

**GAUGING DEFICIT THINKING: AN INVESTIGATION OF PRINCIPALS'  
PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY IN INFLUENCING DROPOUT RATES AMONG  
AFRICAN AMERICAN AND HISPANIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TEXAS**

A Record of Study

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the link between Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory and deficit thinking on principals' efforts to decrease dropout rates at their low-income minority high schools. Although the rate of high school dropouts is declining overall in the U.S., the phenomenon still remains a persistent problem. Principals play a key role in reducing dropout rates on their respective high school campuses. However, when principals are not perceived to have the self-efficacy to effectively influence dropout rates on high school campuses, any efforts made could be significantly diminished. This is especially true within the context of schools primarily comprised of low-income minority students, contexts in which a deficit paradigm normally exists. The defining characteristic of the deficit mindset is the attribution of low-income minority students' inability to succeed to the student's own shortcomings – or deficits – as a poor minority rather than attributing the cause of failure to pedagogic practices or a school's systemic and administrative failures. Thus, the presence of deficit thinking could potentially impact principals' sense of efficacy by leading them to an inevitable conclusion: certain students are doomed to fail academically and/or drop out of school, and the principal is powerless to prevent this inevitable outcome from occurring.

Employing a qualitative case study approach utilizing site observation, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups for data collection, this research study sought to understand principals' levels of perceived self-efficacy, if and how deficit thinking influenced efficacy, and how efficacy affected efforts to curb dropouts in schools. Three principals of predominantly low-income minority high schools and dropout prevention teams were

interviewed, and the findings were transcribed, coded using Stake's (2005) reductionist method, and analyzed for insights and emergent themes across the data collection. Study findings revealed all of the principals operated with some level of deficit thinking; however, their personal backgrounds, which were similar (to some extent) to those of the students in schools, mitigated the effect deficit thinking had on levels of self-efficacy. As a result, levels of self-efficacy to prevent students from dropping out remained moderate to high, and persisted in engaging aggressive programmatic and personal efforts to reduce dropouts on their campuses. The study's findings empower education administrators with key knowledge on how to prepare and select principals who most effectively work with low-income minority students.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate my record of study to my beautiful and loving mother, Rhonda Wooldridge Trotter, for her unconditional love. She has always supported and loved me no matter what path I chose in life. As a single teenage mother, she instilled in me the values of hard work and determination. She also taught me that anything in life is possible if you exhibit faith and character.

I also want to dedicate this work to my grandparents, Richard “Papa Rick” Wooldridge and Erma “Nini” Wooldridge. Papa Rick was a strong influence in my attendance of Texas A&M University as an undergraduate and student athlete (football). I remember our talk during my senior year in high school and that solidified my acceptance of an athletic scholarship to this great university. Nini was a second mother to me, and she also loved and supported me throughout my life. She often filled in the gap when my mother was working to help instill values and support. Thank you so much for all of the love and encouragement throughout the years.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact high school dropout rates are on the decline, the issue remains a serious one in the U.S. educational system. According for the National Center for Education Statistics, high school dropout rates have been trending downward through the 1970s and 1980s. Although the rates increased 5.7% between 1990 and 1995, the trend would reverse to 3.4% in 2009 (Stark & Noel, 2015). However, as positive as these changes might appear, an estimated 2.6 million 16-24 year olds had neither earned a high school diploma or an equivalency certificate in 2012, nor were students enrolled in high school (Stark & Noel, 2015). Further, nearly 1.1 million students in the high school graduating class of 2012 still did not earn their diplomas (Rumberger, 2013). Although some progress has been made, there is much more work to be done to address the retention of students in the nation's high schools, especially since there are enormous implications for both the individual and U.S. society at large when students drop out of high school. Wilson and Smith (2013) reported "Dropping out of secondary school is associated with numerous detrimental consequences, including low wages, unemployment, incarceration, and poverty" (p. 357).

To address the challenge of high school dropouts in the U.S., additional research is needed to understand the various academic, social, and personal problems impacting students and to select tailored interventions to systemically address these issues (Dynarski & Gleason, 2009). According to Knesting (2008), "A critical need exists for research on high school dropout that goes beyond individual student characteristics to include the influence of school factors on students' educational decisions" (p. 3). One school factor to consider in additional research is the role of the school principal in influencing dropout rates, as the principal plays

a key role in mitigating dropout rates of high school students. Principals can be powerful leaders who are successful in their efforts to lead their schools (Brock & Grady, 2011; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Valencia (2015) concluded a trained and prepared principal can be very effective in promoting and realizing school success for students of color (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2007; Reyes, 2005). Perhaps the greatest responsibility a principal has is playing a key role in ensuring students on their school campuses are academically successful and do not become one of more than 7,000 students, on an average, who drop out of school every day (Miller, 2015; Alliance for Excellent Education, n.d.). School districts usually frame the leader's responsibility in curbing dropouts using boilerplate language such as the following: "The principal is ultimately responsible for having procedures in place at the campus level to work towards dropout prevention..." (HISD, 2014, p. 5). Additionally, the principal is accountable for: (a) making campus decisions about dropout issues based upon reliable data and reports; and (b) coordinating the various team members on their campuses that play a role in preventing dropouts, including counselors, teachers, advocates, data and attendance personnel, administration, community members, district resources, and students who demonstrate a potential risk of becoming dropouts (HISD, 2014).

However, despite the responsibilities and expectations for principals to mitigate the dropout crises as well as their adoption of ambitious dropout prevention programming, principals may perceive themselves differently in their capacity to influence dropout rates in their schools. Some may resign to the outlook of low academic achievement and dropping out of school is an inevitable reality for some students, particularly African American and Hispanic students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Principals' varying perspectives on

their ability to enact change will inevitably affect the level of effort invested into preventing dropouts on respective campuses (Valencia, 1997).

Two concepts shed light on principals' effectiveness at influencing dropout rates among predominantly African American and Hispanic high schools: perceived self-efficacy and deficit thinking. Perceived self-efficacy, a construct developed by Bandura (1977), is an individual's belief he or she is capable of producing a certain desired outcome or effect (Bandura, 1994). However, while Bandura's definition of self-efficacy is one representative of an individual personality trait in general, other applications of self-efficacy have been applied to various areas of research. This research has helped to broaden the understanding of the construct and its applicability, particularly in the domain-specific field of education. For example, researchers have studied teacher self-efficacy and have referenced "teachers' confidence in their ability to promote students' learning" (Hoy, 2000, p. 1), student self-efficacy, which refers to students' confidence in their ability to learn (Corkett et al., 2011), and academic self-efficacy, a measure of students' belief in their abilities to attain academic goals (Bandura et al., 1996).

In order to adequately address the high school dropout crisis, principal self-efficacy must be examined. Principal self-efficacy denotes principals' beliefs of using their power to influence the behavior of teachers and students in their schools (Lyons & Murphy, 1994) and personally capable, through whatever means are available or accessible, of impacting the dropout rates for their respective schools. As Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2007) explained, "A principal's self-efficacy is a judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action to product desired outcomes in the school that he or she leads" (p. 90).

Randhawa (2004) asserted “self-efficacy has immense effects on an individual’s motivation, effort, persistence, and performance” (p. 337).

When working with student populations predominantly comprised of African American and Hispanic students, an additional intervening factor must be considered because of its potential impact on principals’ perceived self-efficacy: deficit thinking. Deficit thinking implies the belief economically disadvantaged minority students fail academically or drop out of school because of internal deficits or deficiencies such as limited intellect, lack of motivation, and immoral behavior (Valencia, 1997; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Such thinking may result in lesser amounts of energy and effort invested in preventing and reducing dropout rates in their respective schools (Maehr & Pintrich, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Holding the belief students of color is fundamentally deficient in abilities, mentalities, and motivations can lead principals to feel powerless to make a difference. This powerlessness is often grounded in a low perceived self-efficacy over preventing these students from dropping out of high school. Most importantly, when a principal has a low sense of perceived self-efficacy, this feeling can influence motivation (Bandura, 1986), behaviors, and amount of energy and effort principals invest in preventing and reducing dropout rates in their respective schools (Maehr & Pintrich, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). However, principals who do not engage in deficit thinking, are more likely to have a strong perception of self-efficacy, which results into increased motivation, intentional effort, and dedicated energy towards helping high school students succeed academically and stay in school. Thus, when investigating the dropout crises among high schools with predominantly African American and Hispanic populations, it is critical for researchers to examine the intersection of deficit thinking, perceived self-efficacy and the impact these constructs have on the principals

responsible for managing dropouts in their schools. For these reasons, in this research study, the researcher examined the link between deficit thinking and its impact on principals' perceived self-efficacy to influence the dropout rates of African American and Hispanic students in their schools.

## **Background, Context, and Theoretical Framework for the Problem**

### **Background for the Problem**

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), “On average, 3.4% of students who were enrolled in public or private high schools in October 2011 left school before October 2012 without completing a high school program” (Stark & Noel, 2015, p. 5). Only 68% of students graduate on time with a regular diploma (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2011). The status dropout phenomenon (measures the percentage of 16 to 24 year olds who are not enrolled in high school and do not have a high school credential) becomes even more problematic when race is considered, as African American and Hispanic students had higher dropout rates than white students in 2012 (7.5% versus 12.7% and 4.3%, respectively) (NCES, 2015). Although African American and Hispanic dropout rates for the 2012-2013 school years represented the lowest recorded rates since 2005, rates were still substantially higher than the dropout rates of their Asian and white counterparts (TEA, 2014).

The problematic nature of students dropping out of high school goes beyond failure to complete the fundamental level of education necessary to provide the baseline levels of knowledge and proficiencies needed later in life. According to research, being a high school dropout carries negative consequences affecting personal future aspirations and communities. The NCES reported persons ages 18 to 67 who do not complete high school or who do not

earn a General Educational Development (GED) certificate earn a median income of roughly \$25,000 in 2012, while the median income of those within the same demographic earned roughly \$46,000 in 2012 (Stark and Noel, 2015). Dropouts also face greater levels of unemployment, have disproportionately higher percentages of incarceration, contribute significantly less tax income to the nation, are more likely to engage in criminal activity, have a greater reliance on services offered through Medicaid and Medicare, and have a higher reliance on welfare than their peers who graduate from high school (Stark & Noel, 2015). Rumberger (2013) supported these findings and explained, “Dropouts face extremely bleak economic and social prospects” (para.1). In addition to being prone to suffer from a variety of negative health outcomes, dropouts are less likely to find gainful employment and earn a living wage, and are more likely to be poor in comparison to high school graduates (Rumberger, 2013). At-risk behaviors also tend to increase with dropping out of high school. For example, girls who drop out of school have a higher probability of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI) than non-dropouts (Anderson & Portner, 2014). Less educated men, particularly those who drop out of school, are “considerably less likely to be married and more likely to be absent fathers” (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2011, p. 24). According to Belfield and Levin (2007), high school dropouts are “more likely to rely on public assistance, engage in crime and generate other social costs borne by taxpayers” (para. 1). High school dropouts are 63 times more likely to become institutionalized in a corrections facility than individuals who complete a four-year college degree, and 10% of male high school dropouts were institutionalized compared to only .03% of male high school graduates (Sum et al., 2009).



The diminished life outcomes possibly awaiting dropouts “increases the threat to the country’s strength and prosperity” (Wall Street Journal, 2008, para. 1). In his 2009 address to the joint sessions of Congress, President Barack Obama noted, “...dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It’s not just quitting on yourself, it’s quitting on your country – and this country needs and values the talents of every American” (Government Institutes, 2009, p. 21). On a national level, when students drop out of high school, the nation’s growth and development is inhibited because the U.S. depends on graduates to “fuel our economy and future growth, and the next generation of workers is not prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century global economy” (WSJ, 2008). Former Houston Mayor Bill White asserted, “In a global economy, the single most important issue facing our country is an educated workforce” (WSJ, 2008). Similarly, former New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial explained when one is a dropout, “The whole cauldron of social and economic challenges you face are increased, and those problems are laid at the doorstep of city hall, city government, community organizations, and churches” (WSJ, 2008, p. 2). Thus, in addition to resulting in negative consequences for themselves, students’ decisions to drop out of high school prior to graduation have also been shown to affect society at large. This makes the subject of high school dropouts a serious issue that merits national attention, because, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), “To ensure the economic strength of our country, students must graduate high school ready for college, careers and life” (section 1).

Principals can have an influence over dropout rates in the schools. Clemson University’s National Dropout Prevention Center promotes the idea school principals can play a key role in dropout prevention, and the Center presents seven key principles designed to help principals prevent dropout rates in their schools: (a) identifying students early; (b)

closely examining new and existing school policies and procedures; (c) building strong community partnerships and personalizing their schools; (d) reducing the social isolation of students; (e) managing student transitions; (f) creating options and implementing creative interventions; and (g) building parent/family relationships (Edwards, 2008). According to Heck and Hallinger (2009), principals integrating capacity building of students and school improvement could have an astounding impact on student outcomes, including student dropouts. Dedmond (2005) researched personalized learning and concluded principals could cultivate students' sense of belonging, ownership of learning, and ability to make good choices, which would help students to envision a positive future and prevent dropouts.

Self-efficacy is a notable construct worthy of investigation in any discussion pertaining to education, because a school leader's level of perceived self-efficacy seemingly has an impact on student outcomes. For example, Protheroe (2008) argues a teacher's sense of efficacy can affect his or her teaching, and through this impact on teaching, the teacher's efficacy can also affect student achievement. Protheroe (2008) also highlighted "powerful effects from the simple idea a teacher's belief in his or her ability to positively impact student learning is critical to actual success or failure in a teacher's behavior" (p. 42-43). Renowned teacher efficacy researcher Anita Woolfolk explained "Teachers who set high goals, who persist, who try another strategy when one approach is found wanting – in other words, teachers who have a high sense of efficacy and act on it – are more likely to have students who learn" (Shaughnessy, 2004, p. 156-157). Additionally, a teacher without a sense of efficacy "may have faith generally in the ability of teachers to reach difficult children, while lacking confidence in his or her personal teaching ability" (Protheroe, 2008, p. 43). When researchers in education use the precise term "sense of efficacy," it speaks to an educator's

sense of competence rather than an objective measure of ability or competence (Protheroe, 2008). Thus, whether educators actually have efficacy is not the determining factor in their success or failure; it is their *perceived* sense of efficacy that makes the difference.

Merely having the knowledge and skills to perform functions may not suffice for leaders to successfully perform a given task. Randhawa (2004) explained:

It is generally observed that knowledge and skills are essential but insufficient for accomplished performance. Indeed, people often do not perform optimally, even though they know well what to do. This is because self-efficacy... also mediates the relationship between knowledge and action (p. 336).

In fact, researchers can use knowledge of a person's self-efficacy beliefs to more strongly predict one's performance than one's own expected goals (Orpen, 1995). Further, self-efficacy beliefs have a strong impact on a principal's persistence, ability to adapt, willingness to engage effort, level of aspiration, and goal setting as the leader of a school (Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

Most researchers agree an educator's level of efficacy affects the learning and outcomes of his or her students and a positive relationship exists between an educator's sense of efficacy and student achievement (Protheroe, 2008). Yet, extensive research has been conducted to investigate educators' perceived sense of efficacy, how it is developed, and its impact on student outcomes, while limited research exists surrounding principals' level of efficacy, how it is developed, and how it can impact student outcomes – particularly dropout rates.

One particular factor potentially having a strong influence on a principal's perceived sense of self-efficacy in a school primarily comprised of African American and Hispanic

students is the principal's confidence and belief about their capacities to succeed. This mindset is grounded in a construct referred to as "deficit thinking." When educators engage in deficit thinking, they engage in a "blame the victim" mentality, attributing academic problems and the likelihood to stay in school (or the lack thereof) to the student rather than attributing them to structural defects the principals can directly address (Valencia, 1997). Engaging in deficit thinking can affect principals' perceived self-efficacy to influence dropout rates among African American and Hispanic students in their schools. For example, believing students of color are fundamentally deficient in abilities needed to remain in school can lead a principal to feel powerless, and hence, develop a low sense of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

The preconceptions and stereotypes principals might uphold about minority students from lower socioeconomic and economically disadvantaged backgrounds can have a significant impact on their expectations of what students are and are not capable of achieving academically (Valencia, 1997). If the principal subscribes to a stereotype most low-income minority students are inherently incapable of succeeding academically, he or she might feel a sense of powerlessness to be able to stop students' academic decline and subsequent dropping out of school. This lack of principals' perceived efficacy, in turn, have a significant impact on how far he or she will extend him/herself to help this demographic of students remain in school and succeed academically (Dweck, 2010).

For example, Dweck (2010) suggests educators tend to adopt one of two belief systems regarding students' intelligence: (a) intelligence is fixed and static, so some students are naturally smart and programmed for academic success, while other students are not smart and are not expected to excel academically; or (b) intelligence is dynamic and can be grown

or developed through learning and intentional effort. This is a sobering consideration when educating students, because there is a consensus among researchers of what students believe about intelligence (whether it is fixed or can be grown) directly affects their grades.

Additionally, researchers agree students who believe intelligence can be grown realize significantly higher levels of academic success (Dweck, 2010). Dweck (2010) states further: (a) “students perform better in school when they and their teachers believe that intelligence is not fixed, but can be developed; (b) teaching students that intelligence can be ‘grown’ is especially powerful for students who belong to typically stereotyped groups; and (c) growth mindsets focus on effort and motivate students to overcome challenging work” (p. 27). These are important considerations, because the perceptions and stereotypes that a principal has about students, particularly students from historically underrepresented groups, can affect student academic outcomes. Dweck (2010) cited a study in which educators held varying beliefs about their students’ abilities to learn. In reporting the research findings of the study, Dweck (2010) concluded:

When teachers had a fixed mind-set, the students who had entered their class as low achievers left as low achievers at the end of the year. When teachers had a growth mind-set, however, many of the students who had started the year as low achievers moved up and became moderate or even high achievers. Teachers with a growth mind-set don’t just mouth the belief that every student can learn; they are committed to finding a way to make that happen. People with a growth mind-set don’t put people in categories and expect them to stay there, but people with a fixed mind-set do. They not only believe in fixed traits, but they also believe that they can quickly and accurately judge those traits. This means that once they have decided that someone is

or is not capable; they are not very open to new information to the contrary. And they may not mentor people who they have decided are not capable. (p. 28)

Principals who operate with a fixed mindset, in regards to the academic abilities of African American and Hispanic students, may consider these students less likely to have the necessary internal attributes to succeed in school. Based upon this assessment, principals may not invest in helping these students to achieve their potential. When principals engage in deficit thinking, these leaders responsible for mitigating dropout rates at urban schools run the risk of potentially developing a sense of “learned helplessness.” This refers to a condition closely associated with a low sense of self-efficacy and manifests based on the notion “after repeated punishment or failure, persons become passive and remain so even after environmental changes that make success possible” (Martinko & Gardner, 1982, p. 196). Thus, when examining how principals impact high school dropout rates, it is necessary to examine the connection between principals’ perceived self-efficacy and their efforts to influence dropout rates. That is, in light of principals’ mindsets about African American and Hispanic students, how does their self-perceived ability to influence dropout rates affect their actual efforts to prevent dropouts on their respective campuses?

### **Context for the Problem**

The context selected for this research study is the largest school district in the state of Texas. The district, which is the seventh largest school district in the United States, employs 26,500 employees and has more than 215,000 students enrolled in its 283 schools. The population of students served by the district is ethnically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse, being comprised of 24.9% African American students, 62.1% Hispanic students, 8.2% white students, 3.6% Asian students, and 1.1% students of other ethnicities. A reported

75.5% of the students are characterized as “economically disadvantaged” and 57% of students are characterized as “at-risk” by the district (HISD, 2015).

Three high schools (out of the 40 high schools) within the selected district were utilized in this research study, each predominantly consisting of African American and Hispanic students of low socioeconomic backgrounds. The overall population composition of each student body was similar, as were the courses and programs offered at each school. Each high school was also categorized as (IR) Improvement Required, the state’s lowest accountability rating for schools. Most importantly, the leaders at each of the selected high schools in the chosen district reported significantly higher dropout rates (12% compared to district’s 10% average) among African American and Hispanic students compared to other high schools in the district (HISD, 2015).

High School A opened in 1965 and was initially formed to educate factory workers and their children, 80% of whom were white. The school continued to be primarily comprised of white students until 1975, when the district implemented its first magnet program. Consequently, the school’s population slowly transitioned, becoming increasingly more diverse each year. At the time of the study, the school’s population consisted of 75% Hispanic students, 20% African-American students, and 5% white students.

High School B opened in 1945 and began as a predominantly white school, with 75% white students and 22% black students. Over the past 35 years, the composition has steadily increased towards becoming more diverse. At the time of the study, the school’s population consisted of 35% Hispanic students, 60% African American students, and 5% white students.

High School C opened in 1977, similar to High School A and High School B, it started with a primarily white student population. However, over the past several decades, the

student population has become increasingly more diverse, particularly in the past 10 years. At the time of the study, the school's population consisted of 65% Hispanic students, 20% African American students, and 15% white students.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Problem**

Increasing principals' effectiveness in influencing dropout rates of African American and Hispanic high school students can only be developed based upon a greater understanding of potential causes impacting efforts to address this problem. The researcher engaged two theoretical constructs in this research study to investigate principals' influence over dropout rates at their predominantly African American and Hispanic high schools: perceived self-efficacy and deficit thinking. Self-efficacy Theory, which is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, is a theoretical construct developed by Albert Bandura (1977). According to Social Cognitive Theory, "people are capable of human agency, or intentional pursuit of courses of action, and such agency operates in a process called triadic reciprocal causation" (Henson, 2001, p. 3). This process affects us by influencing what we grow to believe about ourselves and ultimately impacts our decisions and behaviors (Henson, 2001).

At the core of this framework is self-efficacy, which is defined by Bandura (1977) as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Bandura's (1977) main assertion regarding self-efficacy is an individual's perceived self-efficacy beliefs were "powerful predictors of behavior" (cited in Henson, 2001, p. 3). Further, Bandura (1977) has supported the understanding self-efficacy beliefs are "the major mediators for our behavior, and importantly, behavioral change" and "our beliefs in our abilities powerfully affect our behavior, motivation, and ultimately our success or failure (cited in Henson, 2001, p. 3).



Researchers suggest efficacy beliefs help to dictate the motivation of individuals (Maehr & Pintrich, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Bandura (1986) explained, “People regulate their level and distribution of effort in accordance with the effects they expect their actions to have. As a result, their behavior is better predicted from their beliefs than from the actual consequences of their actions” (p. 129). Although Self-efficacy Theory has been widely studied using teachers as the subjects of research, self-efficacy theory has “predictive power and application for practically any behavioral task” (Henson, 2001, p.4). Thus, it is reasonable to believe self-efficacy theory can be applied to a study of principals’ perceived self-efficacy with the understanding levels of efficacy directly affect the outcomes of behavioral tasks. For the sake of this research study, the behavioral task examined was the principals’ implementation and operation of high school dropout intervention programs on their respective campuses.

Deficit thinking is an endogenous theory that posits “the student who fails in school does so because of internal deficits or deficiencies” including “limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior” (Valencia, 1997, p. 2). Researchers birthed the construct when “historically, the confluence of ideology and science made a volatile union in understanding the educational problems and needs of economically disadvantaged and socially segregated groups” (Valencia, 1997, p. x). Since that time, it has remained at the forefront of several theories attempt to explain why schools predominantly comprised of economically-disadvantaged minority students tend to fail at helping students to achieve academic goals (Valencia, 1997).

According to deficit thinking theory, the sources of these alleged deficiencies inherent in minority students of low socioeconomic status (SES) are grounded in their genetic,

culture, class, and familial socialization (Valencia, 1997). As a result of attributing school failure to the students themselves rather than to external structural and institutional attributes like local district politics, oppressive policies, ineffective teaching practices, high levels of school segregation, inequitable program funding, and poor school culture, school and their leaders escape the blame for persistently poor academic performance of lower SES minority students. These external elements are held exculpatory regarding their role in the failure of schools (Valencia, 1997).

For this research study, the researcher investigated the intersection of the two theoretical constructs, perceived self-efficacy and deficit thinking, within the context of high schools serving predominantly African American and Hispanic students. Riehl's (2000) research found the most significant factor in overcoming deficit thinking in school's serving low-SES children was the leadership of the principal, particularly the principal's belief system about what and how much children can learn and what children can accomplish. Principals with high self-efficacy do not solely rely upon external and institutional bases of power, or professional efforts, but also rely on internal power to achieve their goals, or personal efforts (Lyons & Murphy, 1994).

More specifically, if deficit thinking is discovered to be present among principals, this study examined if and how engaging in deficit thinking is linked to principals' perceived self-efficacy to influence dropout rates in their respective high schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

While a number of intervention programs and initiatives exist with the goal of reducing high school dropout rates, in order for the programs to be effective, programs must be implemented and overseen by school leaders who perceive a high sense of self-efficacy –

with capacity to execute the implementation of the programs and initiatives to reduce dropout rates. Otherwise, a lack of or a low sense of perceived self-efficacy could potentially translate into dropout intervention programs and initiatives not fully implemented or fully implemented but with half-hearted interest, effort, support, oversight, and operation. Much research has been conducted concerning the U.S. high school dropout phenomenon and the intervention programs and initiatives implemented to reduce the dropout numbers. However, scarce scientific research exists regarding principals' perceived self-efficacy, or their capacity to influence the dropout rates in their schools, and how these perceptions affect their efforts to curb dropout rates. Further, there is little to no research examining the impact of deficit thinking on the perceived self-efficacy of high school principals governing predominantly African American and Hispanic schools or how their self-efficacy perceptions impact the amount of effort in trying to curb dropout rates among these students often presumed incapable of academic success. Therefore, the research problem is a need to examine the link between deficit thinking and perceived self-efficacy of high school principals regarding their abilities to influence the dropout rates in their schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to understand the link between principals' deficit thinking and their level of perceived self-efficacy, and the impact of principals' perceived self-efficacy on the level of effort to engage in preventing African American and Hispanic students from dropping out of their low-income minority high schools. The results of the study will be used to generate new strategies for developing the levels of efficacy in prospective and existing principals necessary for the effective implementation and oversight of dropout intervention programs and initiatives on their high school campuses.

## **Research Questions**

In order to investigate the link between deficit thinking and principals' perceived self-efficacy to influence the dropout rates in their high schools, this study posited and answered one primary research question and three sub-questions.

### **Research Question**

What sense of self-efficacy do principals perceive to have over the dropout rates at schools?

### **Sub-questions**

1. To what extent is a principal's perceived self-efficacy over dropout rates at his or her school linked to notions of deficit thinking?
2. What additional factors or experiences have influenced principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates at schools?
3. How does principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates at their schools relate to the effort invested in the prevention of high school dropouts on campuses?

## **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

### **Rationale of the Study**

This research study was necessary to gain greater understanding surrounding high school principals' perceived self-efficacy to influence high school dropout rates on respective campuses. This is an important problem meriting scientific research, because without such a sense of self-efficacy, principals could potentially: (a) refrain from dedicating the time, energy, and attention necessary to make dropout prevention programs and initiatives effective; (b) anticipate personally not having the capacity to make dropout programs and initiatives work, and consequently lack the motivation to invest themselves fully into making

the programs work; and (c) be less inclined to allocate the financial and human resources for programs and interventions in order to make them successful. Thus, greater research is necessary to understand principals' perceived self-efficacy to influence dropout rates in schools.

Additionally, it is necessary to investigate what factors have contributed to the development of principals' self-efficacy and to use this information to develop strategies in helping prospective and existing principals develop the efficacy necessary for the effective implementation and oversight of dropout intervention programs on campuses. This knowledge will be of particular interest to policy makers and practitioners working in education administration, as it will extend current knowledge about how to increase the effectiveness of dropout intervention programs and initiatives among high school students.

### **Relevance of the Study**

A scientific investigation into principals' perceived self-efficacy concerning abilities to influence dropout rates among students in high schools is of particular relevance to professionals who either currently work in or aspire to work as leaders in the field of education. The potential value of the findings of this research study for education administrators is the study has produced knowledge for equipping school leaders with strategies to increase self-efficacy not only in the high school principals, but in other practitioners responsible for the implementation, operation, and oversight of various intervention programs on school campuses.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is of significant value for several reasons. First, the study is significant for practice, because the results will empower education practitioners and administrators with intelligence about principal self-efficacy and how this efficacy affects the performance of these school leaders when working to prevent high school dropouts. Such research is critical in certain contexts, particularly in low-income minority schools where deficit thinking is typically prevalent, to decrease the influence of deficit thinking and increase principals' sense of efficacy towards dropout rates. Next, the study is significant to research because it goes beyond a mere study of high school dropout intervention programs and initiatives and offers a closer examination into the perceived self-efficacy of the principals responsible for the implementation, oversight, and outcomes of these programs. This critical component is noticeably absent from the research literature on high school dropout intervention effectiveness. Then, the study is also significant to research because little to no research exists in research literature regarding how deficit thinking impacts the principals that are responsible for mitigating high school dropout rates. Valencia (1997) wrote:

Notwithstanding the historical and contemporary influences of deficit thinking in educational thought and practice, no sustained analysis of this theory appears in literature. We find this remarkable given the long-standing history and ubiquitous nature of deficit thinking. (p. xii)

Since Valencia (1997) published this account, the statement remains true concerning the state of research literature surrounding deficit thinking today regarding the construct in general as well as the construct's application to the work of principals leading predominantly African American and Hispanic high schools.

## **Nature of the Study**

To conduct the researcher's study, the researcher adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate principals' self-efficacy and its impact on principals' motivation and efforts to influence dropout rates in high schools. A qualitative methodology was selected for the study because "Qualitative methods are appropriate for an exploration of factors that mediate efficacy development" (Shaughnessy, 2004, p. 155). The researcher employed qualitative methods to collect data for the research study in two phases: (a) an observation phase, which engaged campus observations; and (b) an interview phase, which engaged semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The researcher triangulated data collected from the observation phase with data collected in the interview phase.

The researcher used campus observations to assess the culture, climate, and interactions at each high school, and notes surrounding any observations made while touring and conducting research on the school's campus were maintained by the researcher in a journal. Data collected during the campus observations were used to inform the questions appearing on the interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Semi-structured interviews consisted of 10 open-ended questions the researcher asked the principals in face-to-face interview sessions. Focus group interviews, in which the researcher led a discussion of five open-ended questions, were conducted to encourage principals and dropout prevention coaches to expound on feelings of efficacy, the potential influence of deficit thinking on sense of efficacy, and the programs and initiatives actively employing in efforts to prevent dropouts in their schools.

