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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

HIGH SCHOOLS IN CALIFORNIA THAT ARE BEATING THE ODDS AND  
HOW THEY ARE DOING IT

A dissertation presented in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

by

Jason Vilorio

May, 2012

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This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my incredible family and to my wife, Holly, for without her love, supportive words, and never-ending encouragement, this journey would never have happened. We have such an amazing life, I love you! In addition, I dedicate this to my two children, Taylor and Ella; you two are the loves of my life and your educational journeys are just beginning. I love you both!

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This amazing journey started with 12 strangers from Cohort 5 who became dubbed the “Dirty Dozen.” I am thankful that we made this journey together and will cherish the time we spent together. Our friendships will last forever.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to determine the common programs and practices that Beating the Odds (BTO) high schools in California are using to achieve high graduation rates. More specifically, this study identifies specific programs and practices that the high schools are using to address at-risk student behaviors as well as what the principals perceive as the most effective program or practice that has helped the schools achieve their respective high graduation rate.

This qualitative nonexperimental study collected interview data from 9 high school principals who were identified as BTO school leaders by the American Institute of Research (AIR). The AIR study investigated the types of transition programs being utilized by BTO schools and their feeder middle schools while this study investigated specific programs and practices used at the high schools to address at-risk students. The 9 high school principals were interviewed using a semistructured protocol that included questions related to this study as well as the AIR study.

This study identified 7 practices and programs that helped BTO schools achieve their graduation rates. These included (a) the use of data, (b) strong remediation programs, (c) strong academic supports, (d) a strong counseling model, (e) strong connections to school, (f) high expectations for all students, and (g) the development of a strong professional learning community.

The findings of this study concluded that the 3 most important programs and practices for schools designated BTO were the effective use of data, the development of credit remediation programs, and the development of academic support programs. Furthermore, it was determined that the practice that was identified as the single most

important practice was the connection and engagement of students in the school, either through specific activities or a strong counseling program. Lastly, it was concluded that current budgetary constraints are creating substantial challenges for schools that are working to beat the odds and the future is bleak in California with regard to school funding.

## **Chapter One: Foundations of the Study**

### **Background**

The belief that all students can learn was echoed through the school halls for several years during the G. W. Bush administration; yet, currently over a million of the students who enter high school in the ninth grade fail to graduate in 4 years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). In 2006, the United States ranked 17th in high school graduation rates and 14th in college graduation rates among 30 developed nations as identified by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2006). Schools have faced the dropout problem for years and some have successfully managed to graduate students, while the majority have seen large numbers of Hispanic and African American students failing out, especially during the transition time into high school. The fact that U.S. high schools face such large numbers of dropouts calls into question the belief that all students can learn and whether schools are prepared to deal with those who cannot and will not.

California has one of the highest dropout rates in the country and has the highest K-12 school population in the United States with some estimating that only 66% of students graduate from high school in California (Rumberger, 2007). The projected number of nongraduates for the Class of 2009 was 175,011 based on statistics from the Alliance for Excellent Education (2009). The estimates are much worse for certain racial and ethnic groups within California. African American, Hispanic, and Native American groups have graduation rates hovering close to 50%, while graduation rates among White and Asian groups are 75% and higher (WestEd, 2004). These statistics are evidence of the growing dropout problem that plagues the nation and the state of California.

In 2008, approximately 68.3% of students in California graduated from high school. On May 12th of 2009, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell stated during a teleconference for the media that "this statistic is unreasonably high . . . there are long-term economic repercussions from not graduating for the student, for their communities, and for our statewide economy" (California Department of Education, 2009b, para. 3). The state has continued to work to find successful means by which to address the schools that exhibit large dropout rates.

To make matters worse, dropout data throughout the nation are often called into question as to their accuracy. A recent study by Rumberger (2007), a University of California, Santa Barbara professor, found that data gathered in 2003-2004 showed that the graduation rate in California was as low as 65% and as high as 87% depending on which data were used. The lack of accurate data is not just a state issue. School districts are plagued with inaccurate data as well. Alternative high schools often have difficulty tracking graduation rates as students attending alternative style schools often exhibit high rates of mobility, causing validity issues as they relate to the dropout problem.

The enactment of No Child Left Behind in 2001 placed even more pressure on schools and districts to address the problem of dropouts. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires that,

All states implement accountability systems based on challenging state standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades three through eight, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency within 12 years. Assessment results are disaggregated by socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group is left behind. Local education agencies (LEAs) and schools that fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress toward statewide proficiency goals are subject to improvement and corrective action measures. (California Department of Education, 2010, Executive Summary)

In California, Program Improvement (PI) is the formal designation for Title-I funded schools and local education agencies (LEAs) that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for 2 consecutive years.

### **Problem Statement**

The California Department of Education (2009a) published the *2008-2009 Accountability Progress Report* in early September of 2009. The report stated that for the 2009-10 school year, 675 new schools in the state of California were placed into Year 1 of PI bringing the total number of schools in PI to 2,796. An additional 899 schools were no longer classified as PI as schools are not allowed to be designated as PI beyond Year 5. During this same time only 54 schools were able to exit PI. Schools that enter PI are expected to meet specific criteria for 2 years as outlined by the California Department of Education in order to exit PI. Schools that enter PI can either advance in PI by not making AYP the next year, maintain PI status by making AYP for only 1 consecutive year, or they can exit PI altogether as long as they have met AYP for 2 consecutive years. Schools that are able to exit PI have developed specific interventions to address students' needs and have exhibited growth for 2 straight years.

Current research indicates that students who drop out of school in the United States exhibit numerous risk factors. These include living in poverty or single-parent households, and having poor motivation and poor academic skills (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Rumberger and Lim (2008) reviewed 25 years of research on dropouts including national, state, and local data. Their research review identified two different perspectives or factors that determine whether a student graduates or drops out. The first is more of an individual perspective that focuses on "factors such as students' attitudes, behaviors,



school performance, and prior experiences” (p. 3). The second uses an institutional perspective that focuses on the “contextual factors found in students’ families, schools, communities, and peers” (p. 3). So many different factors leading students to drop out of high school place a burden on the educational system to develop ways to address these at-risk behaviors.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this dissertation study was to determine the common programs and practices that Beating the Odds (BTO) high schools are using to achieve their respective high graduation rates and those practices that are perceived to be the most effective by the school principals. The method for the study is phenomenological and consists of conducting interviews with principals or designees from the nine high schools identified as BTO within the larger AIR study that investigated middle school to high school transitions programs.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed for this study:

1. What common practices, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
2. What common programs, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?

3. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the single most effective practice being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
4. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the greatest challenges in achieving their respective high graduation rate?

### **Importance of the Study**

The study will help inform actions to improve intervention programs for schools currently in PI in the state of California as well as schools that are exhibiting low graduation rates. The study specifically focused on how schools were able to develop programs and practices that lead to high graduation rates as well as identified challenges that schools address or attempt to address. Data gathered can be used to aid other high schools in California to develop common programs and practices to help them achieve high graduation rates. This study will add to the growing research on school reform efforts aimed at reducing student dropout rates in the United States and California.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to only high schools in California and the data examined were from 2006 to present. Schools that do not meet the BTO criteria were not considered for the study. The interviewees were limited to those principals or designees from the selected schools. This did not take into account possible principal mobility that can occur from year to year. Finally, this study was limited to those BTO schools that received permission to participate from their district superintendents.

## **Assumptions**

This study assumed that the site principal/designee who participated in the interview was knowledgeable of the school and intervention programs and practices the school is using to achieve their respective high graduation rate.

## **Key Terms and Operational Definitions of Variables**

**At risk.** Students who are deemed *at risk* are those who exhibit the following behaviors: low performance in core academic classes with a failing grade in at least one of those courses, adult-like behavior at a young age, such as substance abuse, and signs of depression.

**Alternative high school.** Alternative education, as described by the California Education Code, is a course of study which is different from and acts as an alternative to conventional schooling (California Education Code 48200-48204, 2010).

**Annual dropout rate.** The percentage of students in Grades 9 through 12 dropping out during a specific year. This is defined as the ratio of the sum of dropouts in Grades 9 through 12 to the sum of the total enrollment in Grades 9 through 12, in the same school year.

**California graduation rate.** Percentage of students of a specific high school cohort graduating within 4 years, accounting for dropouts. Defined as the ratio of the number of graduates in a given year to the sum of those graduates, plus the dropouts in 12th grade of that same year, the dropouts in 11th grade or the previous year, the dropouts in 10th grade 2 years before, and the dropouts in 9th grade 3 years before.

**California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE).** An examination that contains two components. There is a written essay and a multiple-choice reading section

that makes up the English-language arts component of the exam. The material covered in the exam is California English Content Standards up to Grade 10. The math exam consists of multiple-choice questions as well and focuses on math up to the first part of algebra. In order for a student to receive a diploma in the state of California, he or she must take and pass both the English-language arts (ELA) portion and math portion with a scaled score of 350 or above. A score of 350 on the ELA exam is equal to answering 56% of the questions correctly. A score of 350 on the math exam is equal to answering 44% of the questions correctly.

**California state standards (CST).** California State Standards tests are given to students after the completion of at least 85% of the school year. The tests are in the following areas as applicable: English, math, social science, and science. Scores on the exam range from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the lowest score possible; students who score in this area are classified as *far below basic*. The score of 4 is proficient, and the NCLB act requires that by the year 2014, all students reach proficient levels in all areas tested.

**Daily attendance.** Daily attendance throughout a 6-period day over the span of a 90-day semester. Attendance is recorded electronically by teachers by the end of each day; students who are given a tardy are considered between 1 and 15 minutes late; if a student is more than 15 minutes late, he or she is considered absent from school.

**Dropout rates.** The number of students who fail to receive a high school diploma from a school district are considered dropouts. There are various types of calculations used by states when determining dropout rates.

**Engagement in school.** The level of interest a student has as it relates to school; being prepared for class, completing and turning in homework, attending school

functions (dances, sporting events, performing arts events), and participation in extracurricular activities.

**Graduation rates.** This is the number of students who receive a high school diploma or equivalent certificate from a school district. Some states allow students to complete a GED (General Education Diploma) or a proficiency diploma.

**Program Improvement (PI).** The formal designation for Title I-funded schools and LEAs that fail to make AYP for 2 consecutive years per the California Department of Education, which makes this determination.

**Promoting power.** The comparison of the number of 12th-grade students compared to the number of 9th-grade students 3 years prior determines a schools' ability to promote students to graduation.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides the background and the foundation for the study. It explains the brief history of dropout prevention and at-risk behaviors that students exhibit.

Chapter Two details the problem of dropout and dropout calculations in the United States and California. A review of characteristics of dropouts and the different interventions used by schools to address specific at-risk behavior is provided as well as information on leadership styles that promote increases in student achievement.

Chapter Three details the methodology used to conduct the study as well as explains the study and its relationship within the context of the American institute for Research (Parrish, Poland, Arellanes, Ernandes, & Viloría, 2011) study.

Chapter Four includes a review of the study design, followed by the presentation of the findings of the study, using both narrative and tables. A review of the selection criteria as well as demographic data from the nine identified BTO schools are included along with the findings related to the four research questions.

Chapter Five provides a review of key findings with a focus on identified common practices and programs. Based on the key findings, conclusions and discussions and recommendations for policy and practice for practitioners and further study are included. The chapter concludes with final thoughts.

## **Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

Since the beginning of compulsory education in the United States, numerous reports on the status of the educational system have been issued. Some of the most notable reports were issued after the 1960s when Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. This law thrust the federal government into the educational system that, until that point, had been controlled by the local cities, counties, and states. The bill authorized the spending of approximately 1.3 billion federal government dollars on public education, which was a small amount at the time as local and state governments were spending approximately \$18 billion a year. The federal government investment in education climbed to \$25 billion in 2006. Once the federal government started to provide direct funding to the educational system in the United States, the issue of the high school dropout became a national issue.

Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) recently called the high school dropout problem an “epidemic . . . in which nearly one half of all Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans fail to graduate from public high school with their class” (p. 6). Recent federal legislation has attempted to address the problem of high school dropouts as evidenced by the inclusion of provisions for schools to address the crisis in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Title I, Part H, of NCLB established the school dropout prevention program. The grant program provides funds to state education agencies or local education agencies (LEAs) that implement “research-based, sustainable, and coordinated school dropout prevention and re-entry programs for students in grades 6-12” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 53). Currently there are 50 programs

throughout the United States that have been deemed exemplary by the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University (Hammond, Smink, & Drew, 2007).

While the dropout problem persists in the United States, research has demonstrated that those students who drop out of school share many common characteristics. Students who drop out of school exhibit at-risk characteristics that range from low socioeconomic status to lack of family structure, with the most common characteristic being that of poor academic achievement. As the characteristics of dropouts have become identifiable, the focus has shifted to creating programs that address the needs of those deemed “at risk” before they drop out of high school. Hammond et al. (2007), at The National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University, identified a total of 25 significant factors across eight different factor categories, 60% of which were individual factors. Examples of these risk factors include individual background characteristics of early adult responsibilities, school performance, school engagement, and school behavior. School engagement and school performance were the most significant factors with low achievement, poor attendance, low educational expectations, lack of effort, low commitment to school, and lack of extracurricular participation as major factors as well.

Educators often look at dropouts as students who could not be reached and did not want to learn. As DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005) pointed out, “The premise that schools exist to ensure that all students learn at high levels collides with the traditional assumption that schools exist to ensure that all students are *taught*” (p. 12). Current education trends are now focusing attention more toward what students need to learn, how teachers know that they have learned it, and what teachers do when students do not



learn it (Dufour et al., 2005). Schools can no longer take the stance that if students do not learn it is solely due to the students' unwillingness to learn. Brown-Chidsey and Steege (2005) state that problem-solving models for students with school difficulties are now going to fall under the term RTI, or response to intervention, "RTI includes problem identification through observations, problem definition, and the designing and implementing of intervention plans that have measures to ensure that students' needs are being met" (p. 6). RTI requires that teachers begin to individualize instruction for each student with summative and formative assessments guiding the entire process. Kennelly and Monrad (2007) found that "interventions that have the capacity to be oriented around individual student needs, and that work in tandem with schoolwide interventions able to adjust around grade level needs, hold promise as an effective combination for combating the nation's dropout problem" (p. 3).

Schools throughout the nation have had to continue to find unique ways to address students who are at risk of dropping out of high school. The state of New Hampshire has implemented a multitiered intervention program aimed at addressing students who are at risk of dropping out. The program is called APEX II, or Achievement in Dropout Prevention and Excellence, and focuses on attendance data and tardiness data, along with discipline referrals and school climate survey data to identify those students who exhibit behavior indicative of possible dropouts. The goal of the program is to reduce dropouts in the state of New Hampshire by 20% (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2008).

As schools begin the process of identifying underperforming students and those who are most at risk of dropping out, the need for tailored interventions will likely become evident. Jerald (2006) found the following:

The dropout problem is not an inevitable, immutable feature of American education. Demographics matter, but what happens in schools has a great impact on whether students stay in school and graduate. Recent research suggests that, even for students who have difficult home lives, dropping out has much to do with how schools operate and the educational experiences students have within them. (p. 3)

Students will need subject remediation in order to get them to grade level through pullout classes, extra tutoring time, and differentiated instruction. Other students may have the skills to be successful, yet are disconnected from school and fail to progress in their classes. These students have the knowledge, as often is evidenced by their high test scores on state-mandated testing, yet underperform in the classroom. The interventions for these students will require different components than for those students who may not be at grade level in mathematics. These students often struggle at transition times of schooling, most often as they transition from middle school to high school. The focus must then be placed on the ninth grade as it is the critical time period when kids either make-it or break-it in school.

The transition years from Grade 6 to middle school and from Grade 8 to Grade 9 are important time periods in which schools need to create targeted interventions.

National data show that the student population in ninth grade, often referred as the bulge year, declines drastically in the 10th-grade year. In the 2003-2004 school year the United States had a total Grade 9 enrollment of approximately 4.19 million; the following school year the total number of Grade 10 students dropped to around 3.75 million students, a loss of approximately 10.5% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2005).

Creating intervention programs during this transition time for students is critical in addressing the dropout problem in the United States. Students reported receiving less support and monitoring from staff than they received in middle school. They complained about a lack of positive student-teacher relationships, and they also had lower self-esteem and higher rates of depression than middle school students (Barber & Olsen, 2004).

Schools throughout the nation have started to implement strategies to address this transition time for students. High schools have created Schools-Within-Schools or SWAS in an effort to create small learning communities within schools to make sure students receive individualized instruction. Other schools have created transition programs; and schools that implemented this type of program saw a dropout rate of approximately 8% as compared to dropout rates of over 20% in schools that do not have transition programs (Reents, 2002). Though these transition programs may differ in format, they often contain the element of teacher-student relationships.

This chapter reviews the literature related to five areas concerning high school dropout: (a) the dropout problem as a national problem; (b) the dropout problem within California; (c) the characteristics of dropouts; (d) the dropout prevention programs and the evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs, with a focus on truancy and school engagement specific programs; and (e) the importance of site leadership in developing successful dropout prevention programs.

### **The National Dropout Problem**

The definition of the term “dropout” can be traced back to the 1960s and the National Education Association (NEA). Dorn (1993) stated that the stigma of being classified as a dropout is new, as over the last several decades a high school diploma has

become the expectation for youth in America. As the vast majority of citizens began to receive high school diplomas as they entered adulthood, the public focus shifted to those who were not achieving the new norm. Employers also responded to this shift by raising requirements for jobs, and a high school diploma is now a requirement for most jobs. Dorn (1993) explained that high school dropping out is a concern for most citizens as it is perceived as a “departure from an age-specific norm . . . the norm is high school graduation as a teenager” (p. 354).

