know if that was here, or in another state. But I heard that there is a school that gave high school students a GED test and they didn't know that it was the GED test. They thought it was some other test.

Oh?

I think it was like two high schools that did this. And the students that passed, they told the students that "You never have to come back here again, because you just took the GED test."

Oh!

If they want to do it...I mean...it's a good idea. You know, some people just want that... "You know, I just got my high school diploma," but I think they said that test is like four years of high school in several hours or something. I think that's a pretty big thing!

So for people that are thinking that they want to leave...

If you could do it...

Your advice would be to do the GED?

I mean, it's the same. It's a different certificate. One's a certificate and the other is a diploma. You know. So, you know. You've got to look at that.

So you are saying make a choice to either get a diploma or get a GED. That's your advice to people thinking they might want to leave.

Yeah, because I am saying, you know, if you have the chance...if you are already at the last step, go ahead and finish it. But you know, if you think you could do it, I mean, do it but remember it's four years and seven hours; and what...20 minutes, or 40 minutes.

So you think that the GED is a better deal.

I think they said that it is a harder deal, now.

Yeah, there is a new one. So...

Well, high school is harder because they say if you are sticking it out...

Okay.

But, I don't know. I mean, it's your choice. If I had the choice to do it all over again, I probably would stay if I could. But what if all this happened to me again...you know.

What would you say to administrators at the school to make the school more welcoming so people don't want to leave? What should they do to fix it, or what...

Well, I didn't [unintelligible] high school, but...they only had field trips for high school. I know like they say, "Field trips...you are in high school! What do you need a field trip for?" Trust me. High schoolers talk about field trips. They don't want to sit in that...the school is like a dead cell.

...the connection to life. Real life.

Yeah. They want to feel like, "I'm out of here!" They're still technically on school premises, they are gone off the premises. They are out of the school, you know. They're out. I think...like field trips, they are...maybe not to the zoo like you were a little kid again, but, "Hey..."

...museum of art, or something...

Or...if you guys want to claim that it's educational, take them to the movies. To find a movie that is supposed to be educational—what about "Descendant," or something like "After Earth." I'm just thinking about like a sci-fi, like...

...to start a conversation.

Mm-hmm. Like, "What did you guys think about that movie that we seen?"

So really, you are saying field because you want it to be interesting.

Yeah.

So you want to be engaged in it. You want to be connected, so it's not boring.

Yeah. Like I think that field trips to the movies would be good for the drama club. See what I am saying. If they are acting, why couldn't they go see actors on the screen? You see. Because I was in drama...

Oh, you were in drama! Oh! Okay. So you think that things should be connected to real life. Is that right? That schools should be more connected to real life to make it interesting. Is that what you are saying?

Yeah.

Okay. So field trips to doing other things make it connected, so it could start by going to a roller coaster. It could start about physics.

Yes.

Like that. That's what you are saying, right?

Like I know that some schools do take their kids to Cedar Point and stuff like that..

Yeah, to look at gravity and to, you know,

But I don't know if it's technically about physics stuff. But like if the physics teacher is there, why can't he spark up a conversation about it?

Yeah. Yeah.

At first, they might, like, "Aw, why do we have to..." But that could be a free grade!

And a way to start learning in a different way. Not just so traditional...is that what you are saying?

Yeah. Some way fun, you know. Or play a move in class about it, you know. Like, "That's how you get g-forces, or something like that, you know.

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So that's good. Alright, and you are going to finish your GED this year? Did you say?

Hopefully, this year.

And then you are going to go to community college? And then you are going to get something towards criminal justice. Is there like an associate's degree that you could get? Or are you thinking of transferring, or...

I believe that there is...I want to become a federal field agent, or a federal probation officer.

Oh, okay. So, working with people.

Mm-hmm.

Okay. I won't be one of the mean probation officers.

So your family is connected to the military and everything. Did you feel like it was much more strict? You had more strict guidelines, that you didn't go off into gangs or drugs or anything like that?

[Laughs]. Like my dad told me, "If you want to join a gang, go join the world's largest gang! United States Military!" [Laughter].

That's a good one!

I'd say, "Dad, I's in the suburbs! I don't think that there's no gangs out here!"

Oh, my gosh!

I tell you...we used to go to #####, like every week. We liked to go visit other family members that, like, stayed in the city. Be like, "Oh my God!" Because I was born in the city. Because, like, after my mom passed away, we didn't really go down to the city, because my mom didn't want to move. [Unintelligible].

Wow!

I was like...I love #####, though, I feel like I have a deep hearty root for it. But whenever I go to #####, now I am more at ease, because I am older. But my little brothers, there like, "Front Door! I don't want to be down here!" [Laughs]. Because I grew up in like #####, so... Whooh!