## **Definition of Terms**

### **Deficit Thinking**

Deficit thinking is an attempt to explain why students from low-income minority groups fail in school, which posits “students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies, such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations, or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster – such as familial deficits and dysfunctions” (Valencia, 1997, p. xi).

### **Dropout**

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) defines a dropout as “a student who is enrolled in public school in Grades 7-12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not graduate, receive a GED certificate, continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die” (TEA, 2014, p. x).

### **Leaver**

Anyone who withdraws from a Texas school is considered either a Leaver or a Mover. “A Leaver is a student who leaves Texas public education for an approved reason or is a dropout”, while “A student who moves to another Texas Public School” is considered a Mover (HISD, 2014, p. 6). All Leavers who attend school in the state of Texas require documentation, and this documentation is housed in “Leaver files” maintained by each Texas Public School.

### **Perceived Self-efficacy**

Perceived self-efficacy is defined as a person’s belief he or she possesses the capacity and capabilities to produce specific attainments (Bandura, 1994).



## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

There were four main assumptions underlying the research study. The first assumption included honest and straightforward reporting of perceived self-efficacy by the principals interviewed regarding the capacity possessed over the dropout rates at respective high schools. The second assumption was based on the notion dropouts and dropout programs and initiatives at each high school was led by principals speaking from first-hand experience about how perceived self-efficacy might affect implementation and oversight of dropout programs and initiatives on individual campuses. The third assumption was principals would openly acknowledge the presence of deficit thinking, regardless of the level at which it was present, and be able to explain how this type of thinking impacted the level of efficacy. The final assumption was principals would grant free and open access to the researcher to conduct observations on respective campuses.

### **Limitations**

There was one primary potential weakness representing a threat to credibility in this research study. This included the potential introduction of social desirability bias, which is a basic human tendency encountered by researchers when interviewing respondents who are asked to self-report. Social desirability bias is a pervasive phenomenon in which, rather than answering questions in an honest and straightforward way, respondents reply to interview questions with answers presented in the best possible light. "Respondents are often unwilling or unable to report accurately on sensitive topics for ego-defensive or impression management reasons. The result is data are systematically biased toward respondents'

perceptions of what is ‘correct’ or socially acceptable” (Fisher, 1993, p. 303). Although this threat was potentially present in the study, it was difficult to minimize.

### **Delimitations**

This research study was bounded by three delimiting factors. First, each of the principals interviewed for the research study led urban schools in the state of Texas. Second, each of the principals engaged for the research study led a public high school (as opposed to an elementary or middle school). Finally, each principal investigated for the research study led a low performing school with a high dropout population predominantly comprised of low-SES African American and Hispanic students. Because of these considerations, the scope of the research study was narrowed in order to gain a better understanding of the dropout phenomenon in Texas, a state received national attention for its high school dropout rates.

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

The remainder of the research study will be organized in the manner as follows:

Chapter II will: (a) include the theoretical framework for the research study, and (b) present a review, a synthesis, and a critique of appropriate literature that is related to the statement of the problem detailed in Chapter I. Chapter II will detail the qualitative research methods used to collect data, respond to the problem, and answer the research questions. Chapter IV will present an analysis of the data collected, transcribed, and coded. The final chapter, Chapter V, will include: (a) a summary of the findings, (b) conclusions about the data, (c) the implications for practice, (d) relate the findings to existing research outlined in the literature review, and (e) offer recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Chapter II contains a critical analysis and review of literature supporting the study of the link between deficit thinking on a principal's perceived self-efficacy and the impact of a principal's perceived self-efficacy on his or her efforts to curb high school dropouts in a low-income minority high school. Deficit thinking impacts a principal's abilities to view him or herself as the source of – and consequently, the solution for – improving student academic outcomes. Self-efficacy beliefs mediate our behavior and affect our actions, motivation, and success or failure as we pursue certain goals (Bandura, 1977). When deficit thinking is linked to self-efficacy, the resultant mindset could potentially be one in which a principal does not feel capable of improving the outcomes of low-income minority students. This is because, since all of the cause for the student's shortcomings lay with the student, there is nothing the principal can do; he or she feels powerless to prevent the inevitable, which is the eventual and certain dropout of students who consistently perform poorly academically.

The research literature in this chapter is organized in the following manner. First, low-income minority high schools are discussed to provide a context for understanding the problem of high school dropouts. Next, the review includes a review of literature surrounding perceived self-efficacy. Then, the literature review includes a framework for understanding deficit thinking. Finally, the chapter contains a summary that synthesizes all of the major themes found in the literature.

#### **Low-income Minority High Schools**

Low-income minority high schools, which are typically located in some of the poorest urban communities in the U.S., tend to have relatively lower levels of academic

performance and higher levels of dropouts, trend principals must address in order to decrease dropout rates (Loeb et al., 2010). These schools are typically schools characterized by a set of unique circumstances pose challenges to both students and the administrators that lead them (Esposito, 1999).

### **Principal Leadership in Low-income Minority Schools**

One of the primary factors affecting the prevalence of higher-than-average dropout rates of students in low-income minority schools is the quality of leadership typically found in these economically-disadvantaged schools (Valencia, 2015). Most of the research about the quality of leadership at these schools concludes low principal quality leads to decreased abilities to handle the extreme challenges of leading low-SES schools, the resulting ineffectiveness leads to high principal turnover, and the high turnover in leadership directly affects the outcomes of the school – including dropout rates (Loeb et al., 2010; Valencia, 2015).

**Low-quality principals often lead low-income schools.** Valencia (2015) discovered low-income minority students are more likely to be enrolled in a school with a lower-quality principal. Schools comprised of predominantly African American and Hispanic students of a lower SES are more likely to have a principal: (a) who is a first-year administrator; (b) with less experience as a principal; (c) on an interim or temporary status; (d) without, at least, a master’s degree; and (e) who earned a degree from a less-competitive college (Valencia, 2015, p. 183). Bridgeland and colleagues (2009) supported this assertion, explaining “On average, principals at high dropout rate schools have 3.6 years of administrative experience compared to the 9.6 years by their peers in low dropout rate schools” (p. 43). Similarly, Loeb et al. (2010) research highlighted an “inequitable distribution” of quality among the

principals in a large urban school district, which is similar to the “inequitable distribution” found in the quality of teachers who teach at schools characterized by student populations that are poor, non-white, and low-achieving youth.

**Principals lack desire to lead low-income minority schools.** Exacerbating the notion most low-income minority schools have low-quality principals as leaders and findings reveal most of the principals in these schools have a little-to-no desire to lead schools of this type, resulting in the lack motivation necessary to lead them effectively. Valencia (2015) explains many principals are not inclined to lead economically disadvantaged schools comprised of low-achieving minority students, because the challenge of working within the context of such schools is a difficult one. Valencia wrote:

The thing that sets most urban/inner-city school districts apart is that most of them in America are plagued by annual shrinking budgets, pressure from high-stakes testing, high employee turnover, increased competition from charter schools, pressure from state and federal mandates, and habitually low student achievement, just to name a few. (p. viii)

Working within a context with such challenges and limitations is sure to affect a principal’s ability to lead effectively, and the ability to effectively lead a school is directly related to the principal’s ability to mitigate dropout rates. Then, in support of Valencia’s (2015) position, Loeb et al.’s (2010) research suggested given a choice, principals would prefer to work in schools considered to be easier to administer and prefer not to work in failing schools, in need of reform, or contain many students of poverty.

**High principal turnover and low student achievement.** When principals do not have the necessary skills and training to lead low-income minority schools, and when

compounded with the fact many of them lack any desire to deal with the challenges of leading schools of this type, the inevitable result is high principal turnover (Loeb et al., 2010). Loeb et al. (2010) found there was a higher rate of principal turnover in schools with higher numbers of poor, minority, and/or academically challenged students than in schools not characterized by these demographics. The researchers discovered a correlation between higher principal turnover and lower student achievement gains and between higher principal turnover and teacher turnover. Also, Burkhauser and colleagues (2012) studied how the actions and working conditions of first-year principals (those who were serving first year as principal in a particular school, including those with no previous experience as principals and those with previous experience as principals in other schools) in urban school districts related to outcomes. A key finding the researchers noted was more than 20% of new principals left urban schools within two years, and those placed in failing schools to meet adequate yearly progress targets were more likely to leave than those meet the given targets. This was a key observation, as the researchers explained, “One of the reasons it is important to understand the experiences of first-year principals is principal turnover tends to be high, particularly in urban school districts, leading to a constant influx of inexperienced school leaders” (p. 3).

**Specialized training needed for principals in low-income schools.** Despite the challenges associated with the leadership of low-income minority schools, researchers offer several recommendations for how to better prepare principals to work in these economically-disadvantaged schools, and in turn, reduce the high leadership turnover leading to increased student dropout rates. First, in order to effectively lead students in low-income minority schools, principals need to be equipped with a different and unique set of leadership skills not necessarily required to lead students in more mainstream schools, because the leadership

experience in a low-income minority school is altogether different. Yisrael (2012) notes serving as a principal in an urban school with a population primarily comprised of minorities of low socio-economic status is a notably different experience than serving as a principal in a school with students not mostly minority and are from families of higher socio-economic status. “Individuals who occupy [the] position [of an urban school principal] must possess leadership qualities that meet the extreme needs and diverse circumstances of the students, staff, and communities in which the schools are located” (Yisrael, 2012, p. ix). Similarly, Valencia (2015) noted because of the unique challenges facing principals who lead these types of schools, “it makes sense to be proactive in the training of future principals” (p. 183) and to empower them with these specialized skills. The unique preparation the researcher advocated includes specialized training in social justice curriculum, which will help to empower prospective principals for upcoming leadership duties in socioeconomically disadvantaged urban schools.

**Means to increase principal effectiveness in low-income schools.** In addition to proactively equipping principals with specialized skills necessary to effectively lead low-income minority students, the literature promotes the necessity of empowering principals who work at these schools with greater autonomy. Bridgeland et al. (2009) found the most highly effective principals in high dropout schools were empowered with the autonomy to conduct hiring and firing of teachers, developing staff, setting budgets and leading schools, all of which requires a moderate level of administrative experience. When principals in high dropout schools were not given the autonomy to operate in such a manner and are micromanaged by district administration, principals fail as effective leaders.

Principals who lead low-income minority schools are a unique set of individuals who are tasked with many challenges not otherwise experienced in leading a more mainstream school. All of the literature reviewed pertaining to principals in urban, low-income, minority schools concur experiences of principals who lead such schools face markedly differences from the experiences of counterparts leading non-minority schools of higher SES. Because of the unique challenges principals in such settings face, literature also supports the necessity for the principal to possess a set of unique skills and leadership qualities, to effectively lead schools of this nature.

Educators who accept leadership roles as principals of low-income minority school are typically not the best quality of principal available, lacking the skills, leadership, and administrative experience necessary to lead this unique population. Consequently, because of lack of preparation, the literature unanimously supports when principals are faced with the high level of difficulty unique to leading low-income minority schools, established leadership goals are ineffective. In turn, it is not uncommon for principals leading these schools to quit their jobs much sooner than a principal at a more mainstream high school. High principal turnover in these schools ultimately affects the outcomes of students in many ways – including higher dropout rates.

Several researchers in the literature offered recommendations for increasing principals' effectiveness when leading low-income minority schools, including proactively providing specialized training for principals who will be assigned to low-income, minority schools; the training principals are apt to receive in generic principal training program curriculum is not designed to sufficiently prepare them for the challenges faced in working in this specialized context. Other recommendations to increase effectiveness included



providing principals who lead these schools with greater levels of autonomy. When principals are given the autonomy to lead schools, make critical decisions about campuses, and oversee school budgets, a greater chance of overcoming the challenges associated with and achieving success in low-income, minority schools is accomplished.

Thus, although the types of principals tend to lead economically-disadvantaged schools are typically less-qualified, have little desire to work within the problematic contexts of these schools, and are more prone to quit than principals who do not work in such challenging schools (all of which affect performance and lead to poor student outcomes and higher dropout rates), once proactively provided with specialized training and are given greater autonomy to lead schools, the literature shows the effective leadership of students on low-income minority school campuses.

### **Effect of Principals on High School Dropouts**

As the primary leaders of a school organization, no one holds more responsibility for the outcomes of the school's students than the principal. Federici and Skaalvik (2011) offered, "The role of the principal is vital with respect to overall performance of the school, because the position is essential to address challenges and changes of varying nature..." (p. 296). In accord with Federici and Skaalvik (2011), Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2007) explained, "The principal is a key agent at the school level. He or she sets the tone and direction for the school, initiates change, provides expertise, marshals resources, unifies partners, and maintains effort" (p. 89). Research literature overwhelmingly supports the belief principals play a key role in impacting the academic achievement and influencing the success outcomes of students – and this success includes a reduction in dropout rates. However, prior to making effective efforts to positively impact high school dropout numbers,

it is necessary for principals to have an accurate and realistic perspective of the dropout conditions of the school as well as what factors are contributing to students dropping out.

**Principals influence academic achievement.** Research literature surrounding school leadership and principals consistently supports a relationship between school leadership, namely principals, and student academic achievement exists. When principal leadership is strong and high, students realize positive academic outcomes. However, when principal leadership is inadequate and low, negative academic outcomes are the result, with one such negative outcome being high school dropouts. A number of researchers have found a positive relationship between school leadership and the academic achievement of students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Riehl, 2000). In fact, according to Bridgeland and colleagues (2009), “Research shows principals are the second most important factor in student achievement, behind teacher quality” (p. 8). Researchers agree principals are widely regarded as the cornerstones of good schools, and without the key involvement and strong leadership of a principal, any efforts schools undertake to increase academic performance among students are destined for failure (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2007).

**Principals directly affect dropout rates.** The notion principals affect dropout rates is consistently supported throughout literature. Brown (2012) conducted research designed to answer the question, “Is the high school principal the single agent of dropout prevention as suggested by the State Board of Education?” The study utilized two inner-city high schools in North Alabama, collecting data for the 1999-2000 school year, and later, the 2005-2007 school years for each school, with the purpose of examining how dropout rates might change with a change in principals at the schools. Study results showed a significant difference in the dropout rates of two of the high schools and concluded while the principal of the high school

might not be the single-most important factor in dropout prevention; he or she does have a significant impact on dropout and graduation rates and can influence these rates plus or minus 30%.

Echoing the finding that principals can have a significant impact on dropout prevention is the research of Edwards (2008) in which the researcher concluded principals can play a key role in dropout prevention in schools. The researcher offered seven key tenets principals can use to effectively reduce dropouts in schools including: (a) identifying students early; (b) closely examining new and existing school policies and procedures; (c) building strong community partnerships and personalizing school; (d) reducing the social isolation of students; (e) managing student transitions; (f) creating options and implementing creative interventions; and (g) building parent/family relationships.

One of the means by which principals can increase effectiveness in impacting dropout rates is through the assistance of a dedicated administrative staff person whose sole function is to work with the principal's dropout programs and initiatives. Oftentimes, in schools with high dropout rates, the principal receives this type of assistance with his or her dropout prevention efforts from "dropout coaches" or "intervention specialists." Boyd (2014) investigated high school principals' perceptions of the role of the student intervention specialist in preventing dropouts and found principals supported the student intervention specialists and efforts to reduce dropouts as a result of the extra effort contributed towards curbing dropout rates. The study also offered 10 recommendations, based upon data collected from the principals, which might further assist the student intervention specialists in attaining successful outcomes.

**Importance of principals' perspectives on dropout efforts.** Before principals can effectively address the dropout issues existing amongst schools, it is essential to first properly assess the phenomenon as it is actually occurring on local campuses. However, according to the literature, most principals in areas with high dropouts demonstrate a great deal of uncertainty about the extent to which dropouts were occurring on school campuses. Bridgeland and colleagues (2009) conducted a study investigating the perspectives of 169 public high school principals in schools located in large cities, small towns, and urban areas reported high dropout rates. The researchers noted widespread confusion existed among principals concerning the school's dropout rates . For example: (a) only 20% of principals were able to accurately report a four-year graduation rate below 80%; (b) 80 percent of principals demonstrated signs of confusion over their actual graduation rates, reporting rates significantly higher than the national average; (c) only 21% of principals who reported graduation rates below 85% also reported having "many" students drop out; and (d) other principals were reluctant to make this claim, opting to respond "just a few" students drop out even though graduation rates were lower than 80%.

In comparable fashion, researchers agree before principals can properly intervene with programs and initiatives designed to curb dropout rates, he or she must properly diagnose the reasons why students are dropping out of their schools. Many times, there is a mismatch between the interventions principals introduce to address issues leading to dropouts and the actual reasons students are dropping out of schools. For example, Chatman (2013) studied the reasons urban African American males drop out of high school and emphasized the need for principals to conduct research with dropouts in order to determine directly why this group of students dropped out of school so as to develop effective

interventions. One finding of the study was, “Forty percent of the recent dropouts reported leaving school because it was boring. In contrast, 80 percent of the principals indicated students dropped out because they lacked the academic skills needed to successfully complete high school” (para 2). Thus, there was a mismatch between the problems principals were addressing to keep students from dropping out and the actual problems leading to dropouts.

Pinto (2015) investigated the same topic, from a different perspective. In the study, Pinto (2015) sought to discover how some schools, characterized by the same demographics as other schools with high dropout rates, managed to have significantly low dropout rates (less than 5% each year). According to study results, the primary reasons these schools succeeded against the dropout odds was because rather than paying attention to the reasons mainstream literature offered for students were dropping out (which principals considered to be inaccurate for and inapplicable to their own contexts), the principals focused on developing more local, organic perspectives of why students were dropping out of school. Perspectives were coupled with practical applications to address the dropout crisis, and as a result, efforts proved to be highly effective. In this study, principals achieved greater effectiveness with reducing dropouts by: (a) fostering the six characteristics of professional learning communities (endorsed by DuFour and Eaker, 1998); (b) developing a vision to support student attendance; (c) building relationships; (d) focusing on data; (e) making staff aware of the importance of student attendance; (f) monitoring and identifying at-risk students; and (g) providing support to at-risk students. With regards to providing effective interventions for the high school dropout problem, principals must work to more effectively identify the actual reasons that students drop out of their schools and treat these issues rather

than utilizing personal perceptions, or even the mainstream literature, as guides for the development of dropout intervention programs in low-income minority schools.

Principals play a key role in the academic outcomes of students. Positive academic outcomes can result in higher academic achievement and school success, while negative academic outcomes can result in lower academic achievement and dropping out of school. Through effective leadership, principals can definitely alter the course of a student's academic life, resulting in less likelihood for students to drop out of school. However, before principals can intervene and address the problems resulting in students dropping out of school, first properly assess the condition of the dropout crisis and then diagnose the specific factors leading students to drop out. When strong principals, who are the cornerstone for good schools, are willing to take responsibility for the academic outcomes of students by objectively assessing, diagnosing, and treating the issues contributing to dropout rates through the implementation of campus-specific intervention programs and initiatives, stronger students and successful schools will result.

### **Perceived Self-Efficacy**

A number of researchers have studied perceived self-efficacy and its impact on individual behavior (Bandura, 1989; Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Because perceived self-efficacy has an impact on an individual's perceived ability to impact or influence certain outcomes, it is essential to review the body of literature on the construct, particularly the literature linked to educators and self-efficacy.

### **Perceived Self-Efficacy Theory**

Perceived self-efficacy is defined as "people's beliefs about capabilities to exercise control over events affecting their lives (Bandura, 1989, p. 1) and the level of competence

perceive necessary to execute given tasks (Bandura, 1986). Perceived self-efficacy theory explains how people's beliefs about personal competence positively or negatively affect performance, as these beliefs play a key role in regulating human behavior (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1989) and are a critical factor in the self-regulation of motivation.

**Impact of self-efficacy on behavior.** Perceived self-efficacy is not a reflection of a person's *actual* level of competence to achieve a desired outcome; it is a reflection of the individual's *perception* of his or her competence to do so (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Thus, while an individual might be fully competent to execute a certain task or achieve a certain outcome, his or her perceived efficacy might communicate a lack of confidence, which leads to a belief the task or outcome cannot be accomplished – and thus, it will not be accomplished.

A person's perceived self-efficacy beliefs are “powerful predictors of behavior” and are “the major mediators for our behavior, and importantly, behavioral change” (Henson, 2001, p. 3). According to studies on perceived self-efficacy, “our beliefs in our abilities powerfully affect our behavior, motivation, and ultimately our success or failure” (Henson, 2001, p. 3). Chester and Beaudin (1996) asserted “the self-efficacy mechanism is a central determinant of a person's ability to exert power, action, and influence and is the result of a complex process of self-persuasion resulting from the processing of efficacy information conveyed inactively, vicariously, socially, and psychologically” (p. 235).

When faced with a difficult situation, people with a low perception of self-efficacy are more likely to give up, while people with a high perception of self-efficacy are more likely to exert more effort and intentionality into mastering the challenge, which leads to higher rates of success (Locke et al., 1984). “The nature of an individual's self-efficacy

beliefs are often revealed with statements such as, ‘I can’ or ‘I cannot’: The statements made by individuals regarding perceived capability are powerful predictors of how they will behave” (Bandura, 1977, cited in Siwatu et al., 2011, p.212).

Randhawa (2004) asserted “high self-efficacy enhances an individual’s tendency to preserve and finish up doing a good work” (p. 337). Possessing a higher perceived self-efficacy tends to make individuals more resilient; rather than being discouraged by feedback deemed negative, lessons are learned from it, when choosing to adapt the decisions to the environment. Over time, this high sense of efficacy results in improved performance, and consequently, greater levels of effectiveness and success (Cervone et al, 1991). This is an assertion supported by Bandura (1986), who also observed individuals with low perceived self-efficacy respond to negative feedback by lessening efforts, while individuals with high perceived self-efficacy respond to negative feedback with increased effort and greater levels of motivation to accomplish the task. Bandura (2000) explained, “When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt capabilities slacken efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have a strong belief in capabilities redouble efforts to master the challenge” (p. 120).

**Self-efficacy and general work / task performance.** Regardless of occupation or task-specific assignment, an individual’s efficacy levels affect his or her work performance, goal attainment, and outcomes. Scholars overwhelmingly agree there exists a positive correlation between self-efficacy and work performance; higher levels of efficacy result in greater levels of personal performance. Lai and Chen (2012) investigated the relationship between self-efficacy, work performance, and job satisfaction. The study results revealed self-efficacy had a positive effect on job performance, among other positive associations



between effort, performance, and satisfaction. Similarly, when exploring the impact of self-efficacy on work performance using data collected from 300 scientists, Randhawa (2004) discovered a significant positive correlation between job-specific efficacy and work performance. When workers had a higher sense of self-efficacy beliefs, work performance was higher, and when workers had a lower sense of self-efficacy beliefs to perform a certain function, work performance was lower. These findings were consistent with results from similar studies conducted by Cervone et al. (1991), Stajkovic and Luthans (1998), Bandura (1982).

### **Link between Educator Self-Efficacy and Student Outcomes**

Over the years, various researchers have identified a relationship between teachers' perceived self-efficacy to teach and student performance, as teachers' beliefs, expectations, and predispositions about themselves and students have a strong influence upon behaviors in the classroom (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Clark & Peterson, 1986).

**High-efficacy teachers yield high student outcomes.** There is a clear and evident relationship existing between high perceived self-efficacy among teachers and the student outcomes produced as a result of teaching. One of the driving factors behind this relationship is the fact teachers with high perceived self-efficacy beliefs are more motivated to engage in behaviors leading to high academic gains, while teachers with low perceived self-efficacy beliefs are less motivated to engage in behaviors leading to high academic gains (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

Along the same lines, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) conducted research on the antecedents and consequences of teacher efficacy, which was consistent with a study conducted by Ross (1998) suggesting teachers who have a higher sense of self-

efficacy, tend to be more willing to implement new instructional approaches designed to help students overcome learning challenges and become more academically successful. Siwatu and colleagues (2011) cited Tschannen-Moran & Wookfolk Hoy's research (2001), noting:

Teachers with high teaching self-efficacy beliefs are also more likely to use effective and innovative instructional strategies such as inquiry and hands-on learning activities. Less self-efficacious teachers, however, tend to rely on instructional practices that are easier to adopt, such as direct instruction and whole-group learning. A teacher's sense of efficacy is also related to how much effort he or she puts forth, how long he or she persists in the face of challenges, and student achievement.

**Special efficacy for educators working with low-SES students.** Researchers agree there should be certain types of self-efficacy developed in educators who specifically work with low-income minority students. As teachers are being trained and prepared for the classroom, the focus on this preparation is predominantly about equipping the educators with the skills needed to provide instruction to students. However, particularly when working with low-income minority students, skills are not enough; trainers must couple skills with self-efficacy in order for the classroom instruction to be effective.

Siwatu and colleagues (2011) compiled recommendations for self-efficacy building activities necessary for the effective instruction of African American students. First and foremost, fostering the development of competence and confidence in teachers is a necessary function in which administrators should engage in order to boost self-efficacy levels of teachers working to address the needs of this unique population. While preparation techniques like increasing teachers' multicultural attitudes, increasing teachers' culturally-diverse knowledge base, and helping teachers to develop the skills needed to teach African

American students effectively are necessary and increase the odds of teacher success, “this acquisition of pedagogy-specific knowledge and skills are inadequate predictors of teachers’ classroom behavior” (Siwatu et al., 2011, p. 209); practitioners must couple these skills and knowledge with the efficacy necessary to put them to use and to drive the teachers to be successful. Thus, in order to effectively instruct African American students, teachers must not only acquire related skills, but must be empowered with the self-efficacy beliefs to put the skills to use.

### **Link between Perceived Self-Efficacy and Principal Leadership**

In the same proven way that self-efficacy affects work/task performance in general and educator outcomes specifically, a similar relationship exists between self-efficacy and the performance of school principals. Studying the link between self-efficacy and how effective principals can be in leading schools can yield notable insights for how to better empower principals to achieve goals in leading schools and curbing dropout rates on campuses. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2007) explained the construct of self-efficacy “has the potential to offer insight into the complex, challenging, and critically important role associated with the principalship in present-day schools...”; however, despite this potential, “principal self-efficacy is a promising yet largely unexplored construct for understanding principal motivation and behavior” (p. 90).

**Principal self-efficacy and job satisfaction.** A principal’s level of self-efficacy is positively related to his or her job satisfaction as a school leader. Federici and Skaalvik (2011) explored the relationship between principals’ self-efficacy, burnout, job satisfaction, and motivation to quit. Using the multi-dimensional Norwegian Principal Self-Efficacy Scale to measure principals’ self-efficacy, the researchers electronically surveyed 1,818 Norwegian

principals. According to study results, while there was a positive relationship between principals' self-efficacy and job satisfaction, there was a negative relationship between principals' self-efficacy and burnout and motivation to quit. While Federici and Skaalvik (2011) extended the literature with research results on principal self-efficacy, the literature was not extended to the specific theme of how principals' self-efficacy and its relationship to overall performance outcomes.

**Impact of efficacy on principal leadership behavior.** Principals who have a strong or high sense of perceived self-efficacy, are more effective at producing desired outcomes within the school context. For example, Osterman and Sullivan's (1996) conducted research in which the study discovered principals' efficacy affected both interpretations of organizational content and problem-solving processes. When principals who possess a stronger sense of self-efficacy, tend to be more flexible and willing to adapt strategies based upon the needs or conditions of the context served. This level of adaptation is kept in pursuit of goals rather than giving up on them, and consequently, it made them more effective leaders. Additionally in the study, Osterman and Sullivan (1996) noted principals with a high sense of self-efficacy view change as a slow process and are diligent to pursue goals, once it was determined a certain strategy is ineffective or has been unsuccessful, the strategy was discontinued. Principals with a low sense of self-efficacy hold the perception the environment is uncontrollable, and in light of this, when strategies do not produce effective results, principals are less likely to modify or adapt them; instead, the same failing approaches are utilized and produce dismal results. Principals with a low sense of self-efficacy are also more likely to blame others for failures, which demonstrates an inability to

adapt to the needs of the environment to increase effectiveness, see opportunities, or develop support for initiatives.

Similarly, Lyons and Murphy (1994) supported the notion self-efficacy affects principals' performance in leading high schools. The researchers discovered valuable insights about the relationship between self-efficacy and problem solving, reporting when principals with a high sense of self-efficacy were confronted with problems, rather than interpret inability to solve the problems as failure, expectations are modified to be more conducive to the context. Further, Lyons and Murphy (1994) found principals with a high sense of self-efficacy tended to remain confident and calm in the midst of facing problems in schools, a sense of humor is more likely to be exerted, and access internally-based personal power to fulfill the role rather than access external sources of power. In contrast, principals with a low sense of self-efficacy were more prone to call themselves failures, and more prone to display signs of frustration, stress, and anxiety than principals with a high sense of self-efficacy. Principals with low self-efficacy also demonstrated rather than rely upon internal power to achieve goals, reliance is upon external and institutional bases of power (Lyons & Murphy, 1994).

**Factors influencing principal self-efficacy.** There are a number of factors affecting principals' perceived self-efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and colleagues (2007) examined factors affecting principals' self-efficacy and discovered neither principals' school level, nor school setting, nor did the proportion of low-income students in the school have any significant relationship to principals' self-efficacy. Similarly, neither gender nor race was a strong predictor of principals' self-efficacy. Instead, the strongest predictors of principals' self-efficacy were the set of interpersonal support variables available to them, which was

comprised of teachers, support staff, students, and parents, followed by the principal's level of preparation, interpersonal support from the superintendent and central office staff, and resource support.

Osterman and Sullivan (1996) conducted a similar study with newly-appointed urban principals to explore the factors influencing sense of efficacy and discovered certain external factors, including the presence of role models, district expectations, and personal and organizational support influenced principals' sense of efficacy.

**Development of self-efficacy.** Considering the strong link between efficacy and work performance, several researchers have produced findings about the necessity for employers to develop efficacy in workers, regardless of the industry or field of work. Based upon identified study outcomes, a significant and positive relationship between self-efficacy and work performance, Randhawa (2004) recommended "constructive actions on the part of employers are required to nurture self-efficacy" and employers should engage such methods as "counseling, proper guidance, training and development programs, and challenging and autonomous jobs and rewards" to enhance the levels of self-efficacy of workers, as doing so will help to improve both the individual performance of the employee as well as the overall performance of the organization" (p. 342).