High school dropout research is not a recent phenomenon; studies of dropouts can be traced back to the early 1900s. Early research found that those who dropped out shared particular demographic characteristics, similar to those who drop out today. One such study was conducted by Counts in 1922. Counts (1922) studied the students who attended high school in 1919 and 1920 and concluded that participation in high school was for a select group of students; this was dependent on their social class, parents’ occupation, and home conditions. Dorn (1993) concluded that the high schools of the 19th century were elitist institutions. A study conducted by Smith in 1943 found that less than one third of adolescents with low socioeconomic status were continuing their schooling through high school (as cited in Barclay & Doll, 2001). Graduation rates from 1919 through 1930 were at roughly 29% of school-age children (Greene, 1966). Census data in 1950 showed that roughly 51% of students graduated from high school in the United States. This became an important time period in the public education system as the economy shifted toward a skilled workforce and required that Americans obtain a high school diploma post World War II.

The U.S. Census calculates high school graduation statistics, and since 1955, the number of students graduating from high school has increased and continued to do so until the late 1970s and 1980s when a plateau was reached with graduation rates hovering close to 75%. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2009) found that the percentage of status dropouts in 2006 was approximately 9.3% for students aged 16-24 years old, though that number can fluctuate depending on the calculation used. Though there may have been a reduction in the number of students who have dropped out of high school when compared to the data from 1950s, major issues still exist with urban students.

Some estimate that approximately 50-60% of urban high school students drop out of high school prior to graduation. Balfanz and Legters (2004) conducted a recent study on which schools were producing the largest number of dropouts in the nation. They found that between 900 and 1,000 high schools had a 50/50 graduation rate and schools that have higher rates of minority students exhibited higher dropout rates than schools that were predominately White. It becomes even more startling, as Orfield and Chungmei stated:

[The] prevalence of weak promoting power among majority minority schools when combined with the continuing segregation . . . of schools in many locales means that 50 years after Brown vs. the Board of Education approximately 46% of the nation's African American and 39% of Latino students attend high schools in which graduation is not the norm. (as cited in Balfanz & Legters, 2004, p. 6)

The majority of schools with weak promoting power are located in northern and western cities as well as throughout cities in the southern states.

Current statistics from Fedstats.gov indicate that only 80.4% of Americans aged 25 years or older have received a high school diploma in the United States. However,

there is continual debate regarding what constitutes a dropout in the United States. The NCES has developed different rates to characterize the dropout problem in the United States. These rates include event dropout rate, status dropout rate, status completion rate, and averaged freshman graduation rate:

1. Event dropout rate estimates the percentage of both private and public high school students who left high school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or equivalent.
2. Status dropout rate reports the percentage of individuals in a given age range who are not in school and have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency credential, irrespective if they dropped out.
3. Status Completion Rate indicates the percentage of individuals in a given age range who are not in high school and who have earned a high school diploma or equivalent, irrespective of when the credential was earned.
4. The averaged freshman graduation rate estimates the proportion of public high school freshman who graduate with a regular diploma 4 years after starting 9th grade. The rate focuses on public high school students as opposed to all high school students or the general population and is designed to provide an estimate of on-time graduation from high school. (NCES, 2009, p. 2)

Each rate provides unique information that helps to identify the characteristics of dropouts and those students who complete high school. The fact that there are four different ways in which one could measure dropout data poses a unique problem in attempting to address the dropout problem.

The current data from the NCES (2009) evidences a decline in the status dropout rate since 1980. 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 diploma or equivalent. In 1980, the total percentage was 14.1 compared to 8.7 in 2007. The racial/ethnic breakdown evidenced a substantial decrease in dropout rates for Black students from 19.1% in 1980 to 8.4% in 2007. Though these percentages continue to decrease, the realization that there are approximately 3.8 million 16- to 24-year-olds who

have not yet earned a high school diploma or equivalency is concerning to educators and businesses alike. These young adults are more likely to be unemployed when compared to the same group of 16- to 24-year-olds who have obtained a bachelor's degree. In 2009, among those individuals 16 to 24 years of age without a high school diploma, 26% were unemployed compared to college graduates at 7% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

There are social and economic impacts when students drop out of high school. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) reported that "if the students who dropped out of the Class of 2009 had graduated, the nation's economy would have benefited from nearly \$335 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes" (p. 1). The Alliance also found that the average income for high school dropouts in 2005 was \$17,299 compared to that of high school graduates who averaged \$26,933. In 1997, approximately 41% of inmates in both federal and state prisons had not completed high school or its equivalent and three quarters of state inmates did not earn an actual high school diploma as many had received a GED (Harlow, 2003).

In recent years, NCLB has required that states keep a more accurate count of graduation statistics, though as of the writing of this report there was still a lack of a comprehensive program within all states. California has had difficulty accurately calculating the proportion of ninth-grade students who are able to graduate 4 years later. A study conducted by the California Dropout Research Project in February of 2008 found that the dropout statistics formulated by the California Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education varied anywhere from 10% to 20% difference in the number of students who drop out after 4 years.

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1984) found that “educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future at a Nation and a people” (p. 9). This publication sounded an alarm that the educational system in the U.S. was severely lacking when international comparisons were made among student achievement. Since that time the increases in the number of high school graduates have remained relatively unchanged. *A Nation at Risk* proposed that the content being taught, the level of expectations, and the way students were taught needed to be changed. As the U.S. economy has grown and shifted, the dropout rate has decreased from the 1900s from less than one third of all Americans graduating from high school in 1919 to over 50% by the 1950s to present data indicating that almost 75% of students graduated with a high school diploma in 2003. Fernandez and Shu (1988) found that the concern for dropouts came not only from educators but from business leaders and policymakers. They described the fact that the technical labor force of today was not able to absorb those who have dropped out, and that the competitiveness of the world economy has forced companies to look for a more highly educated workforce.

### **California Dropout Problem**

The educational system in California continues to evolve in the way in which it gathers statistics regarding student performance and student dropouts. In 1979 the California Basic Educational Data System was introduced to make demographic data available. It was not until 1986 that school districts were required to report student dropouts for Grades 10 through 12. The current California Education Code requires that all children between the ages of 6 and 18 attend school full time (California Education



Code 48200 and 48204, 2010). Compulsory education law in California requires that students stay in school longer than many other states, which, in turn, poses a challenge in addressing the dropout problem that has kept California ranked in the bottom of graduation rates when compared to other states. Some studies show that only 68% of high school students in California complete high school on time. There are issues with California's ability to address the high school dropout problem as well. According to the California Department of Education statistics, graduation rates have remained relatively the same for the last 30 years. According to Reed (2003), the number of students who have not completed the ninth grade in California has stayed at a stagnant 10% since the 1970s and the rest of the country has fallen from 20% in 1968 to 4% in 2002.

The issue of dropouts in California has been considerably worse for students with low socioeconomic backgrounds and those who are ethnically diverse. WestEd (2004) found that African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students have graduation rates hovering close to 50% in California, though the California Department of Education (CDE) publishes rates with much higher graduation rates. In 2004-05, the CDE published graduation rates as follows: Latino at 82.4%, American Indian at 83.9%, and African American at 74.9%.

The different ways in which graduation statistics are calculated is one reason that California continues to look as though it is unable to make progress in addressing the dropout crisis. California has had difficulty in calculating its graduation rates because "the state lacks individual student identifiers that would enable accurate tracking of students as they move through grades in school or move from one school or district to the next" (Timar, Biag, & Lawson, 2007, p. 1). In an effort to create a better system in which

to track students, the state has developed a permanent CSIS number, or California School Information Services number. The CDE currently publishes two different graduation rates for students, a completer rate and a basic completion ratio. NCLB requires that all states report a 4-year completion rate in order to meet AYP. This rate calculates the number of students who graduated within a 4-year time span compared to those who did not complete within the 4-year time frame. The formula calculates the number of students who started the ninth grade divided by the number of students who graduated 4 years later, not accounting for students who move in and out of the state educational system. Warren (2007) stated that by using the completer rate, California excludes students from the reported number of graduates, and thus the state violates the federally-required system of accountability under NCLB.

### **Characteristics of Dropouts**

The ability to identify students who are at risk of dropping out of high school before graduating has been a focus of research studies for generations. As recent as 2007, the Federal Register, the U.S. Department of Education's research branch, stated that research aimed at improving the achievement of minority students and other identifiable disadvantages were priorities for proposed research. According to Howard, Anderson, and Slavin,

At risk appears to be a euphemism for students who exhibit a wide range of educational problems, including the failure to respond positively to the instruction offered in basic academic skills, unacceptable social behavior in school, and the inability to keep up with classmates. (as cited in Pierce, 2001, p. 37)

Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007) defined at risk as “the aspects of a student's background and environment that may lead to a high risk of her or his educational failure” (p. 196).

With the continual emphasis on addressing the needs of at-risk students, research continues to identify which factors lead to an increased dropout rate among students.

Current research indicates that students who exhibit certain at-risk behaviors or have certain risk factors are more likely to drop out of high school than those who do not exhibit those same factors. Researchers have identified socioeconomic status, ethnicity, academic motivation, and academic skill level as the four main reasons students fail to complete high school (Alexander, Ackland, & Griffin, 1976; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; Rumberger, 1987; Suh et al., 2007).

The most comprehensive studies of factors associated with students who drop out of high school are those who are longitudinal in nature with large representative samples. One such study was done by the NCES (1984) in 1980. The sample of students extended nationwide and included 30,000 students who were in the 10th grade. The study spanned a 2-year time period from the spring of 1980 until the spring of 1982. The results were a dropout rate of 14%. The dropout rate was conservative as it did not include students who dropped out prior to the start of the 10th grade. The study identified that more males drop out compared to females. This substantial study discovered that students dropped out due to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cognitive test performance.

Suh et al. (2007) used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth in 1997 and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2002 to study the most significant contributing factors to school dropout by “categorizing students according to membership in a particular at-risk group” (p. 196). The data consisted of 9,000 survey respondents nationwide who took part in a two-part survey. Only those students who had dropped out of school were represented in the sample. The study found that students who dropped out

were affected differently depending on the at-risk status they exhibited. This result suggests that schools need to develop different dropout prevention strategies based on the identified at-risk behavior. It also found that low GPA was not the only major factor as 43% of low-GPA students successfully completed high school. The implications of this finding should guide counselors who work with at-risk populations to develop systems to empower students who have low GPAs, as this can provide students with a successful outlook and lead to increased rates of graduation for this group. Another major factor that leads to dropping out is that of low socioeconomic status students who live in a single-parent household in which the mother does not have a high school diploma. This group exhibited higher rates of dropping out than those from two-parent households. Counselors should take an active role in providing extra support, both academically and socially, for students in this group as well as increased parent education.

Abbott, Battin, Hill, Catalano, and Hawkins (2000) studied the predictors of early high school dropout by comparing the adequacy of five theories to predict dropping out of high school before the 10th grade. The theoretical models used include full academic mediation, general deviance, deviant affiliation, poor family socialization, and structural strains as depicted in Figure 1.

The theory of academic mediation posits poor academic achievement, as evidenced by low standardized test scores or grade point average, as the strongest predictor of dropping out of high school. Few studies have examined poor academic achievement as a factor mediating the effects of other variables in predicting early school dropout (Abbott et al., 2000). The mediational hypothesis is reflected by the *a* paths in Figure 1.

General deviance theory focuses on the relationship between deviant behavior and dropping out. Behaviors, like early drug use, delinquency, and pregnancy, are deemed as deviant behaviors. Abbott et al. (2000) hypothesized that poor academic achievement would “partially mediate the association between various types of deviance and dropout . . . and that general deviance or specific aspects of deviant behavior would have direct effects on high school dropout” (p. 570). This is depicted in Figure 1 as path *b*.

Deviant affiliation theory focuses on the peer group and the influence that group has on a students’ behavior and development. Research has been conducted affirming that students who drop out have more deviant friends who also show potential for dropping out, but little has been done to determine “mechanism of the influence on these deviant peers on the decision to leave school . . . has been investigated” (Abbot et al., 2000, p. 570). Suh et al. (2007) investigated the “use of school friends versus family members as resource for personal problems,” and found “a negative correlation coefficient meaning that students’ likelihood of dropping out actually decreased” (p. 198). The deviant affiliation theory is depicted in Figure 1 as path *c*.

As stated previously, the family plays an important role in whether a student drops out of high school. Abbott et al. (2000) hypothesized that regardless of academic achievement a parent’s expectations and own achievement will directly influence whether a teenager stays in school. This theory is referred to as poor family socialization theory and is depicted in Figure 1 as path *d*.

The structural strains theory examines the direct effect of ethnicity, controlling for gender and socioeconomic status (SES), on both poor academic achievement as well as dropping out. Abbott et al. (2000) hypothesized that the structural strain factors would

have a direct effect on whether a student drops out over and above the influence of poor academic achievement. This is depicted as path *e* in Figure 1.

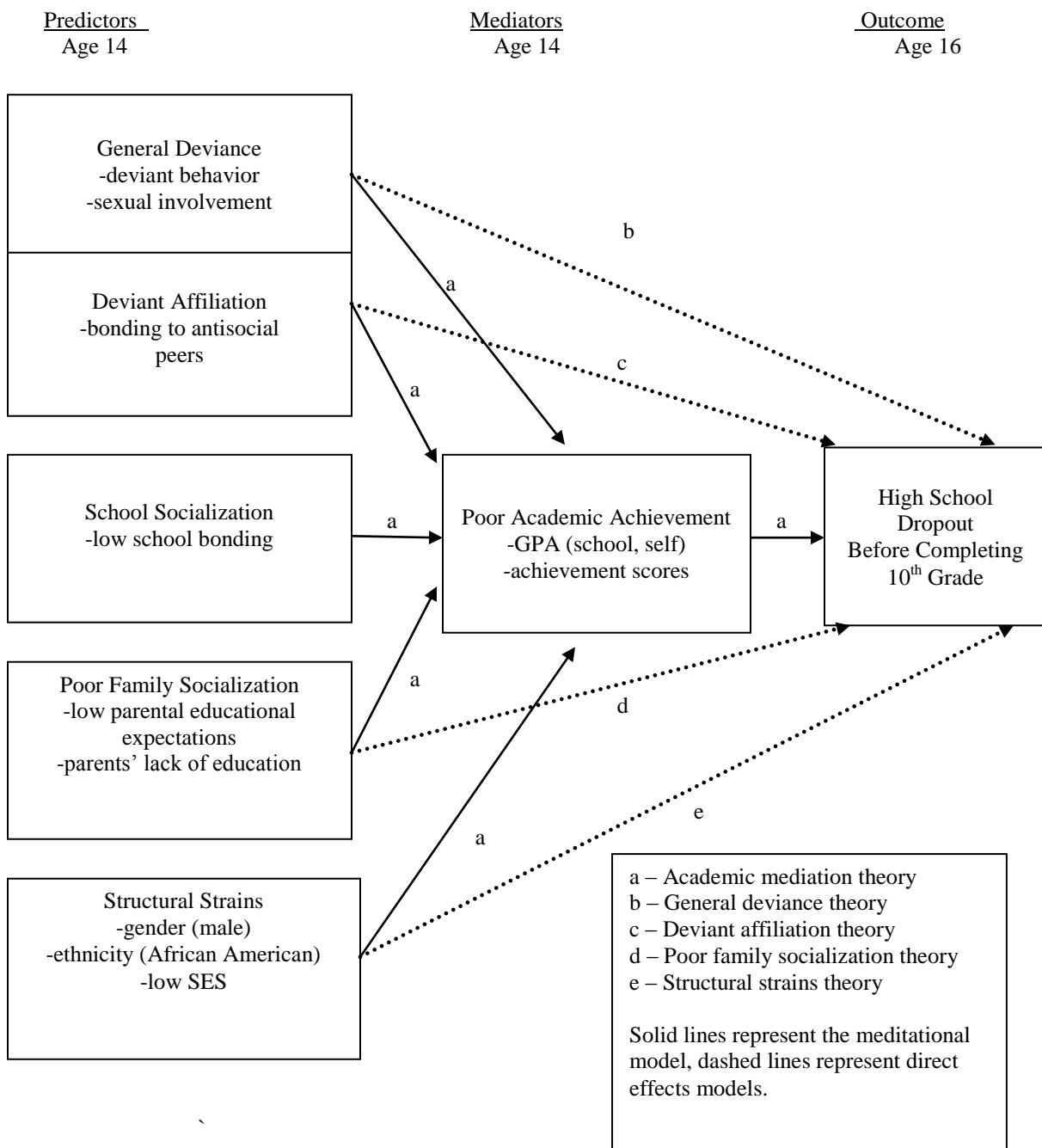


Figure 1. Five theoretical models of dropout. GPA = grade point average; SES = socioeconomic status.

The Abbott et al. (2000) study used the Seattle Social Development Project data, which gathered data from a multiethnic sample of children who were followed from 1985 when students entered the fifth grade. It consisted of 808 students who attended schools throughout high crime areas of Seattle. The sample of 808 included boys ( $n = 412$ ) and girls ( $n = 396$ ) and half identified themselves as European Americans (46%). African Americans (24%) and Asian Americans (21%) were the majority of the sample of non-European Americans. Over half (52%) had participated in the National School Lunch/School Breakfast Program at some point and almost half (42%) indicated that they lived in a single-parent household. Twenty measured variables and scales were used, 14 of which were hypothesized to “reflect the five latent constructs” as described above (Abbott et al., 2000, p. 572). The study found that once again poor academic achievement was the most significant and strong predictor of dropout (standardized path coefficient of .57,  $p < .001$ ). “Low parental expectations for education, bonding to antisocial peers, and ethnicity were the strongest predictors of poor academic achievement with standardized path coefficients of .32, .19, and .22” (Abbott et al., 2000, p. 576). The students found that when academic achievement was modeled as a “mediating variable,” many other factors contributed to dropping out. When each model was viewed separately, general deviance, bonding to antisocial peers, and low SES directly increased the likelihood of dropping out of school regardless of academic achievement at age 14. All in all, the study recommends that, like the Suh et al. (2007) study, that interventions need to be targeted to address the at-risk behavior with early intervention especially for those students who exhibit low academic achievement.

In 2007, researchers from the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) reviewed approximately 25 years of Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) literature regarding the risk factors of dropouts as well as effective program models that identified exemplary programs that were able to address identified risk factors of potential dropouts. The study identified four areas or domains that are related to students' dropping out of school. These are individual, family, school, and community factors. They concluded that the accuracy of dropout predictions increased when combinations of multiple risk factors were present and that dropouts were not a homogenous group. The study concluded that dropping out of school is often the result of a long process of disengagement that begins prior to entering school. Dropping out of school is often described of as a process, not an event, with factors that build and compound over a length of time (Hammond et al., 2007).