So, but you are in this area now, so your friend told you about this opportunity.

Yeah. That's because I'm staying down here and I'm not only just the school down here, but I am also getting help with my... Because I have a really bad back, and my knees. And I'm getting help learning how to cope with the pain.

Oh, so you are in this area because of the health issues.

Mm-hmm.

So, it's something you have to deal with every day, right?

Yeah. Well, when I wake up, I wake up with headaches every day. But...Lord, thank you...it's been getting better, you know. I'd say about two years ago, I'd still wake up crying, because it was bad. But, I hardly notice it anymore, but I can still feel it.

Wow. Thank you #####. You're amazing! I am so grateful that I got the chance to talk with you! You have amazing story, and overcoming the roadblocks that you've overcome, I haven't met anyone who has had to overcome so many health issues. And I'm sure that your ability to overcome things that...your resilience is really going to take you far. I mean it really is remarkable...

Well, thank you! It's something that really inspires people. And will inspire people when I am doing my report...you know, to be able to inspire people like that. That is just amazing! And I'm just honored that you talked to me. It's just really great! So thank you for your time. And...

Thank you for allowing me to share.

It was just great!

Appendix K

Reading Attitude Subscale: Self-Assessment Counts

(Total of Respondent Counts at each Reading Attitude Range; n = 44)

Reading Attitude Range	Academic Reading of Printed Materials	Academic Reading in Digital Setting	Recreational Reading of Printed Materials	Recreational Reading in Digital Setting	Average of All 18 Individual Questions	Average of Subscale Means
1-2	3	1	4	3	2	2
2-3	1	2	4	3	3	2
3-4	10	12	7	5	4	4
4-5	17	17	13	11	22	24
5-6	13	12	16	22	13	12

(Reading Attitude Range: "Very Good" = 6 / "Very Bad" = 1)

Reading Attitude Subscale: Self-Assessment Counts
 (Mean Subscale Values by Respondent; n=44)

ID	Finished or still in GED?	Age	Academic Reading of Printed Materials	Academic Reading in Digital Setting	Recreational Reading of Printed Materials	Recreational Reading in Digital Setting	Average of All 18 Individual Questions	Average of Subscale Means
1	G	37	4.6	4.4	5.6	5.0	4.9	4.9
2	F	19	5.4	5.0	5.2	3.3	4.9	4.7
3	F	38	5.8	5.8	6.0	5.3	5.8	5.7
4	F	20	5.8	5.8	6.0	6.0	5.9	5.9
5	F	34	5.0	5.2	5.4	5.0	5.2	5.2
6	G	20	4.2	4.8	5.2	5.3	4.8	4.9
7	F	35	5.0	5.6	5.6	6.0	5.5	5.6
8	G	20	4.8	4.4	5.0	4.3	4.7	4.6
9	G	19	4.2	3.8	5.2	6.0	4.7	4.8
10	G	23	4.8	4.2	5.2	4.0	4.6	4.6
11	G	34	6.0	5.6	5.4	6.0	5.7	5.8
12	G	21	5.0	6.0	4.6	4.7	5.1	5.1
13	G	20	4.6	3.8	3.8	6.0	4.4	4.6
14	G	19	3.8	4.0	4.4	6.0	4.4	4.6
15	G	20	4.0	4.4	5.0	6.0	4.7	4.9
16	G	23	6.0	5.2	5.6	5.7	5.6	5.6
17	G	19	5.0	5.0	4.8	5.0	4.9	5.0
18	G	19	4.2	3.6	4.8	6.0	4.5	4.7
19	G	18	3.2	4.6	3.4	5.7	4.1	4.2
20	G	23	3.2	4.2	3.4	6.0	4.0	4.2
21	G	54	5.2	3.8	6.0	2.0	4.5	4.3
22	G	29	5.8	5.0	6.0	4.7	5.4	5.4
23	G	23	5.6	4.8	6.0	5.3	5.4	5.4
24	G	18	4.6	4.8	4.4	6.0	4.8	5.0
25	G	18	5.6	4.8	5.2	4.3	5.1	5.0
26	G	24	2.4	3.2	1.8	3.3	2.6	2.7
27	G	20	5.4	5.4	3.0	5.7	4.8	4.9
28	G	21	4.8	5.8	4.0	6.0	5.1	5.2
29	G	35	2.0	3.6	2.2	4.7	2.9	3.1
30	G	19	3.4	3.6	4.0	2.3	3.4	3.3
31	G	19	4.0	3.8	4.4	5.3	4.3	4.4
32	G	19	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
33	G	25	4.2	5.4	4.4	6.0	4.9	5.0
34	G	26	3.8	4.0	3.0	5.7	3.9	4.1
35	G	19	5.0	5.2	4.4	6.0	5.1	5.2
36	G	53	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.7	1.4	1.4
37	G	20	5.2	4.2	4.8	5.0	4.8	4.8
38	G	19	5.6	3.8	4.2	3.0	4.3	4.2
39	G	20	3.5	5.0	1.0	6.0	4.1	3.9
40	G	46	4.2	4.6	3.4	4.3	4.1	4.1
41	G	59	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.3	3.9	3.8
42	G	53	5.6	5.8	5.2	4.0	5.3	5.2
43	G	45	3.2	2.6	2.8	3.0	2.9	2.9
44	G	31	1.8	2.2	1.4	1.0	1.7	1.6
Mean			4.4523	4.4773	4.3545	4.7955	4.4999	4.5199
Max			6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.9	5.9
Min			1.4	1.2	1.0	1.0	1.4	1.4