Individual self-efficacy develops as a result of various experiences encountered cognitively, socially, linguistically, and physically (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Bandura (1986) categorized these experiences into: (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) social persuasion, and (d) people's own physiological and emotional states in estimating capabilities, although the individual's cognitive appraisal combined with how the individual integrates these experiences has the most impact on development of self-efficacy.

Perceived self-efficacy, or the belief one has the capacity to successfully complete a certain task or meet a certain goal, is necessary for any leader to be effective. Researchers literature clearly make the association between how high perceived self-efficacy is linked to the ability to achieve a result, while low self-efficacy is linked to the reduced likelihood of achieving the same result. In essence, when a person thinks he or she is incapable of doing something or powerless over achieving a certain outcome, according to the research, these are the results he or she will realize. However, when a person thinks he or she is capable of doing something or empowered to achieve a certain outcome, the outcome will likely be realized.

Bandura's (1977) theory, which links higher levels of self-efficacy to greater levels of personal performance, has many implications for leaders. For educators to have a high sense of self-efficacy when instructing students in the classroom is important; however, because the accountability for organizational outcomes falls on the shoulders of the leader, in order to perform effectively, it is of even greater necessity for leaders – or principals – to believe to have the power and capacity to attain stated organizational goals of leading the school (including teachers and students) to success. Although studies specifically focus upon “principals’ self-efficacy are few, the existing results of studies tend to be similar to Bandura’s summation about the role of self-efficacy in mediating principals’ behaviors” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2007, p. 90), which suggests the higher a principal’s sense of efficacy, the more effective he or she will be in fulfilling the role of principal. In addition to being related to increased effectiveness, a principal’s higher self-efficacy is also positively related to greater job satisfaction, flexibility, ability to engage in problem solving, ability to remain confident and calm in the midst of school problems, and willingness to adapt in order

to continue pursuing goals rather than persisting in pursuing ineffective strategies. In contrast, self-efficacy was negatively related to burnout, motivation to quit, perceptions of lack of control, unwillingness to adopt new strategies in exchange for ineffective ones, likelihood of considering themselves failures, frustration, stress, anxiety, and a lack of creativity in developing new approaches among principals. Thus, according to the literature, there is support for the need for principals to have a high sense of self-efficacy, because high efficacy carries with it the mindsets, motivations, and characteristics necessary to realize organizational goals.

Without a sense of efficacy, organizational leaders are apt to feel like victims of the circumstances that surround them within an organization and feel helpless to make a change. Without a high sense of efficacy, principals will feel helpless to prevent high school dropouts on campuses. Fortunately, researchers have shown perceived self-efficacy is neither static nor fixed; it can be developed, fostered, and grown in individuals who lack efficacy through intentional, strategic efforts. Thus, employers, and in the context of this study, school administrators, should find constructive ways to systematically nurture and develop self-efficacy in workers to increase efficacy levels, resulting in enhanced outcomes for both the individual and the organization.

### **Deficit Thinking**

A number of researchers have centered research on the construct of deficit thinking (Gorski, 2011; Reister et al., 2002; Valencia, 2015). A consideration of the construct is particularly relevant to a discussion about efficacy, because researchers have discovered a link between the presence of this mindset and an individual's perceived ability to effect change in the lives of students (Valencia, 2015).



## **Deficit Thinking Theory**

Deficit thinking is a problematic way of thinking compromises educators' abilities to effectively educate low-income minority children. Valencia (1997) characterized the construct of deficit thinking as the belief "students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies, such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations, or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster – such as familial deficits and dysfunctions" (p. xi). Further, according to this theoretical construct, when students underachieve or underperform in school, this sub-par performance is "rooted in students' alleged cognitive and motivational deficits, while institutional structures and inequitable schooling arrangements... are held exculpatory" (Valencia, 1997, p. 9). Riester and colleagues (2002) surmised:

In simple terms, the deficit-thinking model is a theory that blames the victims of school failure for their own lack of success in a system that was designed to serve the interests of the wealthy and the powerful. This theory is consistent with historical documentation of the ways in which many students from low-income homes fail academically and then are grouped, tested, labeled, and/or categorized, which significantly affects the academic knowledge they receive. Then, they are blamed for their failure and lack of progress. (p. 282)

The most problematic aspect of deficit thinking is it fails to take into account the "strengths, competencies, resiliencies, and promise of low-SES children and parents" (Valencia, 2015, p. 43). Gorski (2011) offered, "Consider, for example, the stereotype that low-income families do not value education. This stereotype often is propagated within

school walls, not by educators who intend to act unjustly, but by those who have been socialized by the deficit hegemony to buy into and perpetuate it” (p. 155).

**Characteristics of deficit thinking.** In order to comprehensively understand deficit thinking and the reasons why educators should be so vigilant in combating its presence in low-income minority schools, it is necessary to understand an overview of the characteristics delineating deficit thinking. Valencia (2015) reported six primary characteristics of deficit thinking:

1. *Victim blaming.* The student’s school failure is typically attributed to a student’s economic disadvantage and minority status as members of certain racial groups. According to this approach, which is endogenous in nature, students perform poorly in school as a result of internal characteristics, like alleged cognitive and motivational deficits, shifting the blame for poor school performance towards the victim (the student) and away from the inequitable schooling arrangements and institutional structures, which are actually to blame for students’ academic failure.
2. *Oppression.* Deficit thinkers can tend to be the power holders in a relationship with low-SES students and parents, which can lead to a model in which the victim blamers (educators and administrators) oppress victims (low-SES students with poor academic performance) and control the possibilities for change and achieving more successful outcomes for students.
3. *Pseudoscience.* The construct of deficit thinking was developed by researchers who held “deeply embedded negative biases toward people of color” and who “communicate their findings in proselytizing manner” (p. 43). Thus, rather than being

regarded as pure science, the deficit thinking model is regarded by many as a form of pseudoscience.

4. *Temporal changes.* Any changes toward increased academic success students might realize are considered isolated outcomes, because they are considered genetically and socially inferior, low-performing tendencies will still be passed on the students' future generations through "low-grade genes, inferior culture and class, or inadequate familial socialization" (p. 43).
5. *Educability.* The notion exists that the deficit thinking model can predict how well and to what extent minority students can be educated.
6. *Heterodoxy.* Whereas deficit thinking has, in the past, reflected the dominant thought of culture of its era or time, today, the construct has a pervasive presence in academic and philosophical areas in which deficit thinking has become an accepted ideology.

**The "at-risk" label and the deficit thinking construct.** The construct of deficit thinking is often used in the same context as the term "at risk", which refers to students who are considered to be at greater risk of realizing negative academic outcomes than the general population of students. However, when used in relation with deficit thinking, Valencia (2015) posited:

The use of the at-risk label is very troublesome because it is a classist, racist, ableist, and sexist term... a familial deficit framework that locates alleged pathologies in the individual, family, and community rather than focusing on institutional arrangements (e.g., white privilege, political conservatism, class stratification) that generate and perpetuate inequality. (p. 43)

In light of this, as one means of addressing the negativity associated with deficit thinking and at-risk labels, Valencia (2010) recommends rather than refer to “at-risk students”, educators should instead refer to “at-risk schools”, because these institutions, including the adverse effects students face as a result of segregation and the inequitable distribution of resources, teacher quality characteristics, and student academic performance, are the real reasons many low-income minority students are unable to realize academic success – not the students themselves.

### **Deficit Thinking and School Principals**

When principals engage in deficit thinking, the attention shifts away from the administrative, organizational and systematic shortcomings contributing to student academic failure and shift the attention to the shortcomings of the low-income minority student. When the student becomes the focus, principals focus on how students’ lack of intelligence, environmental factors, low value for education, and other student-centered explanations contribute to the inability to be academically successful. Inherent within the paradigm of deficit thinking is a set of educational assumptions, Bieneman (2011) posited, “mask organizational and social issues often overshadowing the abilities of teachers and students” (p. 231). This problem is especially exacerbated among school leaders, who should be focusing on addressing organizational and social issues. The presence of deficit-thinking among principals can hinder abilities to lead an organization capable of producing socially just and equitable educational outcomes for all students, primarily those who are low-income minorities. The lack of providing support to students based on deficit-thinking could lead to students underperforming and eventually dropping out of school. Thus, it is imperative

principals be assisted with identifying the presence of deficit thinking and taught how to confront it in the minds of all educators who work with low-income minority students.

**Identifying deficit thinking in principals.** Although difficult for many to admit, deficit thinking is present to some extent in the mind of everyone – even leaders, and even in principals. It is for this reason researchers have promoted the importance of recognizing the presence of deficit thinking and confronting it directly rather than insisting it does not exist at any level in one’s mind. Valencia (2015) supported this assertion, recommending principals who will teach ethnically diverse schools of low SES should be given opportunities to become aware, confront, and transform any deficit thinking possessed towards students from this demographic. Then, only once a prospective principal has “proven successful in coming to grips with his or deficit thinking, the aspirant should embark on professional training designed to provide strategies principals can utilize to assist teachers to eliminate their own deficit thinking” (p. 183).

Because many people are not open to considering engagement in deficit thinking at some level, teachers and principals who interface with students should be led by administrators in exercises to help them recognize the presence and engagement of deficit thinking. This is especially necessary because deficit thinking can easily mask itself as other discriminatory behaviors people would not ordinarily define as deficit thinking. For example, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) uncovered four specific “equity traps” related to deficit thinking in low-SES schools which consciously and subconsciously prevent educators from being able to create schools providing equitable educational opportunities for students of color. These traps include the deficit view, racial erasure, employment and avoidance of the gaze, and paralogic beliefs and behaviors. The researchers advocated for educational

administrators providing training for prospective principals to teach these school leaders how to identify, understand, and work to eliminate these traps so deficit thinking can be confronted and addressed and low-income students of color can receive access to a fair and equitable education.

Similarly, principals might be open to candidly expressing mentalities about low-income minority students without realizing thoughts and opinions are actually grounded in a deficit thinking mindset. An example of this is the research of Archambault and Garon (2011), who interviewed 45 elementary school principals, questioning them about the qualities, competencies, and attitudes of a principal working in a low-SES school. According to study results, “school principals saw leading a school in a disadvantaged area as: (a) an extra burden placed on them, (b) necessitating particular competencies and attitudes, (c) having to exert a transformative leadership that advocates social justice, and (d) being sustained by ongoing professional development” (p. 294). When probed, the principals also admitted within schools existed deficit thinking, false beliefs, prejudices, and a lowering of the expectations for the low-SES student population. In an interpretation of the findings, the researchers noted even though principals had initially described a role as one of fighting against prejudices, false beliefs, and deficit-thinking, and themselves had showed evidence of operating out of these same prejudices, the principals’ actual level of awareness towards prejudices and false beliefs was as high as perceived. The findings concluded all principals exhibited deficit-thinking. In light of these findings, Archambault et al. (2011) promoted the need for principals to become actively engaged in transformational leadership with a social justice emphasis in order to bring awareness to the prejudices existing towards low-SES students and to serve them more effectively.

Bieneman (2011) also supported the need for deficit thinking training among principals. In the study, the researcher explained “educational leaders will need not only become more aware of the deficit-thinking model but also to gain the skills necessary to counter dynamics that marginalize students and limit opportunities for their success” (p. 231). Part of the work principals must carry out in the role and function as transformative leaders is to understand the deficit-thinking paradigm, and understand its impact on a school’s contexts to improve the quality of educational instruction and support teachers and principals can offer students.

**Principal’s role in promoting anti-deficit mindset.** Although deficit thinking is always present to some extent among educators working with low-income minority students, the presence of a strong principal is intentional about advocating against deficit thinking can have a considerable impact on the academic outcomes of low-income minority students. For example, Riester and colleagues (2002) examined the role principals played in highly successful schools while being primarily comprised of students from low-SES homes. The researchers positioned the principal as the key influencing factor in the success of schools of this type, particularly due to their responsibility to lead the school’s efforts in overcoming deficit-thinking paradigm pervasive in schools of this nature. According to the findings, there were shared beliefs and concomitant practices among principals from these schools, including: (a) promoting a democratic culture; (b) adopting a prescriptive approach to literacy and academic success; and (c) demonstrating a stubborn persistence in getting to their goals.

Similar to Riester and colleagues’ (2002) research about the importance of principals in helping to set the climate for anti-deficit thinking in schools, Riehl (2000) underlined what

is paramount to creating the conditions necessary to produce such notable successes in schools serving children of a low SES is the leadership of the principal. Following the same line of thought, Riester et al. (2002) highlighted, “A key feature of principal leadership in these successful schools is the principal’s own belief system” (283). Haberman (1999) explained:

The essential job of the principal in implementing a belief in students’ potential is to move from blaming the victim to assuming responsibility for what and how much children can learn. For the principal to accomplish this incredibly difficult task, he or she must personally believe in students’ potential. (p. 39)

Additionally, Cormier (2009) conducted a study to investigate school leaders who led schools at one time low-performing and eventually became high-performing schools. The researcher posited school leadership “must perform a balancing act between internal and external forces over which he or she has little control” (p. 63) in order to create a culture of accountability in which leaders move away from the deficit-thinking paradigm and move towards having high expectations of economically disadvantaged students of color.

**Remedying deficit thinking in principals.** In order to defeat deficit-thinking in schools and realize better student outcomes, principals must be willing to take on the role of “anti-deficit advocate”. For example, according to Bruton and Robles-Pina (2009), school districts should provide the necessary training and development necessary for educational leaders, including teachers, principals, and district leaders, to be able to recognize the prejudices held as a result of deficit-thinking practices, to help them to gain a greater awareness of how detrimental engagement in deficit-thinking can be on the educational



achievement of students, and to put into place programs and systematic policies contradicting deficit thinking.

Offering similar recommendations, Flessa (2009) conducted a qualitative study of four principals in an urban school district and negative perceptions, characterized by the deficit thinking paradigm, of the families and communities from which students originated, a position resonant of deficit thinking paradigm. According to the study findings, the deficit-thinking in which these principals engaged was consistent with the stereotypical preconceptions held about low-income minority families and communities. The researcher recommended as part of the readiness system preparing prospective principals to lead schools in urban areas, deficit-thinking frameworks should be addressed, because these beliefs directly impact what leaders are capable of accomplishing in such schools. Further, Flessa (2009) noted “Remediating principals’ deficit frameworks is a prerequisite for school improvement and will require selecting, preparing, and supporting principals differently” (p. 334).

### **Link between Deficit Thinking and Principals’ Perceived Self-Efficacy**

It is quite possible for principals to engage in deficit thinking on a daily basis as a result of harboring blame-the-victim mentalities about students who do not perform well academically without realizing such a mentality is merely masked deficit thinking. For example, Bridgeland and colleagues’ (2009) discovered:

Although more than half of principals believe schools should hold [the expectation for all students to meet high academic standards, graduate with the skills to do college-level work, and should provide extra support to struggling students to help them meet those

standards], significant majorities of teachers and principals do not believe that students at risk for dropping out would respond to these high expectations and work harder. (p. 2)

The researchers considered this to be a finding of great concern, because when principals express support for the types of programs and initiatives proven to reduce dropout rates but do not couple these endorsements with the fundamental expectations for students to attain such high goals and with the necessary support to assist students in attaining them, these programs and initiatives are not likely to be as successful. Principals are merely engaging in deficit thinking without using the theoretical terminology. As a result, principals could easily resign themselves to the notion no matter how high the expectations of certain students, because of the principal's expectation the students will never work harder and rise to higher expectations, there is nothing the principal can do about the student's success. Put into efficacy terms, the principal lacks the self-efficacy to alter the course of the student's academic success and feels powerless to make a difference in his or her life.

Additionally Bridgeland and colleagues (2009) highlighted other statistics that are clearly grounded in the paradigm of deficit thinking:

- 45 percent of principals felt a lack of support at home was a factor in most cases of students dropping out (88% say it was a factor in at least some cases).
- 69 percent of principals felt parents bore all or most of the responsibility for students dropping out.
- 66 percent of principals did not believe students at-risk of dropping out would work harder if more were demanded of them (such as higher academic standards, more studying, and the completion homework) in order to earn a diploma.

Again, according to these findings, a larger problem is present. When principals blame the student for his or her own shortcomings, including the student's lack of support at home, parents, school work ethic, value for education, discipline to complete homework, etc., student's poor academic outcomes are attributed to the student and his or her cultural context rather than the principal and the school context. When the principal places the weight of responsibility and power to attain positive outcomes on the student, it is, for all intents and purposes, an admission the principal has absolved him or herself of any responsibility in producing the poor outcomes of the student as well as an admission he or she feels incapable of changing the outcomes.

Deficit thinking is prevalent, to some extent, in every individual. However, when principals and educators work with low-income minority students, it is of utmost importance these school leaders are taught to identify traces of this thinking, confront the thinking, and remedy it. Otherwise, principals and administrators who engage in deficit thinking will continue to have low expectations for students, because rather than feel powerful to change poor student outcomes, power to make such changes lay with the student, his or her parents, and cultural context at home. Thus, engaging in deficit thinking can leave principals feeling powerless to prevent the inevitable – poor educational outcomes among low-income minority students will result in, with a high degree of certainty, them dropping out of school.

However, despite the prevalence of deficit-thinking, which is commonly present in schools with student populations primarily serving low-income minority students, and the consistent failure of school administrators to help students realize traditional academic expectations, there is a small number of schools in which students of this traditionally underserved population do receive socially just educational opportunities at high rates of

success (Riester et al., 2002). By becoming anti-deficit thinking trailblazers on campuses, principals can advocate for the eradication of this blame-the-victim mindset and lead schools in accepting full responsibility for the educational outcomes of all students with equity and fairness.

### **Summary**

The high school dropout crisis continues to persist in the U.S. in schools predominantly comprised of low-income minority populations. The most critical factor in these schools is the leadership of the principal and his or her abilities to effectively lead schools of this nature. Researchers support the challenges experienced by principals who lead schools of this composition are markedly different from those principals experience when leading more affluent, mainstream schools. One of the challenges principals must overcome when leading low-income minority schools is the presence of deficit thinking, both in the principal him or herself and in the teachers interacting with students on a daily basis.

However, before overcoming deficit thinking, principals must first be led in the exercise of identifying the personal presence of deficit thinking, be willing to confront the presence of such thinking, and then serve as an advocate for others in the school to engage in anti-deficit mindsets so students can receive the quality attention and education needed to become academically successful.

Persisting in deficit thinking could potentially have a serious negative impact on a principal's level of self-efficacy, and having low self-efficacy could potentially have a serious negative effect on the principal's ability to curb the dropout rate at a school. This is prone to occur among principals working with low-income minority students, because it can be easy to attribute poor student academic outcomes to the student him or herself and/or

parents, culture, or home environment – defining characteristics of deficit thinking – rather than to the shortcomings of principals, teachers, administrators, and the school system in providing the necessary academic support required to make the students successful.

Consequently, by placing all of the power for students to attain positive academic outcomes within the sphere of the student and his family/home environment rather than maintaining a sense of feeling capable to change the student's level of academic success, the principal is left feeling powerless to prevent the inevitable – the eventual inevitable dropout of the high school student.

Researchers who have contributed to the literature support the notion it is possible for principals to make a difference in the dropout rates in schools, including low-income minority high schools in disadvantaged communities. When principals enter into a context of low-income minority high schools with a high dropout rate, it is essential to remain consciously aware of attempting to impact a difficult population and there are understandable reasons so many other principals do not desire to work with these populations; when they do, there is a high turnover rate among them. However, principals must also remain motivated about the possibilities existing when working with this special population and maintain a commitment to dealing with them out of a unique sense of cultural understanding. With careful attention to eliminating the influence of deficit thinking and to increasing levels of perceived self-efficacy, principals will be more likely to engage in innovative dropout prevention strategies, coaching teachers, providing feedback, and pursuing retention goals. The result will be increased morale, higher energy, and greater effectiveness in directing campus dropout prevention programs and initiatives. This inevitable outcome of such awareness and efforts will be an overall decrease in the number of student dropouts.

After a review of the body of literature surrounding principals and self-efficacy it is clear a void exists. Although researchers have examined principals and self-efficacy, research has typically been centered on principals building the individual or collective efficacy of teachers, leaving a lack of research exploring principals' own self-efficacy. Further, at the time of the review, there was no identifiable research present in the body of literature investigating the link between deficit thinking and the self-efficacy of principals and how self-efficacy under the influence of a deficit thinking paradigm might limit the behaviors principals are willing to engage in to prevent high school dropouts. Through this research study, the researcher will contribute understanding to the literature about how the topic, and the findings resulted, can be used to inform the development of preparatory and on-going training and professional development for principals deployed to work in low-income minority schools.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this research study was to understand the link between principals' deficit thinking and level of perceived self-efficacy and the impact of principals' perceived self-efficacy on the level of effort to engage in preventing African American and Hispanic students from dropping out of low-income minority high schools. African American and Hispanic students drop out of U.S. high schools at nearly twice the rate of white and Asian students, and principals are tasked with the challenge of reducing these rates. However, in order to effectively employ dropout prevention programs, these school leaders must possess the self-efficacy, or the belief they can make a difference in dropout rates of low-income, minority students (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2007) a population many consider to be at such a deficit will inevitably become dropouts.

In previous chapters, the researcher established a context for understanding factors affecting principal self-efficacy and student dropout rates at low-income minority high schools. This chapter contains the methodological practices used in this research study, including a review of the research questions and descriptions of the research design, setting and sample population, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and analysis used in the study.

## **Research Questions**

One primary research question and three sub-questions were used as a guide for this research study.

### **Research Question**

What sense of self-efficacy do principals perceive having over the dropout rates at their schools?

### **Sub-questions**

1. To what extent is principal's perceived self-efficacy over dropout rates at his or her school linked to notions of deficit thinking?
2. What additional factors or experiences have influenced principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates in schools?
3. How does principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates in schools relate to the effort invested in the prevention of high school dropouts on campuses?

## **Research Design**

The researcher employed a qualitative research design to investigate deficit thinking, principal self-efficacy, and the link of self-efficacy to principals' efforts to influence dropout rates in low-income minority high schools. According to Hays and Singh (2012), "Qualitative research is the study of a phenomenon or research topic in context" (p. 4). Further, qualitative research is conducted by researchers who "listen to individuals' accounts of a phenomenon, engaging actively, and integrating new perspectives into their own ways of understanding participants, the context, the phenomenon, or all three" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 4). This process, in which a researcher studies phenomena in its original context rather



than conducting the investigation at a distance is referred to as *local groundedness* by Miles and Huberman (1994).

According to Creswell (2013), the use of a qualitative research design is appropriate when the exploration of an issue or a problem is necessary and when the researcher aims to understand a problem or issue at a deeper, detailed and more complex level in its natural setting. Further, Creswell asserted, “This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature” (p. 48). Consistent with this methodological thought, for this study, the researcher aimed to understand at a deeper level the link between principals’ deficit thinking, self-efficacy, and efforts to reduce dropouts in low-income minority high schools. Additionally, the researcher conducted research by visiting the principals’ school and inquiring about experiences with preventing students from dropping out of school.

Qualitative inquiry is particularly effective in studies of efficacy and education. Wyatt (2015) argued for the need of more qualitative research methods to be used in studies examining the link between self-efficacy beliefs because of the greater depth of understanding offered over quantitative research methods. The researchers noted “it can be problematic if any one methodological approach to educational research is allowed to dominate any particular line of enquiry” and “a continual neglect of qualitative research methodology over the years has unfortunately led to various misconceptions and misapplications of theory” (p. 117). The notion a qualitative research tradition is appropriate for this type of research study is also supported by researchers like Shaughnessy (2004), who asserted “Qualitative methods are appropriate for an exploration of factors that mediate

efficacy development” (p. 155). It is also supported by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), who stated utilizing qualitative methods can assist researchers with investigating “how people such as teachers, principals, and students think and how they came to develop the perspectives they hold” (p. 3). Thus, the researcher’s selection of a qualitative method for this study was closely aligned with the recommendations of the literature.

The researcher selected a case study method to conduct the qualitative research. Case studies are only one of several types of qualitative research; other qualitative research approaches include narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenological (Creswell, 2013). The research goal is the primary determination for which approach should be selected by the researcher to conduct and analyze the research. For example, researchers use a narrative approach when the research goal is to describe and collect stories about individual, focusing on a single person’s experience rather than a group (Creswell, 2013). A grounded theory approach is used by researchers when the research goal is to discover theory from data obtained through the research (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). When the research goal is to “enter a field situation and to obtain basic information about social structure, social events, cultural patterns, and the meanings people give to these patterns” (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013, p. ix), an ethnographic approach is employed by researchers. A phenomenological approach is employed by researchers when the research goal is to find meaning about a particular phenomenon, concept, or experience encountered by multiple people (Creswell, 2013). However, a case study approach is the most relevant approach to qualitative research when: (a) the research questions seek to investigate how or why some social phenomenon or circumstance occurs; or (b) the research questions require an extensive or in-depth description of the social phenomenon or circumstance (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2009) defined, “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Creswell (2006) asserted “a case is a specific, unique, bounded system, and the case study allows the researcher to study individual(s), events, activities, or processes/elements of a bounded system” (cited in Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 44). There are several characteristics of qualitative case study inquiry including: “(a) It copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points; (b) It relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion; and (c) It benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Then, Stake (2005) explained case studies are categorized in three ways characterized by levels of applicability: (a) in intrinsic case studies, the researcher has an internally guided, or intrinsic, interest in a particular case; (b) in instrumental case studies, the researcher seeks out cases to assist in an understanding of a particular issue exterior to a specific case; and (c) in collective case studies, the researcher examines multiple cases and uses them to investigate a more general or broad phenomenon or population (in Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 46). Due to the applicability of the research results, the researcher conducted this research study using an instrumental case study. This study was also a multiple-case case study, which is a type of case study “can cover multiple cases and then draw a single set of ‘cross case’ conclusions” (Yin, 2009, p. 20).

The selection of a case study approach was most appropriate for this research study for several reasons. Hays and Singh (2012) emphasized the case study tradition “is particularly useful in counseling and education because practitioners are interested both in

unique dimensions of a case... as well as their more generalized applicability to other individuals” (p. 46). In addition, Schwandt (2001) underscored it is preferable to use case study strategy “when the inquirer seeks answers to how or why questions, when the inquirer has little control over events being studied, when the object of study is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, when boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear, and when it is desirable to use multiple sources of evidence (p. 23). The research under investigation met each one of the case study criteria highlighted in Schwandt (2001), and thus, the method was preferred for conducting this research study.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), it is advisable to utilize multiple sources of data collection because multiple sources “lead to fuller understanding of the phenomena you are studying” (p. 107). Also, Moustakas (1994) advised any form of data collection used to describe the phenomenon under investigation should be collected and evaluated in order to gain a greater understanding of the lived experience. Thus, several methods of data collection were employed by the researcher in this case study, including campus observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. These various data collection methods are three of the four basic sources of qualitative information, which according to Creswell (2013) include “interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual materials” (p. 52). With the exception of audio-visual materials, each of the other data sources was engaged by the researcher for the study. Utilizing multiple forms of data collection is one criterion by which qualitative studies are considered to have undergone the type of rigor to qualify them as high-quality research (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher conducted research at each site in two phases – an observation phase and an interview phase – triangulating observations from the observation phase with the

interview phase. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), triangulation, or using multiple sources to examine data from different points of view, results in greater accuracy in the researcher's analysis and interpretation of study results.

In the first phase, which was the observation phase, the researcher visited each participating high school campus and making observations for the case study within the context in which the dropout phenomenon was occurring. In the second phase, which was the interview phase, the researcher returned to the same schools for a subsequent visit at a later time and conducted semi-structured interviews with the principals and focus group interviews with both the principals and dropout coaches.

The researcher began the observation phase with a one hour campus observation as a qualitative method. While touring and sitting in silent observation at each of the high school campuses, the researcher made notations in a researcher's journal recording observations about campus conditions, interactions between teachers, students, and administrative personnel, campus culture, and other items could potentially contribute to understanding the issue of high school dropouts on the campus. Creswell (2013) also recommended the researcher make notes about experiences during the data collection process, what he or she learned as a result of the process, as well as any hunches he or she felt while collecting data. These notes helped the researcher to develop a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the dropout condition on each of the high school campuses.

The researcher conducted the interview phase two weeks following observation phase of data collection; the researcher returned to each participating high school to engage in the interview phase of data collection. The researcher began the interview phase by conducting semi-structured interviews with the principals responsible for leadership and oversight at

each high school campus. Next, the researcher used 10 open-ended interview questions to guide face-to-face principal interviews for the purpose of gaining an understanding about the central phenomenon of the research study (Creswell, 2013). The researcher developed the questions after the first phase of data collection; based upon what the researcher observed and the documents the researcher reviewed while on campus, open-ended interview questions were developed to explain and probe more deeply into what was observed. To ensure the researcher gathered descriptive data on salient points important to measure for the study while simultaneously ensuring the principals had an opportunity to share in-depth information and stories about personal experiences, the researcher used pre-constructed open-ended interview questions. Patton (1987) explained “an open ended interview... permits the respondent to describe what is meaningful and salient without being pigeonholed into standardized categories” (p. 15). Weiss (1994) supported this notion, noting interviews provide fuller responses and offer greater “coherence, depth, and density of the material each respondent provides” (p.3).

The researcher opted to utilize semi-structured interviews, recognizing the potential existence for the conversation to organically flow into other areas, depending upon the participant’s responses. This is consistent with Creswell’s (2013) assertion, qualitative studies are carried out with an emergent design, allowing for the initial plan to be loosely adhered to rather than tightly followed, and compensating for the potential during the process of collecting the data, the questions might change. Such an approach was necessary because “The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and engage in the best practices to obtain information” (Creswell, 2013, p. 47).

The notion of allowing for a less-rigid interview protocol is also consistent with Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing model, which allows the researcher to change the open-ended questions asked in the study in order to gain the greatest level of insight possible into the topic of investigation.