### **Dropout and Intervention Programs**

As risk factors are identified, schools are often faced with the dilemma of what type of intervention or program needs to be implemented in order to address these factors. The most obvious immediate support that often takes place comes in the form of academic support. As stated previously, academic success and motivation are major contributors to student dropouts, and almost all successful dropout programs provide some sort of academic assistance. These programs also contain increased quality of curriculum, tutoring, attendance goals, mentoring or counseling programs, prosocial activities, and giving students a reason and purpose for completing high school (Fashola & Slavin, 1998).



Recent studies of successful intervention programs have identified several key components that are necessary to address the risk factors that potential dropouts have. These include early intervention of students, the ability to create personal connections with students, the need to create unique programs that address the unique needs of individual students, and the importance of community involvement (Bateman & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Hoyle & Collier, 2006; Mellard & Johnson, 2008; Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, & Francis, 2007; Suh & Suh, 2007). The early intervention for potential dropout requires that schools have processes in place to identify the risk factors that potentially lead to students' dropping out and create systems to allow for those in charge of the programs to know who the students are.

The NDPC issued a technical report on *Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs* (Hammond et al., 2007). The report attempted to identify the most common risk factors exhibited by dropouts and, more importantly, what types of evidence-based programs exist in the U.S. schools to address the most common risk factors. The NDPC used an existing matrix developed by Mihalic (2005) to evaluate evidence-based programs. The study only included programs that met the following criteria:

1. Were ranked in the top tier or level by at least two sources;
2. Were currently in operation;
3. Had no major revisions since the ranking of the program;
4. Had consistent, positive evaluation outcomes; and
5. Targeted K-12 school populations. (p. 7)

Fifty programs identified based on the above criteria are listed in Appendix A. Many of the programs listed did not contain rigorous evaluation criteria to evaluate effectiveness and have been determined by the U.S. Department of Education as unsubstantiated

programs. The programs were broken down into specific areas that addressed identified at-risk behavior as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

It is important to note that the exemplary programs identified by Hammond et al. (2007) included components that address more than one at-risk factor. The study found that approximately 25% of the programs addressed both individual and family factors and that 80% of the programs addressed more than one risk factor. The large number of programs that were investigated also evidenced the uniqueness of how educational institutions throughout the United States have developed programs to address specific risk factors that affect their student population. Though there are many unique programs that exist throughout California and the United States, there are some regularly accepted programs that exist including alternative high schools. Along with alternative schools, one of the standard practices in education for at-risk students is grade or subject retention. Although this is a very common practice and perceived as successful, retention is an insufficient intervention strategy for promoting student achievement (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). In actuality, retention of a student increases the likelihood that a student will drop out at a later point. The NDPC report found that retention/overage for grade level was one of the four major contributors to a student's risk of dropping out (Hammond et al., 2007).

Along with grade-level retention, truancy is a major contributor to dropping out of school as well as delinquency. NCLB legislation contains specific implications for schools that exhibit poor attendance as it is reflected in the school's AYP. Similar to dropout data, truancy data are also difficult to ascertain. The use of truancy data to determine a school's AYP could also lead to an increase in dropouts as schools attempt to

Table 1

*Number of Exemplary Programs That Address Individual Risk Factors*

Individual risk factors for school dropout	Total number of programs addressing factor	
	Risk factor	Total
Individual background characteristics		15
Has a learning disability or emotional disturbance	15	
Early adult responsibilities		5
High number of work hours	0	
Parenthood	5	
Social attitudes, values, and behavior		33
High-risk peer group	6	
High-risk social behavior	33	
Highly socially active outside of school	0	
School performance		18
Low achievement	16	
Retention/overage for grade	2	
School engagement		14
Poor attendance	6	
Low educational expectations	3	
Lack of effort	4	
Low commitment to school	4	
No extracurricular participation	8	
School behavior		21
Misbehavior	18	
Early aggression	9	
Total number addressing individual risk factors		50

*Note.* Adapted from *Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report*, by C. Hammond, J. Smink, and S. Drew, 2007, Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center.

Table 2

*Number of Exemplary Programs That Address Family Risk Factors*

Family risk factors	Total number of programs addressing factor	
	Risk factor	Total
Family background characteristics		6
Low socioeconomic status	1	
High family mobility	0	
Low education level of parents	1	
Large number of siblings	1	
Not living with both natural parents	4	
Family disruption	4	
Family engagement/commitment to education		8
Low educational expectations	0	
Sibling (s) has dropped out	0	
Low contact with school	7	
Lack of conversations about school	1	
Total number addressing family risk factors		12

*Note.* Adapted from *Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report*, by C. Hammond, J. Smink, and S. Drew, 2007 (Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center).

push truants out of schools rather than attempting to re-engage them. Students who are withdrawn are no longer marked absent and the impact is no longer placed onto the school.

The National Center for School Engagement (2007) found that truancy has been “clearly shown to be related to high school dropout, substance abuse and use, and delinquency. The relationships are circular, rather than linear . . . truancy can be both a cause and a consequence of any of these troubling behaviors” (p. 6). Thus, as schools

develop intervention systems, it is clear that attendance is a key component that must be addressed.

Intervention programs that aim to address truancy need to be multifaceted. Brown found that there were three necessary steps, “The first is in assessing the causes of the truancy problem and the individual needs of the student and to then establish a program accordingly” (as cited in Gullatt & Lemione, 1997, p. 11). The second step is to meet with families to determine the necessary team approach to address the attendance, and the final step is a “multimodal intervention approach to effectively change the school system” (p. 12). That includes clearly defining truancy and attendance guidelines for students and parents. This task falls squarely on the shoulders of the school site administrators.

Many states have started to develop procedures to address truancy, which include possible referral of parents and students to the district attorney for prosecution in court. In the state of California, for example, the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) is set up by school districts to address truancy issues within their districts. SARB typically works with the local district attorney to prosecute those students whose attendance is deemed worthy of further law enforcement. Other options include transferring students to alternate high schools or county high schools, or referring them to probation. This process is meant to be a district-wide intervention to address attendance issues, but can often fail to address the specific needs of the students as it is very limited in its ability to address students’ needs, but acts in a punitive manner instead.

Some dropout prevention programs are limited in their scope, often focusing on just one or two of the risk factors associated with dropping out. One such study, which

focused on absenteeism and low academic achievement, was completed by the Tecumseh Consortium (1990). The study focused on 77 students with irregular attendance and poor academic achievement, 53 of which were freshmen. The program aimed at developing better decision-making skills through the use of small-group instruction. The study found that there was no significant increase in the attendance or overall academic achievement of students in the program and that the life patterns that were created by these students were difficult to change once they entered high school. The study also found that parental involvement among these at-risk students was extremely low.

Other dropout programs are comprehensive in nature. In New York City, the Board of Education and the State of New York implemented a dropout prevention program (DPP) aimed at reducing the high number of student dropouts. Each intervention program was unique to the school in which it was implemented, though they all included DPP set goals. The DPP used a basic set of assumptions regarding student dropouts: (a) unexcused student absences are the first sign of trouble, (b) severe attendance problems begin in middle and secondary grade levels, and (c) students drop out of high school for many different reasons; thus, a comprehensive program is required to address these unique needs (Sherman, 1987). The programs focused primarily on the transition from middle to high school and included a team approach of public and private agencies that provided adolescents with support. Parents were also an integral part of the program and were considered central to success. According to Woods (2007),

Many of the implemented programs included flexible schedules, job development and placement for seniors, incentives for those who show effort and achievement, part-time employment that helps students achieve the school to work transition, and tutoring and mentoring of younger at-risk students by older ones. (p. 9)

Within 2 years of program implementation, the dropout rate went from 42% in 1985 to 30% in 1987 (NCES, 1993).

The common thread that runs throughout the intervention programs is the development of a connection between the student exhibiting the at-risk behavior and an adult. This adult could be a teacher, counselor, administrator, district office personnel, or just about any member of the educational community. This connection helps the student become engaged in his or her education. Current research on student engagement has determined that a connection to at least one adult in the education or school community is vital to student success, reduces the possibility of students dropping out, and engages the student in his or her education (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).

One such study was conducted by Brewster and Bowen (2004) who investigated the effects of teacher support on Latino students identified as at risk of dropping out. The study focused specifically on “student perceived teacher support and its impact on the school engagement of at-risk Latino youth and the social capital assets for the students that directly and positively influence school engagement” (p. 49). The definition of school engagement used in the study comes from Wehlage et al., which states that “school engagement includes a student’s affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses related to attachment, sense of belonging, or involvement in school” (as cited in Brewster & Bowen, 2004, p. 49). The method of the study was to survey 699 Latino middle and high school students from the United States whom school staff had at one point designated as at-risk. This 699 was a subset of a larger dataset of 5,016 students from multiple races and various ethnic backgrounds, though all were middle and high school

students. The results found, through hierarchical regression analyses, that teacher support on Latino youth does significantly affect both problem behavior and perception of school meaningfulness. As the “level of student perceptions of teacher support increased, mean levels of problem behavior decreased and mean levels of perceived school meaningfulness increased, both beyond the influence of demographic controls and parental support” (Brewster & Bowen, 2004, p. 55). Teacher support is a very important component in engaging students in school in a meaningful way and thus reducing the at-risk behaviors students exhibit.

School engagement is an important component for schools to address when dealing with a large dropout rate. Suh and Suh (2006) investigated the relationship between educational engagement and high school degree attainment among school dropouts. They defined engagement and levels of engagement as follows:

Students’ engagement levels can be assessed through the way they complete class work, whether they maintain educational expectations or aspirations for themselves, whether they complete homework on time, whether they control their TV watching, whether they attend class regularly, and whether they participate in class discussions and other school activities. (Suh & Suh, 2006, p. 15)

The study sample consisted of 678 males and 752 females with data gathered from the NELS:88/00 database conducted by NCES in the Department of Education. The NELS:88/00 collected information from students, both personal as well as relating to their behavior, education, and family experiences. The study revealed that there is a significant correlation between degree attainment and educational aspiration. The Pearson correlation coefficient showed that aspiration had the highest  $r$  with .191 followed by organizational skills, locus of control, homework, and TV watching (Suh & Suh, 2006). Suh and Suh (2006) found that the three most prominent factors associated



with degree attainment for dropout adolescents were academic aspiration, organizational skill, and locus of control. It is important for schools to develop programs and train staff to address the needs of students based on the above findings. Schools often rely on counseling programs and teacher advisement to create that connection with students.

Counselors play a vital role in addressing students who exhibit at-risk behavior. Current counselor ratios in the state of California from the California Department of Education exhibit averages of 945 to 1, compared to the national average of 477 to 1. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends ratios of closer to 250 to 1. The average in California places the state last when compared to all other states. School counseling programs provide an important component to high schools, both those with high graduation rates as well as those with low graduation rates. The programs often focus on three domains in counseling: academic, career, and personal/social. Reviews of research have found that school counselors have a positive effect on children as well as increase the likelihood that they will graduate from high school (Borders & Drury, 1992; Gerler, 1985; St. Clair, 1989; Whitson & Sexton, 1998). Counselors often become mentors to students as well, providing yet another adult on campus that they look to for support.

Mentoring programs exist in many different ways in schools. Some programs attempt to link all students with an advisor on campus, such as a teacher or administrator, while others bring in outside community members to meet with at-risk students. Hickman and Wright (2011) studied the impact of a mentoring program on students in the Cincinnati Public School system (CPS) over a 10-year period. The primary focus of the study was on mentoring and its relationship to the academic and behavioral variables

related to the dropout rate. The results of the study indicated the importance of not starting the mentor program too early as students who are identified as at-risk very early in their education are less likely to graduate. The study also found that the mentoring program helped to increase student GPAs over time and this led to a higher graduation rate for those students whose GPAs increased in the program. The study did lack comparison data for students prior to entering the mentor program and should be considered a limitation. Also, data for those students who stopped the mentoring program were not included in the data.

Schools that are often successful in achieving high graduation rates have transition programs for students as they move through different points in their education. These programs are more often found as students' transition from middle school to high school. The transition to high school is often difficult for students for a variety of reasons including the larger size of the school, complexity of work, and the accountability of passing classes in order to graduate from high school. Another complication for students as they transition is the type of school they transfer from. Weiss and Baker-Smith (2010) studied eighth-grade school form and the resilience in the transition to high school comparing middle schools to K-8 schools. Using data from the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study (PELS), a study of public high school students in Philadelphia, Weiss and Baker-Smith (2010) examined "differences across transition by looking at ninth-grade outcomes while controlling for eighth-grade levels of the same outcome . . . controlling for socioeconomic and other key characteristics that could affect the outcomes examined" (p. 828). The study found that students from K-8 schools actually did better academically in terms of overall GPA in ninth grade as well as had a lower

likelihood of having a grade of *F* in at least one course when compared to middle school students. Also important to note is that absenteeism in Grade 9 was not tied specifically to a students' middle school or K-8 status (Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010).

The shift from middle school to high school poses a significant challenge to the educational system. At the same time that students' transition from middle to high school, they are also experiencing significant changes in human development. These include "greater pubertal changes, development of larger social networks, social cliques, and sexual and other social stresses" (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009, p. 179). Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) studied the elements of effective transition programs and found that, in order to address the needs of various constituencies, programs need to be multifaceted. Tables from Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) depict a variety of strategies schools can employ to ease the transition for students in specific areas. Table 3 shows several strategies to deal with students who face academic challenges.

Tables 3 to 6 outline clear steps that administrators, teachers, and counselors can institute to address specific challenges students often face when transitioning to high school. One strategy or intervention that has shown considerable success is the development of a summer bridge program.

Summer bridge programs for students transitioning from middle school to high school has been one way that schools engage with at-risk students prior to the school year beginning. These programs are often not just a summer school remediation program but often act as a conduit to prepare students for the next step including study skills, writing

Table 3

*Suggested Transition Activities for Academic Challenges Faced by Students*

Issue/concern	Strategy/intervention
Students not understanding scope of work at next level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the spring, provide information about academic programs, courses, etc., through school counselors and administrators of visits</li> <li>• In the spring, invite students to visit school and shadow students at next level</li> <li>• In the spring and fall, host presentations by teachers at new school about expectations, homework, responsibilities, etc.</li> <li>• In the spring, hold an open house for students and parents to showcase current students and activities – band, choir, art displays, typical math and science lessons, technology demonstrations, etc.</li> <li>• In the spring and fall, provide coping skills curriculum: good study skills, organization skills to get homework done, etc.</li> </ul>
Assisting weak students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage/require students to attend summer programs</li> <li>• Assign weak students to strongest teachers</li> <li>• Assign tutors and/or after school assistance</li> <li>• Reduce course load for struggling students</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from “Developing an Effective Transition Program for Students Entering Middle School or High School,” by K. M. Cauley and D. Jovanovich, 2006, *The Clearing House*, 18(1), p. 20.

skills, and other important facets of schooling. These programs are often utilized at colleges as well to prepare students as they enter college. Stone, Engel, and Nagaoka (2005) evaluated the summer bridge program conducted by the Chicago Public Schools. The summer program offered students who are not meeting specific minimum score cutoffs in third, sixth, and eighth grades to enroll in intensive reading and mathematics programs. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, they found that 74% of the students enrolled in the summer program liked the summer program better than the regular year; 84% stated they worked harder in the summer program than in the regular school year. Students also exhibited substantial test score gains—on average, between 1997 and 2000, eighth-grade students gained .60 grade equivalents with learning rates at

two to three times higher than during the regular school year (Stone et al., 2005).

Summer bridge programs and summer school programs aimed at addressing skill deficiencies are often at risk of being cut due to budgetary constraints so districts should evaluate the impact of such cuts in light of studies similar to the Stone et al. (2005) study.

Table 4

*Suggested Transition Activities for Procedural Challenges Faced by Students*

Issue/concern	Strategy/intervention
Introduce school procedures during the spring before entering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite students to visit school and shadow students at next level</li> <li>• Host orientation programs: tour new school, classrooms; meet students to learn about life at new school</li> <li>• Provide presentations by students from new school regarding how to be successful, to answer questions, etc.</li> <li>• Organize visits by middle school guidance counselors and administrators to elementary schools to provide students with specific details about the school and a “typical school day”</li> <li>• Work with teachers and students to develop and present an “Introduction to Middle School” program, which can include video, chat groups with current middle school students, and a handbook of typical concerns and coping skills</li> </ul>
Support following new procedures with incoming students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A week prior to school beginning, distribute school handbook to each family with phone numbers; teachers identified by grade level, team, and subject; bell schedules; lunch procedures; etc.</li> <li>• A week prior to school beginning, invite parents and elementary students to “locker night” to tour school, receive locker and combination to practice, receive schedules, and find classrooms</li> <li>• During the first week, be ready to address concerns about logistics, locker organization, finding classes, etc. (e.g., older students can be resources, guides or counselors can visit classes to answer questions)</li> <li>• Hold a freshmen-only first day</li> <li>• Use student ambassadors to establish personal links</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from “Developing an Effective Transition Program for Students Entering Middle School or High School,” by K. M. Cauley and D. Jovanovich, 2006, *The Clearing House*, 18(1), p. 20.