Reading Attitude Rating Level (Highest = 6 / Lowest = 1)

Reading Attitudes Scale (Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna 2013)

Individual Responses to Reading Attitudes Questions; n=44

Reading Attitudes: Multiple choice of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. ("Very Good" = 6 / "Very Bad" = 1).									
ID	Reading news online for class	Reading a book during free time	Research using encyclo- pedias for class	Texting/ emailing friends... free time	Reading online for a class	Reading a textbook	Reading a book online for a class	Talking w/ friends about... something read in spare time	Getting a book or mag. for a present
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	3	6	4	5	4	4	4	6	5
2	5	6	5	5	5	6	4	6	4
3	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6
4	6	6	5	6	6	6	5	6	6
5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	6
6	3	5	4	6	6	5	6	6	4
7	6	5	5	6	6	5	6	6	5
8	3	6	5	4	5	5	4	5	4
9	4	6	5	6	3	3	3	3	5
10	4	6	4	4	4	5	4	5	5
11	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	5
12	6	4	5	4	6	5	6	5	3
13	6	3	4	6	3	5	3	1	6
14	3	4	3	6	4	5	4	3	6
15	5	4	3	6	4	4	4	6	6
16	6	4	6	5	4	6	4	6	6
17	5	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	4
18	3	5	6	6	4	5	2	5	5
19	4	2	2	6	6	5	5	4	4
20	4	3	3	6	4	4	4	5	3
21	4	6	4	2	3	5	3	6	6
22	5	6	6	5	5	6	5	6	6
23	5	6	6	6	4	6	4	6	6
24	4	6	3	6	5	4	3	6	1
25	4	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	5
26	2	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	1
27	6	1	6	6	6	3	3	6	3
28	6	4	5	6	6	5	5	6	2
29	4	1	1	2	2	2	2	4	1
30	4	4	2	3	4	4	3	4	4
31	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	5	3
32	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
33	6	4	3	6	6	4	6	6	3
34	2	2	2	5	4	4	2	6	3
35	5	5	5	6	6	5	5	4	5
36	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1
37	4	6	5	5	4	6	4	5	3
38	3	4	6	3	3	6	4	5	3
39	#	1	#	6	#	1	#	#	1
40	4	4	3	5	5	5	5	3	4
41	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4
42	6	4	6	4	6	6	6	4	6
43	3	3	4	2	2	3	3	5	2
44	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1

Reading Attitudes Scale: Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna, 2013