Following face-to-face interviews with the high school principals, during the same campus visit, the researcher utilized focus groups with each campus principal and dropout prevention team as a qualitative method. Researchers often use focus groups in multi-method studies "combine two or more means of gathering data in which no one primary method determines the use of the others" (Morgan, 1997, p. 2). The data collected through focus groups are added by the researcher to the data collected through other methods and the researchers uses the focus group data to assist with contributing to the researcher's understanding about a particular phenomenon and are especially helpful in obtaining information not accessible through other qualitative methods like individual interviews (Morgan, 1997). Similarly, Creswell (2013) noted focus groups can be beneficial when the researcher desires to observe interactions between interviewees and also adds this type of group interviewing can be helpful when people might be reluctant to provide certain information when interviewed one-on-one, when there is only a limited window in which the researcher can collect information from the participants, and when the focus group participants are similar and cooperative. Each of these criteria is applicable to the circumstances of this research study, validating the use of focus group interviewing as a viable qualitative method of data collection.

The focus group interview protocol consisted of five open-ended questions designed to guide the conversation between the researcher, the principal, and dropout prevention

coach. The researcher designed the questions on the protocol to encourage principals and dropout prevention coaches to expound on feelings of efficacy, the potential influence of deficit thinking on sense of efficacy, and the programs and initiatives actively employing in efforts to prevent dropouts in schools.

### **Target Population, Sampling Method and Related Procedures**

#### **Target Population**

The target population for the study included principals of low-income minority high schools within a specified school district in the state of Texas who were employed during the 2015-2016 school year. The researcher targeted principals leading these schools because it is estimated one-third of Texas students drop out of school before completing school and because in 2013, “African American students had the highest longitudinal dropout rate across racial/ethnic groups (9.9%), followed by Hispanics (8.2%)” (TEA, 2014, p. xi). Within the selected school district, these statewide trends continued, with African Americans having the lowest graduation rate (78.4%) followed by Hispanic students’ graduation rate (81.6%). Thus, the chosen population of principals was targeted because of the persistence of high dropouts among minority students in schools (HISD, 2014).

Additionally, the researcher targeted this population because its Improvement Required status and use of dropout prevention programs. Although high school dropouts remain prevalent among minority students in Texas, many school districts still report not having dropout prevention programs in place, and among the districts with such programs in place, few of the administrators leading these districts audit dropout programs or investigate the effectiveness of programs (TEA, 2014). The leaders in the selected district in which the principals for this study were employed have implemented the use of dropout prevention



programs, including the employment of dropout prevention personnel. The leaders in the selected district also regularly evaluate the effectiveness of its dropout prevention efforts. Thus, the study was able to investigate how self-efficacy beliefs were linked to principals' efforts to reduce dropouts through the use of these dropout prevention programs.

### **Sampling Method**

The sampling method the researcher utilized to access the principals selected for participation in the research study was purposive sampling. The researcher engaged purposive sampling for the research study because the intention of this sampling method is “to select participants for the amount of detail they can provide about a phenomenon and not simply selecting participants to meet a certain sample size” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 8). Participants selected through the purposive sampling process are considered to be experts on the phenomenon under investigation and thus become partners, alongside the investigator, in the research (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Sample Size**

The sample size for the research study included three high school principals leading low-income minority schools within the selected Texas school district and who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research study. According to Hays and Singh (2012), there is no right number of participants necessary to comprise a sample size when utilizing purposive sampling. Instead of seeking to fill a pre-established quota of participants for inclusion in case study research, Stake (2005) argued, “Researchers select cases that offer the greatest opportunity to learn and thus more often the case or cases to which they have the greatest accessibility” (cited in Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 46).

## **Setting**

Research was conducted at the principals' schools selected for the research study. The researcher took campus observation tours at each respective high school campus. Each principal was interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview protocol was conducted by the researcher in the principal's office. Focus group sessions with the principal and dropout prevention administrators took place in a neutral administrative area of the school. All research was conducted by the researcher during school hours.

## **Recruitment**

The researcher began the recruitment process with a pool of the forty high schools within the selected school district. First, the researcher filtered out the high schools by the low-income population criteria examining which high schools offered free or reduced lunch, a program based upon economic criteria of its student population; only schools with a high population of low-income students were eligible to offer the free or reduced lunch program, and each of these schools is predominantly minority in composition with high dropout rates relative to schools not low-income minority schools. This filtering process yielded seventeen schools fitting the purpose of the research study. Next, the researcher sent correspondence to each of the seventeen high school principals with an invitation to participate in the research study, requesting a reply to the invitation by a specified deadline of two weeks. At the end of the two-week deadline, three of the principals voluntarily consented to participate in the research study along with campus dropout coaches. After additional follow-up on the principals not responding by the two-week deadline, the researcher secured no additional participants. Thus, principals selected for inclusion by the researcher were those who led low-income minority high schools in the selected district and who volunteered to participate

within the research study, and those whom the researcher deselected included those who did not meet the school population criteria and those who did meet the criteria but did not volunteer to participate in the study.

### **Description of the Sample**

The sample engaged by the researcher for the purpose of this research study was comprised of three high school principals and seven administrators from a large school district in Houston, Texas. Study participants ranged in age from 35 to 60. Among the principals, one was a Hispanic male (School A), one was an African American male (School B), and one was a white female (School C). On average, the three principals held nearly seventeen years of experience in the educational arena. Principal A had twelve years of experience and started as a high school history teacher who later became a high school assistant principal. After two successful years as an assistant principal, he transitioned to middle school as an assistant principal. Two years later, he became a middle school principal and later transitioned to the high school principal position at his current school. Each campus he has worked on has been a low performing school and he has been successful at drastically improving student achievement. He grew up in a low income family where his family migrated to America from Mexico. Principal A attended college on a football scholarship. Principal B had twelve years of educational experience. He had several years as an elementary principal, a middle school principal, and a school support officer. During his tenure as an elementary principal, his school won a Blue Ribbon Award. He also brought a failing middle school from low performing to high performing. He grew up in an impoverished family in the south side of Chicago. Every night he heard gun fire and saw heinous acts of crime. Principal B is the only one in his family to attend college and have a

professional career. Principal C had 26 years of experience in instruction and administration. She spent ten plus years of her career as an elementary teacher, assistant principal, and principal. The last ten years have been spent as a middle school principal. Her middle school was in an affluent area of the city. This was her first year as an administrator in a high risk school. She grew up in a single parent home and is the only sibling of eight kids to have a college education. As a teenager, her parent could not afford for her to attend college. Her high school did not have a girls' cross country team so she ran track on the boys cross country team, which enabled her to gain a scholarship to college. Principal B and C had been serving as principal for less than one year at the time of the interview; Principal B had been serving in the position for four months and Principal C had been serving in the position for six months. Principal A had been serving at School A for a year at the time of the interview. Principal A had 100 dropouts among a population of 1,861 students. Principal B had 68 dropouts among a student population of 1028 students. School C had 101 dropouts among a student population of 2,100 students. Each of the principals reported having either caseworkers, counselors, or both present to address the needs of their students in order to curb and prevent dropouts.

Among the seven dropout-prevention administrators participated in the focus group interviews, each was a minority including the female caseworker working on campus for a university-sponsored research project designed to pilot a new dropout prevention program. School A's dropout prevention administrators consisted of an African American female who served as the Assistant Principal in charge of attendance and dropout prevention and the researcher. School B's dropout prevention administrators consisted of three African American females: a dropout prevention caseworker, the student data coordinator, and the

registrar. School C's dropout prevention administration consisted of a Hispanic male, who served as the at-risk and mentorship coordinator.

For the purposes of maintaining anonymity of all study participants, actual names of principals, administrators, and schools were not used in the reporting of research findings. Pseudonyms were assigned to represent each school respectively: School A and Principal A, School B and Principal B, and School C and Principal C. Administrators from each school were also identified using the A, B, or C identifier assigned to each school.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher utilized two instruments as a means of data collection for the research study: an interview protocol for use in semi-structured interviews with the principals and a focus group protocol to guide the discussion in the focus group with the principal and his or her dropout prevention coach.

First, the researcher constructed a ten question interview protocol based upon observations gathered during the observation phase of data collection. Any efficacy or dropout-related occurrences or incidents the researcher witnessed while conducting the observations and about which the researcher desired to gain additional insights were used to construct questions on the protocol to be used when conducting the one-on-one interviews with the principals. Questions were designed by the researcher to guide the semi-structured principal interviews as a means of gaining additional insight into the self-efficacy beliefs of the principals and the impact deficit-thinking might have on these beliefs. Morgan (1997) wrote "distinct advantage of individual interviews occurs when the goal of the research is to gain an in-depth understanding of a person's opinions and experiences" (p. 11).

Second, the researcher utilized a focus group protocol to guide the discussion in the focus group consisting of the principal and his or her dropout prevention coach, again using the results of the observations conducted on the campus in the observation phase to inform the content of the interview protocol. Combining the use of a focus group protocol with interviews in this research study can be helpful in gaining deeper insight into the phenomenon under investigation. According to Morgan (1997), “Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants’ opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from post hoc analyses of separate statements from each interviewee” (p. 10). Thus, the focus group protocol was developed by the researcher to gain greater insight into the actions the principal was taking on a programmatic level to prevent dropouts in the high school with the assistance of the dropout coach and to assess the level of energy he or she was contributing to the dropout efforts while simultaneously observing the interaction between the dropout coach and the principal. The input from the dropout prevention coach about the principal’s level of activity would provide support for whether the principal was fully engaged and committed to employing every means possible of preventing dropouts or whether he or she was only making minimal, half-hearted efforts to reduce dropouts because of feelings of powerlessness to prevent the inevitable dropout of some of the students in the school.

The researcher contacted each principal via e-mail to schedule an appointment for both the observation phase of data collection and the subsequent interview phase of the data collection. Once both dates were set, the researcher arrived at the high school campus on the first date to engage in the observation phase. First, the principal led the researcher on a tour of the high school campus. During this time, the researcher conducted observations about the

facilities, the faculty members, administrative staff, principal, and students, as well as any interactions observed between the parties. The researcher made mental note of the various dynamics observed during the tour and made a written record of the observations after the tour concluded. Following the guided tour, the researcher sat alone in a common area for one hour and conducted additional observations of the school, the faculty and staff, and the students, making notes in the researcher's journal about the observations. Aside from brief introductions to a few faculty and administrative staff members made by the dropout prevention coach, the researcher had no interaction or dialogue with any person on the campus during the tour. At the end of the campus visit, after all of the data collection activity was completed, sitting in his personal vehicle, the researcher made final notations in a researcher's journal about observations, hunches, and experiences encountered while on the high school campus.

Approximately two weeks following the completion of the observation phase of data collection, the researcher returned to the campus for the interview phase of data collection. Each campus was visited on separated days to maintain consistency and allow adequate time for the researcher to gather information. On the day of interview data collection, the researcher met each principal at his or her respective school. After arriving at the research site and being directed to the principal's office, the researcher provided a consent form for the principal to review and sign. Once the principal signed the consent form, the researcher used a script to explain the purpose of the research study, the amount of time needed to complete the semi-structured interview, and how the results from the interview would be used in the research study (Creswell, 2013). Next, the researcher informed the principal the interview session would be recorded. Upon gaining the principals' consent for recording, the

interview began. The researcher asked the principal questions from the approved interview protocol, encouraging the principal to explain his or answers with examples, anecdotes, stories, and other information, which would serve to provide insight into the impact of deficit thinking on his or her level of self-efficacy and on how his or her level of self-efficacy was linked to efforts to prevent dropouts among the low-income minority students in the school. Throughout the interview, the researcher recorded written notes about key points and topics calling for further exploration. The semi-structured interview with each principal lasted for one hour. Throughout the interview, the researcher engaged in repeated verification, making constant assessments and reassessments about the significance of the data being collected with the aim of representing the principals' experiences as closely and genuinely as possible (Moustakas, 1990).

Next, after completing the interview with the principal, the researcher and the principal departed from the principal's office and relocated to a more neutral setting in the school for the one-hour focus group interview. Upon arrival in the neutral location, the dropout prevention coach joined the principal and the researcher for the focus group interview. The researcher presented a consent form to the dropout prevention coach, asking him or her to sign the form prior to beginning the interview. Following this, the researcher used a script to explain to the dropout prevention coach the purpose of the research study, the amount of time needed to complete the focus group interview, and the researcher's plans for using the results of the focus group interviews in the research (Creswell, 2013). Then, the researcher notified the principal and dropout prevention coach the interview would be recorded, and when both parties consented to the recording, the interview began. The researcher asked the principal and dropout prevention coach questions from the focus group



interview protocol, encouraging elaboration using examples, anecdotes, and stories, which would help the researcher develop a clear picture of the level of effort the principal was engaging to prevent the dropout of African American and Hispanic students on the high school campus. When necessary, to gain further insight into an area of interest, the researcher asked probing questions not appearing on the formal protocol of focus group questions. Throughout the focus group interview, the researcher recorded written notes and observations about the responses and interactions between the principal and the dropout prevention coach. Again, the researcher engaged in the process of repeated verification was also used throughout the focus group interviews in order to ensure the principals' and dropout coaches' experiences were represented as genuinely and closely as possible in the data collection process (Moustakas, 1990).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The researcher engaged Miles and Huberman's (1994) generally recommended strategy for the analysis of all data collected for the research study. Miles and Huberman (1994) offer a recommended strategy for approaching the analysis of qualitative data: (a) affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observations or interviews; (b) noting reflections or other remarks in the margins; (c) sorting and sifting through these materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences; (d) isolating these patterns and processes, commonalities and differences, and taking them out to the field in the next wave of data collection; (e) gradually elaborating a small set of generalizations covering the consistencies discerned in the database; and (f) confronting those generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories (p. 91).

In addition to using Miles and Huberman's (1994) strategy for the analysis of the data, the researcher also engaged specifically in one of Stake's (1995) four major forms of data analysis with case study designs: categorical aggregation. Categorical aggregation was used primarily in the third step of general analysis, which consists of "Sorting and sifting through these materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 91). In using categorical aggregation, the researcher must "examine several occurrences for critical incidents, concerns, and issues within the data" collected (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 340). Thus, the researcher examined each case in the data for recurring themes, to construct categories, and to highlight instances holding meaning according to the guidelines of categorical aggregation.

Hays and Singh (2012) explain researchers working with case studies, tend to collect data from multiple sources and consequently, the researcher has to choose from multiple options of how the data will be analyzed. In light of this, the researcher's decision on how to analyze the data should be "guided by the case itself and not by the many factors surrounding and/or involved in the case" (p. 340). In an effort to ensure the analysis of the one-on-one interview data, focus group interview data, and researcher observations were guided by the case itself, the researcher defined the themes by which the data would be analyzed based upon the research questions guiding the case and defined the categories under each theme by the topics presented in the literature review. In taking this strategic approach, during the analysis, the researcher was able to more easily identify excerpts from the data that held direct meaning and relevance for the case study and the questions its research was designed to answer.

The methodology of reduction, in which the researcher engages in an “analysis of specific statements and themes and a search for all possible meanings,” is used to analyze qualitative one-on-one interview and focus group data in a research study (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). Specifically, the reductionist method utilized to analyze the data are the four phases of data analysis for case study designs promoted by Stake (1995): (a) categorical aggregation, in which the researcher examines several occurrences for incidents, concerns, and issues among the data collected; (b) direct interpretation, in which the researcher analyzes the data by directly interpreting the meaning of a singular critical incident, concern, or issue in the data, essentially taking one element of the data and analyzing it for meaning before interpreting it within the context of the whole case for meaning; (c) pattern identification, which the researcher constructs broad categories of themes within the case, analyzing any relationships or interactions present between or among them; (d) naturalistic generalization, in which the researcher interprets the data, keeping in mind how an audience would be able to use the broad categories or findings by transferring them or applying them to another case (cited in Hays & Singh, 2012, pp. 340-341).

While conducting the analysis, the researcher also used memos, which is the process of making notes and recording the researcher’s reflections throughout the research process. Hays and Singh (2012) assert developing memos about additional thoughts, details or impressions might come to mind during or after data collection and while engaging in analysis is a beneficial way to ensure this information is considered in the process of analysis.

Additionally, when conducting analysis, Creswell (2013) encourages researchers to not only examine the major findings of a case study but to provide important details, or a

case description, about the salient facts surrounding the case itself. Stake (2005) also recommends reporting on several standard components should be present in case study research, including: (a) the nature of the case; (b) the case's historical background; (c) the physical setting of the case; (d) economic, political, legal, aesthetic, and other contexts; (e) other cases to which this case is attached; and (f) the informants through whom the case is known (Stake, 2005). Thus, as a feature of the data analysis, the researcher provided a description of the details surrounding the recommended components of the research conducted at each high school.

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

There were two identifiable limitations to the research design, particularly those surrounding the use of a case study method. First, Yin (2009) acknowledges other qualitative research methods are often considered to be more rigorous than the case study method, and for this reason, many researchers will engage the case study method as an exploratory stage of research preceding another method of research used for the primary collection of data. Also, when conducting research of this nature, it is impossible to completely separate the researcher from the research (Hays & Singh, 2012), and consequently, researcher bias is always a threat when conducting qualitative research. Consistent with this thought, Haverkamp (2005) explains, "The researcher's values, personal history, and 'position' on characteristics such as gender, culture, class, and age are inescapable elements of this inquiry" (p. 147). In light of this potential, Hays and Singh (2012) suggest to maintain researcher neutrality, researchers should constantly question and reflect on the role personal and professional interests might play in conducting and analyzing research, taking any steps possible to minimize such bias. In order to minimize the effects of this limitation, while

conducting each step of this research study, the researcher remained consciously aware of the presence of bias and was intentional in maintaining objectivity and neutrality as much as possible.

### **Credibility**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are several considerations ensuring certain standards of trustworthiness are met in qualitative research. In order to ensure the credibility, or validity of research, researchers are urged to: (a) undergo prolonged engagement in a research setting; (b) share data and interpretations with individuals who participated in the research study; (c) gather data from multiple sources and using multiple methods; and (d) engage in peer debriefing, in which emergent findings of the research is discussed with critical friends. Throughout the research process in this research study, the researcher employed each of these strategies to increase the credibility of the research findings.

In accordance with these recommendations, the researcher spent in-depth time on the three high school campuses conducting observations, reviewing documents, and conducting interviews and focus groups. Next, the researcher gathered data from multiple sources using multiple methods and then triangulated the data collected in the observation phase of the research with the data collected in the interview phase of the data collection process, all for the purpose of ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the findings (Patton, 1990). Additionally, the research findings and preliminary analyses were shared with the principals and dropout coaches once all of the data was collected. Finally, the researcher discussed the final analysis with other education leadership professionals for the sake of debriefing in order to ensure the researcher's interpretations were accurate. Combined with the use of a well-

defined research question, a comprehensive methodology, carefully documented data collection, and the sound ethical standards were employed throughout the research process, these research strategies have helped to ensure the study is both trustworthy and believable.

### **Transferability**

Yuksel and Yildirim (2015) explain transferability, generalizability, or external validity, is a construct measuring whether research findings can be generalized to other contexts and situations outside of the research study itself. The researchers cite Johnson (1997), asserting “The findings from qualitative research are generally less generalizable to other populations, contexts, and time” (p. 14). Researchers generally agree the case study method provides little basis for scientific generalization. However, Yin (2009) counters this concern by explaining “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (p. 15). Thus, even though the case study might not be applied beyond the boundaries of the population studied, it can assist other researchers with the development of theoretical constructs when working with similar paradigms.

### **Ethical Issues**

Creswell (2013) highlights various ethical considerations about which researchers should be aware prior to conducting the study, beginning to conduct the study, while collecting the data, when analyzing and reporting the data, and after publishing the study. These include considerations like seeking approval from the institution and campus prior to attempting to conduct research, gaining permission from participants to include them in the study and/or observe environments, having consent forms signed by all participants, fully disclosing the purpose of the research study, respecting the norms of the participants and

environments, refraining from asking questions creating power imbalances among the participants, causing as little disruption as possible when site visits are made, protecting sensitive information, avoiding taking sides, reporting all aspects of the data collected (both good and bad), and presenting the results in an honest manner (p. 58-59). Each of these considerations was taken into account, employed by the researcher, and used as guiding principles to undergird the data collection and analysis of the research. As a result, the research posed no risk to any of the individuals participating in the research study.

### **Researcher's Position Statement**

As an educational professional employed by the school district in which the research study took place, the researcher is responsible for overseeing the daily operations of a low-income minority high school in the district. Engagement with principals and other administrators and faculty within the district has provided the researcher with opportunities to discuss issues of high school dropouts and the factors affecting principals' efforts to reduce them on a daily basis. The research topic under investigation in this study emerged as a result of these discussions and interactions as well as the researcher's desire to gain greater understanding about the factors affecting efforts taken to reduce dropouts in the researcher's own school.

### **Conflict of Interest Assessment**

Despite the researcher's role as a leader in the school district serving as the backdrop for the research study and the researcher's interaction with other leaders in the district, there are no interactions in the research study representing any foreseeable conflict of interest.

## **Researcher's Position**

The researcher claims no particular bias regarding the topic addressed in this research study.

## **Summary**

This chapter presented a review of the purpose and research questions guiding the research and introduced the qualitative process used as a methodological framework for the study. A case study method was engaged to collect data for the study and to guide the study's analysis. Participants for the research study were selected using purposive sampling and consisted of three high school principals and dropout prevention coaches. Additionally, the process of collecting data, a description of the instruments used to collect data, and issues of credibility, transferability, and ethics were discussed.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

The purpose of this research study was to understand the link between deficit thinking and principals' perceived self-efficacy, and perceived self-efficacy on the level of effort principals are willing to engage in to prevent African American and Hispanic students from dropping out of high schools. The following research question guided the research study: What sense of self-efficacy do principals perceive having over the dropout rates at in schools? Additionally, three sub-questions helped to inform the research study: (a) To what extent is principal's perceived self-efficacy over dropout rates at schools linked to notions of deficit thinking?; (b) What additional factors or experiences have influenced principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates in schools?; and (c) How does principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates in schools relate to the effort invested in the prevention of high school dropouts on campuses? Using interviews with school principals and focus groups including principals, dropout prevention coaches, and school caseworkers, study participants discussed the state of high school dropouts on respective campuses, the efforts taken to mitigate them, and the level of power or influence possessed to reduce the dropout rates of low-income minority students. This chapter presents the research findings of the study based upon the analysis of the interviews, focus groups, and the researcher's notes recorded throughout the data collection process.

#### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

A qualitative case study approach was adopted to investigate principal self-efficacy and its impact on principals' motivation and efforts to influence dropout rates in high schools. The study was conducted using an observation phase, during which the researcher

toured each high school campus and recorded observations in a notebook and an interview phase in which the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each respective high school principal, followed by a focus group interview including the principal and his/her dropout prevention individual or team as participants.

Because this research study focused on the self-efficacy, deficit thinking, and efforts to prevent dropouts of the principals, all statements made by the principals in both the interviews and focus groups were considered in the analysis. Statements made by administrators participating in the focus groups were analyzed for the purpose of gaining insight into the programs, initiatives and other efforts under each principal's leadership was engaged in to reduce and prevent dropouts among low-income minority students. Additionally, administrators' statements were analyzed to ascertain the types of challenges present in the school potentially affecting each principal's sense of self-efficacy. In conducting the analysis according to this manner, all participants involved in the individual interviews and focus groups were significantly represented in the final analysis of the data. Based on the interviews with all principals, four themes emerged.

### **Summary of the Findings**

Four themes were present in the data:

1. Self-efficacy Level
2. Influences on Self-Efficacy
3. Deficit Thinking Present
4. Efforts to Prevent Dropouts

As is often experienced when analyzing qualitative data, some overlap occurs among themes, categories, and sub-categories (Creswell, 2006), most often between Self-efficacy Level (notably in the category of “Implied Self-efficacy”), Influences on Self-efficacy and between the themes of Deficit Thinking Presence and Influences on Self-efficacy. The consistency of Self-Efficacy within the themes, categories, and sub-categories creates a pattern of data that allows the researcher to thoroughly analyze the thoughts of each principal. Through various questions, the researcher is able to determine variation in Self-Efficacy demonstrated. After the variation of Self-Efficacy is determined, the researcher analyzes criteria that may influence the Self -Efficacy of each principal. The presence of Deficit Thinking is analyzed through a battery of questions to assess each principal’s perception of their environment. After Presence of Deficit Thinking is analyzed, the researcher seeks to establish a correlation on the influence of Self-Efficacy, if Deficit Thinking is present. The last theme considers the previous themes and analyzes the potential impact Self-Efficacy and Deficit Thinking have on each principal’s effort to prevent dropouts. The last theme may prove to be one of the most important components of the study because it actually assesses the translation of Self-Efficacy to actual actions demonstrated to prevent dropouts.

Table 1

*Themes Emergent from Interviews and Focus Groups*

Theme	Criterion	Responses Coded to Theme
Self-efficacy Level		
	Stated Sense of Efficacy	5
	Implied Sense of Efficacy	55
	Theme Total	60
Influences on Self-efficacy		
	Systemic and Resource Factors	30
	Student Factors	63
	Experiences and Training	13
	Theme Total	106
Deficit Thinking Presence		
	Responses that lack Deficit Thinking	0
	Responses that infer Deficit Thinking	22
	Theme Total	22
Efforts to Prevent Dropouts		
	Programs and Initiatives	30
	Personal Efforts	86
	Theme Total	116

## Theme 1: Self-efficacy Level

This theme was constructed to describe the principal's level of self-efficacy. It consists of two categories: (a) Stated Sense of Efficacy (SSE); and (b) Implied Sense of Efficacy (ISE).

**Stated sense of efficacy.** Data were coded as Stated Sense of Efficacy (SSE) when principals made statements expressly stating a sense of self-efficacy in regards to being able to impact dropout rates among the students. Criterion under the Stated Sense of Efficacy category included: (1) High; and (2) Moderate.

Table 2

*Responses Coded to Stated Sense of Efficacy (SSE)*

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Total
High	1	1	0	2
Moderate	0	2	1	3
Low	0	0	0	0
Total	1	3	1	5

**High.** Two of the principals, Principal A and Principal B, stated high levels of self-efficacy to curb dropout rates. When asked by the researcher, “Do you feel that you can make a significant difference in the lives of your students to help them stay in school?” both of them responded, “Absolutely”. However, Principal C, when asked the same question, did not reply as definitively. In response to the same question, she responded, “So, yeah, I feel like we can make a significant difference in their lives, but it’s convincing them and showing

them we mean what we say, we say what we mean, and we're here to help you and create an environment where, you know, you can make... get everything you need." The designation of high is determined because the principals voiced in a confident manner possessing the ability to prevent dropout rates. The principal could also verbalize alternative actions to potentially address challenges experienced daily involving position.

**Moderate.** Throughout the course of the interview, Principal B went on to make additional comments suggesting a lower sense of self-efficacy than initially stated. He spoke of his past leadership encounters with elementary and middle school and how he was confident he could make a significant difference in schools at these lower levels, but now he was leading a high school, his sense of efficacy seemed to be shifting. At one point, he commented about his sense of self-efficacy, "Now that I'm at high school, it's even less, because there's so many outside influences these kids are involved in, whether it's academics, sports... drugs, sex, I mean, you run the spectrum, right?" He also went on to admit concerning his sense of efficacy, "So... I do have limitations. I would love to say that I don't, but I have a lot of limitations on what I can do to help kids." Moderate highlights a combination of strong statements demonstrating confidence to make a difference in a difficult environment with a few statements alluding to some concern and doubt but not severe hopelessness. Moderate could also serve with neutral responses of neither low or high.

**Low.** None of the principals interviewed exhibited low levels of self-efficacy. Low is categorized by negative statements of environment and continued demonstrations of hopelessness. For example, a principal communicates he or she does not believe he or she could effectively affect dropouts on campus would be scored low. Lack of suggestions to decrease dropouts on campus will also cause a participant to receive a low score.

**Implied sense of efficacy.** Data were coded as Implied Sense of Efficacy (ISE) when principals made comments offering some indication or intimation as to how level of self-efficacy was perceived, even though it was not explicitly stated. Criteria under the Implied Sense of Efficacy category included: (a) Belief in abilities to perform; (b) Sense of power; (c) Internal motivation; (d) Determination and commitment; (e) Creativity in problem solving; (e) Job satisfaction; (f) View of change; (g) Emotional state; (h) Maintain standards and expectations.

Table 3

*Responses Coded to Implied Sense of Efficacy (ISE)*

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Total
Belief in abilities to perform	0	3	0	3
Sense of power	1	2	6	9
Internal motivation	4	6	0	10
Determination and commitment	5	0	4	9
Creativity in problem solving	5	2	11	18
Job satisfaction	0	0	2	2
View of change	1	1	0	2
Emotional state	0	0	0	0
Maintain standards and expectations	0	0	2	2
Total	16	14	25	55

***Belief in abilities to perform.*** Two of the principals made at least one statement expressing a belief in abilities to perform, which is considered to be an indicator of strong

self-efficacy. Principal B made several statements both suggesting and questioning his abilities to perform in making an impact on the dropout rates of his low-income minority student population. For example, as he was speaking about some of the major changes he had already made during his short tenure at the school, he said, “I think, you know, as I’ve been told, just in the four months of being here at [School B], for example, we’ve done some things that has [sic] not been done before. And I think it’s just having school, but they think of it as a major change!” He also expressed the following belief in the strategic approach he was taking to lead the organization towards curbing dropouts:

...I think that that strategy alone can make a difference in any type of school, provided that the leadership at the school knows the population that they are going to serve. You have to know who you’re trying to affect and make a positive impact and so you can actually back up and look at, okay, how do I... what do I need in order to make this ship be successful?

However, Principal B also continued to make a comment suggesting there were limitations to his belief in his abilities to perform, saying, “But again, I can’t... I know my limits, right?”

Principal C’s comment regarding a belief in abilities to perform actually surrounded her lack of belief she would be able to do the job required of her as the principal of the school, because prior to being selected to lead School C, she had never worked with high school students before. She comments, “But when I was given this job, you know, I think that, um... I told Dr. Grier, and I believe it... I said ‘I’m *not* the best person for the job, [Superintendent]! I mean, seriously, there’s *got* to be somebody with high school experience!’”