Table 5

*Suggested Transition Activities for Social Challenges Faced by Students*

Issue/concern	Strategy/Intervention
Help students with social concerns before entry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan panels of students from new school for questions and answers, dispelling myths, etc.</li> <li>• Host spring social at new school</li> <li>• Create pen pal programs between students or classes</li> <li>• Plan culminating activity for exiting grades</li> <li>• Assign students to teachers and/or teams before the end of the school year and encourage teachers or teams to contact students over the summer by phone or postcard</li> <li>• Send letters home in summer welcoming students and inviting them to school activities</li> </ul>
Help students with social concerns at new school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sponsor big sister/brother programs</li> <li>• Create sub-communities of learning</li> <li>• Identify students with behavior problems and provide needed counseling or social support from peers</li> <li>• Sponsor co-curricular fair; involve students in co-curricular activities</li> <li>• Use student ambassadors to establish personal links</li> <li>• Organize freshman awareness groups where students discuss common problems</li> <li>• Establish first-year support groups for counselors to help students with transition issues</li> <li>• Develop freshmen-only activities, such as a pep rally to learn cheers, a picnic, and a “don’t wear this to school” fashion show</li> <li>• During the first year in middle school, advise small groups of students about friendships, solving problems, etc.</li> <li>• Provide more personal learning environment-small classes, cooperative learning, team teaching to facilitate friendships, belonging, and motivation and academic success</li> <li>• Identify ways to ensure that students will be comfortable in the new school (e.g., ensure that a friend is in class with each student)</li> <li>• Provide classroom guidance lessons for teachers or teams that deal with communication skills, peer pressure, how to meet people, etc.</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from “Developing an Effective Transition Program for Students Entering Middle School or High School,” by K. M. Cauley and D. Jovanovich, 2006, *The Clearing House*, 18(1), p. 21.

Table 6

*Recommendations for Successful Transition Programs*

Recommendation	Suggested Activities
Transition committees need to meet regularly to plan, evaluate, and revise the program; effective transition programs involve continuous planning and communication among teams of teachers and school leaders <sup>a</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold meetings of administrators across levels to discuss articulation</li> <li>• Plan cross-curricular meetings with teachers to discuss curriculum and instruction practices and expectations between levels (including special education)</li> <li>• Share information between counselors who need to become aware of students at risk</li> </ul>
Focus transition activities on social concerns as well as academic and procedural concerns; students have many academic, procedural, and social concerns, and social worries are often not adequately addressed <sup>b</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create pen pal programs between students or classes</li> <li>• Create sub-communities of learning</li> <li>• Sponsor a co-curricular fair, and encourage involvement</li> <li>• Identify ways to ensure that students will be comfortable in new school (e.g., ensure that a friend is in each class)</li> </ul>
Target various constituencies and needs with a mix of activities. Effective transition programs have, on average, five different activities <sup>c</sup>	
<p>a. Transition programs typically end as soon as school starts; students may need support, especially with social concerns into the fall <sup>d</sup></p> <p>b. Girls, students in academic difficulty, students with behavioral problems, and low socioeconomic status minority students have the greatest difficulty with transition <sup>e</sup>, include activities and supports that target high-risk groups</p> <p>c. Include activities to meet the needs of parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create support groups to discuss friendship, problems, etc.</li> <li>• Reduce course load for struggling students</li> <li>• Assign weak students to the strongest teachers</li> <li>• Establish support groups</li> <li>• Identify students with behavior problems and provide needed counseling or social support from peers</li> <li>• Invite parents to meet with administrators and counselors to discuss school curriculum, policies, etc.</li> </ul>
Identify ways to ensure that students will be comfortable in new school (e.g., ensure that a friend is in each class <sup>f</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a “school-within-a-school”</li> <li>• Develop special courses for at-risk students</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from “Developing an Effective Transition Program for Students Entering Middle School or High School,” by K. M. Cauley and D. Jovanovich, 2006, *The Clearing House*, 18(1), pp. 22-24.

## **Leadership and Dropout Prevention**

Research on successful intervention programs typically focuses on the program elements and the data that show the success of the program in reducing students' at-risk behavior and/or reducing the number of dropouts at a school site. In Marzano, Waters, and McNulty's (2005) publication, *School Leadership That Works*, 69 studies on leadership and student achievement were analyzed and they determined that three significant factors exist. First, there is a clear relationship between leadership and student achievement-leadership matters. Second, there are 21 leadership responsibilities, each with statistically significant and positive relationships to student achievement. Last, leaders who were perceived as strong do not always have a positive impact on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005).

Determining the true impacts, or the "educational leadership effect," on a school has typically been done through the use of qualitative case studies or large quantitative studies. Both of these types of studies provide useful data, but it could be argued that they do not explicitly evidence the leadership effects. A third type of study combines both the small qualitative and large-scale quantitative studies, a meta-analysis. This is the type of study conducted by Marzano et al. (2005). On the other hand, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2010) conducted a 6-year study with an additional 6-year follow-up study. The study included respondents from nine states, 43 school districts, and 180 elementary, middle, and secondary schools. The underlying assumption was that "leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning . . . leadership provides two core functions. One function is providing direction; the other is exercising influence" (p. 9). The study determined that leadership



has its impact on student achievement, much of which is indirect in nature, thus its ability to be measured is limited.

Collective leadership, or shared leadership, and distributed leadership are the most common researched styles as they relate to increasing student achievement in schools. The terms are often used interchangeably in the school setting with the focus being on the hierarchy that has existed in the school setting for many years. Most of the research that has been conducted regarding leadership in school settings has focused primarily on teachers and administrators. The other stakeholders—parents, students, and the community—are often left out when determining influence in the schools.

There are many different definitions for the different types of leadership styles; as Leithwood et al. (2010) stated, “Collective leadership refers to the extent of influence that organizational members and stakeholders exert on decisions in their schools” (p. 19). Leithwood and Mascall (2008) surveyed teachers and evaluated student achievement data with a focus on teacher variables of capacity, motivation, and work setting and the impact that collective leadership had on these areas. They found that “collective leadership has significant direct effects on all teacher variables . . . and the paths linking the three teacher variables to student achievement indicate that collective leadership influences student achievement through teacher motivation and work setting” (p. 545). They also determined that teacher capacity is impacted by collective leadership but that the variable could not be significantly linked to student achievement. Teachers in the Leithwood and Mascall (2008) study perceived that influence is distributed in the school setting but still in a hierarchical manner. This is again evidenced in the Leithwood et al. (2010) study in which they found that the most influence exerted on a school came from district-level

administration and the site principal. The next most influential role at the school site was that of an assistant principal, though teachers in designated leadership roles were perceived to have similar influence. The importance of collective leadership is often indirectly evidenced in student achievement results.

The growth of professional learning communities in recent years through the growing influence of the DuFours has put additional focus on teacher leadership and the concept of shared leadership. Professional learning communities place a specific focus on the way teachers work to improve instruction. DuFour et al. (2005) stated that “a professional learning community is one that shifts from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning” (p. 32). Linda Lambert (1998) identified the five key assumptions for building leadership capacity that are essential for schools to become self-renewing: “Leadership is a learning process, it leads to constructivist change, everyone has the potential to become a leader, leading is shared or collective, leadership requires redistribution of power” (p. 9). Lambert (1998) and DuFour et al. (2005) focused on the redistribution of power or the sharing of power between site administrators and teachers in an effort to address at-risk student behavior.

The ability for leaders to impact students who exhibit at-risk behavior also requires a substantial amount of capacity building. The concept of building capacity within others and to allowing them to lead is imperative as administrators cannot lead alone (DuFour et al., 2005; Fullan 2003, 2006). Fullan (2006) considered this the pathway to the intelligence and commitment within an organization. The goal of the leader is to build capacity within others, which will then enable individuals to develop the skills and motivation necessary to navigate the turbulent process of creating a democratic

learning community. This is often referred to as lateral capacity-building, which takes place through networks, and it means identifying and investing in strategies that promote schools learning from each other (DuFour et al., 2005). Mullen and Jones (2008) stressed the importance of a democratic accountable leadership style in schools. They conducted a qualitative analysis of three high-performing, urban, public elementary schools in central Florida with high mobility and lower-income homes. Utilizing a case study approach they reviewed information from surveys and interviews to attempt to determine the processes that principals used to enhance leadership roles within their school as well as discerning the leadership roles the teachers fulfilled (Mullen & Jones, 2008). The study identified the importance of providing conduits for teacher leadership development. This includes leading grade-level teams, developing curriculum, attending professional development opportunities, and developing school-wide conduct expectations, as well as social opportunities in which staff can interact. Involving the teachers in the decision-making process and soliciting opinions is vital in creating the environment that led to the individual schools' success (Mullen & Jones, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

The problem of school dropouts has been a substantial problem for the U.S. educational system in the last century. In the early 1920s, the U.S. educational system was tailored to those individuals with the income to support going to school, thus mainly Caucasian males. As the 1950s approached, the number of students completing high school increased to almost 50%. The 1960s and 1970s were a time when the dropout rates steadily declined for many different populations in the United States. The federal

government became very involved in education during Lyndon Johnson's presidency and, since that time, its role has grown to present day NCLB policies.

The dropout problem in California continues to be a major issue for educators, politicians, and researchers. In July of 2008, the state of California released revised graduation rates using its new CSIS system, and most schools showed a 5% to 15% increase in the number of dropouts under the new calculation. The dropout problem in California has plagued African American, Native American, and Hispanic students the most, with some groups dropping out at a rate close to 50%.

Research continues regarding how to address the issue of dropouts. Several recent studies have provided background into identifiable risk factors that can be used to assess whether a student will drop out of school. As it becomes easier to identify students with at-risk factors, schools have started to create unique programs to address students' needs. These programs are often site created and have shown promise. The requirement to meet AYP under NCLB has helped to provide some funding sources to help create and sustain dropout prevention programs. The dropout problem will continue to be one that frustrates educators in the United States, with varying statistics, inadequate funding to address the problem, and a growing student population.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Current research indicates that students who drop out of school in the United States exhibit numerous risk factors. These include students' living in poverty, those who come from single-parent households, and those with poor motivation and poor academic skills (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Rumberger and Lim (2008) reviewed 25 years of research on dropouts including national, state, and local data. The research review identified two different perspectives or factors that determine whether a student graduates or drops out. The first is more of an individual perspective that focuses on “factors such as students’ attitudes, behaviors, school performance, and prior experiences.” The second uses an institutional perspective that focuses on the “contextual factors found in students’ families, schools, communities, and peers” (Rumberger & Lim, 2008, p. 3). With so many different factors leading students to drop out of high school, it places a burden on the educational system to develop ways to address these at-risk behaviors to keep students from dropping out. Schools continue to work to address at-risk behaviors that students’ exhibit and some schools seem to achieve higher rates of success than others.

### **Research Context**

The researcher used interviews to determine the types of interventions that high schools with respective high graduation rates are using to achieve high graduation rates. The researcher was able to collaborate with a team of researchers from the American Institute for Research (AIR) who were conducting research on a similar topic on behalf of the CDE Middle Schools Division. The AIR research consisted of interviews with school

site personnel from BTO high schools and their feeder middle schools to determine types of transition strategies being utilized by the schools related to high graduation rates. The framework of the AIR study conducted in 2011 and how the dissertation's research was conducted will be explained in detail.

In 2007 AIR conducted a study on high schools in California that were considered to be "beating the odds." The study was conducted in two phases. The initial portion of the study involved the identification of schools that were considered to be beating the odds (BTO). The method for this phase of the study was quantitative and used descriptive and inferential calculations to identify schools (Appendix B). Once the schools were identified the second phase of the study began using a qualitative approach. AIR interviewed administrators to determine what the schools were doing to achieve high graduation rates.

The researcher contacted AIR in an effort to obtain permission to access the data from the original BTO study (Dunn, Muraki, Parrish, Socias, & Woods, 2007) to do a follow-up study with the schools that were identified in 2007 at BTO. Upon contacting AIR, it was discovered that they had been commissioned by the CDE Middle Schools Division to do a new study (Appendix C). The new study was commissioned to determine effective transition programs that BTO schools were doing as well as identified interventions. The research project was divided into two phases, the first phase was quantitative and updated the original BTO schools list with data from 2006-09, and the second phase was to conduct a qualitative study to identify successful transition programs that the identified BTO schools are using between middle school and high school. This qualitative process included identifying nine schools and interviewing district and site

administrators, and then conducting further detailed interviews with four selected sites. The researcher was asked to join the AIR research team to aid them in conducting the updated BTO study, while also providing the researcher the opportunity to access the interview data for this study. The interview protocol (Appendix D) were designed to gather data on transition programs as well as all programs and interventions that the high schools are doing to achieve high graduation rates.

The researcher's role on the AIR research team included interviewing participants via telephone, conducting some site visits including interviewing students and staff, assisting in coding the interview transcripts, and participating in regular team meetings. The overall project included developing interview protocols, carrying out a quantitative analysis, and conducting case studies to gain further insight into transitions. The case studies included visits to four identified high schools and the primary feeder middle school as available.

The researcher received permission to use any of the data gathered from the AIR study for the purposes of this dissertation research (see Appendix E). The study of the common programs and practices is a subtopic that this researcher planned on exploring in the context of the larger AIR study regarding transition programs.

### **Objective**

The purpose of this dissertation study was to determine the common programs and practices that BTO schools are using to achieve their respective high graduation rates and those practices that are perceived to be the most effective by the school principals. The method for the study was phenomenological and interviews were conducted with

principals or designees from the nine high schools identified as BTO within the larger AIR study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed for this study:

1. What common practices, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
2. What common programs, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
3. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the single most effective practice being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
4. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the greatest challenges in achieving their respective high graduation rate?

### **Data Collection and Sampling Method**

The interviews were conducted with the nine high school principals of the selected Beating the Odds high schools over the course of a month. The interview dates and times were coordinated by the CDE and AIR. The phone interviews were recorded by AIR staff and conducted with 3 different researchers on the conference call taking notes and asking questions.

The sampling was considered purposeful in nature as only principals of schools that were identified as BTO schools were selected for possible interviewing. Leedy and



Ormrod (2005) refer to purposeful sampling as the selecting of “individuals or objects that will yield the most information about the topic under investigation” (p. 145). The schools that are considered to be BTO provided specific data regarding the success of their programs and practices. Their background on the topic of interventions would be considered credible due to their population and respective high graduation rates that qualified them as BTO.

### **Instruments**

The instruments for the AIR study consisted of interview protocols for district leaders and principals, as well as focus group questions for assistant principals, faculty, and students for use at the sites where the site visits were conducted along with follow-up interview questions with the site administration. The interview questions were developed and designed by the research team using extensive literature review. The interview questions had dual foci; first, a focus on interventions that lead specifically to high graduation rates, and second, a focus on those programs schools are using to help students transition from middle school to high school (Appendix D).

The instrument that the researcher utilized for this study was the protocol for the principal. The principal questions align to the research questions in this study as evidenced by Table 7. The initial interview questions gathered basic information regarding the principal and length of time he or she worked at the BTO site as well as school and community climate data. The second tier of questions related specifically to how the BTO schools were achieving such high respective graduation rates, and lastly, what types of transition programs the BTO schools might be utilizing to achieve the BTO status.

Table 7

*Alignment of Research Questions With Interview Questions*

Research questions	Interview questions
1. What common practices, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?	<p>4. What factors do you feel have been most effective in achieving this relatively high graduation rate? I realize there are multiple components, but if you had to limit them, what would you list as the top three?</p> <p>Possible follow-up questions:</p> <p>a. What specifically about this strategy is important to your success? Can you provide examples?</p> <p>b. How has this factor influenced graduation rates? Can you provide specific evidence?</p> <p>c. Did you need additional funding or resources to implement this factor? What particular tradeoffs in terms of funding and resources has your school had to make to provide these supports?</p> <p>d. How well do you feel this factor is implemented?</p>
2. What common programs, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?	9. Are there particular programs (e.g., AVID; programs focused on aligning curricula; California High School Exit Exam [CAHSEE] preparation programs; or career, college, and self exploration) or particular staff who focus on graduation and transition at your school?
3. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the single most effective practice being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?	5. Of the three factors listed above, if you had to pick one as <b>most</b> important, which would it be?
4. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the greatest challenges in achieving their respective high graduation rate?	<p>6. We are also interested in learning what you feel are the greatest challenges to achieving a high graduation rate at your school. I recognize there are likely multiple challenges. But if you had to limit it, what are the top three challenges your school faces?</p> <p>How are you addressing these challenges?</p>

## **Analytical Techniques**

The data were analyzed using categorization and interpretation into specific themes. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) refer to this type of coding as open coding:

When data are divided into segments and then scrutinized for commonalities that reflect categories or themes. After the data are categorized, they are further examined for properties that characterize each category . . . this is a process of reducing the data to a small set of themes that appear to describe the phenomenon under investigation. (p. 141)

The next step traditionally taken when utilizing this type of coding is to axial code or, as Creswell (2003) stated, “to interconnect the themes for each individual case and across the cases” (p. 194). The small set of interconnected themes allowed the researcher to determine what practices BTO schools are utilizing in the areas identified in the research questions. The researcher spent a significant amount of time developing the categories and coding of interviews. This allowed the researcher’s data to be specific to the research questions and thus clearly differentiate those data from the larger context of the AIR research study. The AIR research team was comprised of several research assistants that also worked in coding and developing categories within their data which aided in the reliability and validity. Regular discussions were had with all researchers regarding categories that were being used as coding took place. The researcher was able to work directly with the lead AIR researcher in the coding process to verify that the themes that emerged were consistent within the larger study. The lead AIR researcher has over 40 years of experience in conducting research in education.

## **Validity and Reliability**

The AIR research team took steps to ensure that the study was valid and reliable in nature. This dissertation drew from the larger context of the AIR study so the work of

the research team is important to note. The research team developed semistructured interviews, which provided an opportunity for the team to ask clarifying questions and to probe further. As Isaac and Michael (1997) stated, reliability increases with objectivity when using any type of interview, and semistructured interviews require the interviewer to have more training and skill both to “probe at significant points and to avoid biasing tendencies” (p. 145). The semistructured interview questions were developed after a thorough review of literature regarding transition programs and dropout prevention studies (Appendix F). The AIR research team that developed the interview protocol consisted of several assistant researchers as well as the lead researcher for AIR. The interview protocol was expertly reviewed by the research staff at AIR. The framework or theme for the semistructured interviews was (a) identification of possible transition programs that the BTO schools are utilizing, (b) identification of most important factors, and (c) specific programs used by BTO schools that are leading to the respective high graduation rate.

The principal interviews were conducted with the researcher as a component of the interview team. All interviews were recorded by the AIR team and transcribed and reviewed by interviewers to ensure accuracy. Much of the interviewing was conducted by one member of the research team who is skilled in the area of interviewing in an effort to get reliable data along with two other support interviewers. After each interview the team conferenced to cross reference notes.