Individual Responses to Reading Attitudes Questions; n=44

Reading Attitudes: Multiple choice of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. ("Very Good" = 6 / "Very Bad" = 1).										
ID	Texting friends in spare time 10	Reading a book on a rainy Saturday 11	Working on internet project w/ class-mates 12	Reading printed book/mag /comic in free time 13	Using a dictionary for class 14	Using social media - spare time 15	Looking up info online for class 16	Reading newspaper or mag. For class 17	Reading a novel for class 18	All 18 Questions
1	5	5	6	6	6	5	5	5	4	4.7
2	4	4	6	6	6	1	5	5	5	4.7
3	5	6	5	6	6	5	6	6	6	5.6
4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5.8
5	5	6	6	5	6	5	6	5	5	5.2
6	6	6	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	4.9
7	6	6	4	6	5	6	6	5	5	5.6
8	4	6	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	4.8
9	6	6	5	6	4	6	6	4	5	4.9
10	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	4.9
11	6	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6.0
12	4	5	6	6	5	6	6	5	5	5.5
13	6	4	3	5	6	6	4	3	5	4.8
14	6	4	5	5	3	6	4	4	4	4.9
15	6	3	5	6	6	6	4	4	3	5.3
16	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6.2
17	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.6
18	6	4	4	5	5	6	5	3	2	5.2
19	5	2	5	5	4	6	3	3	2	4.8
20	6	3	6	3	3	6	3	3	3	4.8
21	2	6	5	6	5	2	4	6	6	5.4
22	5	6	5	6	6	4	5	5	6	6.3
23	6	6	5	6	6	4	6	4	6	6.4
24	6	4	6	5	6	6	6	6	4	5.8
25	4	5	4	6	6	4	6	5	6	6.1
26	3	1	4	3	2	4	4	3	2	3.8
27	5	1	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	5.9
28	6	3	6	5	5	6	6	5	4	6.3
29	6	1	4	4	2	6	6	4	1	4.3
30	3	4	3	4	4	1	4	4	3	4.8
31	6	6	4	4	5	6	5	5	4	5.7
32	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6.4
33	6	4	4	5	4	6	5	6	4	6.4
34	6	1	6	3	6	6	6	1	6	5.5
35	6	3	5	5	6	6	5	5	4	6.6
36	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	3.2
37	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	6	6.5
38	3	4	3	5	6	3	6	4	6	6.1
39	6	#	4	#	6	6	6	#	#	4.1
40	3	3	4	3	5	5	5	3	5	6.0
41	3	4	#	4	4	4	4	4	4	5.9
42	3	6	5	6	6	5	6	6	4	7.2
43	3	3	2	1	6	4	3	2	1	5.0
44	1	1	5	3	2	1	3	1	1	3.9

Reading Attitudes Scale: Conradi, Jang, Bryant, Craft, & McKenna, 2013

Appendix L

Resilience Assessment Subscale: Resilience Range Counts

(Respondent Counts at each Resilience Range; n = 44)

Resilience Range	Personal Competence	Social Competence	Structured Style	Social Resources	Family Cohesion
1-2	0	2	0	1	4
2-3	5	6	8	5	11
3-4	19	13	21	16	14
4-5	20	23	15	22	15

Resilience (Highest = 5 / Lowest = 1)

Resilience Assessment Subscale: Resilience Range Counts

(Mean Subscale Values by Respondent; n=44)

Participant	Finished or still in GED?	Age	Average of					Average of All 28 Individual Questions	Average of Subscale Means
			Personal Competence	Social Competence	Structured Style	Social Resources	Family Cohesion		
1	G	37	3.9	3.0	3.0	3.8	3.2	3.4	3.4
2	F	19	3.4	4.0	3.5	2.4	1.3	2.9	3.3
3	F	38	4.6	4.2	4.5	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.5
4	F	20	4.1	4.6	3.8	3.4	2.8	3.8	4.0
5	F	34	4.5	4.0	4.3	4.0	2.3	3.8	4.2
6	G	20	2.8	2.4	2.8	4.2	2.8	3.0	3.0
7	F	35	3.5	3.6	3.3	3.0	2.0	3.1	3.3
8	G	20	4.0	4.6	4.3	4.6	4.2	4.3	4.4
9	G	19	4.4	4.8	3.3	4.0	3.8	4.1	4.1
10	G	23	3.9	4.0	3.8	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.9
11	G	34	4.3	4.0	3.8	4.2	4.3	4.1	4.1
12	G	21	3.7	3.2	3.5	3.4	2.7	3.3	3.5
13	G	20	4.0	5.0	3.3	3.4	2.8	3.7	3.9
14	G	19	4.1	4.4	3.3	4.0	3.2	3.8	3.9
15	G	20	4.4	4.6	3.8	4.6	3.2	4.1	4.3
16	G	23	3.9	4.6	4.1	4.4	3.5	4.1	4.3
17	G	19	3.4	3.0	4.0	3.8	4.2	3.6	3.5
18	G	19	4.3	4.4	3.8	3.4	3.3	3.9	4.0
19	G	18	4.1	4.0	4.3	4.6	3.2	4.0	4.2
20	G	23	3.6	5.0	4.3	4.0	4.3	4.2	4.2
21	G	54	3.9	4.2	3.8	4.4	4.2	4.1	4.1
22	G	29	4.3	4.8	4.3	3.2	2.0	3.7	4.1
23	G	23	4.0	4.4	5.0	4.6	3.2	4.1	4.5
24	G	18	3.4	4.6	3.3	5.0	2.0	3.5	4.1
25	G	18	3.5	3.6	3.5	4.2	3.3	3.6	3.7
26	G	24	2.5	2.6	2.8	3.0	2.5	2.6	2.7
27	G	20	4.5	4.6	3.0	4.6	4.5	4.3	4.2
28	G	21	4.0	4.8	4.3	5.0	3.2	4.2	4.5
29	G	35	4.6	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.5	4.8	4.9
30	G	19	2.6	2.0	2.8	3.0	3.0	2.7	2.6
31	G	19	3.8	3.6	3.8	4.2	4.8	4.0	3.8
32	G	19	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
33	G	25	4.5	5.0	3.8	4.6	4.8	4.6	4.5
34	G	26	4.5	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.8	4.8	4.9
35	G	19	4.4	4.8	3.8	4.2	5.0	4.5	4.3
36	G	53	3.5	1.8	2.5	2.2	2.3	2.6	2.5
37	G	20	2.9	3.4	3.3	3.8	2.2	3.0	3.3
38	G	19	3.4	4.0	3.0	3.4	3.3	3.4	3.4
39	G	20	3.3	3.6	4.3	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.6
40	G	46	3.6	2.6	3.5	3.6	3.0	3.3	3.3
41	G	59	2.4	3.0	2.8	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.8
42	G	53	4.8	4.2	4.8	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.5
43	G	45	4.1	4.6	4.3	4.0	4.7	4.3	4.3
44	G	31	3.4	2.4	3.3	1.6	3.0	2.8	2.7
Average			3.8	4.0	3.7	3.9	3.4	3.8	3.9