***Sense of power.*** Expressing a sense of power to affect change in a situation is an indication a person has a strong sense of self-efficacy, while expressing a sense of



powerlessness is an indication a person's sense of efficacy in a situation is diminished. The evidence of sense of power is demonstrated by a principal's ability to create initiative and persist when faced with challenges. There were several statements made alluding to helplessness when referring to addressing the global concerns of dropouts within the context of schools. For example, each of the principals made several statements, in some cases, suggesting a sense of power over being able to impact the dropout rates in respective schools and, in some cases, suggested a sense of powerlessness. Principal A offered only one comment indicating having a sense of power over the dropout conditions at the school when he stated, "So we are doing several things that are working. We've just got to keep doing them." However, he also made several other statements indicating a sense of powerlessness, like, "The power of influence that I would have over someone like that is limited, again, due to time," and "I think the number one factor is being at a high school with this experience at this point, um... there are outside factors that you can't handle." Principal A also mentions:

When you have that much negativism in the background of a student or in their home life or just in their circle, you can feel like you are making progress, but any situation can present itself and just take you right back to the beginning, and in that sense, you know, that's where, uh, I've felt truly powerless, you know, after spending time when you've seen students try to climb, and any given moment that one person that influences them a lot more can just tear them back down.

Principal B also made several statements both indicating a sense of power and a sense of powerlessness. For example, he stated, "So... there are some factors that I can't control, and absolutely, I feel helpless about some of those things." Then, when questioned by the researcher about how much influence he felt he had over dropout rates when compared with

the influences students faced outside of school, he said, “I would say it’s probably, unfortunately, by the time you get to high school, it’s probably about 70/30. The home, family, parents, have about 70% influence on the kid, and the school environment has about 30%.” The principal seems to have a feeling of helplessness based on the statements he has provided. This can prove completing a job task can be very difficult and shows the effects of deficit thinking. According to Bridgeland et al. (2009), 69% of principals felt parents bore all or most of the responsibility for students dropping out. He also explains the changes he had experienced in his sense of power throughout his career:

My philosophy has changed. When I was an elementary principal, I thought I had, you know, omnipotent power! I can change these kids’ world! And in a lot of ways, we did, because my perception at the time was there’s nothing that an elementary kid needs that I can’t provide. I can figure out a way to get the kid what he needs. At middle school, it became a little less. Now [in high school], it’s like, okay, you’ve got some circumstances that are out of my, you know, expertise, so I had to pull in some other resources from other entities and other people to help me figure out what I... how do I help this kid be successful, and not just at school, but the whole child?

However, Principal B also expressed some belief in his sense of power, noting, “So we as a resource, the human capital, we are actually the tools that our kids need in order to navigate the system to get to college, to get to the resources, to get to the scholarship money needed, to get to, you know, all the employment opportunities. We hold those keys.”

Principal C made several statements in regards to her sense of power over being able to impact dropout rates in her school, and most suggested the presence of a sense of power and hopefulness rather than powerlessness. Her sense of powerlessness was indicated when

the researcher asked if she ever felt powerless over dropout rates, she explained, “Yeah, I don’t know if I feel powerless, but I feel defeated sometimes by the fact that you just try everything you can to keep them from dropping out, and the bottom line is that if they have no heart to even want to say ‘I’m willing to try,’ then, um...” However, she went on to make several statements indicating the presence of a sense of power. For example, she mentioned concerning meeting the needs of students in such a challenging context, “...it’s difficult, but it’s not impossible, and if they’ll work with us, we’ll find ways around it.” About her success rate to date, she expressed, “I... I’m not defeated, but I will say it’s... we’re not getting 100%, and I would love to say we have 100%, so...” and “But we’re not giving up on them and we need the parents not to give up on them!”

***Internal motivation.*** Internal motivation refers to an individual’s intrinsic drive to engage in a certain behavior (Bandura,1996). Insights into Principal A and Principal B’s interviews revealed the presence of an internal motivation driving behavior to reduce or prevent dropout rates at his or her respective school throughout each interview. Principal C made no statements the researcher considered to reveal her internal motivations.

Principal A indicated the interests and success of the students were his motivation, stating, “...but in the end it’s still trying to do what’s best for the child so they can finish.” The relationships he had formed with the students also played a role in his motivation to be effective, as he noted, “But when you get to know these students, you want to really be able to help them.”

Principal B explained his motivation was rooted in loving his students so much he wanted to ensure each student received the best education possible, and in doing so, he desired to push them beyond what the students believed they could do. He explained, “I love

the underdog, and whether it's true or not, most of our high minority schools are the underdogs to the system. And so, I love proving the system wrong these kids can be educated just as well and just as talented as other kids." He also recounted a conversation he'd had with one of his administrators who felt he was too demanding of them about servicing the students: "But [Administrator B], we already graduated from high school! We've got to make sure the next generation comes through and gets out and has an opportunity! And she just shook her head and walked off. But that's my mentality. It's like, if we can do other things and more for kids, we've got to do other things and more for kids, because nobody else may do it!"

***Determination and commitment.*** The presence of determination and commitment in a leader are signs of a strong sense of efficacy. Two of the principals, Principal A and Principal C, made statements indicating a strong sense of determination and commitment while facing the continuous challenges of impacting dropout rates among a low-income minority student population.

Principal A expressed determination and commitment to his mission of curbing dropouts through statements spoke to his energy commitment and tirelessness in the face of challenges and obstacles. For example, he said, "So those types of challenges... so when I say direct and indirect, my *entire day* is dedicated to preventing, uh, dropouts, because any point in time any of these kids can become a dropout." He also speaks of his determination to go the extra mile with his students and his teachers, never giving up, and going the extra mile and doing whatever it takes to make them successful: "We have to really work with that student and find out what their needs are and give them to understand, you know, that there is hope. At the same time, we have to work with the teachers."

Principal C provided insight into her level of determination and commitment to achieve her mission of curbing dropout rates at her school. These thoughts were expressed in terms of time commitment, continuing to motivate students despite the challenges faced, and transferring her own level of determination to the students of School C. For example, when the researcher asked how much time and energy she specifically dedicated towards dropout efforts, she proudly exclaimed, “One hundred percent of my day!” Principal C also explained her own determination to challenge students beyond excuses when she explained, “I think that the biggest thing is not having too much empathy but having a lot of grit,” and her commitment to transferring her own level of determination to her students to foster beliefs in capable of graduating: “And so, I say to these kids you can do anything you want. I mean, anything that you set your mind to, you can make it happen!”

***Creativity in problem solving.*** Creativity in problem solving characterizes an individual’s ability to approach challenges from creative innovative ways when traditional methods fail. Each of the principals made statements suggesting taking creative approaches to solving the problems surrounding helping the low-income minority students to stay in school and graduate rather than dropping out. This was an important characteristic because each of the principals had to refine decisions in order to impact the student population. As stated in the proceeding statements, each principal had to become reflective and create multiple opportunities for students to maximize instruction and resources enabling them to transition from high school or even become acclimated to high school life.

Principal A explained the importance of taking different approaches in School A than principals in schools with a less challenging population might normally take. He mentions, “Our students in the urban school districts have a lot of baggage. And in doing so, you have

to approach [them] differently.” Principal A also explained the thought process he underwent when creatively approaching a problem, particularly when addressing each student’s individualized needs: “We’re trying to find and let them understand what is the best fit? What is the best solution to help you continue that path?” After he worked through the answers to these questions, Principal A would begin addressing the problem. The researcher was also able to see Principal A’s creativity in action through the principal’s explanation of some of the creative approaches he used to solve problems in the school. For example, in order to address the high dropout rates among ninth graders who were having difficulty with transitioning and becoming integrated into high school with the older students, he developed the following creative approach: “So we created the pod system, moving all the ninth graders into one building and having core classes in certain sections to prevent from them having to go across campus. And we cut back on the, uh, transition time, you know, seven to five minutes.” He went on to explain this new creative approach to educating ninth graders had a significant impact on the dropout rate.

Principal B made two comments pointing to his creative approach to addressing the dropout issue for the students of his school. Providing insight into his creative problem solving process, he explained, “We just have to do some things differently in how we get them there, uh... and that’s always been a challenge. And it’s almost kind of like a puzzle: how do we make this better for our kids?” There was also a brief insight into one of the creative ways he approached helping to make his students’ lives outside of school better to have an increased chance of graduating: work with the parents. He states the following about the parents and the creative approach he planned to take with them: “...they just need somebody to kind of coach them and teach them on how to do some of those things because

they are damaging their own kids.” This is important because he is presenting opportunities for parents to become involved and the communal piece will ultimately benefit kids. Based on his statements there may be various opportunities where a principal may have to step outside of his/her role to provide more academic counseling and coaching to parents and students.

Principal C offered a number of statements throughout her interview regarding creative approaches towards problem solving. Principal C is the only principal who explicitly expressed the need for creative approaches towards solving the problems of the unique population she served, saying, “We’re always trying to be creative, you know, and assist them.” When talking about how she is able to work through many of the challenges her students face in school, she explained, “...you have to get super creative and come up with ways to keep these kids from dropping out. And, and just, you know... you have to work with them.” Principal C also mentioned “angles” on several occasions, and approaching problems from various angles indicates the presence of creativity in problem solving. For example, she stated, “So, we look at every angle there is to help these kids be successful,” and “So, money always imposes limitations and available resources imposes limitations. So, they’re definitely limited, our resources are. But we’re always looking for an angle for something else.” Principal C also tells several stories suggesting she operated with a creative approach towards problem solving. For example, when a number of her low-income minority students could not afford \$25 for a laptop, even when the cost was divided into several monthly installments, she sought out the local civic center for help in solving the problem: “Our [local] community civic center put in like, uh, \$2,000. Or maybe it was a little bit under \$2,000 to pay for the rest of the kids to get their laptops.” Principal C’s creative approaches

were not just used for school-wide needs; she engaged them on an individual level for use when trying to solve each and every student's individualized problem. She explained:

I'll be a... just compulsive about getting extra funds and extra things for the students to try and make it work, you know? Who can watch your baby? How can we help you? What can we do, you know, to make it happen for you? So, you just... you have to think outside the box and just be creative.

***Job satisfaction.*** Expressing job satisfaction is an indication of a strong sense of self-efficacy. In the data, only one principal expressed statements pointing to the presence of job satisfaction: Principal C. She noted, "This has been eye opening for me, this job has been. But it's been very rewarding, too. It has been super rewarding because the kids are so appreciative!" She also commented about the joy of working with the students in the school, despite working with the most difficult cases, saying, "They're some of my naughtiest ones, but they're... you know, they're so loveable, and so, they're great kids. Really great kids!"

***View of change.*** Leaders with a strong sense of efficacy do not view change as an overnight process; it is viewed as a slow and steady process succeeding with persistent effort. Two principals, Principal A and Principal B provided insights through statements indicating an efficacious view about change. Both principals expressed change would be a slow and gradual process. Principal A explained, "It's a slow process, but again, we have to be able to reach those kids at all levels. Right now, we are just scraping the tip of the iceberg, but we'll take those small victories and keep on working and that's why she keeps doing it." Principal B commented about the changes he was trying to make in his students, "It takes a long time. It may not be this year they get it, but you know, it's that constant message you can do this. This can happen for you if you just try."



***Emotional state.*** The emotional state of a leader provides an indication to his/her level of efficacy over a situation; an expression of positive emotions suggests a strong sense of efficacy while an expression of negative emotions suggests a lower sense of efficacy. Principal A and Principal C made comments providing the researcher with insight into emotional states.

Principal A offered comments the researcher determined to be one of hopefulness despite the challenges he faced. He explained:

We talk about a lot of the struggles that we have. We have systems in place that we put in, you know, just for my arrival here in January and having [Administrator B], you know, just focus on those things. I don't want to say it's all negative. We still have a lot of work to do, but we've managed to improve attendance at this campus two percentage points. It's big. It's big for funding for us. It's big.

Principal C also offered insights into her emotional state, but these comments pointed towards the presence of a negative state of emotion. In two different comments, the principal expressed frustration. In one portion of the interview, she spoke of her frustration of making available all of the help, tools, and resources the school offered to help the students graduate, and yet, students enter the senior year and be short of credits to graduate – and quit. Principal C explained:

“It's frustrating. It's frustrating because I feel like there's so much support here for the kids, and even the teachers here are so supportive of, if you'll just come to me. If you'll just be in my class! If you'll just turn in an assignment! If you'll just *participate!* You know, we're willing to work with them here.”

*Maintain standards and expectations.* In some instances, leaders may have to come into an environment and create standards and expectations among staff and students. The environment of a school may indicate the need or severity of change must take place in order to create standards and expectations. Once these are created, it is the responsibility of the leader to create systems enabling those standards and expectations to consistently be maintained.

Leaders with a strong sense of self-efficacy maintain standards and expectations in a context despite the challenges the context offers threaten the effectiveness of the leader. Principal C was the only principal who made comments providing insight into her tenacity in maintaining standards and expectations. She explained even though there were clear challenges to her achieving her standard of reaching 100% of her dropouts, she would not reduce this expectation among her staffers. Principal C offered:

...when we're looking up prior leavers, I'm like "100 percent! I want 100%!"

They're like, "We had 350 kids we couldn't find! Are you kidding me?" I'm like, "No! I want 100%! I want 100% of the kids. I want to know where they are if they're not in school. I want to know what we can do to get 'em back."

This comment, along with her comment, "You're always gonna aim for 100%. So, we're not ever gonna keep all of them in school and keep them from dropping out, but you go for 100%," suggests Principal C maintained her strong standards and expectations among her administrative staff despite the obstacles challenging the capacity to achieve them.

## Theme 2: Influences on Self-Efficacy

This theme was constructed to identify any potential influences affecting a principal's self-efficacy, whether stated or implied, and whether internal or external. It consists of three categories: (a) Systemic and Resource Factors (SYSF); (b) Student Factors (STUF); and (c) Experiences and Training (EXPT). The two categories considered external influences are Systemic and Resource Factors and Student Factors. The category considered internal influences is Experiences and Training.

**Systemic and resource factors.** Data were coded as Systemic and Resource Factors (SYSF) when principals explicitly described or alluded to external dynamics he or she had to deal with on an administrative, structural, or financial level while leading the school. Criterion under the Systemic and Resource Factors category included: (a) District / school system factors; (b) Budget and finance factors; (c) Faculty factors; and (d) Non-monetary resources.

Table 4

*Responses Coded to Systemic and Resource Factors (SYSF)*

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Total
District / School system factors	3	2	6	11
Budget and finance factors	5	0	3	8
Faculty factors	2	2	0	4
Non-monetary resources	1	5	1	7
Total	11	9	10	30

*District /School system factors.* The school district and school system in which a principal operates places certain administrative and systemic parameters on a principal's behavior, which could potentially have an impact on the principal's level of self-efficacy. Each of the principals made reference to the district and school system factors affecting ability to act in some way, some positively and some negatively.

Principal A spoke of the policies, laws and funding restrictions the district imposed on him and limiting his abilities to do the things he felt needed to be done to curb dropout rates. He commented:

I would like to say that I would have an unlimited bank of resources. You know, of just strategies and time and energy, uh, to help students. If you look at, I guess, the confines of what policy or laws that we have to follow or even just the funding that we have, that is what I see that poses limits to our organizations.

Principal A also explained the need for the school district to create a ninth-grade center on his campus, because this population of students transitioning from middle school to high school had some of the highest dropout rates in his school. Ninth-grade centers had already been established by the district on other campus, and the model had proven effective, because it allowed principals to pour a concentrated amount of resources into these students. In his estimation, for the district to not establish a ninth-grade center on his campus made his job curbing dropouts among ninth-graders a significantly more challenging one.

Principal B made two references to district and school system factors having a potential influence on his level of efficacy. First, he listed a few factors challenging his ability to be effective, noting, "Umm... there are also external forces at the district level that are challenges with the demands on high- stakes testing, um, the budget, um, when you're

looking at staffing, sometimes you're not staffed accordingly or appropriately for the population you're trying to serve." The second reference expanded on his first reference and alluded to the tight time constraints under which the district required he operate when staffing a school. Principal B explained one of the keys to reducing and preventing high school dropouts had a lot to do with the administrative and faculty staffing of a school and for this reason, a principal needed to take his time to hire just the right people to serve the unique needs of the school's population. However, this process was short-circuited because of the short timeline the district allowed to make such hiring decisions. He explained:

We are always put to the test of rushing to get the job done that we don't do it as well as we think we should do it because of time, and sometimes there are other factors that are playing behind the scenes. But if we're actually, as leaders of educational institutions, if we are actually given the time and the liberty to find the good people to do this work, I think all of our schools would be better.

Principal C made statements about a number of district and school system factors impacting her ability to effectively curb dropout rates at her school. The statements referenced everything from inter-organizational communications to truancy laws and from special district programs to the need for the district to provide additional supplemental human resources. First, Principal C discussed the need for greater levels of communication between the organizations the school partnered with in the district. In some cases, when a student seemed to be at high risk for dropping out of the school, one of the approaches the school would take would be to refer him or her to an educational program outside of the school. However, once the student had been turned over to the new program, because of the

lack of communication between the two entities, the student could fall between the cracks.

Principal C explained:

You know, you set them up for some of these programs outside of, uh, your school that you hope they'll be successful with, they go there for two days and then they sit at home for the next, you know... who knows how long? And you have no access to the records to know that they are doing that, because what we'd like to do is immediately jump on them and say get back in here!

Not having sufficient inter-organizational communication between the school and these programs could potentially lead to greater numbers of student dropouts and consequently hinders the principal's sense of efficacy to curb dropout rates.

Next, Principal C and her team members referenced the new truancy laws had taken effect, limiting the power the school once had to control the truancy of its students. Prior to the truancy laws being changed on September 1, 2015, the school could take students who missed school to truancy court and engage in more preventive measures to keep them from becoming dropouts. After the truancy laws went into effect however, the principal was much more limited in the preventive actions she could take in curbing dropouts among her students. For example, the change in truancy laws reduced the school's ability to hold the parents accountable. Of the recent change in the law, she questioned, "But, um, one of the things is with the courts changing these rules it stopped holding parents accountable, so I would like to see them... why did they do this and why are they not holding parents more accountable?" Principal C's question suggested the changes in truancy laws by the district could have a potential significant effect on her sense of efficacy to impact the dropout rates in her school.

Then, Principal C was in a unique situation because her school had been selected by the district to host a program for foreign students transitioning into high school. However, she explained this population was a transient population oftentimes did not remain in one place or at one school for long. Consequently, this had an inevitable and ongoing effect on the dropout statistics at her school. The fact she could do little to control the fact enrollment of these students in her school was only temporary could potentially affect her level of efficacy in reducing or preventing dropouts at her school. She commented:

We will never get to zero dropouts, and I say that because we are a unique campus and we have kids, like I said, will come one day new to the country and the next day they disappear. I mean, we can do everything under the sun, and typically we feel like most of those kids may have gone back to their home country or they're moving around in the states, but they're ghosts in a sense, so that's a unique situation in itself.

Another district and school system factor Principal C addressed was principal transfers, a program offered by the school district. Principal transfers were students who requested to be transferred from the current school to School C. Most often, these were students having academic challenges at a previous school and were considered at-risk or at high risk for dropouts. Typically, principal transfers were freely granted. According to district policy, schools only had to accept a certain number of transfers up to a maximum number each year, and then could begin denying these transfers to students who requested them. Principal C explained the practice of having to accept at-risk students who under principal transfers into her school contributed to her dropout rate and reduced her ability to control it. Although it was district policy to accept principal transfers, however, Principal C decided to place restrictions on the number of students she would accept via principal

transfer. She noted, "...the majority of our kids are our kids, but we do have a percentage that are on principal transfers because they asked for transfer. We're not at our maximum, [but]... we have put a little bit tighter reins on that because of the past..."

Finally, Principal C highlighted the need for additional supplemental human resources on a district level to help with the problem of dropouts. Like other principals, she also had the challenge of dealing with the truancy ninth-graders because of the inability to effectively transition from middle school to high school. To help remedy this issue, she supported the development of administrative staff positions by the district covering feeder paths into her high school, working with the middle school students to better prepare them for entry into high school. She explained need for the district to develop such a feeder program was necessary "Because the truancy problem doesn't start in high school. It starts way before that, and there's not enough being done earlier on."

***Budget and finance factors.*** Budget and finance factors refers to the financial limitations principals face limiting abilities to operate certain programs, deliver certain services, complete certain tasks, or perform certain functions deemed critical to preventing dropouts. As such, budget and finance factors could potentially have an impact on levels of efficacy to curb or prevent dropouts. Only Principal A and Principal C made statements referencing budget and finance factors during the interviews, and each made the same number of statements about these systemic and resource factors.

Principal A's comments all pointed to the same underlying message: if he had more financial resources, he could do more to help the students in his school, and if he could do more to help the students in his school, he could greatly reduce the likelihood of them dropping out of school. For example, he commented, "...in a perfect society, if I thought I



had unlimited funding, I think we would have a greater impact on the situations of what our students have to face, and I think it would help them manage staying in school and fighting through those obstacles.” Principal A stated resources were essential to helping his students “stay in school and survive with all the other things they have to be responsible for.”

Ultimately, his need to have access to greater resources in order to impact the dropout rates of his unique population were summed up in his comment:

If you had unlimited resources, there’s a lot you could do. Obviously, you could provide a lot more for students that... present causes of not coming, you know? It’s simple as they didn’t get any food or they didn’t get enough rest because they might have been out working, you know, trying to help with the bills in the home, or mom and dad are not home and they still haven’t gotten... they don’t know how to wash clothes or they don’t have clean clothes. Or they have to watch somebody at home because, you know, little brother or little sister is sick and they’re school age but they’re not going to leave them by themselves. I mean, just so many of those scenarios come into play that if you were to really be a neighborhood community school with all those unlimited resources, we could provide that extra personnel that says, you know what, bring your little sister, we can watch them here. You know, bring your clothes, we’ll wash them here or we’ll have some clothes readily available for you – clean clothes. Meals and all of that, that’s a given, right?

Principal A also explained in the absence of the resources he needed, he had to compensate by reaching outside of the school to find other entities would come onto the campus and provide some of the resources his students needed in order to keep them in school.

Similar to Principal A, Principal C also spoke of the various things she could do to assist her unique population of students if she had greater access to financial resources and the concerns she had for the success of her students in light of her limited financial resources. However, she also countered these concerns with appreciation for the additional funding allocated to her school by the district superintendent. For example, about her concerns, she expressed, “So, money always imposes limitations,” and “You know, a school like this that has 85% of free and reduced [lunch] is always going to have [financial] limitations.” She illustrated these limitations by offering a story as an example of some financial limitations her school was currently facing. The marching band had received the honor of being selected to go to Disney World to perform at a big event. However, to send the band to Disney World was going to take some serious financial resources the school did not have and the students did not have access to family funds. She explained, “Our kids want to go to Disney for band. Okay? That is not an easy trip to... to raise that much money for our band to go, and they certainly don’t just have the money. Even deep within their own relatives, they don’t have the money.” She went on to describe the various efforts the students were undertaking in an attempt to raise the necessary funds to make the trip. Additionally, similar to the strategies used to compensate for shortfalls in financial and budgetary resources used by Principal A, Principal C also spoke about her drive to gain access to extra funds so she could assist her students with becoming successful. She explained, “You bring in that support for them... I mean, I’ll be... just compulsive about getting extra funds!”

Principal C was the only principal who expressed appreciation for the funds the school had received from the district superintendent for the purpose of assisting its students with graduating, even though most of the schools in the district had received the same funds.

On two different occasions, she made statements of appreciation. One such statement she made was, “Luckily, the district has provided us with some really great funds and resources for our Grad Lab. We were all loaded with some money this summer, and that’s extending through this year to get these kids to graduate. So that’s been most helpful.”

***Faculty factors.*** Faculty factors referenced issues among faculty members in a principal’s school could potentially affect his or her level of efficacy to impact dropout rates at the school. Principal A and Principal B made statements alluding to the influence of these systemic and resource factors. Principal C made no statements to this extent.

Principal A made comments suggesting both a positive and a negative influence of faculty members in the discussion of curbing dropout rates. On the positive side, he explained one of the keys to his success at impacting students resulting in reduced dropout rates in his school was his ability to develop relationships with everyone. He noted, “...the relationships I build with students and the staff at schools, um, is also a major factor I see is impactful for our students.” On the negative side, he also explained faculty members could potentially hinder students’ desire to stay in school and many times, as soon as he was able to get a student to return to school, the student had a negative interaction with a faculty member, and this interaction threatened to discourage the student from attending school all over again. He explained, “[The students] are trying to manage a way to finish up, and there is always something that gets in the way, whether it be [faculty] not understanding fully where a student comes from or the amount of work they have to go through just to try to get to school.” The ability with which an out-of-touch faculty member could potentially derail a student’s efforts to come back to school and remain until graduation could potentially have an impact on a principal’s sense of efficacy to reduce dropout rates at his school.

Principal B's statements surrounding the faculty at his school suggested a potentially negative impact on helping students to stay enrolled in school. The two statements he made about the faculty members were both to this extent. For example, he stated, "And so, here at [School B], umm... I inherited this staff. And... in a lot of ways, there are so many people here that have... they have the skills and talent to be able to do a lot of different things with these kids, but they're... for whatever reason, they don't have the capacity to deliver it to kids at a high level." Principal B later expressed the faculty members of a school were instrumental to a student's success because faculty held the keys to a student's future; however, if the school did not have the right faculty members in place, this could be detrimental to a student's success. He stated, "And I think that sometimes, if we don't hire the right people, they hide the keys from the kids, you know." Principal B's comments suggest he did not feel he had the right faculty members in place in order to be as effective as possible at reducing and preventing dropouts at his high school, a feeling that could potentially have an impact on his level of efficacy to achieve this goal.

***Non-monetary resources.*** Non-monetary resources refer to external resources other than budgetary and financial resources affecting a principal's abilities to operate certain programs, deliver certain services, complete certain tasks, or perform certain functions deemed critical to preventing students from dropping out of school. Each of the principals made statements alluding to the impact of non-monetary resources on abilities to achieve goals of curbing and preventing students from dropping out of schools.

Principal A made a statement expressing a need for a greater number of social services to be offered on the campus to address the needs his unique population faced outside of school. By being able to offer these intensive services to them, he could increase the

likelihood the “baggage” carried as a result of low-income minority status would not inevitably cause them to become dropouts. He explained:

In order for us to give that intensive help, it needs to be on a larger scale, you know? Because we do have different types of scenarios and so many kids come from a different... They have different baggage, and its baggage altogether, but it’s so specific to why they’re not being successful. We can’t extend past, you know, just bringing them here and offering them services only on this campus.

Principal A felt by offering his students intensive social services on the school campus, he would have a greater level of success at keeping his students in school and preventing them from becoming dropouts.

Principal B and his dropout team made a number of statements about the impact of having access to additional non-monetary resources could have on the success of his unique low-income minority student population. First, he supported one of the recommendations of his team members for access to some type of mentoring program, particularly for young men who grow up without a father in the home and who have no male father figures to emulate. Next, Principal B made several recommendations of his own for access to such non-monetary resources as a campus clinic to address the health issues of his students and a Communities in Schools liaison could serve as an outreach person and connect his students to other resources in the community. He placed particular emphasis on the need for a mental health professional – someone other than a school counselor to address many of the mental health challenges many of his students did not even recognize they had. He explained, “Just having... not necessarily a counselor type position but someone who actually is an expert in the mental health field.” Finally, Principal B agreed with a recommendation of one of his dropout team

members for a daycare. The team member explained, “[We need] a daycare. I can’t... I talked to [Principal B] about that once before, because one of our kids was dropping [out]. Matter of fact, she is on the dropout list now because her mom was like, “I can’t keep watching this kid! This is *not* my child!” Without the ability to provide such resources on his campus, Principal B felt like there were various critical needs of his students were going unmet. This lack of services could potentially jeopardize students’ abilities to stay in school and graduate, which could consequently affect the principal’s own level of efficacy to prevent this undesired outcome from occurring.

Principal C made only one statement referencing non-monetary resources. She differentiated between monetary resources and non-monetary resources and the lack of them imposed limitations on what she could do to prevent her students from dropping out. Principal C explained simply, “So, [lack of] money always imposes limitations and [a lack of] available resources imposes limitations. So, they’re definitely limited, our resources are.” With this response to the question, “Would you say that your abilities to help keep students from dropping out of school are unlimited, or are there limitations on what you can do to prevent students from dropping out?” Principal C alluded to the notion limited non-monetary resources played a role impacting the extent of what she could do to keep students from dropping out of school.

***Student factors.*** Data were coded as Student Factors (STUF) when referenced any factor present in or among the lives of students the school served could potentially cause the principal to feel either a greater or a lesser sense of efficacy in being able to impact dropout rates in the school. Criteria under the Student Factors category include: (a) Influences outside of school; (b) Home life / Need for money; (c) Seek easier non-academic route; (d)

Substance abuse issues; (e) Mental health / Behavioral issues; (f) Family history; (g) Lack of motivation to graduate / succeed; (h) Lack of parental support; and (i) Social / Community acceptance.

Table 5

*Responses Coded to Student Factors (STUF)*

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Total
Influences outside of school	5	2	1	8
Home life / Need for money	3	6	9	18
Seek easier non-academic route	1	0	2	3
Substance abuse issues	2	3	0	5
Mental health / behavioral issues	2	2	0	4
Family history	1	2	2	5
Lack of motivation to graduate / succeed	2	2	3	7
Lack of parental support	1	0	8	9
Social / community acceptance	1	3	0	4
Total	18	20	25	63

***Influences outside of school.*** Influences outside of school refer to the acquaintances, networks, and associations in the community negatively influencing a student to drop out of school. Each of the principals made statements suggesting influences outside of school played a key role in whether or not students would eventually drop out of school, although Principal A made the majority of statements to this extent.

Principal A tended to place strong weight on the level of influence on the students' influences outside of school. For example, the researcher asked the question, "In your estimation, what are the most significant factors that determine whether or not you will be able to keep a student from dropping out of school?" He responded, "The most significant factor I believe would... it would have to be what that student sees when they leave our schools." In his estimation, the only way to lessen the impact of a student's influences outside of school would be to isolate them. He explained, "You'd have to really create a compound, or you know, an environment where you definitely just keep all outside influences out, and in that case, I don't see that I would feel powerless." This comment suggests the challenges Principal A has to deal with pertaining to students' influences outside of school affect his sense of power, and doubtless, his sense of efficacy to make an impact on whether or not drop out is inevitable.