Some qualitative researchers have argued that validity does not specifically apply to qualitative research but as Golafshani (2003) stated, “They do understand that there is some need to have a qualifying check or measure for the research” (p. 602). That being

said, the intent of the research team is to ensure that the responses are trustworthy and valid. The researcher will validate data by, as Creswell (2003) stated,

Build coherent justifications for the themes as well as using member-checking to determine the accuracy of interview findings by taking any specific descriptions back to the interview participants to make sure they feel they are accurate and peer debriefing when appropriate. (p. 196)

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures for Pepperdine University Graduate and Professional Schools were followed in conducting this study. The researchers applied for and received exempt status by the Pepperdine University IRB. All data used in this study was drawn from the AIR team research. The AIR research team also had to get AIR IRB approval in order to conduct the research. All sites that were selected for study were contacted by the CDE to solicit their participation in the study. This contact was done by the CDE Middle Schools Division. The school district superintendents all provided signed approval and consent for participation in the study within their districts. There were no drugs, medical devices, or procedures used in this study. No animals participated in the study. All participants were asked to sign a release provided by AIR research team (Appendix G). All interview responses and identities will be kept confidential and no identifiable responses will be shared in any report without the express written consent of the individual. This dissertation will not identify by name any school, school district, or person.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study analyzed interview responses to identify what interventions high schools are doing to beat the odds as it relates to graduation rates. The purpose of

this dissertation study was to determine the common programs and practices that BTO schools are using to achieve their respective high graduation rates and those practices that are perceived to be the most effective by the school principals. Precautions were taken to protect the privacy of all individuals. These steps provided validity and reliability to the study as well as to how the interview and case study data will be analyzed, using coding methods that will help to focus and develop specific themes. Human subjects were taken into account by the research team and human subjects' approval was provided by AIR IRB as well.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

### **Introduction**

Chapter IV presents the data collected through the literature review and personal interviews with the nine identified BTO school principals. The nine schools are identified as Schools A-I in order to maintain confidentiality though details of how they were determined to be BTO are detailed. The analysis of data is presented through tables and narrative.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this dissertation study was to determine the common programs and practices that Beating the Odds (BTO) high schools are using to achieve their respective high graduation rates and those practices that are perceived to be the most effective by the school principals. The method for the study is phenomenological and consists of conducting interviews with principals or designees from the nine high schools identified as BTO within the larger AIR study that investigated middle school to high school transitions programs.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed for this study:

1. What common practices, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
2. What common programs, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?

3. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the single most effective practice being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
4. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the greatest challenges in achieving their respective high graduation rate?

### **Design of the Study**

The study identified a list of possible schools that were considered to be BTO schools utilizing a formula designed by AIR in a previous study. After identification of the possible schools for study, the list was narrowed to include nine high schools that provided for a representative sampling of high schools throughout the state. High school principals from the identified sampling were interviewed over the telephone. The study used semistructured interviews to determine the types of interventions that BTO high schools with high graduation rates are using to achieve their respective high graduation rates. The semistructured interviews created the ability for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and for clarification on items though not all follow-up questions were used during the interviews. The study and the research stemmed from a collaborative effort with a team of researchers from AIR who were conducting research on a similar topic on behalf of the CDE Middle Schools Division.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The findings are presented with a brief explanation of the process that was used to identify the nine schools used in the BTO study including significant demographic data from each school. The themes that were identified after a review of interview responses



are followed by specific data regarding responses from the nine high school principals as they align with the four research questions for the study.

### **School Data**

The nine high schools that were chosen for the BTO study were among the top 20 California high schools with the highest calculated graduation residuals from 2005-06 to 2008-09. The Graduation Rate Residual is the variance between a school's real graduation rate and its statistically predicted rate. Some schools were excluded from the list if their percentage of low-income students was lower than average in their particular region in the state and schools that received a Similar Schools Ranking of 7 or lower were also excluded. In order to select a stratified sample in California AIR included two schools from each region, at least three urban schools and two rural schools were identified; two were to be high school-only districts; and there was an attempt to strive for a balance of schools based on school size, district size, and percentage of enrolled African American students (Tables 8 and 9).

During the preliminary review of the interview data from the principals the results were grouped into seven different categories: (a) Use of data to identify at-risk students and track interventions, (b) Team-approach or professional learning communities, (c) Opportunities for credit remediation, (d) Opportunities for academic support, (e) Counseling model, (f) Developing connections to school, (g) School-wide high expectations and college-going culture (Tables 11 and 12). These identified themes were developed based on the responses from the principals as well as a review of literature of the common characteristics of successful intervention programs as identified in Table 10.

Table 8

*Demographic Data Regarding the Nine Identified BTO High Schools That Were Studied*

High school	District type	Region	Urbanicity	Poverty <sup>a</sup>	Avg. 4-year grad rate	Avg. 4-year grad residual
A	Unified	South	Suburban	67.9%	97.3%	13.4%
B	Unified	Central	Rural	86.6%	89.5%	13.2%
C	High	South	Suburban	65.5%	96.0%	12.0%
D	Unified	South	Suburban	85.2%	95.2%	11.6%
E	Unified	South	Urban	70.6%	94.1%	9.9%
F	Unified	Central	Rural	89.1%	93.2%	9.2%
G	Unified	North	Urban	52.5%	93.6%	9.0%
H	Unified	North	Urban	84.2%	82.6%	9.0%
I	High	Central	Suburban	84.6%	94.7%	8.9%

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Poverty is based on the total number of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals divided by the California Basic Educational Data System enrollment.

Table 9

*Data Regarding the Nine Identified BTO High Schools—Continued*

High school	School size	2009 API (scale of 200 to 1000)	2009 Similar schools rank	Total # of teachers (2010-11)	Total # of counselors (2010-11)
A	574	724	9	26	2
B	666	696	9	31	2
C	1,962	728	9	79	11
D	2,253	712	8	84	5
E	2,401	716	8	97	5
F	539	729	9	32	2
G	2,093	763	9	91	8
H	1,631	716	10	78	5
I	1,198	724	9	53	5

The data in Tables 8 and 9 provide initial screening data for the nine high schools that agreed to take part in the BTO study. The data chart identifies districts as unified (kindergarten through Grade 12) or high school only (Grades 9-12), their region within the state of California, as well as their urbanicity which was determined by total population of the city where the school was located. Also included is poverty rate, or the number of students receiving the Free or Reduced Lunch Program, a federal program that uses income as a basis for qualification, divided by the total student population as determined by the California Basic Educational Data Systems enrollment (CBEDS). The average 4-year graduation rate as well as the average 4-year graduation residual are also included as those two statistics along with Similar Schools Ranking were the main determinants for the schools being identified as BTO. Table 9 data include information regarding school size as determined by CBEDS, API score, and Similar Schools Ranking, as well as data on staffing ratios from CBEDS.

### **Development of Categories**

The initial literature review that contributed to the identification of the preliminary categories used during the initial coding process is presented in Table 10. The literature review identified early identification of students, the importance of establishing a connection with students and parents to the campus, as well as the development of unique programs, and community involvement as the four most important characteristics of successful intervention programs. During the review of the interview data, it was apparent that the initial four common categories needed to be expanded and become more specific due to the responses from the nine principals.

Table 10

*Literature Review on Common Characteristics of Successful Intervention Programs*

Author	Theme 1: Early identification	Theme 2: Creating connections	Theme 3: Unique programs	Theme 4: Community involvement
Bateman & Karr-Kidwell 1995	Needs of students known early  Possible self-esteem issues—“Power of Positive Students”  Step-by-step program, addressing personal needs of student	Emphasize student-teacher contact  Positive environment—higher educational aspirations, academic excellence, lack of substance abuse, lack of antisocial behavior evident  Training for teachers of at-risk students  Develop trusting relationship, free from anxiety	Unique settings  Substance abuse counseling and general issues addressed  Tutorial/counseling  Summer school programs	Parent should come to school, be involved in process throughout
Hoyle & Collier, 2006		Small learning community, less reliance on one individual teacher to take on whole component  Resiliency strategies	Recovery programs Mall and on-campus digital high schools  Instructional programs aimed at remediation	“Hands on Program” mainly involvement of police, courts, community partners  Community substance abuse counseling  Mentoring programs Nonprofits—Big Brother/Big Sister, Boys/Girls Club, etc.
Suh & Suh, 2007	Academic failure, low socioeconomic status, behavioral problems have highest rate of dropout  As students accumulate risk factors, they become more likely to drop out, intervention efforts become more limited		Dropout prevention program cannot be aimed solely aimed at students with academic risks  Dependent on risk factors being exhibited- Intervention must be targeted, each identified area has specific issues to address	Parents must be involved in the identification of areas of need  Increase in community activities and educational enrichment activities

*(table continues)*

Table 10—*continued*

Author	Theme 1: Early identification	Theme 2: Creating connections	Theme 3: Unique programs	Theme 4: Community involvement
Patterson, Belyukova, Berman, & Francis, 2007	Freshman year vital for outreach in high school	Relationships valued by students, need to feel a part of the school  Quality of student- teacher interaction valued above curriculum  Small learning community	High school transition program	Mentoring programs—Big Brother/Sister
Mellard & Johnson, 2008	Response to intervention model  Tiered approach, all students who struggle get Tier 1		Screening models to ensure accuracy of identification	

The categories were expanded and clarified to reduce the amount of answers falling to several categories and to aid in developing a guide for current practitioners. The seven categories as identified in Table 11 were developed in conjunction with the AIR research team assistants utilizing the information from Table 10.

### Findings for Research Question 1

**Research question 1.** What common practices, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?

**Interview question.** What factors do you feel have been most effective in achieving this relatively high graduation rate? I realize there are multiple components, but if you had to limit them, what would you list as the top three?

Possible follow-up questions:

- a. What specifically about this strategy is important to your success? Can you provide examples?
- b. How has this factor influenced graduation rates? Can you provide specific evidence?
- c. Did you need additional funding or resources to implement this factor? What particular tradeoffs in terms of funding and resources has your school had to make to provide these supports?
- d. How well do you feel this factor is implemented?

The three most common practices that the principals most often cited involved (a) the use of data to identify at-risk students and track success of interventions, (b) school-wide high expectations for all students, and (c) professional learning community models (Table 11). Some of the common practices cited were connected directly to programs; for example, several schools utilize the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program to develop school-wide high expectations for students. These programs are identified in the findings for Research Question 2.

The data in Table 11 show the common practices and programs that were identified during the review of interviews along with the frequency of responses from the principals. The use of data in identifying at-risk students, determining the effectiveness of programs, as well as overall school impacts was a theme commonly found throughout the interviews. The frequency at each school shows that most schools are heavily involved in using data and developing opportunities for credit remediation, as well as academic support. The frequency of responses within the identified themes also aligned with the research questions for the study as is explained in further detail. Table 12 provides more detail regarding individual schools and identified practices and programs within each school. The least amount of

programs or practices identified was four by one principal while three principals identified all nine themes during the interviews.

Table 11

*Frequency of Common Practices and Programs Identified in Principal Interviews*

Common practices and programs	Frequency
Use of data*	9
Opportunities for credit remediation +	9
Opportunities for academic support +	9
Counseling model+	8
Strong connections to school+	8
School-wide high expectations/college going culture*	7
Team approach/professional learning community*	7

*Note.* \* Considered to be practice; + Considered to be a program.

Table 12

*Programs and Practices Identified in Principal Interviews by High School*

High school	Use of data	Opportunities for academic support	Opportunities for credit remediation	Strong counseling model	Strong connection to school	School-wide expectations	Professional learning community
A	X	X	X	X			X
B	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
C	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
D	X	X	X	X	X		
E	X	X	X				X
F	X	X	X	X	X	X	
G	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
H	X	X	X	X		X	X
I	X	X	X	X			X

All nine of the principals cited data tracking and use as a vital component of their graduation success. Respondents described how data, often reaching beyond annual CST

data to include more frequently produced benchmark assessment information, provided the impetus for a critical examination of student learning across departments and by individual classroom within departments. Along with individual CST data being used to guide student learning, respondents at School A, School B, School C, School H, and School I described close student monitoring through the use of school-wide or district-wide benchmark exams. The principal of School B explained the process:

The learning director disseminates data based on our benchmarked results, any testing results that we have. He'll run a program, say, for our afterschool program, the students that are enrolled and we can get a program that indicates to us what their testing levels are. So we can create special programs, our migrant students, our Title 3 students, any program he wants to create that we request and then we can see the data on that particular population of students. We use that internally here at the high school as a staff to separate that data as a staff to see where we need to make some improvement, see where we're doing well. We also report that data to the district level.

Respondents cited the data as hard evidence of where important progress was being made and where renewed dedication was needed. This type of detailed data appears to be an important component of enabling the PLCs described above. School H focused on training staff how to utilize the data through extensive analysis. This in turn supported staff engaging in positive relationships with students as well as more extensive data on current levels of achievement for each student. School H utilized benchmark and common assessment data to identify struggling students and provided the staff with the opportunity to address nonproficient learners prior to the administration of the CST tests typically conducted in May. Respondents from four of the nine high schools also described using individual CST data to guide their decisions regarding proper course placement, identification of at-risk students, enrollment, and participation in intervention courses/programs. Principals from three of the sites (School F, School G, and School H)



reported that the state data system is helping them to better track students who leave the school and provide more accurate data regarding graduation rates. The principals stated that data use is an important component of successful PLCs.

Use of PLCs or strategic collaboration was cited at the majority of the schools studied in this dissertation. Of the nine high schools interviewed, seven (School A, School B, School C, School E, School G, School H, and School I) indicated that they use clearly identified small learning community models with built-in collaboration time during the school day. Schools G, H, and I reported that the PLC work was run by a specified instructional coach, English Learner (EL) Coordinator, or administrators who were charged with overseeing the collaboration. School I utilized both instructional coaches and administrators in supporting the PLC model.

District support for PLC work was reiterated by principals at School C, School G, and School I. School G described the use of “Linked Learning,” a nationwide initiative that embeds field-based learning and career technical education into core academic classes, as key in helping teachers collaborate more effectively. School B uses common preparatory periods for teachers to collaborate and pace curriculum. The principal at School E reported that the staff had voted to increase the length of the school day so they could devote one day a week to collaborating.

Principals from five of the nine high schools cited the importance of establishing and clearly conveying high expectations for students; respondents often referred to the development of a college-going culture as one way to achieve the desired results. Five of the nine schools in the study stated that they have various ways in which they engage students in the college-going culture and that they have high expectations. Schools B, F,

G, and H spend a significant amount of time on implementing a college-going culture at their schools. This includes informal conversations teachers have with students to direct them to more specific programs like AVID and Future Farmers of America. The principals at Schools B and F cite a relationship with local universities as one way in which they have developed a strong college culture. These relationships created specific opportunities for students either via summer programs hosted at the university or early college course opportunities, as well as career-oriented programs that provide students with early premedical training and guaranteed admission to the university for those successful in the program.

### **Findings for Research Question 2**

**Research question 2.** What common programs, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?

**Interview question.** Are there particular programs (e.g., AVID; programs focused on aligning curricula; California High School Exit Exam [CAHSEE] preparation programs; or career, college, and self-exploration) or particular staff who focus on graduation and transition at your school?

The analysis of the interviews identified four specific programmatic areas in the high schools: (a) academic support and credit remediation programs, (b) strong counseling programs, (c) connecting students to campus, and (d) school-wide high expectations and college-going culture reinforced with unique programs at each site. These four identified areas use specific programs or elements of programs to help the high schools achieve their respective high graduation rates (Table 11).

All nine of the respondents emphasized the importance of multiple and extensive opportunities for academic assistance and support. These programs are often overlapping and it is difficult for the principals to not interchange the programs during the interviews. The programs range from CAHSEE preparation to after-school tutoring or more structured advisory classes embedded within the school day.

Of the nine high schools in the study, six stated that they utilize teachers as tutors to support students who are struggling and need extra help. School C provides students with a list of every teacher on campus, including their subject area and availability, so that students can go to any teacher to get tutoring, not just their own. School H has a grant that allows them to run evening enrichment and remediation courses. This program allows students to attend five evenings a week, while another site (School C) funds an extensive after- and before-school tutoring program that provides students access to the library for up to 4 hours a day beyond the regular school day. This allows all students, including those involved in extracurricular activities, to take part in peer and teacher tutoring.

Respondents from School C and School E described their use of peer tutoring. These tutors are college students at School C and high-achieving students that are part of the California Scholastic Federation at School E. School E's peer tutoring model is based on the AVID program.

Six of the high schools in the study specifically mentioned AVID as an important resource for addressing academic support and remediation as well as a college-going culture. School I invested significant time and energy in reestablishing the AVID program due to its importance at its primary feeding middle school, which has a very

strong program. School H is an AVID demonstration school, which requires that School H be a model of the program for all other schools in the state to replicate. The principal at School G mentioned that while all of the middle schools within the district have AVID programs, the program was cut at the high schools. Three high schools (School G, School D, and School F) have modeled other intervention programs on the AVID model of support and college readiness. School D has an “Academy” that focuses on student motivation, self-regulation, study skills, and time management. School F has a Grade 9–12 advisory course that teaches study skills and time management in the first year, then shifts to high school exit exam preparation in 10th grade and SAT preparation in 11th grade, and culminates with a postsecondary preparation course. All students are required to attend this 25-minute advisory course.

In addition to ongoing academic assistance, respondents mentioned developing credit remediation programs as important in allowing students who have fallen behind in credits to catch up. Respondents described strategies ranging from an 8-period day to summer school to support credit remediation programs. All nine high schools arranged for students to remediate credits while remaining on the high school campus. School C and School I appear to be similar in nature; they allow students to remediate credits without losing their connection to their comprehensive school by having those identified students attend a continuation high school program for half of the day and then attending the comprehensive campus for the other half. The goal is to allow students enrolled in the program to remain connected to their home school. The principal at School C stated, “We remediate them for a semester—they are not stuck there for a year—and then they transition back into the comprehensive campus.” Several other schools, including School

B, School C, and School I, also identified the connection to the comprehensive high school as an important component.