Resilience Scale for Adolescents (Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006)

Individual Responses to Resilience Questions; n=44

Resilience Scale: Raw Data ("Totally Agree" = 5 / "Totally Disagree" = 1)								
ID	I can reach my goals if I work hard	I am best when I have clear aims and objectives	Have friends/family members encourage me	Satisfied with my life up to now	Family: share views of what is important in life	I easily make others comfortable around me	I know how to reach my goals	I always make a plan before I start something new
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	5	4	5	2	4	4	4	3
2	4	4	1	3	2	5	4	5
3	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4
4	5	5	3	4	3	4	4	3
5	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	4
6	4	4	4	2	2	3	3	2
7	4	4	3	3	2	3	4	3
8	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	4
9	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	3
10	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
11	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	3
12	5	5	5	#	3	3	5	4
13	5	5	4	2	3	5	5	3
14	5	4	4	5	2	5	5	3
15	5	4	4	2	2	5	5	5
16	5	5	4	3	4	5	4	4
17	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4
18	5	5	3	3	4	5	3	3
19	5	5	5	2	1	4	4	4
20	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	4
21	5	4	5	3	4	4	3	4
22	5	5	2	3	2	5	5	5
23	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	5
24	4	#	#	3	2	5	5	3
25	5	5	4	3	4	4	3	4
26	5	4	3	2	2	4	3	2
27	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	3
28	5	5	5	3	3	4	5	4
29	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
30	4	3	3	3	3	2	3	3
31	4	3	5	4	5	4	3	3
32	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
33	5	4	5	3	5	5	5	3
34	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
35	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4
36	5	4	2	4	2	2	4	3
37	4	5	4	2	2	4	4	3
38	4	4	2	3	3	4	3	3
39	4	4	5	3	4	5	3	4
40	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	4
41	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	2
42	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	5
43	5	#	3	5	4	5	3	5
44	3	3	3	3	4	1	3	4

Resilience Scale: Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006

Individual Responses to Resilience Questions; n=44

Resilience Scale: Raw Data ("Totally Agree" = 5 / "Totally Disagree" = 1)									
ID	My friends always stick together 9	I feel comfortable with my family 10	I easily find new friends 11	When not possible to change things: I don't worry about them 12	I am good at organiz- ing my time 13	Have close friends/ family: care about me 14	My family we agree on most things 15	I am good at talking to new people 16	
1	3	4	2	3	2	5	3	2	
2	3	1	3	2	4	3	1	3	
3	4	5	4	3	5	5	4	5	
4	3	1	5	4	5	4	3	5	
5	3	3	4	4	5	4	2	4	
6	4	2	1	2	3	5	3	2	
7	3	2	3	2	4	3	2	4	
8	4	5	5	3	4	5	4	4	
9	1	3	4	5	3	5	3	5	
10	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	
11	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	
12	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	
13	3	1	5	5	3	4	3	5	
14	4	4	5	5	3	5	2	5	
15	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	
16	3	4	5	4	3.5	5	2	5	
17	3	5	2	3	4	5	3	2	
18	2	4	3	5	4	4	2	5	
19	5	2	5	4	4	5	5	3	
20	3	4	5	3	5	5	4	5	
21	4	5	4	3	4	5	3	4	
22	4	2	5	3	5	3	2	5	
23	3	5	2	1	5	5	2	5	
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26	1	3	1	1	3	4	2	2	
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29	5	5	5	3	5	5	3	5	
30	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	2	
31	3	5	3	2	5	5	4	3	
32	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	
33	4	5	5	5	3	5	4	5	
34	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	
35	3	5	4	3	3	5	5	5	
36	1	3	1	3	2	3	3	2	
37	4	3	2	1	3	4	2	3	
38	4	4	5	4	2	5	3	4	
39	2	3	2	3	5	3	3	5	
40	3	4	2	3	3	4	2	2	
41	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	
42	4	5	2	4	5	4	5	4	
43	4	5	5	3	4	5	5	5	
44	1	4	1	5	3	2	2	1	