Principal B made statements referencing the influences students faced outside of school specifically referencing the impact these associations had on students' willingness to want something more out of life – something outside of the comfortable, small world known. He explained:

Trying to sell the world to these kids is hard, because their world is within a six block perimeter of where they live. So it's like, you've got to get out of Third Ward! I said that one day, [and] you would have thought I threw a bomb into the crowd! I said, "Y'all have got to leave Third Ward. There's a big world out there! You've got to go to college. You may go to college in California, or Purdue... you've got to get out of here!" And they're like... "Why? Everybody else we know is here!" I was like... "You guys have no idea how big the world is, and how much you know, and what



you can do, and how talented you are, and how you are just as smart as everybody else, blah, blah, blah.” And they’re like... “I don’t know.”

The fact students referenced knowing everyone within the small neighborhood in which they lived, pointed to the weight this out-of-school influence had on desires to excel in school, go to college, and be successful. Principal B also made another statement reinforcing this sentiment of his students when he explained:

Cause they’re going to stumble, and they’re gonna get tired, and they’re gonna want to give up, especially when some of the environments that surround them, everybody else is giving up, so, “Why should I try so hard? And if I do, am I gonna be, you know, isolated from my peers in my community because I want something different, or should I just follow the status quo and be like everybody else?”

The comments Principal B made concerning the influences his students faced outside of school and how these influences affected his students’ decision making suggest he was competing with these influences in his efforts to keep the students in school and become successful. As a result, his sense of efficacy to curb or reduce dropout rates could potentially be impacted.

Principal C made one statement referencing the influences outside of school could potentially impact the dropout status of her students. She described these outside influences as “peer pressure from the students who have dropped out that they are friends with and they see as a more tempting lifestyle they want to create for themselves as well.” In the context of making this statement, Principal C was referring to the external challenges she faced in trying to keep her students from dropping out. This challenge to her dropout prevention efforts could potentially be a factor affecting her sense of efficacy.

*Home life /need for money.* Home life and need for money refers to the potential influence the home environment in which a student lives and prioritizing the need for money over attending school could have on his likelihood of dropping out of school. Each of the principals made statements alluding to the significant impact of home life and lack of money on a student's decision to drop out of school.

Principal A referenced three factors about a student's home life potentially having an impact on the likelihood of dropping out of school, from the amount of time spent at home, to the home environment itself, and to the lack of having a place to call home. First, Principal A explained one of the reasons a student's home life was such a significant factor in influencing the student was by sheer virtue of time the student spent at home as opposed to the amount of time he or she spent in school. He explained:

Well, the largest [factor fighting against dropout efforts] is the amount of time that a student spends away from our organization. So, I know we've done studies on the amount of time that a student spends in a day of school, which is very limited when you compare it to a 24-hour day and then the 175 days of the year that they are supposed to be in school, so time is definitely one of the factors that fight against us.

Next, Principal B called attention to the home environment itself and how it could potentially impact a student's decision of whether or not to stay in school, noting:

[It's] their home life. If a student comes from an environment that is not conducive for them to be able to work and complete what they need to complete or just spend time on sharpening skills that are required for them to obtain credit or spend time on a course they try to take, that also impacts us negatively.

According to Principal B, if the student does not have a proper environment at home in which he or she can study or do homework, this could work against the efforts the school engages in to help the student advance academically and ultimately graduate. Finally, Principal B highlighted the fact the unique population he served came with its share of homeless students, revealing, “We have students that may be homeless due to their parents just, you know, getting involved in an accident, and the next thing you know, they are no longer around.” In each of these explanations, Principal A introduced detrimental home life issues having a potentially negative effect on a student’s ability to advance in school and graduate.

Principal B referenced several issues students faced surrounding home life and lack of money. These issues ranged from negative interactions with parents at home to parental expectations parents compromising students’ abilities to continue seeking an high school education. First, Principal B spoke about his students’ values about money, explaining, “You know, it’s like... and money is always a caveat. But it’s really... what I’ve learned about our high school kids, money is important to them.” Then, he offered an example surrounding lack of money in which students were pressured into leaving school and going to work, revealing, “There are social situations such as, um, being the breadwinner of the home.”

Next, Principal B and his team touched on the impact of home life on students’ abilities to continue in school, particularly interactions with parents. For instance, one of his team members spoke about a student who was forced to drop out of school because of the pressure she received from her mother at home. She noted, “We had another situation where a student... The parent... didn’t have a high school diploma, and because of her inability to provide for her family, she’s relying on her daughter to care for the kids.” Principal B’s direct

comments tended to focus on the interactions between students and parents and the negative impact these interactions could have on the students' motivation to stay in school. For example, he mentioned:

[B]ecause the parents and families there, sometimes they don't know what to do in terms of helping the kids. "I just beat it out of them. I just ignore them," or ... "You just get a job" ... All of those kind of things, when they don't know the path that these kids could be on to improve their lives. So... we spend a lot of time talking to kids, especially, like [Administrator B] said, the kids that don't want it, but they don't know they want it.

Principal B further elaborated on the parent/student interactions at home by stating:

[The parents] don't know what they don't know until they need some help trying to navigate just getting their kids to be healthy mentally, and the things that are happening in their home that probably shouldn't be happening and just having another way of doing things that... they just need somebody to kind of coach them and teach them on how to do some of those things because they are damaging their own kids. They are doing what they think is in the best interest of their own kid, but cursing them out and knocking them upside their head is not always the right answer.

With these comments, Principal B suggested the home life conditions of his students, namely the parental interactions stood to be improved. The damage the negative interactions was having on the kids could potentially be a detriment to them desiring to attend school in the future, and this could potentially affect the principal's sense of efficacy to be able to keep them in school rather than seeing them drop out of school.

Principal C made numerous references to home life and lack of money, primarily concerning students having to go to work to earn money and having unstable home environments. There were several instances throughout the interviews in which Principal C highlighted the issue of students needing to work because they lacked money. For example, she commented, “A lot of students want to drop out because they need money. They need a job,” and “We try to keep them in school, we try to encourage them, even when they have, um, obstacles that they put in front of us like I need money, I need to work.” Principal C illustrated how prevalent the emphasis on work was among her high school students when she described two recent interactions with a couple of her students:

Like, this morning, one of the students that helps me with announcements was telling me she worked until 12:30 am last night. You know? Another student came in yesterday and said he just got a job at Sam’s and he had a Sam’s tag on. So I’m like, “Why are you wearing that as your ID?” And he said, “Oh, I just forgot to take it off. I just got off at 6 am this morning. I work from 11 pm to 6 am.” And then they come to school, you know?

Prior to working at her current school, Principal C admitted she had never been in a school in which she had to face the challenge of students working to such an extent. She commented, “So when our kids work, they work. I mean, they can’t *wait* to get a job, you know?”

Additionally, Principal C addressed issues surrounding the home lives of some of her students, particularly how having unstable home environments contributed to the likelihood of them dropping out of school. For example, she revealed, “Some even don’t have a home they go to. We have students who are homeless. We have students who live in group homes.”

She also offered a story about a student affected by both an unstable home life and a lack of money:

[Y]ou know, two days ago, I had a kid that came in and said, “I need money. I’m gonna have to drop out. My dad’s never home. I live by myself basically. We’re in the same apartment, but he leaves and I come, and then I go to school and he leaves.” And, you know, the dad had said that he’d been missing for three days, and I found out that he’d been staying at somebody else’s house just because he didn’t have bus money to get across town where he was coming from. So, ummm... the thing about keeping them from dropping out is okay, immediately when he said that, that’s when I got my Student Success Center, [Dropout Prevention C], involved. And I’m like, he wants a job, he needs something part time. He’s not doing anything after school anyhow. Let’s see if we can find something for him.

To further illustrate the extent to which students were faced with dropping out because of a combination of home issues and economic issues, Principal C’s team told a story of how a star basketball player had been affected by these factors:

[W]e have a basketball player, umm... that the family wanted him to kind of drop out to go get a job. He’s like, the star basketball player. They don’t understand the importance of him playing, you know, sports and keeping and getting his academic... [scholarship opportunities]. They say, you know, “You have some issues going on. You need to get a job to cover those issues,” which is crazy.

Being faced with a barrage of home life and lack of money issues, from a student population in which many of the students work real jobs to many students having very unstable home lives could potentially affect the likelihood of students dropping out of school. Consequently,

these external student factors could potentially have an effect on a principal's level of efficacy to curb dropouts.

*Seek easier non-academic route.* Seek easier non-academic route refers to student tendencies to forego completing school and graduating and instead pursue an easier route offering more immediate returns and requires less effort. Two of the Principals, Principal A and Principal C, made statements referring to student tendencies to opt for an easier non-academic route rather than completing high school.

Principal A explained having to deal with students who were trying to make the decision of whether to stay and struggle through school versus quitting and pursuing an easier life. He commented, "When they are in that situation, they are so fragile with trying to decide should they stay the route that we try to get them to follow, or do they just, you know, take the easy way out."

Similarly, Principal C also explained her students were confronted with making the same decisions, trying to choose between putting in the hard work at school versus quitting and getting what was considered to be a "good" job. She noted, "You wouldn't believe how many students sometimes in their senior year decide, you know what, I'm 18 now. I'm gonna go get me a job. And they're thinking that \$10, \$12 an hour is... is a lot when it's really not." Principal C also told a story of one of her dropout students that she had to track down by going to her job. When she finally found the girl and introduced herself as the principal, she encouraged the student to return to school. The student's response provided insight as to why she chose to seek an easier non-academic route rather than struggle through school. Principal C recalled, "I'm like, 'Well, I'm the new principal at [School C], and I need you to finish school! You are very capable of doing this!' And she goes, 'Okay, but I really struggle with,

you know, one area of science that I can't... physics, I just can't do it.'" These accounts point to the reality students are confronted with when experiencing hardships in school and how, on too many occasions, students simply choose the easier route and drop out of school. Having to constantly motivate such a population to struggle through and stay in school rather than choose an easier route could potentially pose challenges to a principal's sense of efficacy.

*Substance abuse issues.* Substance abuse issues refer to the prevalence of drug use among students, which puts them at risk for dropping out of school. While Principal A and Principal B mentioned drug use as being present on campuses, Principal C did not.

Principal A introduced the difficulty of keeping students coming from a background of drug abuse motivated to stay in school but also explained some of the students themselves needed drug counseling and rehabilitation. In light of this, both Principal A and the parents of the students felt there was a need for a substance abuse manager to work directly on the campus. Principal A noted:

[W]e did have a substance abuse manager that was, you know, was a counselor in house, but the district did away with him. But I believe that, uh, some of the parents have been asking for alternative ways to serve their kids, you know? Uh... we have a drug issue on this campus to some extent, just like any other school where there are influences out there. The problem is some of the parents feel like there isn't enough help to rehabilitate students, uh, so that they can, you know, try to, you know, break that habit ...that might be a reason why they're trying to get off campus is so that they can go use, you know, whatever type of drug their preference is.



Principal B also explained drugs were present on his campus and contributing to his dropout issues. He openly agreed with one of his administrators who commented:

[W]e have a lot of students who are, um, on drugs. Um, and when I say drugs, I'm not talking about the heavy drugs, I'm talking about marijuana, and as we know, a lot of our kids think that, well marijuana is fine. But it's illegal here in Texas, and it does affect their ability to learn if they come in at 9 o'clock or 8 o'clock in the morning and they're under the influence, they can't learn.

The same administrator spoke of the school's desire for a drug counseling program on campus to address the issue, suggesting:

[I]f you're coming to school at 8 o'clock in the morning, you're extremely foolish, or you're saying, "Hey I need help!" So, um, I think we deserve... we owe it to our students to provide a safe environment for them to come and talk about the issues... as to why they feel the need, you know, what's going on in their lives that that's the only output at fifteen... for you to get high.

In the absence of a formal drug program on his campus to help curb the drug issue affecting his students, Principal B directly commented, "And so, when you're looking at my abilities and my limitations to keep these kids from getting on drugs, to keep them in the line to get to school on time, to get the... you know, you have all these things you want for your kids, but I'm limited on how much I can do to actually get there." This comment provided insight as to how trying to keep students who were on drugs motivated to stay in school could potentially offer a challenge to the principal's sense of efficacy to keep students from dropping out of school.

*Mental health / behavioral issues.* Mental health / behavioral issues refer to the psychological factors and actions or conduct of students potentially affecting the likelihood to become dropouts. Principals A and B offered these among the student factors faced in schools while Principal C did not.

Principal A's agreed with his administrator who touched on mental health issues in the focus group interview, explaining, "We also have those who, um... who are the good kids, who are quiet kids who have not just needs for material things, but you have those who have, um, emotional issues that are not seen and not known because they are walking the halls and they look okay." The administrator contrasted the behavior of the students with mental health issues with the students who acted out with visible behavioral issues and noted although the "quiet kids" did not act out demonstratively, they also were in jeopardy of dropping out because of the mental issues they faced. Additionally, administrators at School A, with Principal A's agreement, explicated about the behavioral issues prevalent among ninth graders and how this behavior put them in jeopardy of becoming dropouts. The administrator noted:

[O]ur ninth graders have our lowest attendance, and of course, our highest potential for dropout. We are finding that the middle school, if we can get a bridge there, because they are coming in with the same behavior that they had in middle school. So that has kind of been our biggest opportunity. And so, that's one of the things that we need to come up with a plan, um... so that... cause they're carrying over, you know, what they did in middle school. They didn't go to class...

Principal B also made mention of the need to address mental health at his school, because some of his students were known to have psychiatric issues. For example, he

commented on the struggles and challenges some of his students faced because of mental health issues:

And that's a challenge, because we don't have enough services for our kids in terms of mental health support. Because they are struggling in a lot of areas because of their backgrounds and where they come from, as we shared... as I shared with you earlier. Um... I wish that there were more that we could do to help them in terms of what happens to them outside of school.

Principal B spoke about how being plagued with these struggles and challenges, students had a higher likelihood of dropping out of school, especially when not receiving the help needed to remedy issues. Based upon this reality, the presence of untreated mental health and behavioral issues at the school could potentially affect a principal's sense of efficacy to keep these students from dropping out.

***Family history.*** Family history refers to how the background of a student's parents affects the student's own chances for success. Each of the principals alluded to the impact of family history on the students.

Principal A spoke about when the parents were not successful in educational endeavors; this value could trickle down to offsprings. He noted, "...when you have parents that also have limited education; it's a vicious cycle."

Principal B made reference to the struggle students had to face when growing up in a household not valuing or even respecting the student's educational endeavors because the parents did not graduate from high school. He commented on his challenges in motivating his students to stay in school and succeed, saying, "So our kids are fighting this... they're in a battle all the time, and they'll tell you, no, nobody else has done this. Nobody in my family's

gone to college. Nobody else has tried this.” He also referenced the story of a student who was influenced by her mother to drop out of school, explaining, “We had another situation where... The parent... didn’t have a high school diploma, and because of her inability to provide for her family, she’s relying on her daughter to care for the kids.”

Principal C also represented family history as being cyclical among generations when she referenced how many of the parents of her students did not finish high school. She noted, “But it’s a generational thing. It’s like kids are seeing what their parents have done, what their parents are doing, what they have done.” Being from a family where the parents were either constantly on the move, did not complete their own education and consequently did not value the necessity of education in their children’s lives, or did not make education a priority for their children was an especially prevalent phenomenon among the various cultures her school served. She observed:

We have so many different cultures, races ... I mean, you would not believe... We have... Nepali, we have, like I said, it’s just... so with all those different types of um... cultures mixed in presents so many different problems. So we’ve got parents that are coming into the country, their kids may have had a second grade... they went to school, and the last grade they attended was the second grade, but yet they’re 17 or 18 and now they want to come to high school and just because... they applied for immigration.

Each of these references to family history, whether culturally influenced or generational, contributes to the likelihood of a student dropping out of school and threatens to potentially affect the principal’s level of efficacy in keeping the students from dropping out of school.

***Lack of motivation to graduate / succeed.*** Lack of motivation to graduate / succeed refers to the internal drive and motivation of the students to complete high school and either go to college and pursue a path of success in life. Each of the three principals listed this as a student factor faced in schools.

Principal A spoke of the challenges with dealing with students who had a lack of drive to succeed and who were unmotivated and excuse driven. He stated, “Um... and then their follow through with, just again, not finishing up or coming up with excuses of why they cannot continue to press. It makes it very difficult.” Additionally, he referenced how being an older student in the school system can affect a student’s lack of motivation to graduate and succeed in life, noting:

Once a student gets behind and they’re overage, they become a dropout and they don’t see the sense in staying three or four years. They are looking for a quick way out at that point – GED programs or anything like that. Or some of them just say forget it, I’m just going to drop out and go work somewhere.

Principal B addressed fear as being one of the core issues behind students’ lack of motivation to graduate and succeed. He explained:

So, they’re starting to see, as far as I know, they’re seeing the world as a bad place and not as a place of opportunity, and so they’re scared. And they will fight anybody that walks across their path, but when you try to tell them there’s another way to go on the other side of 610, that there’s a college over there, they’re like, “Well why would I go over there?” you know, “I’m scared.”

Principal B also revealed another reason for some of his students’ lack of motivation to put in the work to graduate and succeed: an aversion to hard work. He recounted a

conversation between he and his students to this extent. In the exchange, the students asked, “Why? It’s a lot of work. It’s hard!” and Principal B replied, “And I’m like, ‘Yeah, but just look at the reward on the other side of it. Your life would be a lot easier!’”

Principal C also mentioned a lack of motivation to graduate and succeed as being present among her students and discussed the factor in terms of mobility, lack of persistence, and lack of follow through. In terms of mobility, Principal C recounted a story of a student whose school record exhibited a lack of motivation to graduate and the challenges this posed to her as a leader who was responsible for increasing the graduation rates of students in her school:

[T]his year, I got a student that came from Lamar High School. He’s a senior. He’s been at Lamar for three years. He came here with five credit hours. He needs 26! He needs 22 at the minimum, but 26 is what we hope for. So, you know, you get these kids, and we have 27% mobility here. Having 27% mobility, you’re gonna get kids that come in haven’t been doing anything in school.

Next, Principal C addressed the lack of persistence she felt underlay the lack of motivation of some students to graduate and succeed. She told the story of the female student she had to track down at work and get re-enrolled in school, but although she was able to convince the student to come back to school, and although she surrounded the student with all of the additional resources she could possibly need to succeed, the student lacked persistence. She explained:

She’s called a couple of times and she’s come in a couple of times and taken some tests, but she’s not finishing that class. And it’s such a disservice for her because I

know she can. She's super... I mean she's passed all of her TAKS tests. She's fine there. She doesn't need any of that stuff. It's just the credits.

Finally, Principal C addressed the lack of follow through among her students, a clear signal in her mind of an intrinsic lack of desire to graduate from school and succeed. She explained her frustration of equipping students with all of the resources and the needed to earn credits, but when it was all said and done, students still chose not to succeed:

[T]hey just don't, you know, follow through with anything... you have this whole beautiful plan drawn out... If you take this class and this class, and then next semester you take this and this, and we get you into the winter academy to take these classes, you'll be set! Look at this. Look at these hours. They total up to this, and you can make it! And then, the classes they're in, they fail all of them. So now we've got to put that into the mix, so... it's frustrating.

***Lack of parental support.*** Lack of parental support refers to the missing levels of motivation and encouragement typically provided by parents to support children's educational attainment and help them stay in school. Principal A and Principal C both mentioned this missing factor in the lives of students, while Principal B did not.

Principal A briefly mentioned the need for parental support in addressing the substance abuse issues on his campus, particularly in the areas of communicating with and working in partnership with the school as part of the solution to help students focus on school and not drop out. He explained:

[C]ounseling services that are true counselors that can really aid the students in that drug abuse piece, and, uh... you know, and to also be able to work with the parents to

create that bridge of communication of why it's important for them to get off drugs and focus on school, you know, in school. We're very limited in that case.

Principal C discussed the lack of parental support more extensively and discussed how detrimental not having the proper levels of parental support could be to a child's ability to stay in school and graduate. For example, she explained many students had given up on home lives, because of a lack of trust and integrity:

[T]hey know that their parents or their guardian or whoever it is that is their adult figure in their life doesn't mean what they say anymore. They're not going to go to jail and then they go to jail again. They're going to be there when they get home, they don't come home for three or four days, the parents don't.

Principal C also discussed the impact the new changes in the truancy laws (recently implemented) had on her abilities to hold parents accountable for providing support for children to go to school, saying, "...now the parents are like, 'Well now, you know, [my kid is] gonna do what they want!' We can't... you know. And that doesn't help us any." Because of the new truancy laws, parents were not required to be held accountable for children's truancy.

***Social /community acceptance.*** Social / community acceptance refers to a student's need to feel accepted by the peer group or community in which he or she lives, even if it is to the detriment of the student's educational success. Principals A and B both mentioned dealing with the presence of social and community acceptance as student factors , while Principal C did not make mention of the factor being present.

Principal A made one mention of social / community acceptance within the context of a discussion about the resources his school was able to offer his low-income minority student



population. He highlighted his frustration with the fact one of the most vital resources both necessary and available to the students, they did not want. He explained:

It's the status. They don't want to be known as standing in line for free lunch because they're saying, "Ah, we're going to hear it. We go in there and get free lunch, they're going to make fun of us!" .... And we're 100%. 100 percent free lunch. Everyone is classified free lunch on [School A]'s campus. So I mean, it's like, so who are you really trying to hide from, cause everyone here...

Rather than take advantage of the free lunch everyone in the school was entitled to receive, many of the students simply went hungry, just to not be teased by peers.

Principal B discussed social / community acceptance as a key issue in motivating his students' decisions and behavior. For example, he recalled several conversations he'd had with the students in which he was trying to motivate them to graduate from high school and go on to college so they could get a good job, make good money, and become successful. However, responses to his motivation both frustrated and stunned him, because he recognized the tremendous influence needs for social / community acceptance held the lives of students. He explained:

[M]oney is important to them, but their relationships are more important. So they have to... they're trying to decide, okay yeah, I know I've heard about \$60k, \$70k jobs, but nobody has one around me, so I don't know what that's like. You know? It's that versus, "Oh, Shenay-nay, and Shenequa, and Bobo, and all them, they my homeboys! That's my family! We gonna be together forever, no matter what we go through! I'm not sure I want to leave them to do something new and different where I'll be out there on my own."

Principal B also discussed social / community acceptance as a student factor because of the detrimental impact it was having not only on academics but on level of socialization and chances for having a successful future even if graduating from high school. Through a number of conversations with his students, he recognized students preferred to be isolated and reside within a small familiar community rather than venturing out, expanding horizons and pursuing success. In fact, this type of success was something students were fearful of realizing. Principal B commented:

Ummm... this is the first predominantly black high school that I've ever been in that the kids are so comfortable with each other that they really don't know how to mix.

The community is changing around them, but their community is also getting smaller and smaller as to how they stay connected with each other, and they're not willing to come out of that yet. And it's really shocking, because you're thinking that in the 21st century, our kids have segregated themselves, and it's scary.

**Experiences and training.** Data were coded as Experiences and Training (EXPT) when they referenced any factor present internally in the life of the principal potentially causing the principal to feel either a greater or a lesser sense of efficacy in being able to impact dropout rates in the school. Criterion under the Experiences and Training category include: (a) Personal background; (b) Professional background; (c) Empathy with students.

Table 6

*Responses Coded to Experiences and Training (EXPT)*

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Total
Personal background	4	1	2	7
Professional background	0	1	1	2
Empathy with students	3	1	0	4
Total	7	3	3	13

***Personal background.*** Personal background refers to anything in the principals’ personal background, including conditions of growing up, experiences similar to what current students experienced, etc., equipping them for the task of leading a dropout initiative at low-income minority school. Each of the principals mentioned events and conditions of the past making them qualified to occupy the role as leader at a school comprised of this unique population.

Principal A offered several personal reasons behind his belief he was qualified to lead School A, beginning with his experiences growing up. When asked the question, “Do you feel trained and equipped enough to work with the low-income minority SES that comprises the majority of your student population?” He responded to the researcher:

I do. I absolutely do. I feel that I’m equipped because of my background. So in other words, I know what it’s like to come from a low-income family because I came from a low-income family, a single-parent home, and so a lot of the struggles that I see students not wanting to talk about nowadays are the same ones that I didn’t want to talk about or face with the friends that I had growing up in my small town.

Principal A went on to make several similar statements to the same extent about how his background and the way he grew up were very similar to what his students experienced, so he was better to relate to them. He stated he was also able to understand at a deeper level the challenges and obstacles his students faced.

Principal B's responses were similar to those of Principal A, because he grew up under many of the same conditions his students were growing up with, he felt he understood the challenges and how to help students overcome adversities at a deeper and a more intimate level. However, although Principal A made repeated references to this effect, Principal B only discussed the relevance of his personal back ground once, explaining:

I grew up poor, we grew up on welfare, blah, blah, blah, the story, in the projects, all of that. And education was my ticket out of my situation, and I'm the youngest of seven kids. So I'm the only one who got out, right? And so everybody else chose other paths that were not good for them, and, um, they're all alive; but by the grace of God, that's why! But I just chose to be different. I chose... I wanted something different for me, and I know what these kids are like.

Principal C also felt her personal background qualified her to work with the population of students at her school. She explained, "I understand low SES. I understand, you know, how to stretch a dollar, how to make resources out of stuff that's not there." She also elaborated on the experiences of her background and told the story of how she went from a very poor background, to figuring out a way to go to college because she knew her family did not have the resources to send her there. She began running cross country, petitioned to run with the boys' team because there was not a girls' team, fought for her spot, became a top-

ranked runner and eventually earned a scholarship giving her a full ride through college. She explained:

So, um, I ended up getting a full ride scholarship to college, which is what sent me into where I am, you know? And so, people look at me and think, “Oh she came from...” No. I came from a very poor background. Very limited resources, you know. And, um, raised by a single dad, my mother died when I was seven, so, you know, it was like, not the same.

With her comments, Principal C alluded to the idea she understood where her students were coming from, but only to an extent. She had grown up poor and with only one parent, but in adding the disclaimer, “so you know, it was like, not the same”, she recognized her experience growing up poor differed in some way from the population of poor students she served.

***Professional background.*** Professional background refers to any jobs, training, or professional experiences the principals might have engaged in preparing and equipping them with the knowledge and skills they needed to lead the population of low-income minority students comprising schools. Only Principal B and Principal C mentioned elements out of professional background training and equipping them with what was needed to be effective as the leaders of a school.

Principal B felt his professional background had prepared him to work with low-income minority students because for the most part, the vast majority of his more than two decades of professional experience had been in working with this population. He explained:

I do think I’m trained to work with low-SES kids, uh, and populations that teach low-SES kids. Umm, that’s all I’ve ever done with the exception of one school for two

years. I was at a middle-class school, uh, or we thought as middle-class school. They had the money; they just didn't have the mentality to work around some of the things. Um, but other than that, all my other experiences for 23 out of the 25 years have been working at low-SES schools.

Principal C made references to her professional background, but each of the references pertained to how her professional background had not prepared her to work with the current population of students she served at School C. First, she admitted this was the first job she'd had working with students of this nature, saying, "So, it's been a learning experience because there's no lie in that I came from [several upper class schools]." Each of these schools were located in upper and upper-middle class neighborhood and were not faced with many of the challenges she currently faced at School C, so Principal C was honest in her admission the whole experience of leading this school as its new principal was one in which she was learning as she went.

Additionally, Principal C spoke about her fears in working at School C, because she had never worked with such a population in her professional career. However, in referring to the population, she shifted the focus off of the low-SES and instead focused on the fact her professional background had not prepared her to work with high school students. She confessed:

[T]he truth was my biggest fear probably wasn't as much [working with low SES students] as it was the experience of high school and understanding how credits work and all of the stuff that you have to understand, because you don't have... you don't have a year to learn it. You have to learn it coming in the door, you know? Like on the cusp immediately, because you cannot mess up that kind of stuff for these kids...

or they don't graduate at the end of the year. So that was a huge learning curve for me. Um... working with low SES, I think it's just about compassion, about empathy, about building relationships and about relating to the situation you are put in, you know?

Finally, Principal C makes another admission highlighting the notion her professional career had not prepared her for working with her current context of students when she speaks about how many of her high school students have jobs. Again, she openly admitted, "We've got *a lot* of students at work. That was one thing I didn't understand when I came here, is like our students won't come because they work. I kept hearing, 'Our students won't come because they work.' And I'm like, '*Really?*' And they *really* work!"

***Empathy with students.*** Empathy with students refers to principals' self-perceived ability to understand and share the feelings of students. Principals A and B made statements expressing abilities to empathize with students while Principal C did not.

Principal A connected his ability to empathize with his students to his personal background, having grown up in the same way his students were growing up. As a result, he felt a strong sense of being able to identify with them, and consequently, help students work through obstacles to stay in school and be successful. For example, he explained his ability to empathize, saying:

In most cases, you have to have an understanding of some of the issues that are obstacles for our students and at least have a track record of showing them or be able to have a conversation of how you overcame those obstacles as examples so that you can try to get them to stay the course. Um, because I come from such a background, I think that gives me more credibility to establish a better relationship with the students

that we serve. They take what we tell them a little more literal, and they take it to heart, so they listen a little closer, and a lot of that stuff, they retain, so... because of my, uh, experiences and a similar background that I come from and the world that I was raised, I believe that it just gives me just that much more credibility to help our students that are in these situations.

Additionally, Principal A was able to leverage his ability to empathize with his students to gain access and influence them. As a result, he was able to develop a level of relationship with them in which he could share his story of how he progressed from a low-income minority student to become a successful principal. He noted, “I pride myself in utilizing my past and my experiences that I’ve had to tell our students, you know, why they should stay the course and what it has done for me, you know.”

Principal B made one comment in the course of his interview pointing to his ability to empathize with his students. Like Principal A, he acknowledged the source of his ability to empathize with his students was grounded in the fact he had grown up in a situation much like his students were growing up in; therefore, he was able to relate to them. He commented:

I mean, I know exactly what it’s like when everybody else in your household is drunk or on drugs... and you don’t have anybody in your corner. They need somebody in their corner, cause I had a few teachers that were in my corner that said, “You know, you can do this, you can make this, you can try it.” ...And just that little message of “You can do it!” from somebody that sees you struggling or whatever and says “You can make it,” helps. It just helps. It’s hard. And it was hard. And that’s what I tell people all the time. The road to success is not easy.