Schools B, D, G, and H reported providing credit remediation programs after school. School A's principal stated that the school's focus is on seniors who lack credits in order to get them into the classroom getting the instruction they need as quickly as possible, and an online program helps support this endeavor within the regular school day. School B, D, E, and I offer academic support classes that focus on developing study skills for students, helping them complete homework, learn time management skills, and set goals. These intervention courses focus on at-risk 9th and 10th grade students in an attempt to keep them from failing courses. Two of the nine schools use summer school as a way to provide remediation for students who are behind in credits, although a School E principal stated that budget cuts have forced the school district to centralize the summer school program possibly causing further issues in remediating students.

School F provides students with an 8-period block schedule, which allows students to take more classes than a traditional school that only has six classes. This helps students who are credit deficient as well as those who wish to advance in their academics. The principal believes the key is to "give kids opportunities to remediate without taking away ROP or elective classes."

The majority of respondents stated that having a strong counseling program was an important component of their success. Of the nine principals, six stated that their programs were integral in their success. The program's most common theme was that of individual attention the counselors provided to students who are at risk. Three of the

schools had counselors meeting with all students on campus at least once a year and in some instances two or three times a year.

At School I, counselors ran data every couple of weeks to determine who was at risk. These data included current grades and attendance and those that were deemed at-risk were called and invited to come to school to meet with the counselors. At School H the counselors work with the feeder middle schools and meet the students prior to their enrolling in high school to establish a relationship early on. School G recently hired a parent advisor as a component of their counseling staff that went out into the community to work with parents including doing home visits, calling at-risk students' homes, and following up with parents to find ways to support them. Each school has a unique style to its program dependent on their school size and location. Some schools use a case carrier model that assigns students to specific counselors who follow them from grade level to grade level while others are grade-level specific. The component most often referred to was the personal connection the counseling department made with both students and parents. The personal connection is made through workshops for college admission or financial aid, for example, as well as Student Study Teams (SST) for identified at-risk students.

The development of strong connections to school was evident in most of the participating schools. Schools rely heavily on clubs, with five schools citing clubs as a mechanism they use to connect students. Clubs that were cited by schools were the Future Farmers of America (FFA), AVID, and Mechanical Engineering Science Achievement (MESA). The clubs provide connections with staff and students as each club has one teacher advisor who oversees the program. One principal cited that clubs

are a way to keep students on campus after school and engaged in the learning process. The clubs that exist on the campuses are often representative of the ethnic population of the particular school. School B focused on providing as many elective opportunities to students as possible. These electives range from culinary to farming along with traditional electives in foreign languages that would be found in schools throughout California.

### **Findings for Research Question 3**

**Research question 3.** What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the single most effective practice being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?

**Interview question.** Of the factors listed above (referring to questions regarding practices and programs), if you had to pick one as most important, which would it be?

In response to the most effective practice being utilized, the respondents had one theme in common, that of making a connection with students (Table 13). Seven of the nine respondents cited connecting students to school by establishing relationships with students either via a counseling department, principal, or teacher on campus. One school cited having teachers who were willing to do after-school programs with students to offer them a place to go, which helps support building relationships. School A stated that tracking students is the most important practice to making sure they graduate from high school. School B agrees and, due to its size, is able to easily follow students from year to year.

Table 13

*Frequency of Identified Most Effective Practice in Achieving High Graduation Rates*

Connection with students	Frequency
Staff connecting to students	7
Using specific programs	3
Through counseling programs	2
Finds ways to establish relationships	2
Tracking students	2

**Findings for Research Question 4**

**Research question 4.** What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the greatest challenges in achieving their respective high graduation rate?

**Interview question.** We are also interested in learning what you feel are the greatest challenges to achieving a high graduation rate at your school. I recognize there are likely multiple challenges. But if you had to limit it, what are the top three challenges your school faces? How are you addressing these challenges?

The challenges ranged from budgetary to the effective use of data. The principals were asked to provide their top three challenges though all focused solely on the top challenge they faced. The funding impacted staffing in areas of administration, counseling, and teachers with four schools citing this loss while two schools cited reductions to specific programs whether after school or support for specific intervention programs. Table 14 shows the frequency of identified challenges faced by the BTO schools. Two schools cited data tracking as a major challenge and referred specifically to transiency of students from school to school and the high mobility rate the schools encounter. One principal mentioned that CalPADS, if all school districts used in fidelity,



could help address the lack of good data but that the state has not supported the implementation but considered lack of funding to CalPADs as an issue. One principal was concerned that staff turnover was going to be a major challenge to moving forward as teachers and administrators were changing and often the programs they have developed move as well. When the principals were asked to respond to how they were addressing the identified challenges, all nine cited that the identified challenges were beyond their control and not worth focusing on and instead focused on what was working.

Table 14

*Frequency of Identified challenges to achieving high graduation rate*

Challenges	Frequency
Reductions in staffing	4
Reductions to specific programs	2
Data tracking and mobility of students	2
Fidelity of CalPADS	1
Staff turnover	1

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Restatement of the Problem**

Current research indicates that students who drop out of school in the United States exhibit numerous risk factors. These include students' living in poverty, coming from single-parent households, and having poor motivation and academic skills (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Rumberger and Lim (2008) reviewed 25 years of research on dropouts including national, state, and local data. The research review identified two different perspectives or factors that determine whether a student graduates or drops out. The first is more of an individual perspective that focuses on "factors such as students' attitudes, behaviors, school performance, and prior experiences." The second uses an institutional perspective that focuses on the "contextual factors found in students' families, schools, communities, and peers" (Rumberger & Lim, 2008, p. 3). With so many different factors leading students to drop out of high school, it places a burden on the educational system to develop ways to identify and address these at-risk behaviors to help reduce the current dropout problem that exists in California and the nation.

### **Restatement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this dissertation study was to determine the common programs and practices that Beating the Odds (BTO) high schools are using to achieve their respective high graduation rates and those practices that are perceived to be the most effective by the school principals as well as possible challenges faced. The method for the study is phenomenological and consists of conducting interviews with principals or designees from the nine high schools identified as BTO within the larger AIR study that investigated middle school to high school transitions programs

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed for this study:

1. What common practices, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
2. What common programs, if any, are reported by principals of the nine identified Beating the Odds high schools as being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
3. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the single most effective practice being utilized to achieve their respective high graduation rates?
4. What do the nine Beating the Odds high school principals perceive to be the greatest challenges in achieving their respective high graduation rate?

## **Research Design Summary**

The study explored the perceptions of the nine high school principals who were identified as BTO with high graduation rates regarding the practices and programs that they utilized to achieve high graduation rates as well as their perceptions of the single most important practice and greatest challenges they face. The study was conducted in conjunction with the AIR study, which identified successful transition programs being utilized by BTO high schools and their feeder middle schools as well as successful intervention strategies. The data used for this study consisted of principal interviews. The principals were asked to participate in a semistructured telephone interview. The principals were asked a series of questions about their school along with specific

questions relating to practices and programs the schools were utilizing related to achieving high graduation rates.

### **Discussion of Key Findings**

The analysis of the interview data resulted in the identification of seven key practices and programs that contributed to their respective high graduation rate. The three most commonly identified practices identified were the use of data, the development of school-wide expectations, and strong PLCs with a frequency of responses ranging from 9 to 7. The four most identified programs that BTO schools acknowledged were the ability for students to readily get academic support as well as credit remediation, connecting students to campus through a variety of programs and practices, and a strong counseling program. The most frequently identified programs and practices involved credit remediation, academic support, and use of data, with all nine principals citing specific examples in what their school was doing in these areas.

Though each school was unique in regard to its student body population in terms of size, demographics, and location in the state, the principals' and staffs' focus on supporting students was very similar. These characteristics are not unique to these nine BTO schools but exist in high schools throughout the state of California.

### **Common Practices and Programs**

The principals all identified similar practices and programs with regard to the use of data, academic supports, and credit remediation. It is important to note that the majority of the principals did not identify any of the previously mentioned practices and programs as the single most important practice being utilized at the school in achieving

their high graduation rate but instead focused on the personal connection and engagement to school. As identified in the literature review, the importance of individualizing the specific needs of the student was of utmost importance (Bateman & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Hoyle & Collier, 2006; Mellard & Johnson, 2008; Patterson et al., 2007; Suh & Suh, 2007). Though the categories that developed throughout the interviews with principals are similar in nature, the specifics of the each school are unique to their stakeholders.

One of the most important practices for BTO schools involved credit remediation. All nine schools had developed programs to support credit remediation for at-risk students; though unique in function and form, they all had similar successful results for each BTO school setting. School G had over 90% of its students complete the credit remediation program successfully. The programs not only attempted to get students credits in a quick manner but were also meant to keep students engaged at their home high school, reducing referrals to continuation or alternative programs and avoiding retention as this is not a sufficient strategy in promoting student achievement (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). Retention of a student actually increases the likelihood that a student will drop out at a later point. The NDPC report found that retention/overage for grade level was one of the four major contributors to a student's risk of dropping out (Hammond et al., 2007). The programs identified by the principals were focused on getting the credits necessary to remain on track for graduation while not overloading the students. Two schools shared a similar program, often called "opportunity programs," which was aimed at providing students, as the title states, a chance to stay at their high schools to catch up. One principal stated that when a student is forced to transfer to the continuation school it is considered a "loss for his school." Students were often receiving

more credits in a semester than a regular on-track student so one could assume the at-risk students were handling a larger workload though this was not always the case. The programs were aimed at ease of use and ability to get credits in a rapid fashion; at times an online program was used to help expedite credit remediation efforts. The use of quick remedies for credit remediation often assumes that the student has the ability level, though one principal was concerned regarding the lack of rigor in the courses possibly setting the student up for failure later on. Other principals were expecting that their students take extra courses, remaining on campus for longer periods of time or attending Saturday Academy classes to address any perception regarding lack of rigor.

Along with academic remediation for failing students, BTO schools realized the need to develop academic support programs that supported students at all nine schools had well-developed programs. The ability for students to get specific academic support in subjects they were struggling in had both specific programs involved, such as Read 180 and *home grown* courses on study skills, and healthy living skills. Four schools had developed programs that addressed specific populations of students that they had identified through the use of data. These site-specific courses were often developed to address school-specific needs and often contained components similar to the Student Success Skills concepts, tools, and strategies that have been designed to address the academic achievement gap between African American and Hispanic students compared to their White counterparts. The five components of Student Success Skills are “(1) Creating a caring, supportive, and encouraging classroom; (2) Goal setting, progress monitoring, and success story sharing; (3) Cognitive and memory skills; (4) Performing under pressure: managing test anxiety; (5) Building healthy optimism” (Miranda, Webb,

Brigman, & Peluso, 2007, p. 492). The academic remediation programs and interventions at the BTO schools involved many of the five identified components.

The most important component of the programs' uniqueness stemmed from their teachers' willingness to participate, student interest, and funding. The importance stressed by BTO principals regarding the effort the teachers and other staff at the schools put in requires a sense of shared influence and collective leadership. Leithwood and Mascall (2008) reinforced the need to focus on teacher variables of capacity, motivation, and work setting and the impact that collective leadership had on these areas. The ability to empower the teachers to become part of the solution is evident in most BTO schools. Several principals mentioned that the teachers were the key component in academic support; their availability to provide one-on-one support to struggling students and, more importantly, their willingness to do so were of utmost importance. One principal cited teachers who were working well over their contracted day, some in excess of 3 hours including Saturdays. This is something that cannot be mandated by a principal due to contract rules, so this dedication shows the importance the teachers have placed on student achievement at this particular school. That same school utilized a teacher mentor program for a small number of identified students. Each teacher tracked 10 at-risk students who needed more attention and supported them through the entire school year, focusing on improving their academics. These types of programs provide connections between students and staff that help address both individual predictors of those who dropout as well as institutional predictors (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

The dedication of these teachers at this BTO school is not unique within education. One school principal stated that when he hires teachers he emphasizes the

need for a commitment to running extracurricular activities, because he realizes the need to keep the kids busy for 2 hours after school. Principals mentioned key members of their staff and how these individuals guided the practices at the school, whether they be a counselor, assistant principal, or learning director. These types of individuals often make an intervention work for students just due to their personalities, but when those people move into a new position, the ability to maintain continuity gets lost. This was a concern expressed by some principals when discussing challenges they were facing as they moved forward. The importance of developing leadership capacity within the staff, though not mentioned specifically as a practice supporting high graduation rates, was an important component to the school's success.

The willingness of teachers to work together in a PLC enhanced the learning experiences at the BTO schools. DuFour et al. (2005) and Lambert (1998) reiterated the importance of building the leadership capacity within a school to help shift the school to an environment that promotes learning over teaching. Teachers at the BTO schools were engaged in the decision-making processes at several BTO schools; Mullen and Jones (2008) emphasized the importance of having teachers involved in the process as it creates an environment that focuses on student success. One BTO school evidenced the power of teacher leaders in that they had been through at least three principals in the previous 4 years, all the while they were out-performing similar schools with, at one point, an interim principal. The school's focus was on building programs that were teacher focused and not reliant on an administrator or funding for its success.

Setting high expectations for students and developing a college-going and career preparatory culture requires a concerted effort by teachers, students, parents, and the



community. One school cited a partnership between all the schools in the region that focused on a K-12 academic plan for students. This was reinforced regularly at meetings with parents, students, and counselors. The American Federation of Teachers (1996) in an article titled, "Reaching the Next Step," stressed the importance of setting high expectations for teachers and students and creating a curriculum that prepares students for their future. Horn (1997) utilized NELS: 88/94 data to analyze at-risk students compared to not-at-risk students for the graduating class of 1992. The outcome of the study was an outline of the necessary process, or "pipeline," that at-risk students need to follow in order to reach college entrance. According to Horn (1997), "The five steps that make up the college pipeline include: aspirations for a bachelor's degree (step 1), academic preparation for college (step 2), taking entrance exams (step 3), applying to college (step 4), and enrolling (step 5)" (p. iii). The role of teachers and principals is intertwined throughout the process as is that of parents and the community. The importance of a college-going culture often requires partnerships between universities and high schools. McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez (2002) studied the importance of a partnership between an urban university and 27 schools, entitled, "Creating a College Culture." The results of the study provided a model that other partnerships and programs could emulate to develop a college culture, but more importantly it stressed the importance of programmatic partnerships.

The partnerships are not relegated to high schools and universities but also extend into middle schools, and the focus is not just college awareness but early career education. *Middle MATTERS*, a collection of papers on the importance of early career literacy, emphasized reaching into the middle schools to help provide career education.

The papers developed for the National Association of Elementary Principals (2009) provide step-by-step college and career planning guidelines, processes that teachers can use to help facilitate and support career planning within their classrooms, as well as model programs that exist and ways that middle school principals can and must assist students through early career planning.

The interviews revealed the reliance that schools often have on federal- and state-funded programs. Some examples of programs mentioned by principals in supporting their high graduation rate were AVID, CalSoap, Gear-Up, 4H, FFA, Early College, Regional Occupational Program, and International Baccalaureate. Several of the above-mentioned programs rely on state and federal funding and/or local funding to exist. These programs all carry a similar theme, connections to kids. The goal of the programs is often unique to the grant they may be funded through; regardless of the goal, the underlying impact is to engage students in the learning process, whether through academics or through raising animals. Each school was able to mention specific programs, some unique to their schools, that were making a difference. Two schools cited partnerships they had created with local businesses in the area that allowed students opportunities to engage in real-life skill building. For students who are exhibiting at-risk behavior, connecting them to a real-life program makes a substantial difference. One principal called these types of programs the *fun* programs for students and said that by focusing all of a student's effort on English and math, educators were depriving them any activities that will help them see the importance and value in what they are doing as it will be void of fun.

Clubs were often mentioned as a program used by schools to engage students. The clubs were very much tied to the population being served at the school. These ranged from 4H clubs to math clubs to comic book clubs. The principals reiterated throughout the interview process that they would allow any club on campus for students in an effort to get them engaged in the school, while also establishing a connection with a faculty member who would function as an advisor. The principals saw a huge value in having clubs for those two reasons. One principal was in the process of requiring students to take part in at least one school club or extracurricular activity in an attempt to engage them in the school. BTO schools used clubs, athletics, after-school tutoring, as well as open library times, in an effort to keep the students engaged and on-campus as long as possible.

Two of the BTO schools were considered community hubs; the gyms were used for non-school-related events, and the libraries were meeting places for parents beyond school programming. The importance of engaging the community in the success of the school created a focus on education within the community. One school determined that due to parental constraints, the school connection needed to be made in the community itself, and the school created a learning lab within a large housing complex that allowed parents and students the opportunity to engage in school while not on the campus itself. When schools engage families in this manner, they empower the parents and students to set high expectations for their students.

Many of the programs identified in the interviews focused on supporting students in their efforts to get to college. This provided a clear link between how schools established a learning environment at their schools that focused on college and career

readiness. AVID, Cal-Soap, and Gear-Up all focus on supporting students to get to college by addressing misconceptions, necessary steps that students need to take to remain a candidate, the application process, as well as numerous other ways. These programs are vital for BTO schools, Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) reported on the findings of Stanford University's Bridge Project, a 6-year project, that more and more students want to attend college, but that universities and states themselves have created barriers that often undermine these aspirations. The disconnect is often manifested in how information is delivered to students, the differences that exists between high school and college entrance and assessment tests, and coursework expectations. The principals reiterated that the strategies utilized by these programs were often replicated throughout the school regardless of whether a student was actually enrolled in the program or not; one principal called this a secondary gain to having these programs. The schools are able to focus on supporting students in fulfilling college entrance requirements and this often became a focus of conversation that counselors were engaging in with students and parents. These conversations were further supported through relationships with local community colleges and universities in their areas. The partnerships forged, some larger than others, was another way that students were able to gain access to programs that supported a college-going culture at the schools.

A concern that arose around the use and reliance on specific programs at the BTO schools related specifically to current lack of education funding in the state of California. The ongoing budget cuts to counseling, class-size reduction, and other programs have left the BTO principals wondering how they will continue to achieve such high graduation rates. California ranks 49th in overall ratio of staff to students, ranks among the lowest of

the 50 states in per pupil spending, and continues to face potential catastrophic cuts to vital programs in the near future.