Resilience Scale: Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006

Individual Responses to Resilience Questions; n=44

ID	I feel competent 17	My family has rules that simplify everyday life 18	I always someone: can help me when I need it 19	Given options, I usually know what will be right for me 20	Family: positive future even when sad things happen 21	I always find something fun to talk about 22	My belief in myself gets me through difficult times 23	Family: we support each other 24
1	5	3	3	4	3	3	4	3
2	3	1	1	4	1	4	3	2
3	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	5
4	5	2	2	3	5	5	4	2
5	5	3	4	4	2	3	4	2
6	3	2	4	3	3	2	3	3
7	4	2	3	3	2	4	4	2
8	4	5	5	3	4	5	4	4
9	5	3	5	3	4	5	5	5
10	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
11	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
12	4	2	2	3	3	4	4	3
13	5	2	3	3	3	5	4	3
14	5	3	4	3	4	5	3	4
15	3	2	5	5	4	5	5	3
16	4	4	5	3	5	4	4	4
17	3	4	4	3	5	3	3	5
18	3	3	5	5	2	4	5	4
19	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	3
20	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	5
21	4	3	4	4	4	4	5	5
22	5	2	3	4	2	4	5	2
23	5	5	5	3	3	5	5	3
24	5	2	5	3	1	5	3	3
25	3	2	4	3	2	3	4	4
26	4	2	3	1	3	2	2	3
27	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	5
28	5	3	5	4	3	5	4	3
29	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
30	2	2	4	2	4	2	2	3
31	3	4	3	4	5	4	5	5
32	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
33	3	5	4	5	5	5	5	5
34	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	5
35	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	5
36	3	1	2	3	2	2	4	2
37	3	2	4	3	2	4	3	2
38	3	3	2	2	3	3	4	4
39	2	4	4	4	4	2	3	3
40	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	3
41	2	3	3	3	3	3	#	3
42	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
43	4	4	4	3	4	3	5	5
44	4	3	1	4	2	4	2	3

Resilience Scale: Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006

Individual Responses to Resilience Questions; n=44

Resilience Scale: Raw Data ("Totally Agree" = 5 / "Totally Disagree" = 1)					
ID	I find something comforting to say to others when they are sad	When things go badly, I find some good that can come from it	My family: We like to do things together	I have close friends/ family that value my qualities	All 28 Resilience Questions
1	4	4	2	3	3.3
2	5	4	1	4	2.9
3	4	5	5	5	4.6
4	4	4	3	5	3.8
5	4	4	2	4	3.9
6	4	2	4	4	3.1
7	4	4	2	3	3.2
8	4	4	3	4	4.4
9	5	4	3	4	4.3
10	4	4	4	4	4.1
11	4	4	5	4	4.4
12	4	3	2	4	3.6
13	5	3	4	3	4.0
14	2	2	3	3	4.2
15	5	5	2	4	4.5
16	4	4	2	5	4.5
17	4	4	3	3	4.1
18	5	5	4	3	4.3
19	4	4	3	4	4.5
20	5	4	5	4	4.7
21	5	4	4	4	4.7
22	5	4	2	4	4.3
23	5	3	3	5	4.8
24	4	2	1	5	4.3
25	4	5	4	4	4.3
26	4	2	2	4	3.4
27	5	5	4	5	5.1
28	5	3	3	5	5.0
29	5	4	5	5	5.6
30	2	3	2	3	3.6
31	4	5	5	5	5.0
32	5	5	5	5	5.9
33	5	5	5	5	5.6
34	5	5	5	5	5.8
35	5	4	5	5	5.5
36	2	2	2	3	3.7
37	4	3	2	3	4.2
38	4	4	3	4	4.6
39	4	4	2	2	4.7
40	3	4	2	4	4.6
41	3	2	3	3	4.1
42	5	5	3	4	5.8
43	5	5	5	4	5.7
44	5	3	3	1	4.2