### Theme 3: Deficit Thinking Presence

This theme was constructed to indicate the presence of deficit thinking detected in the principal or in the school. Data were coded as Minimum Presence of Deficit Thinking when the principal made a comment aligned with indicators presented in the literature pointing to the presence of a deficit thinking mindset. Principal A, Principal B, and Principal C all made comments in this section meeting the criteria for Minimum Presence of Deficit Thinking. Criteria under the Minimum Presence of Deficit Thinking category include: (a) Cognitive and motivational deficits; (b) Parental / home deficits and dysfunctions; (c) Off-campus environment and associations; (d) Values (personal and parental); (e) Economic priorities; and (f) Teenage mother / fatherhood.

Table 7

*Responses Coded to Minimum Presence of Deficit Thinking (MPDT)*

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Total
Cognitive and motivational deficits	1	1	2	4
Parental / home deficits and dysfunctions	2	1	1	4
Off-campus environment and associations	4	1	1	6
Values (personal)	0	2	1	3
Economic priorities	1	1	1	3
Teenage mother / fatherhood	0	1	1	2
Total	8	7	7	22

**Cognitive and motivational deficits.** Cognitive and motivational deficits refer to any references the principal might have made to intrinsic deficits perceived to exist in students' intellectual abilities or drive to finish high school and graduate. Each of the principals made statements interpreted by the researcher to imply the presence of cognitive and motivational deficits in students. Although the criterion was created to identify the presence of cognitive and motivational thinking, all of the statements made by the principals in this category implied motivational deficits. None of them made statements implying a cognitive deficit was present.

Principal A spoke of a motivational deficit he perceived to exist among his students when spoke of the challenge of motivating them to invest in the hard work needed to succeed in school and graduate versus pursue an easier route as dropouts when he stated, "And so, because it takes so much time, students are not willing to put in those hours."

Principal B also made one statement implying a perceived motivational deficit in students when discussing the struggle of keeping students optimistic about abilities to complete classes and graduate, especially after having been in school for so long without graduating. He commented, "Umm, the other side of it, I think, is that some of the kids feel like it's hopeless. They've lost hope that school can actually help them, because they've been engaged in the system for so long."

Principal C made two statements alluding to a motivational deficit being present in her students. The comments were made in the context of discussing, despite the amount of passion she held for her students to stay in school and graduate, students lack the drive to accomplish the same desires, so there was little she could do to help them. For example, she noted, "We're not, you know, asking them to all be 4.0's, but some of them just don't have

the drive.” Principal C also commented about the lack of “heart” among many of her students:

I feel defeated sometimes by the fact that you just try everything you can to keep them from dropping out, and the bottom line is that if they have no heart to even want to say “I’m willing to try,” then, um... you know, or “I want this to happen,” or the parent has like, given up on them...

Each of these statements made by the principals hinted at the presence of a motivational deficit existing among student populations.

***Parental /home dysfunctions.*** Parental / home dysfunctions refer to any impairments present among the parents or in the home lives of students compromising abilities to stay in school and graduate. All three principals made comments interpreted by the researcher to imply the presence of parental and home dysfunctions hindering the abilities of students to stay in school.

Principal A discussed the effects the home lives of his students had on students’ ability to stay in school and graduate, noting home conditions could serve as a point of discouragement and engender a sense of hopelessness. He made one statement to this extent, noting:

That is what makes it so difficult, because I think these young lives, their backgrounds, or their home lives are so volatile that at any point in time, uh... it could drive them to the point of discouraging them, you know, and putting them back in that same situation or that same state of mind that they were in of giving up and, you know, why fight the good fight, you know, if it’s not going to get any better?

Principal A continued to affirm the presence of this mindset by repeating the sentiment in another comment in which he expressed not being able to save certain students because of home situations, and unless he could provide certain resources for families operating with limited resources, little could be done to save them. He explained:

And so, in that case, I feel that there are some students that have that situation, where, you know, no matter what you do or what you can provide for them, if your resources are limited, obviously, you can't extend any more help to that family, you know.

Even though his responsibilities go beyond him, himself, he had to contribute to the household. In a perfect world, if you really want to save that student, you would essentially have to provide, you know, resources for the entire family.

Principal B made only one statement the researcher categorized under the criteria of parental / home deficits and dysfunctions. The researcher interpreted the comment made under this criterion after interpreting the statement in context as he considered the principal's tone and body language. When the principal simply stated, "So outside factors of their home environment, *that's* something," the researcher understood this to imply that the principal was making a statement about the challenges that his students' home lives posed to his ability to effectively retain them in school.

Principal C was more open about the statement the researcher classified as an implication of deficit thinking. When commenting about the many factors influenced students to drop out of school while she made every attempt to keep her students in school, she stated, "It has to do with the lack of support at home," as one of several factors that she had to compete with in order to accomplish her goal of student retention.

*Off-campus environment and associations.* Off-campus environment and associations refers to the various relationships and networks outside of school influence students to drop out of school. Each of the three principals made statements interpreted by the researcher to imply the presence of off-campus environment and associations hindered the abilities of students to stay in school.

Principal A made several statements about the competition he faced as a result of his students' off-campus environments and associations. First, he spoke of the likelihood of his dropout retention efforts working on students spent much more time with off-campus associations and in off-campus environments and how the surroundings influenced students in the opposite direction than the direction in which he was trying to lead them. He explained, "Again, it hasn't always worked because it just depends on the individuals, the type of environment they are in and the certain influences that they have pulling them in the opposite direction or maybe showing them a different route, you know?" Next, Principal A discussed the level of difficulty students' off-campus environments and associations posed to his efforts to keep him in school and how these influences often derailed his efforts, saying, "It is very difficult to know because you can have students that, uh, that get on a plan and stick to it and they start seeing, experiencing success, but there could be one thing that happens outside of the school in home to derail everything." Then, in a later statement, Principal A openly expressed a deficit way of thinking when he spoke of the likelihood of students' off-campus environments and associations to influence them to drop out of school. He expressed:

In my opinion, uh... I do feel that there are some students that will be more likely to drop out. And again, it goes back to what I stated earlier. The outside influences... we

don't know... by the time students get to us in high school, you really don't know what the past, you know, 10 years have been like or what level or what their educational or home life has been like.

Finally, whereas Principal A's previous comments addressed his perception the students' off-campus environment and associations served to negatively influence the educational pursuits of his students, in his final comment categorized under this criterion, he explained how these factors swayed students to drop out of school:

When even the shift happens within the student, you know, going from a negative to a positive and really starting to embrace what an education can do for them. Then you have a family member or somebody close to them just tear them back down again, and say that, you know, no matter how hard you try, you're always going to be XYZ. Uh, and in that case, you know, no matter how many resources you pump into an individual, if they have someone pulling at them like that, uh... it really just, you know, it works against everything that we've tried to do or that I've tried to do to try to turn it around for that student.

Principal B made one comment implying the strong influence students' off-campus environments and associations had on the likelihood of dropping out of school. He mentioned the comment in the context of discussing the limited impact he could have on students strongly influenced by these factors and also explained one of the motivations driving the reason these factors deterred students from finishing school. Principal B stated:

And some of them... and I hate to keep bringing this up, but some of them have an environment that's outside of the school that's not healthy, but there's only so much that I can do to step into that world with them and try to pull them out of it slowly.

Because it's that, uh... and it's a horrible analogy, but it's the crabs in the bucket mentality that as soon as one tries to crawl out, the other ones pull him back down.

Principal C discussed her lack of ability to achieve a 100% success rate with keeping her students in school and how her inability to realize this goal was directly tied to her students' off-campus environment and associations tempting them in another direction. She commented, "It has to do with, um, a more enticing um... social life outside of school, and um... you can't... it's sad to say, but you... you can't reach 100%."

*Values (personal).* Values (personal) refer to the regard for certain principles and standards of behavior upheld by students influence students to drop out of school. Principals B and C made statements interpreted by the researcher to imply the presence of personal values hindering the abilities of students to stay in school.

Principal B made two comments hinting at the presence of the type of values detrimental to a student's success in school. The first reference implying the presence of deficit thinking of this nature was discussed in the context of parental values. When the researcher asked, "For the students more likely to drop out of school, how much power do you feel you have to keep them from dropping out?" the principal responded in such a way emphasizing the lack of value for education among the family, noting, "The majority of kids that are dropping out have that 70% influence that we talked about from home where parents didn't finish, grandparents may not have finished, t friends haven't finished..." Later, Principal B made a statement implying the level of value many of his students had for education by discussing it in terms of its importance to them. He stated, "...because they don't see school as important, they don't see it as an opportunity to improve their lives."

Principal C made one statement alluding to the lack of value students' families had for education, values which were consequently adopted by many of the students themselves when she commented, "And you know, a lot of times, it has to do with family history. It has to do with siblings who dropped out."

*Economic priorities.* Economic priorities refer to the level of importance students give to making money over and above the completion of a high school education. Each of the three principals made statements interpreted by the researcher to imply the presence of economic priorities hindering the motivation of students to stay in school.

Principal A discussed the prioritization of making money within the context of a conversation about students' desire for instant gratification and how, when considering the ability to satisfy desires through dropping out of school, getting a job, and making the money to get them the things they wanted immediately and weighed this ability against continuing to struggle through school and defer this gratification, making money often won out. He explained, "I think the young people nowadays want instant gratification just because of what they see on TV or what they experience or what, you know, whatever others might be telling them. They might be close to somebody else who had quick success by going another route."

Principal B also emphasized how students placed a lot of importance on making money and how this often competed with his efforts to keep them in school until the necessary credits were completed to graduate. He commented, "...so their access to whatever they're doing to make money or make a living or working part time at this, that, or the other, that's a pretty strong force that's pulling them in that direction. Umm... and I think that that's hurting a lot of us."



Principal C discussed the economic priorities of her students on several occasions. In a key comment describing the prioritization of money of education typically present among her students, her dropout prevention coordinator explained:

...sometimes in their senior year decide, you know what, I'm 18 now. I'm gonna go get me a job. And they're thinking that \$10, \$12 an hour is... is a lot when it's really not. But that said... that goes back to them not seeing a bigger picture. They're not even being exposed to a bigger picture. So, and, like I said, that's the sad part about it.

***Teenage mother /fatherhood.*** Teenage mother / fatherhood refers to students becoming mother and fathers while still enrolled in school and how being a teen mother or father increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school. Two principals, Principal B and Principal C made statements interpreted by the researcher to imply how teenage mother / fatherhood reduced the likelihood of students remaining in school and graduating.

Principal B explained how being a teen mother or father impacted the abilities of a lot of his students to remain in school, particularly how the responsibility of having children coupled with a lack of family support affected the possibility of dropping out when he commented:

Umm... a lot of them are dropping out because they've gotten pregnant and had kids, and their family is not really supporting them to go back to school. You know, they're like, well you had these kids, you need to stay here and take care of them... and that kind of thing. So the kids aren't able to get the educational support that they need, so they're dropping out.

Principal C explained how teenage mother / fatherhood affected her abilities to realize her goal of keeping 100% of her students in school when she commented, "So, we're not ever

gonna keep all of them in school and keep them from dropping out, but you go for 100%. And some of the factors contributing to it is [sic], I've had my second baby, okay? I'm gonna do something else."

#### **Theme 4: Efforts to Prevent Dropouts**

This theme was constructed to enumerate the various means and levels of effort principals used in schools to try to curb or prevent dropouts among low-income minority students. It consists of two categories: (a) Programs and Initiatives (PI); and (b) Personal Efforts (PE).

**Programs and initiatives.** Data were coded as Programs and Initiatives (PI) when study participants, either the principals or the administrators described or listed a formal program or strategic initiative the school was using to reduce and eliminate dropouts among students. Criterion under the Programs and Initiatives category include: (a) Mentoring program; (b) School caseworkers / counselors; (c) Graduation support; (d) Attendance programs / appeals; (e) Credit recovery programs; (f) Incentive programs; (g) Social contracts; and (h) Learning support programs.

Table 8

*Responses Coded to Programs and Initiatives (PI)*

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Total
Mentoring program	0	0	2	2
School caseworkers / counselors	2	1	3	6
Graduation support	1	4	0	5
Attendance programs / appeals	2	0	0	2
Credit recovery programs	1	1	5	7
Incentive programs	1	1	0	2
Social contracts	1	3	1	5
Learning support programs	0	0	1	1
Total	8	10	12	30

***Mentoring program.*** Mentoring program refers to a formal program operating in the school designed to guide, offer direction to, and counsel students. Only one principal reported the presence of a formal mentoring program operational in the school, Principal C. Principals A and B made no mention of the presence of a formal mentoring program operating within schools.

Principal C's school operated a formal mentoring program called "Relationship Matters". The dropout prevention coordinator for the school explained the rationale behind the development of the program:

[We started a] program called Relationship Matters because we feel like the first line of defense for preventing a kid from dropping out is that teacher having that

relationship with that kid and trying to discover what's going on to try to help be that buffer before a kid drops out.

***School caseworkers /counselors.*** School caseworkers / counselors refer to the school's programmatic use of dedicated caseworkers and counselors to provide individualized attention to students necessary in addressing the academic, behavioral, and personal issues and obstacles increasing the chance of dropping out of school. Each of the principals reported having caseworkers, counselors, or both present to address the needs of students to curb and prevent dropouts in schools.

Principal A oversaw the efforts of a caseworker sent to the school as part of a university research project, noting the individual was a dropout prevention caseworker coming in to the school to assist with his dropout prevention efforts. The caseworker, who was a researcher and not an employee of the school, operated "Project GOAL", which stood for (Graduations Equal to Opportunities for Achievement and Leadership", and addressed the attendance issue of a specific set of students in the school via the constant monitoring of two related constructs: behavior and conduct. Additionally, Principal A used traditional school counselors to discover and address the needs of his students as a means of increasing retention.

Principal B explained the counselors in his school engaged in counseling sessions with the students and parents and often sat in on these sessions to provide whatever support he could as the principal. No caseworkers were employed or assigned to address the needs of specific sets of students.

Principal C also employed the use of traditional counselors and used counseling for the students in her school as a means of addressing issues to decrease the probability of

dropping out of school before graduation. While the school did not have dedicated caseworkers, the dropout prevention coordinator referenced doing “intensive case management” with the students who were not coming to school in order to get them re-enrolled and as a means of keeping them enrolled in school.

***Graduation support.*** Graduation support refers to programs and initiatives the school engaged as a specific means of supporting their efforts to graduate, separate from credit recovery programs. Principals A and B made mention of programs schools had undertaken to this extent. Principal C did not suggest any formal means of providing graduation support.

Principal A explained he and his dropout prevention staff members held weekly graduation support meetings designed to discuss the progress of each student towards realizing graduation. During these meetings, students were identified as high risk of not graduating and discussed what type of interventions and support mechanisms could be offered to students in order to ensure on time graduation.

Principal B undertook several efforts categorized by the researcher as graduation support. First, motivated by the lack of awareness of his students about what was necessary to graduate from high school, on the first day of school, he ensured high school transcripts were available to all students and teachers and counselors spent dedicated time teaching them how to read them. After having conferences with the students about high school transcripts and educating them on the importance of school, how to make up missed credits, etc., the school brought in additional counselors and the school registrar to formally discuss credits, how high school differed from middle school, and how the practice of social promotion did not exist in high school (the students would have to work to graduate), and graduation plans.

Principal B also implemented informational sessions about graduating hosted by upperclassmen – students had learned the hard way about recovering from bad academic decisions in the past and he trained them how to read a transcript, the importance of graduation, how to recover from shortfalls in credits, graduation plans, etc. He explained, “So we have sessions planned in the spring: how to take tests seriously from the upper class. You know, it’s not like we’re working magic here; we’re just using the resources we have to educate somebody else through a bad issue.”

Principal C did not formally highlight a specific initiative designed for graduation support. This could be attributed to the lack of personnel on her campus. As noted during the initial interview, Principal C only has one administrator addressing dropout prevention on campus. While this was not specifically stated as a root cause, that lack of personnel could have affected this area.

*Attendance programs /appeals.* Attendance programs / appeals refers to programs within the school developed specifically for the purpose of increasing attendance among the students, which was designed to reduce the likelihood of repetitive absences, a precursor to dropping out of school. Principal A was the only principal to make reference to an attendance program in the school.

Principal A recently introduced and was focusing on a program called “Attendance First,” was developed to consistently emphasize the importance of attendance and school attendance was to come first before everything else. Additionally, the school had a process it dubbed “attendance appeals” preventing students from dropping out of school by helping them regain credits lost as a result of attendance issues.

*Credit recovery programs.* Credit recovery programs refers to programs within the school were designed to help students recover credits not earned in the past to graduate. All of the principals made mention of the presence of credit recovery programs. The credit recovery program used for all of the schools was Graduation Lab (referred to as “Grad Lab” by the principals), a program active on all of the comprehensive high school campuses in the district. Grad Lab is a program the district uses to offer classes online to seniors at risk of not graduating by May and underclassmen who have failed multiple courses in a previous semester, or students retained in high school. The purpose of the program is to motivate students to stay in school by helping them move closer towards the goal of graduation through the recovery of credits. Each of the principals spoke of offering the online Grad Lab and coupling the on-campus Grad Lab with a graduation coach and tutors.

Principal B explained how students, who were introduced to reading a transcript, saw shortfalls and were instantly interested in attending Grad Lab to graduate on time:

[Student:] Okay, can I come to Grad Lab, because I need to make up this class?

[Principal:] Yeah, we’ll have Grad Lab over Christmas break. We’re gonna have six days: three days next week, three days the week after. [Student:] Okay, where do I sign up? [Principal:] Now these are the kids... you couldn’t have paid them to come before. But now that it’s getting close to crunch time, they’re like... it’s a sense of urgency now, like, “I’ve got to get my transcript right!”

Principal C commented about how she used Grad Lab as a means to help her dropout students recover some of the credits missed after dropping out of school:

We had 87 students who didn’t graduate last year, okay? And they had still, till August 15<sup>th</sup> to graduate, and then now, it’s till December. This is the first year they’re

extending it to the December, so I'm looking for these 87 kids all summer, right? We were bringing them in, bringing them in serving them breakfast and lunch and keeping them here in Grad Lab and getting them to finish it.

Further, Principal C's commitment to getting her students through Grad Lab in order to help recover credits necessary for graduation was made clear through explaining how she went and found many of her dropout students by visiting homes and work and then brought them to the school for the program:

So we called the kid over and I introduced [myself to] him. He didn't know me at all. I was the new principal at [School C] and told him I needed him to be here and that I would pick him up, I would, you know... and so we did that. I mean, every morning this summer, I had a carpool. I went around and picked up kids. But I told them, "I go to work at six. If you want to come to school, you're coming at 6 am, because I'm not leaving my job to come get you at 7:30 am, because it starts at 8 am." So they sat in this room and started their Grad Lab work, and I brought them breakfast, and they worked, you know? So, you just do whatever you can and luckily, the district has provided us with some really great funds and resources for our Grad Lab. We were all loaded with some money this summer, and that's extending through this year to get these kids to graduate.

***Incentive programs.*** Incentive programs refers to programs the schools operated as a means of inducing or encouraging certain desired behaviors among its students increasing the likelihood of staying in school and graduating. Principal A and Principal B both made mention of incentive programs operating in schools to encourage desired behaviors. Principal C made no mention of an operational incentive program at her school.



Principal A placed an emphasis on attendance through an incentive program rewarding perfect attendance. In this “Attendance First” program, students who had achieved perfect attendance for the semester were celebrated with a certificate and were invited to take place in a special celebration held in honor of their achievement.

Principal B also use incentive programs at his school designed to encourage and motivate students to engage in behaviors promoted by him and his staff. He discussed the use of such incentives in the context of how the school disaffirmed negative behaviors via consequences and affirmed desired behaviors through offering incentives. Principal B explained he and his staff were committed to “Making sure that, uh, you know, there are consequences that are followed through when kids make mistakes. Um, making sure that we give... provide kids with rewards and incentives for doing the right thing, just promoting that message consistently.”

***Social contracts.*** Social contracts refer to a school’s programmatic use of written agreements students entered into as a means of making a formal commitment to engage in a certain desired behavior. Each of the principals mentioned the use of one or more types of social contracts in school.

Principal A used social contracts in the school, although it was unclear as to what types of social contracts were used. The dropout prevention caseworker noted, “And um, a few of them have contracts; we know what their issues are,” which provided insight into the fact that contracts were used but did not specify how and by what students.

Principal B also used social contracts in the school, a fact highlighted by his dropout prevention coordinator. The use of contracts was referenced by the coordinator in several statements. For example, she explained, [O]ne of the steps that we have to take is to put the

student on what's called an attendance contract to kind of make them accountable for, uh, coming to school every day." She also revealed the school's use of behavioral contracts, noting, "[W]e place them on a behavioral contract that kind of goes along with the attendance contract, again to put the behavior back on the student because it would mean something to them."

Principal C's dropout prevention coordinator also mentioned the school's use of attendance contracts as one of several approaches the school used as a preventive measure to leading students into a commitment to continue attending classes and to discourage its students from dropping out of school.

***Learning support programs.*** Learning support programs refers to programs engaged by the school, outside of the curriculum and classroom instruction, designed to enhance the learning of the students, which increases the likelihood they will remain in school and not drop out. Principal C was the only principal to make mention of the presence of a learning support program in her school. Neither Principal A nor B made reference to the existence of a program of this nature.

Principal C described the Link Learning program she had implemented in her school as a means of enhancing the learning experience of her students:

So Link Learning is a big part of where kids move through classes with the same teacher so these five teachers that teach the core content have all of those kids. Those five teachers work together. Those five teachers work with the CAPE program, too, and the Link Learning program to make sure that those kids are... like kind of have another set of eyes on them.

**Personal efforts.** Data were coded as Personal Efforts (PE) when study participants, either the principals or the administrators described informal, personal efforts individually engaged in for the purpose of attempting to positively impact dropout rates at schools. These efforts personally motivated and are not required by the school and are not mandated by any formal policy or program. Criteria under the Personal Efforts category include: (a) Building relationships; (b) Creating culture; (c) Informal mentoring; (d) Motivation / inspiring vision for future; (e) Welfare assistance / resource referral; (f) Presenting alternatives to overcome obstacles; (g) Home / job visits; (h) Individualized student attention; (i) Attendance enforcement; (j) Teacher quality / accountability; and (k) Presence at extracurricular events.

Table 9

*Responses Coded to Personal Efforts (PE)*

	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C	Total
Building relationships	2	3	3	8
Creating culture	1	2	8	11
Informal mentoring	1	0	1	2
Motivation / inspiring vision for future	2	3	2	7
Welfare assistance / resource referral	3	2	5	10
Presenting alternatives to overcome obstacles	1	0	11	12
Home / job visits	1	3	3	7
Individualized student attention	1	5	4	10
Attendance enforcement	3	4	2	9
Teacher quality / accountability	1	4	1	6
Presence at extracurricular events	0	2	2	4
Total	16	28	42	86

***Building relationships.*** Building relationships refers to the principal's personal practice of and encouraging staff members to build relationships with students as a means of keeping them closely connected, reducing the chances of them dropping out of school. Each of the principals referenced the importance of building relationships with students.

Principal A emphasized the significance of building relationships with both the students and the staff as being one of the keys to his effectiveness in helping to curb student dropout rates. He commented, "[T]he relationships that I build with students and the staff at school, um, is also a major factor that I see is impactful for our students."

Principal B expressed similar remarks about the importance of building relationships with his students. When the researcher asked about what major factors contributed most to his effectiveness to help a student stay in school, he replied, "First, I think it's building relationship with kids. Umm... academically, of course. That's always the foundation. But building relationships, getting them to trust you and want to be here. So that's key." Principal B also elaborated on how he built relationships with his students, commenting, "And also talking to them, just taking the time out to get to know who they are and their story so we can actually have a relationship, that we can both meet each other halfway."

Principal C and her team made three comments suggesting the importance for not only her to build relationships with the students but for her dropout prevention team members to build relationships with the students. For example, she referenced how effective her dropout prevention building coordinator had been, in large part because he took the time to build relationships with the students. She said:

That's truancy prevention. He's talking to kids, he's making connections with kids, he's... you know, he's asking about other kids that aren't there, so it's in the morning,

out at duty, you're seeing who's coming, who's not, where so and so I know he always comes in this way at this time... you're looking for kids all the time, and it's really about building the relationships and knowing your kids, too, because he really knows the kids, and you have to look out for them...

***Creating culture.*** Creating culture refers to principals' efforts to create the type of organizational culture in the school necessary to curb and prevent dropouts among students at the school. Each principal made personal efforts to create this type of culture in the schools.

Principal A explained the necessity of creating a culture fostering success in his students. In fact, he explained it was one of the three major factors contributing most to his effectiveness in being able to help students stay in school. This culture was characterized by being safe, accepting, ready to give second chances, and encouraging of the students' goals.

He commented:

And then the culture that we create in whatever setting I'm in, whether it is a middle or high school... uh, creating a safe culture for students and a culture of not really looking at where they have been but what their goals are, their new goals to try to make sure that they can finish what they started. I think that that makes a safe environment overall for students to come in and feel like they have a new start, and uh, they can definitely get a second chance at trying to finish something that is going to be beneficial for them.

Principal B offered two comments specifically pointed to the type of culture he was trying to create in the school, and both surrounded the reinforcement of rules, standards, and regulations communicated. He explained, this included "Making sure that, uh, you know, there are consequences that are followed through when kids make mistakes," and described

an example of this as “simple things as making kids wear uniforms when they come to school.” However, the other side of this culture was one of celebrating compliance with the rules and standards of the school by celebrating kids with rewards and other incentives.

Principal C referenced a number of concerted efforts she and her team were making to create a desired culture in her school. First, she was focused on developing a culture marked by safety, trust, positivity and encouragement. She explained:

If we say that we’re going to do it, we’re going to do it. That’s what our kids battle everyday – adults in their life that don’t follow through with doing what they say they’re going to do. And so, what we try to do is motivate them to believe that, you know, no matter... that adult in their life that said “You can’t”, “You’re never gonna”, “You’re not any...”, “You’re not worth it”, “You’re not good”, we try to rebuild that back up.

Next, Principal C strove to create a culture of success. To this end, she changed the name of her truancy office to the “Student Success Center” because this was a more positive and optimistic name, and it was more welcoming to students and parents. Then, Principal C was intent on creating a culture marked by heavy visible presence of her and her staff so students could not only get to know them but know they were there to support them. She noted:

They, you know, say over and over again, in the past years, they didn’t even know who the principal was here. And they’re seeing a totally different view on that. In the hallways, every single bell we are out there. Even in between, we stay out until every kid is in a classroom, so that might be another five or ten minutes from the time the bell rings, especially at the beginning of the day because they are coming in late still. So, we’re just there. We’re a presence, and I think that that’s the, uh, influence and

the difference that we're making for the kids as well, because they know that we are there to support them.

Finally, Principal C and her team sought to create a culture helping to inform students about particular issues and help them grow in proficiencies in certain areas. This was accomplished by working with the faculty and staff to create outreach videos and uploading them on YouTube and the school's own network for viewing by the students. The videos covered everything from college readiness to dropout prevention and parental involvement, and the school had recently won an award by the school board as a result of this particular effort to create culture in the organization.

***Informal mentoring.*** Informal mentoring refers to the presence of mentoring activity in the school undertaken as a means to guide, direct, and support students in efforts to succeed, but the mentoring was not driven by a formal program. Rather, it was driven out of being a personal value of the principal. Principal A and Principal C both made comments suggesting this type of mentoring was occurring to support students.

Principal A discussed the importance of mentoring relationships and the role it played in helping to expose the students to examples of positive future successes if necessary steps were taken to stay in school and graduate. He explained:

So what we've tried to do in the past is really just expose our students to what some other adults that have kind of similar backgrounds experienced and just expose them to what type of obstacles they faced and how they got over those obstacles. You know, match them with a mentor and have conversations about what it's like to get through high school, and what are the benefits of getting a better education so that they can eventually go into the workforce or experience for the university, what

university life is like, and you know, use their lives as data as well to show them what happens when minority students are limited in their education, what their future looks like.

Principal C mentioned the development of an initiative birthed out of her own personal efforts to connect students with potential mentors; thus, it was not a formal mentoring program in the school. The effort, which she labeled “SOS” (Save One Student) was developed to encourage teachers who connected with certain students to continue to connect with the student beyond the teacher’s own class and to extend his or her influence in the student’s life in other ways as well. She explained:

But one of the things that I told the teachers is without actually counting it and making it a program at [School C], we did this SOS “Save One Student” where you know in my class... I know in my class that I’ve got these two kids who I... they come to me and they ask me questions, and I can really make a difference with them, but I can make a difference in more than my class. Cause they’re doing well in my class, but they’re not doing well anywhere else. So how can I be a mentor for those kids and... and you know, say, “Okay. What’s going on in biology? Why are you not doing well in there? What’s going on over here in your math class? Cause you’re doing really well in my English class. You can do this.” Why... you know? And holding them more accountable because you’ve developed that relationship with them and they’ll talk to you. They’ll open up to you.

***Motivation /inspiring vision for future.*** Motivation / inspiring vision for future refers to the principal’s personal efforts to inspire students’ success and help students develop a picture of a thriving future, if successful in school, particularly if these efforts fell outside of



any mandate or formal program to do so. Each of the three principals made comments suggesting students engaged in these activities based on personal efforts taken by the principals.

Principal A used a strategy of trying to show his students a better picture of what the future holds after graduating from high school and going to college. He offered it as a primary key necessary for his students to succeed, because the conditions they faced outside of school communicated the opposite message. He noted, “[T]hen you have those other students that will require you completely separating them from their environment to really show them what they are missing out on.” Principal A elaborated on how he used data and statistics to illustrate for his students the kind of lives to expect when using education as a means to escape current environments and pursued a greater future:

For the most part, um, sticking to the data, showing them what happens if you stay the course, what it looks like for someone who does get an education versus somebody who has a limited education really translates into salaries and quality of life. It’s the most... the clearest picture that we could paint for them, and of course, having those mentor conversations that they can share their own experiences so they can see what it’s like.