### **Conclusions and Discussions**

This study was designed to examine the practices and programs that enabled these nine identified schools to achieve respectively high graduation rates and BTO. The results of the study can be used as a guide to developing programs and implementing practices to reduce the dropout rate. Schools and principals throughout California often look to successful schools for intervention programs and strategies to help support their work toward improving. The identified BTO schools have much to share regarding successful practices and strategies. The following conclusions resulted from the analysis of findings: (a) the use of data and schools' PLC model are commonplace in BTO schools; (b) developing academic support and remediation for all students is vital to achieve high graduation rates; and last, (c) establishing connections with students either through strong counseling programs, after-school programs, or through academic support and tutoring has positive implications in achieving high graduation rates

Findings from the study support the following conclusions: The use of data is a vital component in achieving high graduation rates at the high school level. The data were used by schools to identify students at risk, to develop programs and interventions, and to determine the fidelity of interventions to reduce the probability of their chances of dropping out. The importance of using data in this fashion helps drive the schools toward successful programs. Programs that are deemed as unsuccessful are discontinued while those that show positive results are continued and expanded. The data used ranged from grade reports to CST and CAHSEE results for individual students. Pinkus (2008)

reinforces the importance of data beyond just “simply identifying at-risk students . . . as it does nothing to mitigate their risk factors and help them graduate” (p. 1).

The importance lies not only with utilizing data and early warning indicators but more so in the application of the data in developing interventions and supports needed to get students to graduate involvement (Bateman & Karr-Kidwell, 1995; Hoyle & Collier, 2006; Mellard & Johnson, 2008; Patterson et al., 2007; Suh & Suh, 2007). Schmoker (2001) noted that schools that are successful develop clear goals and are driven by data through continued assessments that then drive innovation. The U.S. Department of Education uses data in a similar fashion when identifying successful intervention programs and publishes them in the What Works Clearinghouse for other schools to use as appropriate.

The use of data extends beyond simple standardized tests scores but into common local assessments that schools have developed within their learning communities to identify students not meeting agreed-upon proficiencies. Schools that have well-defined expectations and corresponding local assessments typically have well-developed learning communities established. The importance of strong learning communities in schools with large at-risk populations is a significant component in achieving high graduation rates (Dufuor et al., 2005; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Learning communities that utilize data effectively in addressing students who are struggling with low academic proficiencies is a core practice found throughout the BTO schools. The concept of PLCs and collaboration are not new ideas to education, and most educators consider it best practices though too often teachers are not provided the time to work together to develop the necessary assessments and curriculum. The BTO schools had several staff members who were

focused on making time either through unique scheduling or through release time to accomplish the tasks.

The relationship between strong learning communities and effective academic support and credit remediation must be strong for a school to beat the odds. Establishing an effective PLC model at an underperforming school forces schools to identify what the school wants students to learn, aligning assessments and developing interventions for students that do not meet the expectations. As schools develop into learning communities there is also a shift from teachers focusing on teaching to a clear focus on student learning. When student learning becomes the goal, teachers and staff become more aware of the need for academic support for students struggling to meet expectations. This academic support can come in the form of specific programs, such as AVID as well as practices, such as utilizing peer tutoring. The BTO schools employed a variety of strategies related to academic support as schools cannot rely on just one program.

One common factor in academic support is the connection being made between the student seeking help and that of another adult on campus, which research has shown as one of the most significant ways in which to reduce the possibility of students dropping out of high school (Archambault et al., 2008, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). School engagement and student achievement are inextricably connected and should be a focus of all schools in addressing at-risk student behavior (Blum, 2005; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002). The importance of the student-to-adult connection is most often found in the counseling programs.

Schools with strong counseling programs provide significant support in the identification of at-risk students, appropriate assignment to academic support, and credit

remediation programs. The impact of counseling programs has suffered in recent years due to lack of funding, as evidenced by the concern from the participating BTO principals in interviews. Counselors are not only managers of large caseloads but also mentors to students, which is a significant component in addressing at-risk behaviors exhibited by at-risk students (Borders & Drury, 1992; Gerler, 1985; St. Clair, 1989; Whitson & Sexton, 1998).

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice for Practitioners**

This study was designed to determine trends in practices and programs that BTO high schools in California utilized to achieve respectively high graduation rates. The findings from this study can be used to inform school practices and program development as well as policy recommendations. Based on the results from the interviews, schools and districts should focus on supporting counseling programs, the use of data and how PLCs use data to support practice, and the development of research-based opportunities for credit remediation and academic support, as well as developing strong connections to school for all students.

With eight of the BTO principals identifying the importance of their counseling program, school districts should continue to find ways to fund counseling programs to keep ratios in a range that allows counselors to support students exhibiting at-risk behavior and/or find alternative ways as needed during these difficult budget constraints (Borders & Drury, 1992; Gerler, 1985; St. Clair, 1989; Whitson & Sexton, 1998). The current flexibility provided to school districts in regard to counseling funding is putting pressure on these programs to stay effective and, in some cases, even present in schools.



Strong school counseling programs provide a multitude of support that often is immeasurable as they interact with students who are struggling academically, socially, and emotionally. Counselors help keep students engaged in school, which has a significant impact on academic achievement (Suh & Suh, 2006).

The term “data rich and information poor” is prevalent in education. Schools have access to CST data, CAHSEE data, district assessment data, and CELDT data, as well as formative and summative data in classrooms. How these data are used to improve student learning, tracking progress of interventions and engaging teachers in focusing on learning is a challenge for all schools. All BTO schools identified data as one important component of their success. Schools in California need support in developing protocol regarding use of student data in identifying students, developing interventions, and evaluating success of interventions whether academic or behavioral in nature as students who drop out exhibit at-risk behavior over time (Abbott et al., 2000; Hammond et al., 2007).

The use of data becomes even more powerful when used in a PLC model. Of the nine BTO schools, seven identified the importance of functioning as a learning community as one of the reasons for their success. Schools should continue to support the development of collaboration, both vertical and horizontal, across all grade levels utilizing the PLC model (DuFour et al., 2005). This should include the involvement of elementary and secondary teachers and discussion on possible academic support programs that could bridge student learning from year to year.

Leaders at schools should develop systems to connect or engage students in the learning process in the schools. This could be programmatic in nature through programs

like FFA to practices that require each student to participate in some extracurricular program in the ninth grade. The BTO schools had a multitude of site-specific programs developed to address their student population needs. Some were more academically oriented while others were solely developed to engage students in the school setting on a more social level. The single aim of all the extracurricular programs and clubs at the BTO schools was to engage students in the school and to connect them to the campus and teachers (Archambault et al., 2008, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). The general agreement among the BTO principals was that the at-risk students need a way to remain connected to the school or the rate of dropout would increase.

The importance of strong credit remediation and academic support programs was expressed by the nine BTO principals. Rumberger and Lim (2008) reiterated the importance of focusing on supporting educational performance for at-risk students as poor performance is one of the strongest predictors of those who drop out of school. The programs that are developed need to use data to establish credibility as well as to track effectiveness (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). The focus on RTI in recent years provides a way for principals and staff to develop tiered levels of interventions and forces schools to track students as they move along the pyramid of interventions (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). The individualization of education stems from the use of the RTI model, which focuses on each student's needs and develops programs and interventions that meet the need and are evidence based (Mihalic, 2005). A list of programs that have met the criteria as evidence based are listed Appendix A.

Finally, principals need continued support and professional development in developing their leadership capacity to empower all stakeholders in the learning process

(Fullan, 2003, 2006; Lambert, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2010). All BTO principals substantiated that staff are the single most important component to their success. The involvement of staff ranged from running clubs and athletics to spending lunchtime meeting with English language learners. One principal noted that the rapport staff built with students and the relationships the parents have with staff are the keys to a successful school. Principals need teachers to take on roles as leaders within the PLC model, as advisors and coaches, and lastly as mentors to new teachers and students.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The following are recommendations for further study:

1. Conduct a longitudinal study regarding the sustainability of identified BTO schools in achieving their respective high graduation rates. This study was a follow-up to the previous BTO study and none of the original BTO schools were present on the updated list of BTO schools. A longitudinal study could provide more specific details on what changes take place at a school that directly impact a school's ability to continue to BTO both negatively and positively.
2. Conduct a comparative case study regarding schools that are not considered to be BTO compared to those that are. The results of this study could provide insight into the importance of teacher leadership at BTO schools, key personnel, and/or district office support that could, in turn, support those schools not currently BTO to make changes to their programs.
3. Conduct a study regarding teacher perceptions of key leadership strategies exhibited by principals at BTO schools to better understand the specific leadership traits that

principals exhibit at these sites and the impact the leader has on the school achieving a respective high graduation rate.

### **Final Thoughts**

Dropouts in the state of California and the nation continue to be one of the top issues confronting educators and politicians. Rumberger (2007) estimated that only 66% of students graduate from high school in California, and nationally the problem is worse. Politicians have passed legislation to provide guidelines for schools to address the dropout problem, most recently the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The goal for both educators and politicians is to identify successful dropout prevention programs that utilized research-based protocols that can be identified as successful. Important to note that, in a country with approximately 56 million students in kindergarten to high school, there were only 50 programs identified as exemplary by the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University (Hammond et al., 2007).

The characteristics of those who drop out have been identified through numerous studies and reaffirmed by numerous literature reviews conducted through the years. The two most common characteristics are school engagement and school performance. This study attempted to decipher what schools within California were doing to address these two areas. The reality is that schools throughout the nation are facing unique challenges and are responding to those challenges in innumerable ways.

There are many examples of high poverty, diverse high schools achieving high graduation rates in California. There is also a large amount of research indicating the specific practices and programs that make a difference in addressing the dropout problem that exists within California and the nation. Our issue is not what needs to be

accomplished but how. As educators we are inundated with new programs and standards as well as massive budget reductions leaving less and less time and personnel to develop and implement programs to support student learning. The importance of this study lies in the ability of these BTO schools to overcome these obstacles and have success in providing evidence that with the right practices in place educators can address the dropout problem.

The importance of connecting with students and engaging with them could be solved in a variety of ways with no cost to schools. Also, collaborative learning communities led by powerful teacher leaders help to develop strong pedagogical practices that contribute to student achievement. Educational leaders must assist schools in sharing these best practices throughout the state, not allowing successful schools to remain isolated, but instead to develop a clearinghouse of strategies that these schools can share and promoting schools to visit each other to share best practices. Allowing successful schools to work in isolation without tapping into their well of knowledge is a disservice to educators and, more importantly, to our students.

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APPENDIX A

Exemplary Programs From National Dropout

Prevention Center/Network

List of Identified Exemplary Programs from National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

Across Ages  
 Adolescent Sexuality & Pregnancy Prevention Program  
 Adolescent Transitions Program  
 Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)  
 Athletes Training and Learning to Avoid Steroids (ATLAS)  
 Big Brothers Big Sisters  
 Brief Strategic Family Therapy  
 Career Academy  
 CASASTART  
 Check & Connect  
 Children of Divorce Intervention Program  
 Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program  
 Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Child Sexual Abuse  
 Coping Power  
 Families & Schools Together (FAST)  
 Family Matters  
 Fast Track  
 Functional Family Therapy  
 Good Behavior Game  
 Guiding Good Choices (formerly Preparing for the Drug-Free Years)  
 Helping the Noncompliant Child  
 Keepin' it REAL  
 LifeSkills Training  
 Linking Interests of Families & Teachers  
 Los Angeles' Better Educated Student for Tomorrow (LA's BEST)  
 Midwestern Prevention Project (Project STAR)  
 Multidimensional Family Therapy  
 Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care  
 Multisystemic Therapy  
 Nurse-Family Partnership  
 Parenting Wisely  
 Preventive Treatment Program  
 Project Graduation Really Achieves Dreams (Project GRAD)  
 Project Toward No Drug Abuse  
 Project Towards No Tobacco Use  
 Prolonged Exposure Therapy for PTSD  
 Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)  
 Quantum Opportunities  
 Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways  
 Safe Dates  
 Schools & Families Educating Children (SAFE Children)  
 Skills, Opportunities, and Recognition (SOAR)  
 School Transitional Environment Program (STEP)  
 Strengthening Families Program  
 Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14  
 Success for All  
 Teen Outreach Program  
 The Incredible Years  
 Too Good for Violence  
 Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

*Source.* C. Hammond, D. Linton, J. Smink, & S. Drew, S. (2007). *Dropout Risk Factors and Exemplary Programs: A Technical Report.* Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center.

APPENDIX B

Beating the Odds Identification Protocol

The BTO Study from 2007 developed the following protocol to identify BTO schools. These schools had at least 50% of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch, identified as BTO by the California Graduation Rate, identified as BTO by the Annual Dropout Rate, and have an Academic Performance Index Similar School Rank of 8, 9, or 10.

The initial identification of BTO schools by the American Institute for Research (AIR) used the California Graduation Rate and the Annual Dropout Rate as follows:

1. Calculate the California Graduation Rate for all high schools in California for each school year from 2002-03 through 2005-06. The definition for this rate is provided below and was recommended by the California Dropout Research Project at UC Santa Barbara.
  - a. California Graduation Rate: Defined as the number of graduates in a given year divided by that number of graduates plus the dropouts in 12th grade of that same year, the dropouts in 11th grade of the previous year, the dropouts in 10th grade 2 years before, and the dropouts in 9th grade 3 years before.
2. Calculate the Graduation Rate Residual for each school year for all noncharter high schools. The Graduation Rate Residual is the difference between the school's actual graduation rate and its statistically predicted rate. The predicted graduation rate is based on multiple regression analyses, which compare the graduation rates of all noncharter high schools across the state serving students with similar characteristics. These analyses of similarity are based on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch; who are Asian, Hispanic, or African American; who are female; who receive special education services; who are English learners; and who



- are not “continuously enrolled.” A Graduation Rate Residual greater than zero indicates that a school’s actual graduation rate is higher than predicted based on the students they enroll, while a Graduation Rate Residual that is less than zero indicates that a school’s actual graduation rate is lower than predicted.
3. Exclude schools that did not have better-than-expected graduation rates in all four years (i.e., the schools’ Graduation Rate Residual must be greater than zero).
  4. Calculate the 4-year average of the Graduation Rate Residuals and rank the remaining schools on this average.
  5. Exclude schools that are not above average poverty for their region.
  6. Exclude schools with an Academic Performance Index (API) Similar Schools Rank lower than 8.

The study resulted in 22 California high schools selected as potential case study candidates. AIR attempted to contact all 22 schools to better understand (a) the context in which the schools were able to appear so strong in regard to limiting dropouts, and (b) the extent to which this evidence of success, as indicated in the data, reflected strategies and structures locally developed and implemented for this purpose.

*Source:* L. Dunn, M. Muraki, T. Parrish, M. Socias, & L. Woods. (2007). *California High Schools That Beat the Odds in High School Graduation*. Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research.

APPENDIX C

American Institute for Research

Case Study Selection Protocol

This document outlines the steps the AIR-CA CC team is using to select high schools to contact for potential case study analysis.

**I. The steps for initial high school selection are the following:**

2. Calculate the California Graduation Rate for all high schools in California for each school year from 2005-06 through 2008-09. The definition for this rate is provided below and was recommended by the California Dropout Research Project at UC Santa Barbara (Dunn, Muraki, Parrish, Socias, & Woods, 2007).
  - a. California Graduation Rate: Defined as the number of graduates in a given year divided by that number of graduates plus the dropouts in 12th grade of that same year, the dropouts in 11th grade of the previous year, the dropouts in 10th grade two years before, and the dropouts in 9th grade three years before.
3. Calculate the Graduation Rate Residual for each school year for all noncharter high schools. The Graduation Rate Residual is the difference between the school's actual graduation rate and its statistically predicted rate. The predicted graduation rate is based on multiple regression analyses, which compare the graduation rates of all noncharter high schools across the state serving students with similar characteristics. These analyses of similarity are based on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch; who are Asian, Hispanic, or African American; who are female; who receive special education services; who are English learners; and, who are not "continuously enrolled."<sup>1</sup> A Graduation Rate Residual greater than zero indicates that a school's actual graduation rate is higher than predicted based on the students they enroll, while a Graduation Rate Residual that is less than zero indicates that a school's actual graduation rate is lower than predicted.
4. Exclude schools that did not have better than expected graduation rates in all four years (i.e., the schools' Graduation Rate Residual must be greater than zero).
5. Calculate the 4-year average of the Graduation Rate Residuals and rank the remaining schools on this average.
6. Exclude schools that are not above average poverty for their region.

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<sup>1</sup>The definitions for the school-level mobility variable for each year follow:

- 2009: Percentage of students counted as part of school enrollment in October 2006 CBEDS and has not been continuously enrolled since that date;
- 2008: Percentage of students counted as part of school enrollment in October 2006 CBEDS and has not been continuously enrolled since that date;
- 2007: Percentage of students counted as part of school enrollment in October 2006 CBEDS and has not been continuously enrolled since that date;
- 2006: Percentage of students counted as part of school enrollment in October 2005 CBEDS and has not been continuously enrolled since that date

7. Exclude schools with an Academic Performance Index (API) Similar Schools Rank lower than 8.

**II. To calculate the District Average Graduation Residual, we:**

1. Aggregate the school-level data listed above to the district-level.
2. Calculate the Graduation Rate Residual (as described above) for all districts.

**III. Steps for selecting a stratified sample**

1. Include at least two schools from each geographical region
2. Include at least three urban schools and no more than two rural schools
3. Include at least two high school districts
4. Strive for balance with approximately half of schools above and half below the state averages for (a) school size, (b) district size, and (c) percentage of enrolled African American students.
5. Ensure that schools come from districts that also have positive Graduation Rate Residuals

**IV. Phone interviews and screening for site visitation sites:**

Based on the list above, we will conduct 16 phone interviews in 9 districts selected on the Average Graduation Residuals '06-'09 and the stratification variables: region, district-type, school, and district size. We will then carry out screening interviews in these eight districts with the selected high school principal and a district-level administrator to inquire about their graduation/dropout success and to probe on their use of transition plans. Based on these interviews, we will identify four of these districts that appear to have particularly well-articulated and effective transition plans worthy of further study where we will conduct site visits.