Resilience Scale: Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006

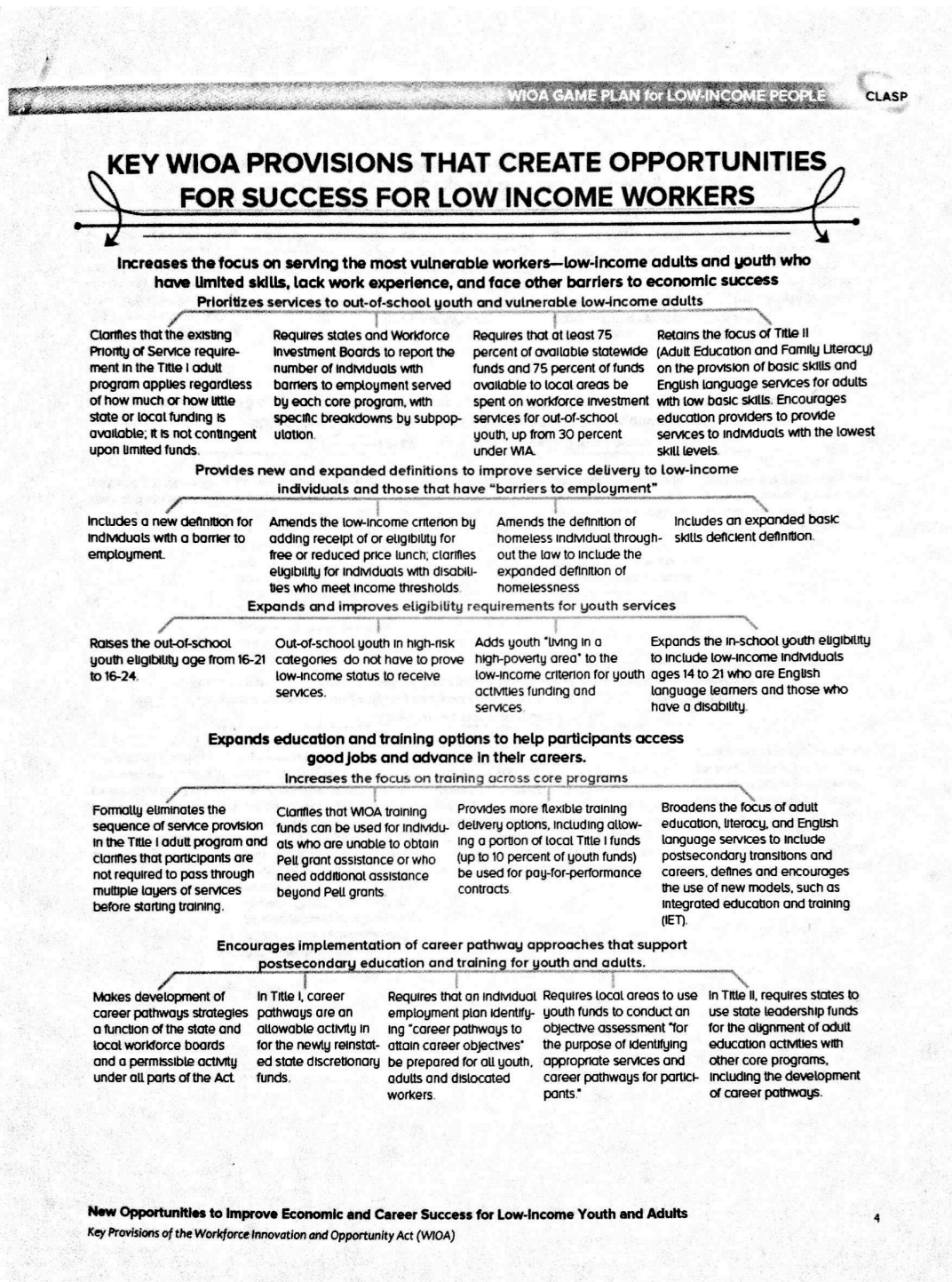
Appendix M

Resilience vs. Reading Attitude (Normalized to 0 - 5 Scale)

ID	Finished or still in GED?	Age	Reading	Resilience	Normalized	Normalized	Connections: Number of EngagementTypes
			Average of Subscale Means	Average of Subscale Means	Average Reading Subscale Means	Average Resilience Subscale Means	
1	G	37	4.90	3.42	3.90	3.02	0
2	F	19	4.73	3.32	3.73	2.90	1
3	F	38	5.73	4.53	4.73	4.41	1
4	F	20	5.90	3.97	4.90	3.71	1
5	F	34	5.15	4.19	4.15	3.98	0
6	G	20	4.88	3.03	3.88	2.53	1
7	F	35	5.55	3.34	4.55	2.92	1
8	G	20	4.63	4.36	3.63	4.20	1
9	G	19	4.80	4.11	3.80	3.88	4
10	G	23	4.55	3.91	3.55	3.63	2
11	G	34	5.75	4.05	4.75	3.81	4
12	G	21	5.07	3.45	4.07	3.07	1
13	G	20	4.55	3.91	3.55	3.64	1
14	G	19	4.55	3.94	3.55	3.68	2
15	G	20	4.85	4.33	3.85	4.16	2
16	G	23	5.62	4.25	4.62	4.06	1
17	G	19	4.95	3.54	3.95	3.18	2
18	G	19	4.65	3.95	3.65	3.69	1
19	G	18	4.22	4.24	3.22	4.05	2
20	G	23	4.20	4.22	3.20	4.02	3
21	G	54	4.25	4.06	3.25	3.82	1
22	G	29	5.37	4.13	4.37	3.91	1
23	G	23	5.43	4.50	4.43	4.38	2
24	G	18	4.95	4.08	3.95	3.85	2
25	G	18	4.98	3.70	3.98	3.38	0
26	G	24	2.68	2.71	1.68	2.14	1
27	G	20	4.87	4.18	3.87	3.97	1
28	G	21	5.15	4.51	4.15	4.39	2
29	G	35	3.12	4.91	2.12	4.88	1
30	G	19	3.33	2.59	2.33	1.99	0
31	G	19	4.38	3.83	3.38	3.53	2
32	G	19	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	3
33	G	25	5.00	4.46	4.00	4.33	1
34	G	26	4.12	4.88	3.12	4.84	2
35	G	19	5.15	4.28	4.15	4.10	3
36	G	53	1.42	2.50	0.42	1.88	1
37	G	20	4.80	3.33	3.80	2.91	1
38	G	19	4.15	3.44	3.15	3.05	4
39	G	20	3.88	3.58	2.88	3.22	1
40	G	46	4.13	3.33	3.13	2.91	4
41	G	59	3.83	2.79	2.83	2.24	2
42	G	53	5.15	4.53	4.15	4.41	1
43	G	45	2.90	4.26	1.90	4.08	3
44	G	31	1.60	2.66	0.60	2.07	3
		Mean	4.52	3.87	3.52	3.59	1.66
		Max	5.90	5.00	4.90	5.00	4.0
		Min	1.42	2.50	0.42	1.88	0.00

Appendix N

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Provisions



Helps disadvantaged and unemployed adults and youth earn while they learn through support services and effective employment-based activities.

- Supports increased use of on-the-job training by allowing increased reimbursement rates to participating employers (up to 75 percent of wages, increased from 50 percent under WIA).
- Allows local areas to reserve up to 20 percent of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds for incumbent worker training.
- Allows up to 10 percent of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds to be used for transitional jobs for individuals with barriers to employment.
- Requires that at least 20 percent of Youth formula funds be spent on paid and unpaid work experiences that incorporate academic and occupational education for out-of-school and in-school youth.
- Encourages states and the federal government to support activities that promote adult education as an employment based activity.

Aligns planning and accountability policies across core programs to support more unified approaches for serving low-income, low-skilled individuals.

Requires unified planning at the state and local levels.

- Requires the development of a four-year unified state plan for the core programs.
- Allows a state to develop a combined plan that includes core programs and one or more additional programs, including, but are not limited to, Career and Technical Education, TANF, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Employment and Training.
- Requires state and local plans to include youth and adults with barriers in their analysis of the current workforce and their strategic vision and goals.
- Requires local plans to describe how access to services will be expanded, particularly for eligible individuals with barriers, and how the local board will facilitate co-enrollment.
- Requires the local workforce board to review applications for Title II funding from local providers of adult education.

Improves accountability across the core WIOA programs to increase access to employment, education, training, and support services for individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment and economic success.

- Establishes common performance measures for the core programs (with variation for the Title I youth program) to support greater integration of services.
- Creates a credential attainment measure that includes recognized postsecondary credentials and secondary school diplomas or their recognized equivalent. Secondary credentials can only be counted for individuals who have obtained or retained employment or who are engaged in education or training leading to a postsecondary credential within one year after program exit.
- Creates a new progress ("skill gains") measure that identifies individuals who are making measurable skill gains while in an education and training program.
- Requires state and local performance expectations and levels to be adjusted based on economic conditions and participant characteristics.
- Establishes financial sanctions for performance failure at the state level. As a step toward shared accountability, states are subject to a reduction in Title I discretionary funding (from 15 percent to 10 percent) for failing to meet performance goals in any of the core programs.

New Opportunities to Improve Economic and Career Success for Low-Income Youth and Adults

Key Provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)