**V. Interview/focus group protocols to be prepared for these calls and visits are the following:**

1. District administrator screening interview protocol
2. High school principal/vice principal screening interview protocol
3. Middle school principal/vice principal interview protocol
4. High school teacher/counselor focus group protocol
5. Middle school teacher/counselor focus group protocol
6. High school student focus group protocol

7. Middle school student focus group protocol

**VI. Other materials to be prepared:**

1. Parent permission slip for student focus groups
2. Consent forms for staff interviews and focus groups

**VII. Steps for contacting districts:**

CDE Middle Grades office will call selected districts to request their participation (details being worked out with CDE).

*Source: L. Dunn, M. Muraki, T. Parrish, M. Socias, & L. Woods. (2007). California High Schools That Beat the Odds in High School Graduation. Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research.*

APPENDIX D

American Institute for Research Interview Protocol

**CACC Middle Grades Transition Study—High School Principal/  
Vice Principal Interview**

<b>Respondent:</b>	<b>District:</b>	<b>Position:</b>
<b>Interviewer:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Consent form received:</b>
<b>Note-taker:</b>		

### **Introduction**

Thanks again for taking the time to speak with me this morning/afternoon. I am \_\_\_\_\_, from the American Institutes for Research (AIR), working as a partner in the California Comprehensive Center at WestEd. \_\_\_\_\_ is also here with me, taking notes during our conversation. We are working with the Middle Grades Improvement Office at the California Department of Education to identify schools with high graduation rates relative to schools with similar student populations. We will be creating a report summarizing our findings and highlighting best practices to share with other principals, policy makers, and interested stakeholders.

Before we start, I would like to cover some logistical items. This interview is scheduled for an hour. You are free to end it at any time and to pass on any question you do not wish to answer. All information obtained today will only be used for purposes of this study. Data gathered from the interview may be used to create state profiles and in research publications. However, this will not be done without your permission. All sections written about your school will be sent to you in advance to ensure accuracy and to gain your permission for inclusion.

We would also like to record our conversation for note taking purposes. No one outside the research team will listen to the recording, and if at any point you would like the recorder turned off, just let us know. Would that be OK?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Background**

1. Why don't we start by having you tell me a bit about your background in education?  
For example, how did you come to be a principal at this school?
  - How many years have you been a principal in total?
  - How many years have you been a principal at this school?
  - Do you have teaching experience? (How many years, which subject(s), what grade(s)?)

2. Could you tell me a bit about your school (i.e., How would you describe your students, parents, teachers, and community)?

- What is the overall school culture? How did that evolve?
- How involved are the parents at this school?
- What is the general rate of teacher turnover?
- Can you describe the leadership and instructional support staff at your school?
- Are there leadership teams or regular department head meetings at your school?

### **Factors relating to graduation record**

7. Your annual graduation rate is approximately \_\_\_\_\_. Based on this rate, your school appears to be successful in relation to schools with similar student populations in helping students graduate. To what extent do you feel that your school is successfully addressing this issue?

**Note to Interviewer:** If the respondent does not seem to think the school is successful on these measures, probe a bit more to understand why.

8. What factors do you feel have been most **effective** in achieving this relatively high graduation rate? I realize there are multiple components, but if you had to limit them, what would you list as the top three?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Note to Interviewer:** For whatever the respondent replies, use the probes below to go more in depth about the three primary strategies. If the respondent discusses a transition plan or discusses policies that indicate that there may be a transition plan in place, ask if the respondent would be willing to e-mail a copy of the plan to us.

- a. What specifically about this strategy is important to your success? Can you provide examples?
- b. How has this factor influenced graduation rates? Can you provide specific evidence?



- c. Did you need additional funding or resources to implement this factor? What particular tradeoffs in terms of funding and resources has your school had to make to provide these supports?
- d. How well do you feel this factor is implemented?
9. Of the three factors listed above, if you had to pick one as **most** important, which would it be?
10. We are also interested in learning what you feel are the greatest **challenges** to achieving a high graduation rate at your school. I recognize there are likely multiple challenges. But if you had to limit it, what are the top three challenges your school faces?
- \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
11. How are you addressing these challenges?

### Transition Strategies

**Note to Interviewer:** If the respondent has *not* specifically mentioned strategies to ease transition for students moving to or from their school, move to question 8. If the respondent has already discussed transition in depth above, move to question 9.

12. Are there any measures or strategies that you have taken to make it easier for students to transition to their next school (i.e., middle school to high school)? If so, to what extent do you feel these are contributing to these positive graduation results?

**Note to Interviewer:** If YES, move to question 9, if NO probe as to why the school is not currently implementing a transition program, and if the principal believes transition is unrelated to graduation rates.

9. Are there particular programs (e.g., AVID; programs focused on aligning curricula; California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) preparation programs; or career, college, and self exploration) or particular staff who focus on graduation and transition at your school? Are there leadership teams or regular department head meetings at your school?
10. To what extent and in what ways do the transition strategies rely on:

**Note to Interviewer:** For factors marked with an asterisk, use the probes in the Appendix to go more in depth about the transition strategies.

- a. District or school policies?\*
  - b. Specific steps you have taken to create a sense of school community?\*
  - c. Collaboration across schools to ease transition?\*
  - d. Support services?\*
  - e. Teacher, counselor, parent, community involvement?\*
  - f. Identifying and providing supports for at-risk students?\*
  - g. External partnerships (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters, partnerships with universities to provide mentoring to students, social work interns, behavior support staff)?
  - h. Professional development?\*
  - i. Student-centered learning environment?\*
  - j. Funding?
  - k. Other factors/strategies?
11. Do you think it would be possible to transfer the strategies you have mentioned during this interview to similar schools in your region or across the state? Why or why not?
  12. Based on your experience, what advice would you give other principals about facilitating high graduation rates?
  13. As my final question, is there anything else you would like to tell me about your school's success?

#### Appendix. Probes for Question 10

- a. District or school policies
  - Do students choose their own classes or assignments?
  - Is there flexible scheduling to meet the needs of middle school students, or provide individualized interventions for students to catch up?
  - Do you have separate facilities for sixth graders? Why or why not?
  - How are these policies shared with schools and teachers?
  - Do teachers receive professional development regarding these policies?

b. Specific steps you have taken to create a sense of school community

- Do incoming students have a cohort of peers with whom they attend the same core classes? What about an advisory/homeroom teacher?
- Do teachers work to build relationships with students through a sport, club, activity, or Small Learning Community (SLC)?
- Is school work, school principles or benchmarks displayed around the school to give a sense of a single school culture?
- Are teachers at your school working together to share strategies or information about students to help them through the transition process? For example, do teachers have dedicated common planning time?

c. Collaboration across schools to ease transition

- Are administrators from both schools working together on articulation, progress, needs of students and programs?
- Have you informed students about the new school's programs, requirements, procedures, opportunities and responsibilities they will encounter?
- Have you used shadowing or allowed students to attend classes at the receiving school to ease the transition?

d. Support services

- Do you offer peer mentoring (e.g. a buddy program where a new student is paired with an older student on entry to the receiving school)?
- Are counselors at your school working with students routinely to develop the socioemotional skills (e.g., communication skills and learning to work in teams) needed to be successful?
- Are counselors building relationships with parents to create an open dialogue about warning signs and issues that their child's facing?

e. Teacher, counselor, parent, community involvement

- Do you involve teachers in interdisciplinary teams, where they work with other teachers of different disciplines to share responsibility for a large group of students to build parent/teacher partnerships and reduce student anonymity?
- Are teachers at your school involving both student and parents in meetings and goal setting? For example, do you have student-led conferences?
- Does your school provide workshops for parents or information about child development?
- Have you partnered with outside organizations (e.g. city agencies, community or faith-based organizations) to better meet the needs of students and their families?
- How do students learn about/get involved in community service or learning projects? What percentage of students are regularly involved in these activities?

f. Identifying and providing supports for at-risk students

- Have you implemented an “on-track” or “early warning” indicator system (may include reviewing student achievement data, disciplinary referrals or attendance) to identify students at risk for not graduating?
- Do you offer before or after-school programs, an extra subject period, tutorials or other assistance to students struggling with their academic work or who are struggling academically?
- Are there counselors at your school that are specifically dedicated to students at risk for dropping out?
- Have you created incentive programs that reward good behavior and academic achievement?

g. Professional development

- What kind of professional development has been most beneficial for your school?
- What types of professional development (e.g. preparing staff to help students adjust and succeed in a new school environment) have been offered this year to your staff?
- Who provided this professional development?
- Have you or the district offered tutorials, workshops or other opportunities for staff to learn more about the developmental issues facing students that are making this change?

h. Student-centered learning environment

- How do administrators and teachers make themselves available to students during times classes are not in session?
- What kinds of electives are offered to students? On average, how many electives are offered to students during a given school year?
- What kinds of clubs and co-curricular activities are offered before or after school? How would you describe the level of student involvement in these activities?

APPENDIX E

American Institute for Research Institutional Review Board

Participant Protection Assurance



## AIR Institutional Review Board (IRB) Participant Protection Assurance

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*This form is used by individual or organizational collaborators (e.g., consultants, co-investigators, temporary staff, recruiting firms, subcontractors) who will be collecting data from and/or analyzing data about human participants. The form documents assurance to protect the rights and welfare of research participants, and to abide by applicable regulations and the decisions of associated regulatory entities. The form must be completed and sent to [IRBAdministrator@air.org](mailto:IRBAdministrator@air.org) before applicable work on the project begins. The form will be retained on file in AIR's IRB Office for the duration of the project.*

Name of Institution with the Federalwide Assurance (FWA): American Institutes for Research

Applicable FWA #: FWA00003952

AIR Project Name Covered by this Assurance: \_\_\_\_\_

AIR Project Number: \_\_\_\_\_

AIR Project Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual or Organization's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- (1) The Individual or Organization accepts the responsibility to protect the rights and welfare of human participants involved in research conducted under this Assurance. This includes activities that involve collecting data from and/or analyzing individually-identifiable data about human participants. The Individual or Organization agrees to abide by the principles contained in the Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research (aka the Belmont Report; see <http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/belmont.html>), which are summarized below. Organizations will ensure that all staff who work on this project have read and abide by these guidelines. Unless the AIR Project Director has indicated that a specific waiver has been approved by AIR's IRB, the principles below may not be modified.

### **Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Participants**

- I will do everything I can to ensure that human participants are exposed to no more than minimal risk for physical, mental, or emotional harm.
  - I understand that participating in research is voluntary. There are very rare exceptions when participation in research may not be voluntary; these exceptions must be approved by AIR's IRB.
  - If I collect data, I will fully inform participants about any risks they may incur in participating, and I will obtain uncoerced informed consent from each participant for any personally identifiable data collected directly from them or from other sources. There are sometimes exceptions in relation to consent procedures; these exceptions must be approved by AIR's IRB.
  - If I collect, transport, code, analyze, or otherwise deal with individually identifiable information, I agree to maintain the privacy of participants' identity and the confidentiality of the data to the extent such privacy and confidentiality are outlined in the project's informed consent document and/or are explained to me by the AIR Project Director.
  - I will be vigilant in maintaining the rights and welfare of populations that might be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence. Such populations include, but are not limited to children, prisoners, pregnant women, mentally disabled persons, and economically and/or educationally disadvantaged persons.
- (2) The Individual or Organization will comply with all other applicable institutional, federal, international, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies that may provide additional protection for human participants participating in research conducted under this Assurance.
- (3) The Individual or Organization will abide by all determinations of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) designated under the above FWA and will accept the final authority and decisions of the IRB, including but not limited to directives to terminate participation in research activities.

- (4) The Individual or Organization will complete any educational training required by the IRB prior to initiating research covered under this Assurance.
- (5) The Individual or Organization will report promptly to the IRB any proposed changes in the research conducted under this Assurance, and will not initiate changes without prior IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants.
- (6) The Individual or Organization will report immediately to the IRB any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others in research covered under this Assurance.
- (7) The Individual or Organization, when responsible for enrolling participants, will obtain, document, and maintain records of informed consent for each such participant or each participant's legally authorized representative as required under HHS regulations at 45 CFR part 46 (or other applicable regulations) and stipulated by the IRB.
- (8) The Individual or Organization acknowledges and agrees to cooperate in the IRB's responsibility for initial and continuing review, record keeping, reporting, and certification for the research referenced above; and will provide all information requested by the IRB in a timely fashion.
- (9) The Individual or Organization will not enroll participants in research under this Assurance prior to its review and approval by the IRB.
- (10) Emergency medical care may be delivered without IRB review and approval to the extent permitted under applicable federal regulations and state law.
- (11) This Assurance does not preclude the Individual or Organization from taking part in research not covered by this Assurance.
- (12) The Individual or Organization acknowledges that it is responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of each research participant, and that the participant's rights and welfare must take precedence over the goals and requirements of the research.


Individual or Organizational Official Signature:  \_\_\_\_\_

Title: Principal Date: 02-23-2011

Name: <sup>Jason Vitoria</sup> Jason Vitoria Degree(s): BA, MA

Address: 3 Fern Haven Farm Ln

Phone #: 949-936-7800 Email: jvitoria@iusd.org

FWA Institutional Official (or Designee) Signature:  \_\_\_\_\_

Title: IRB Administrator Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Erin Wallace

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Washington, DC 20007

Phone #: 202.403.5542

Email: ewallace@air.org

APPENDIX F

Relevant Literature for Development of Interview Questions



### **Middle Grades Transition Study: Relevant Research**

- Balfranz, R., Bridgeland, J., Moore, L., & Hornig Fox, J. (2010). *Building a grad nation: Progress and challenge in ending the high school dropout epidemic*. America's Promise Alliance Civic Enterprises, Everyone Graduates Center.
- Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. (2003). *An introductory packet on transition: Turning risks into opportunities for student support*. Los Angeles, CA: Author.
- Connors, L. J., & Epstein, J. (1995). School and family partnerships in the middle grades. In B. Rutherford (Ed.), *Creating family/school partnerships* (pp. 155-158) Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Dunn, L., Muraki, M., Parrish, T., Socias, M., & Woods, L. (2007). *California high schools that beat the odds in high school graduation*. Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research.
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APPENDIX G

American Institute for Research Consent Forms

## District Administrator and Principal Follow-up Interview Consent Form

- Purpose* The American Institutes for Research, a non-profit independent research firm in contract to WestEd and the U.S. Department of Education as part of the California Comprehensive Center (CA CC) aims to assess factors contributing to effective transition between schools ultimately leading to high school graduation for California students.
- The information you provide will be used to create research reports highlighting your school's or district's strategies that have been effective in helping students transition between schools. The reports may be disseminated to district and school administrators, as well as policymakers and other interested stakeholders.
- Procedure* We are requesting your permission to participate in an interview as part of the data collection activities for this project. During the interview, we will ask you several questions that will help to give us a comprehensive understanding of transition strategies at your school. Interviews will last approximately 30 minutes. We will use your interview responses to write reports including your school's or district's strategies.
- Risks and Discomfort* There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this interview. You may skip any question you do not want to answer.
- Benefits* Your participation will benefit other schools in California by providing useful feedback in order to better understand the factors that have enabled your school or district to be successful.
- Confidentiality* Interview notes will be kept confidential among members of the research team. In the event that the research team would like to use your name or your school's name in the report, we will seek your permission to do so. We would like to request that we tape record the interview, but no one outside the research team will listen to the recording without your permission. Furthermore, at any point during the interview you may request for the interviewer to turn the recorder off. We will dispose of the interview responses after successful completion of the project.
- More Information* If you would like more information about this component of the CA CC, you should contact AIR's subcontract Project Director, Dr. Tom Parrish, at the American Institutes for Research at (650) 843-8119 or TParrish@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Chair of AIR's Institutional Review Board (which is responsible for the protection of project participants) at irb@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or c/o IRB, 1000 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW, Washington, DC 20007.
- Freedom to Withdraw* Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may choose to not participate or refuse to answer any questions without penalty.
- Informed Consent* By signing this form you are indicating that you have read and understood the information provided to you about your participation in this interview.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School/District: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Principal, Vice Principal and Staff Interview Consent Form

<i>Purpose</i>	<p>The American Institutes for Research, a non-profit independent research firm in contract to WestEd and the U.S. Department of Education as part of the California Comprehensive Center (CA CC) aims to assess factors contributing to effective transition between schools ultimately leading to high school graduation for California students.</p> <p>The information you provide will be used to create research reports highlighting your school's or district's strategies that have been effective in helping students transition between schools. The reports may be disseminated to district and school administrators, as well as policymakers and other interested stakeholders.</p>
<i>Procedure</i>	<p>We are requesting your permission to participate in an interview as part of the data collection activities for this project. During the interview, we will ask you several questions that will help to give us a comprehensive understanding of transition strategies at your school. Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes. We will use your interview responses to write reports including your school's or district's strategies.</p>
<i>Risks and Discomfort</i>	<p>There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this interview. You may skip any question you do not want to answer.</p>
<i>Benefits</i>	<p>Your participation will benefit other schools in California by providing useful feedback in order to better understand the factors that have enabled your school or district to be successful.</p>
<i>Confidentiality</i>	<p>Interview notes will be kept confidential among members of the research team. In the event that the research team would like to use your name or your school's name in the report, we will seek your permission to do so. We would like to request that we tape record the interview, but no one outside the research team will listen to the recording without your permission. Furthermore, at any point during the interview you may request for the interviewer to turn the recorder off. We will dispose of the interview responses after successful completion of the project.</p>
<i>More Information</i>	<p>If you would like more information about this component of the CA CC, you should contact AIR's subcontract Project Director, Dr. Tom Parrish, at the American Institutes for Research at (650) 843-8119 or TParrish@air.org. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Chair of AIR's Institutional Review Board (which is responsible for the protection of project participants) at irb@air.org, toll free at 1-800-634-0797, or c/o IRB, 1000 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW, Washington, DC 20007.</p>
<i>Freedom to Withdraw</i>	<p>Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may choose to not participate or refuse to answer any questions without penalty.</p>
<i>Informed Consent</i>	<p>By signing this form you are indicating that you have read and understood the information provided to you about your participation in this interview.</p>
<p>Name: _____ School/District: _____</p>	
<p>Signature: _____ Date: _____</p>	