Principal B engaged in efforts similar to Principal A, as he saw exposing students to the kind of lives they could live only by staying in school, graduating, and going to college as a key strategy in helping them to envision a better future and develop motivation to pursue it. He attempted to do this in multiple ways. First, on a personal level, he’d had many conversations with his students in efforts to help them envision something greater, something he referred to as “selling the world” to them. He explained:

There's a big world out there! You've got to go to college! You may go to college in California, or Purdue... you've got to get out of here! I was like... you guys have no idea how big the world is, and how much you know, and what you can do, and how talented you are, and how you are just as smart as everybody else... It's selling the world to our kids, and they see a whole different world than we see...

Then, Principal B encouraged his teachers to share stories with the students to inspire them into believing and envisioning a brighter future and make it a reality. This was a part of Principal B's larger effort to expose his students to what was possible to achieve so they would be motivated to achieve it for themselves. He commented:

So what my goal is to give them some access so they can see and experience: You can be this. You can have this. Look at how this guy... look at whether they came from. And what I've been sharing with the staff and everybody that comes around my kids is to tell them... is to share with them... tell them your story. How did you get to where you are?

Principal B was the only principal to use spirituality as a means of inspiring and motivating his students to aspire to do more and be more. He mixed this spirituality with his own testimony of how he was helped by just a few other people who believed in him and nurtured his dreams, goals, and ambitions into becoming the successful leader:

You cannot do it on your own, but if you have a few people in your corner, that's all you need. You don't need a whole bunch of people. You just need a few people in your corner the whole time just to walk you through it. And I felt, and I told some of the kids before, I said, I was blessed in my life because I felt that when one teacher helped me as far as he or she could, God put someone else there to carry me to the

best place. And so I tell these kids, I said, nobody... God's *not* leaving you. He *hasn't* forgotten you. You've just got to do your part!

Principal C discussed her personal efforts to keep her students motivated in two ways. First, she commented about how she and her team were very intentional in motivating and building up students with a culture of positivity and affirming words in light of the fact many of them lived in home situations in which uninspiring words are spoken telling the students what they could not do, were not worth, and were never going to do. In addition to offering constant affirmation to the students, Principal C also engaged in personal efforts by encouraging students to get involved in extracurricular activities like trying out for the basketball team, being a part of the entrepreneur group after school, being in the UIL, speech, debate, or even attending a homecoming dance, as a means of keeping them connected to the school.

***Welfare assistance /resource referral.*** Welfare assistance / resource referral refers to the personal efforts of the principals and teams to offer welfare assistance and other resources as well as referrals to resources students need to increase the likelihood students would continue attending school. Each of the principals utilized personal efforts to offer welfare assistance and resource referrals to students.

Principal A explained the lengths he and his team went to in providing welfare assistance to his students. He and his team commented, "We'll wash clothes if we have to", "We'll buy clothes", "[We'll buy] backpacks, school supplies..." Providing these resources for his students helped to ensure they had the necessary tools and resources allowing them to continue attending school.

Principal B and his team made comments suggesting primarily providing resource referral to students who expressed a need for them. The online resource Triad was used to refer students to these services. For example, the dropout prevention coordinator explained, “I talk to them all day long, provide additional outside resources for them, tutorials...” and “[I] use, um, Triad to also... if our kids are in need of services such as pregnancy services.”

Principal C and her team engaged several personal efforts in the areas of welfare assistance and resource referral. For welfare assistance, she sought out creative ways to meet the financial shortfalls of her students who could not afford certain financial obligations. For example, when some of the students were unable to afford the \$25 fee for laptops, she identified a local civic organization to make a financial donation to cover the expenses for them. On several occasions, she also explained how she referred her students to sources to help them get part-time jobs agreeing to work around school schedules so students could continue attending classes. Additionally, she and her staff used Triad for resource referrals for students who needed them among other county referral sources and community partnerships. Finally, Principal C spoke of her persistence in ensuring her students received the resources needed in order to be able to stay in school, even if she and her staff had to bring them in from the outside. Accomplishing this took a knowledgeable, experienced team of staff members committed to meeting the needs of the students:

... it's about experience and about the people that work for you knowing what's out there to go after it. You know, who can come give shots? Who can make sure that our kids, you know, get medication that they need or glasses that they need or all of those things?

*Presenting alternatives to overcome obstacles.* Presenting alternatives to overcome obstacles refers to principals involving personal efforts to help students through the process of identifying potential solutions to the problems potentially jeopardizing abilities to continue attending school. Two principals, Principal A and Principal C, offered comments pointing efforts to personally help students by presenting alternatives to help overcome obstacles. Principal B made no comments indicating he personally assisted students by presenting alternatives for them to overcome difficulties faced by students.

Principal A made one comment denoting he engaged in personal efforts to help students overcome potentially graduation-derailing situations. He commented, “[We] show them... how they can really overcome those obstacles without having that negative influence.”

Principal C made 11 comments pointing to her personal efforts to help students by presenting alternatives to overcome obstacles. In contrast to Principal A, who made one comment, and Principal B who made no comments to this extent, presenting alternatives to overcome obstacles was one of the themes Principal C considered to be central to her effectiveness. Her interview was littered with comments like, “you can make up this class, because we hold additional winter camp classes where you can make them up,” and, “They know that they can come to us with any problem and we’re going to help them find a solution.” Principal C told multiple stories of students who presented her with the obstacle of needing money, when announcing they would have to drop out of school, and she immediately presented alternatives, even to the extent of helping them to get jobs and personally visiting employers and asking them to partner with her to ensure the students had the leeway necessary to be able to attend classes, Grad Lab, etc. For example, of one

instance, she commented, “And I’m like, he wants a job, he needs something part time. He’s not doing anything after school anyhow. Let’s see if we can find something for him. And so, between him and our CTE classes and what they can be involved in here, we find jobs for our kids.” Finally, Principal C made several references about how she and her team were always intentional about presenting alternatives for students who expressed a desire to no longer attend School C but could still complete an education and graduate. For example, she commented, “You are not gonna come back to [School C]? Let me find you some place to go,” and “we try to help them see that they could do an alternative school.” Principal C’s team also enumerated referring students to several alternative education programs throughout the community when students were determined to no longer attend School C.

***Home /job visits.*** Home / job visits refers to the personal efforts the principals and teams undertook to make visits to the homes and jobs of students. All of the principals made comments describing either personal home / job visits or t dropout prevention staff making home / job visits.

Principal A made reference to his caseworker, the university researcher, conducting home visits on her students and then returning to meet with the principal and the rest of his team to report the results. The university researcher / caseworker reported having a caseload of 48 kids she intensively monitored and this number did not change.

Principal B explained teachers, and counselors went out to do home visits at nine o’clock in the morning on students who had not shown up for school or who had dropped out in order to attempt to bring them back to school. The staff person responsible for attendance reported going out to do home visits when she discovered information in the computer system was incorrect and she needed to make contact with a student.

Principal C reported personally making both home and job visits and using her dropout prevention staff members to also make visits. To illustrate how these visits went, she recounted an interaction she had with a parent when she and another staff member went to the home of one of her students:

An example is one of the students this summer that we were trying to get to come back. She worked, and we went to her apartment and Mr. M and I were at the door, and the mom barely spoke English, but we communicated... she only had like three classes left... [Principal C:] I said... “She can do this. Where is she? Let me talk to her.” “She’s working.” “Where does she work?” [Mom:] “I don’t know where she works.” [Principal C:] “No, no, no. You know where she works.” [Mom:] “She just started a new job,” Mom said. And I said, “Well, where?” And she said, “It’s somewhere on Beechnut [Street].” And you’re communicating with broken language here. So I’m saying, “Beechnut and what? Tell me the intersection.” She couldn’t tell me. Finally, she said, “Beechnut and, um... Hillcroft [Street].” So we go to Beechnut and Hillcroft, and there’s several stores there. I don’t know what store it is, so Mr. M and I start at one store. “All right. Do you have this person here? This is her name. Does she work for you?” I asked the manager. “No, she doesn’t work here.” Next store, “No.” Third store, we hit it. We hit it! I walked in the door and she looked at me and I said, “You are so and so,” and I said, “Yeah, I am.” I said, “And your mom told you I was coming.” And she said, “Yeah. Who are you?” And I’m like, “Well, I’m the new principal at [School C], and I need you to finish school!”

Principal C engaged similar efforts when she went to the jobs of some of her students in order to negotiate with employers to work around students' schedules so the students could finish school or engage in credit recovery courses. She explained:

I went to Belden's (?) for one of the kids and said, "Hey, you're the manager. He's working here. He didn't graduate yet. I really need him to come back and graduate. Can you not let him work for two weeks so he can come up here this summer and finish his Grad Lab classes and graduate August 15th?" I said, "Will you work with me on that? I don't want you to fire him. He needs his job." And the guy said, "Absolutely. We'll work with you!"

***Individualized student attention.*** Individualized student attention refers to the personal efforts of principals to personally offer individualized student attention and to enforce it as a value among team members for the sake of helping students to remain in school rather than dropping out. Each of the principals either explicitly stated this practice being present among them and team members or made comments implying engagement in this practice.

Principal A implied he and his staff felt individualized student attention was vital in the keeping the students in school and preventing them from becoming dropouts. For example, he commented, "...we look at the whole child, not just the attendance piece. Because usually, if there is an attendance problem, they are also not earning credit, they are having problems in their classes, so it's a number of things that we look at."

Principal B gave several examples of how he and his staff offered individualized student attention, addressing each of the students' situations on a case-by-case basis. He summed up his philosophy concerning this as, "So educating them, getting them the access,



getting the right teachers, getting them in front of the right people who care about them, providing enough information and support to them, and keep pushing them.” Principal B also explained how he worked in conjunction with his staff members to offer personalized attention to his students when he stated:

[Dropout prevention staff member] has been here for several years, she knows the kids, she knows the families, but as she’s enrolling them, she... she’ll pull me in sometimes and say, “You know what, this kid has issues with attendance... this is what the parents say, so can you come talk to them?”

Additionally, Principal B’s dropout prevention coordinator explained the approach taken when it seemed a student was at high risk for graduating. “When we do find that kids are at risk for dropout, we call a meeting. We kind of do a sit down...go over the importance of them graduating and completing.”

Principal C reported engaging in multiple personal efforts indicating she personally offered individualized attention to her students. In addition to picking up students in the morning to bring them to school in the summers, she would commit to each student to help students receive the support needed to stay in school, whatever the necessary support might be. In most cases, the necessary support was finding a job, so she offered individualized students the attention needed until a job was obtained. Her bottom line in working with each student was made clear when she stated, “How can we work together... to keep you in school?” Once her students explained their needs, she sought means to meet them on an individualized basis. Additionally, Principal C strongly upheld the need for individualized student attention as a value among her staff, telling the story of how her shop teacher helped to meet the need of a student:

One example of even that happened with our CAPE (?) Program is, um, our auto shop had somebody who didn't have a job and, so our auto shop teacher went and talked to him. He was like, "I'm going to have to drop out of auto shop. I'm gonna have to drop out of doing this because I need to just go to work for my family. I need to help make money." And so he helped him get a job. The guy actually came here from the dealership and interviewed him, and he ended up getting the job. So now he gets to do both.

***Attendance enforcement.*** Attendance enforcement refers to personal efforts principals engage in and encourage among staff members to reinforce the importance of attendance and to ensure students attend school. Each of the teachers spoke of non-programmatic ways of achieving this goal driven by personal efforts.

Principal A described his multiple efforts to round his students up in the mornings and trying to keep them on campus, noting he spent all of his time and energy on this effort. He commented:

I spend all my time and energy on that... whether it's, um, finding the students that are physically present on our campus but not physically present in the class they need to be in. Um... or most mornings, when I first got on this campus, I spent it just on the perimeter of the campus trying to keep our students back... you know getting them back on campus... they were walking out of campus. Once I got them in, working on how to keep them in.

The staff of School A also engaged in efforts to ensure students stayed on campus and remained in school throughout the day. In addition to helping to monitor the perimeter of the

campus in the mornings, the staff also participated in a Reach Walk designed to bring students, who had dropped out of school, back to campus.

Principal B did not directly allude to any personal efforts he engaged in for the purpose of attendance enforcement, but his staff members explained some of the personal efforts used for this purpose. For example, one staff member reported, “I rely on some of my students, some of the, um, upperclassmen students to locate some of our, our freshmen and sophomores that are not on the globe at this time.” Additionally, staff members report using social media to locate students and enforce attendance, speaking with students one-on-one, and even reaching out to police officers to help them find students.

Principal C made no mention of personal efforts to enforce attendance, but her dropout prevention coordinator explained the value of the principal and the staff in enforcing attendance, noting always “making those phone calls, pulling those parents in, and doing the very best that we can to try to prevent them from dropping out.”

***Teacher quality /accountability.*** Teacher quality / accountability refers to the personal efforts of a principal to ensure the quality of teachers is high and held accountable for providing a classroom experience keeping students attending school rather than discouraging attendance. Principals A and B and teams made comments indicating engagement in efforts to directly uphold teacher quality and accountability as a personal standard. Principal C made no comments to this effect.

Principal A placed a high emphasis on teacher quality, noting the importance of interesting and relevant classroom instruction in being able to hold the attention of students and to keep them consistently attending class. He explained, “...you have to go to the

classrooms and deal with the teachers to ensure that they are providing an engaging lesson or an interesting lesson to keep those kids in those classrooms and wanting to go to class.”

Principal B made several comments alluding to his personal efforts to uphold teacher quality and accountability, and this included hiring. For example, he stated, “So when you’re hiring good people that care about kids, you’re indirectly helping them to stay in school,” and “I tried to pick not only the right person culturally for my demographic group, but I also wanted to choose the right person that would love kids but would be very smart about how they taught them.” Finally, Principal B explained the reason why he engaged in personal efforts to ensure high teacher quality and accountability, expressing, “We want to make sure that kids can take bite-sized pieces of instruction and learning and then be able to internalize it so that it helps them to grow.”

***Presence at extracurricular events.*** Presence at extracurricular events refers to principals’ personal efforts to have a visible presence at the after-school events in which students participated for the sake of connecting with them and motivating them to remain in school. Principal B and Principal C made mention of being present at students’ extracurricular events. Principal A did not make mention having a presence at these after-school activities.

Principal B explained he was intentional about making a personal effort to appear at his students’ events because of the message it sent to them about his level of support for them, and he was also intentional about reinforcing this value among his staff. He commented:

For the basketball team, they... they were like, okay, you gonna come to our games this year? I’m like, I’m not coming to all y’all games, but I’m gonna come to a lot of

them. Okay. And so when they saw me at the games, they were like, oh, okay. He really showed up! You know, it's like, he showed up! And you know, it's stuff like that, I think, that will help some of our kids realize that not only am I their principal, I am going to help them walk through this. You know, I'm going to do my very best to help them do that. And I'm gonna put people in front of them that are gonna try to do the exact same thing consistently.

In addition to athletic events, Principal B also attended other events attended by his students, like school dances, as his personal effort to connect with the students outside of school:

Um... and I'll step out on a ledge with some kids because I feel like they need somebody to do that, um... some of the kids are like, "Well I don't have uh, uh, uh... a date for prom or whatever." I say well, "Just come. I'll dance with you!" You know, I... whatever! They're like, "Really?" And I'm like, "Yeah! I'll be there!"

Principal C also made personal efforts to be present at extracurricular activities for the sake of connecting with her students and demonstrating her support for them. This was not only a practice she personally engaged in; it was something she organized for her staff to participate in for the same reasons. She explained:

And so, you know, we are at... all of the things that the kids do and the kids know that we are going to be there. And by "we" I mean staff, but definitely administration. We assign somebody to every event whether it's home or away and we're there. I try to go to as much as I can. I'm not on the schedule to be a, uh, administrator on duty. I just try to go to everything that I can possibly go to, and the kids love it.

Further, Principal C went on to explain how the students responded when they saw her at the extracurricular events she attended:

At basketball games, I go sit with the kids, because number one I want them to behave, and number two, I want them to know that I'm there for them. They ask me a trillion questions while I'm there about stuff that's not related to the sporting event that I'm at all the time. But you know, it's a good way to communicate with them!

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the research study. The findings are primarily based on the analysis of transcripts from one-on-one interviews with principals and transcripts from focus group interviews with principals and dropout prevention teams conducted during the course of this study. Two methods were used to characterize the narrative data: (a) preset themes; and (b) emergent themes. Four pre-set themes were used to characterize the data: (a) Principals Demonstrated Beliefs in Their Ability to Impact Students in Various Ways; (b) Recognition of Influences on Self-Efficacy Within and External to the School; (c) Minimum Presence of Deficit Thinking; and (d) Principals Reported Engaging in Efforts to Prevent Dropouts. Findings were discussed in four parts according to the four major themes identified in the data.

In the first section, data focused on the first theme, Principals Demonstrated Beliefs in The Ability to Impact Students in Various Ways. Two categories preset categories were used to organize the data under this theme: (a) Stated Sense of Efficacy (SSE); and (b) Implied Sense of Efficacy (ISE). Preset criterion under the Stated Sense of Efficacy category included: (a) High; (b) Moderate; and (c) Low. Criterion under the Implied Sense of Efficacy (ISE) category included: (a) Belief in abilities to perform; (b) Sense of power; (c) Internal motivation; (d) Determination and commitment; (e) Creativity in problem solving; (f) Job

satisfaction; (g) View of change; (h) Emotional state; (i) Maintain standards and expectations.

In the second section, data focused on the second theme, Recognition of Influences on Self-Efficacy Within and External to the School. It consisted of three preset categories: (a) Systemic and Resource Factors (SYSF); (b) Student Factors (STUF); and (c) Experiences and Training (EXPT). Emergent criterion under the Systemic and Resource Factors category included: (a) District / school system factors; (b) Budget and finance factors; (c) Faculty factors; and (d) Non-monetary resources. Emergent criterion under the Student Factors category included: (a) Influences outside of school; (b) Home life / Need for money; (c) Seek easier non-academic route; (d) Substance abuse issues; (e) Mental health / Behavioral issues; (f) Family history; (g) Lack of motivation to graduate / succeed; (h) Lack of parental support; and (i) Social / Community acceptance. Criterion under the Experiences and Training category include: (a) Personal background; (b) Professional background; (c) Empathy with students.

In the third section, data focused on the third theme Minimum Presence of Deficit Thinking. It consisted of six preset criteria: (a) Cognitive and motivational deficits; (b) Parental / home deficits and dysfunctions; (c) Off-campus environment and associations; (d) Values (personal and parental); (e) Economic priorities; and (f) Teenage mother / fatherhood.

In the fourth section, data focused on the fourth theme, Principals Reported Engaging in Efforts to Prevent Dropouts. It consisted of two emergent categories: (a) Programs and Initiatives (PI); and (b) Personal Efforts (PE). Emergent criterion under the Programs and Initiatives category include: (a) Mentoring program; (b) School caseworkers / counselors; (c) Graduation support; (d) Attendance programs / appeals; (d) Credit recovery programs; (e)

Incentive programs; (f) Social contracts; and (g) Learning support programs. Emergent criterion under the Personal Efforts category include: (a) Building relationships; (b) Creating culture; (c) Informal mentoring; (d) Motivation / inspiring vision for future; (e) Welfare assistance / resource referral; (f) Presenting alternatives to overcome obstacles; (g) Home / job visits; (h) Individualized student attention; (i) Attendance enforcement; (j) Teacher quality / accountability; and (k) Presence at extracurricular events.

The level of self-efficacy among principals varies, as do the factors influencing principals' levels of self-efficacy, including the presence of deficit thinking. Efforts to prevent dropouts on both a programmatic and a personal level also varied among principals. Chapter 5 will discuss the themes and criterion identified throughout the study and will also offer recommendations for future research.



## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this research study was to understand the link between deficit thinking and principals' perceived sense of self-efficacy, and perceived self-efficacy on the level of effort principals were willing to engage in to prevent African American and Hispanic students from dropping out of high school. Research was conducted through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with three high school principals, focus groups with the three high school principals and dropout prevention administrators and school caseworkers, and notes from the researcher's journal. This chapter reviews, analyzes, and discusses the findings of this study in light of the relevant literature. The chapter also discusses the implications of the study's findings for the training and development of high school principals who are preparing to work with low-income minority student populations, which are typically marked by higher-than-average dropout rates. Limitations of the research study are also discussed, followed by recommendations for future research.

#### **Summary of the Findings**

The following primary research question was used to guide this research study: What sense of self-efficacy do principals perceive having over dropout rates in schools? In general, the principals had a moderate-to-high sense of self-efficacy regarding abilities to affect dropout rates among the students. Principals' sense of efficacy was determined by measuring explicitly stated levels of self-efficacy against various implicit indicators (drawn from the related literature) of levels of self-efficacy were identified in the interviews by the researcher. All of the principals explicitly declared having either high or moderate level of self-efficacy. After measuring these statements against various implicit indicators of self-efficacy in the

data, the researcher determined although there were numerous obstacles challenging a sense of efficacy to reduce dropouts in high schools, obstacles suggested the principals actually operated out of a lower sense of self-efficacy than explicitly stated, the principals collectively maintained a moderate-to-high sense of self-efficacy in the midst of these challenges.

Next, the following sub-question helped to frame the research study: To what extent is principal's perceived self-efficacy over dropout rates at his or her school linked to notions of deficit thinking? Generally speaking, deficit thinking, which was present to some extent in all of the principal interviews, had little impact on the principals' levels of self-efficacy to impact the dropout rates of schools. Despite the presence of deficit thinking indicators (drawn from the literature) in the principals' interviews, the researcher concluded this thinking did not translate, at a noticeable level, into a reduction in self-perceived capacity to execute the programs, tasks, and behaviors necessary to keep low-income minority students from dropping out of school.

The second sub-question helped to frame the research study was: What additional factors or experiences have influenced principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates in schools? A number of factors and experiences, from systemic and resource factors to factors introduced by the students themselves and by the principals' own background experiences and training, emerged from the data. Each of these factors had some level of positive or negative influence on principals' perceived levels of self-efficacy. For example, although systemic and resource factors and student factors posed negative challenges to principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates, the level of influence was low-to-moderate. This is evidenced by the researcher's conclusion the principals maintained a moderate-to-high level of self-efficacy despite the fact to consistently contend with these

internal and external influences sought to challenge, or reduce, self-efficacy levels. However, principals' personal experiences, particularly sharing of the similar backgrounds, , positively influenced levels of self-efficacy by causing these levels to increase.

The final sub-question helped to frame the research study was: How does principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates relate to the effort invested in the prevention of high school dropouts on campuses? The level of effort principals collectively exhibited in schools seemed to be in alignment with perceived self-efficacy levels. A number of themes emerged from the data highlighting many of the efforts the principals engaged in as a job requirement on a professional level, but even more efforts emerged from the data emphasizing the efforts principals undertook on a personal level to curb dropouts, efforts not required of them by formal job descriptions. Thus, moderate-to-high levels of perceived self-efficacy translated into engaging in dropout prevention efforts going above and beyond the efforts formally required of them by the school district.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

#### **What Sense of Self-efficacy do Principals Perceive having over the Dropout Rates in Schools?**

There was a tendency among the principals to explicitly state high levels of self-efficacy to impact dropout rates and follow these declarations with statements implying, in reality, they operated out of a lower sense of self-efficacy than was explicitly stated. The researcher referred to the literature to identify various indicators used to imply a sense of efficacy, from expressions of job satisfaction (Lai & Chen, 2012), to indications of creativity in problem solving and exhibiting high levels of determination and commitment (Osterman

&Sullivan, 1996), and internal motivation (Valencia, 1997; Gibson & Dembo, 1984), among others.

For example, when Principals A and B were asked by the researcher during respective interviews if significant difference could be made in the lives of students to help them stay in school, both replied with an answer explicitly declaring a strong sense of efficacy:

“Absolutely”. However, Principal A later made statements like, “The power of influence that I would have over someone like that is limited, again, due to time,” and “...there has [sic] been times when I felt powerless and that no matter what I did, it wasn’t going to have an impact on a specific student just because of the amount of things, the amount of hurdles, I guess, that they have to, um... jump over.” The researcher interpreted these comments about the principal’s sense of power to suggest a lower sense of efficacy. Thus, while the explicitly stated sense of efficacy was strong, there were indicators throughout the interview implying Principal A’s sense of efficacy was, in reality, slightly lower than was stated. This was unique because when initially asked principal A stated with confidence he could significantly make a difference and help students stay in school. After discussing various deterrents transpiring within and outside of the school setting however, principal A’s responses at times seemed to lack hope or a definite solution to correct the concern. Principal A still remained optimistic about improving dropouts despite expressing challenges.

The same occurrence was seen with Principal B, who explicitly stated a strong sense of self-efficacy to impact dropout rates, but followed this declaration with statements throughout his interview like, “But again, I can’t... I know my limits, right?” and “So... there are some factors that I can’t control, and absolutely, I feel helpless about some of those things,” and “So... I do have limitations. I would love to say that I don’t, but I have a lot of

limitations on what I can do to help kids.” Similar to Principal A, Principal B was quick to state a very high level of self-efficacy, but various comments the principal made about his own sense of power throughout the course of the interview and the focus group implied a lower sense of self-efficacy to impact dropout rates. The statements made by Principal B specifies his limitations and the effect it could potentially have on his ability to prevent dropouts. The hesitation of Principal B to give a definite solution could be interpreted as a lowered sense of efficacy even though he described challenges with some variables and not all. Nonetheless, even when the implied sense of efficacy statements were taken into consideration along with the stated sense of efficacy declarations, the researcher determined the actual sense of efficacy among Principals A and B was still moderate to high. This was established because there were actions and statements demonstrated consistently with addressing the current concerns of improving dropouts rather than reinforcing the concerns of limitations stated.

Principal C was the only one of the three principals who did not explicitly state a high level of self-efficacy when asked about whether she could make a significant difference in the lives of her students to help them stay in school. Her response of, “So that’s a battle that we fight every day. We try to keep them in school, we try to encourage them...” demonstrating she felt only a moderate level of efficacy, because she declared she was “fighting” a battle and “trying” to make an impact. In light of the fact Principal C neither spoke confidently nor doubtfully in terms of her capabilities to curb dropout rates, the researcher interpreted her stated sense of efficacy as “moderate.” However, additional statements made throughout the course of the interview suggested to the researcher Principal C’s level of self-efficacy was at a much higher level than her declaration indicated and her

response was a reserved one. For example, Principal C maintained high levels of expectation throughout her tenure as the leader of the school even as she had to contend with the dropout crisis on a daily basis. She explained:

...when we're looking up prior leavers, I'm like "100 percent! I want 100%!" They're like, "We had 350 kids we couldn't find! Are you *kidding* me?" I'm like, "No! I want 100%! I want 100% of the kids. I want to know where they are if they're not in school. I want to know what we can do to get 'em back!"

This statement was among numerous other statements expressing a sense of power and capability, like, "...it's difficult, but it's not impossible, and if they'll work with us, we'll find ways around it," and "...you have to get super creative and come up with ways to keep these kids from dropping out. And, and just, you know... you have to work with them." The statements alluded to hope and perseverance even though there were challenging circumstances exciting. She also acknowledged a possible collaborative with students and her optimism for positive results. Although Principal C also made statements interpreted as having lower self-efficacy, the number of these statements was strongly overwhelmed by the prevalence of statements interpreted to indicate a high level of self-efficacy. Thus, overall, although Principal C explicitly declared a moderate sense of self-efficacy, she was actually deemed to have the highest sense of self-efficacy of all of the principals, namely Principals A and B explicitly declared a high sense of self-efficacy but were deemed to have only a moderate-to-high level of self-efficacy.

## **To what Extent is a Principal's Perceived Self-efficacy over Dropout Rates at his or her School linked to Notions of Deficit Thinking?**

Each of the principals made comments during interviews the researcher interpreted to indicate the presence of deficit thinking, although the number of indicators made by each principal was minimal. Indicators (drawn from the literature) of deficit thinking included, for example, statements alluding to cognitive and motivational deficits (Valencia, 2015), parental and home deficits and dysfunctions (Valencia, 2015), lack of support at home (Bridgeland et al., 2009), and a lack of value for education (Gorski, 2011), among others.

Although small numbers of various indicators of deficit thinking were present in each of the principals' interviews, the researcher concluded the principals did not allow deficit thinking to impact perceived abilities to influence dropout rates. The indicators of deficit thinking present in each of the principals interviews were motivational deficits; parental/home deficits and dysfunctions; off-campus environment and associations; and economic priorities. The principals readily acknowledged the reality of the deficits existed among the student population served and the weight of these deficits in the lives of students. For example, Principal A spoke to the motivational deficits of his students when he commented, "And so, because it takes so much time, students are not willing to put in those hours."

Principal C also referenced a motivational deficit among her students when she explained:

I feel defeated sometimes by the fact that you just try everything you can to keep them from dropping out, and the bottom line is that if they have no heart to even want to say "I'm willing to try," then, um... you know, or "I want this to happen," or the parent has like, given up on them...

Later, Principal A also referred to the deficits in students' external environments and how the deficits increased the likelihood of students dropping out of school:

In my opinion, uh... I do feel that there are some students that will be more likely to drop out. And again, it goes back to what I stated earlier. The outside influences... we don't know... by the time students get to us in high school, you really don't know what the past, you know, 10 years have been like or what level or what their educational or home life has been like.

Principal B made comments pointing to a deficit in a value for education, commenting, "...because they don't see school as important, they don't see it as an opportunity to improve their lives."

However, in the face of this reality, it is known from the examples of principals' lives (see the discussion on personal background) it was possible to keep deficit-prone, high-risk students in school, graduate them, and see them live successful lives. For them, being at a deficit did not equate with being an inevitable dropout, because such was true for them while matriculating through school. Thus, the principals remain convinced either mitigate or successfully combat these deficits in the lives of students to the extent of at least keeping them enrolled in school through graduation. In the words of Principal C, "...it's difficult, but it's not impossible, and if they'll work with us, we'll find ways around it."

The primary reason for concluding deficit thinking did not impact principals' self-efficacy is grounded in the idea at no time did either of the principals indicate shifting focus, energies, and efforts to students who were more likely to stay in school and graduate. Also, at no time did the principals mention or allude to any reduction in the efforts undertaken on a personal or professional level to curb dropouts. Lastly, rather than decrease efforts to reduce



the dropout rate, each of them reported persistence in engaging various new and creative means of approaching the dropout issue in hopes of increasing levels of effectiveness among students. For example, Principal A recognized the presence of the deficits in his students lives, but commented, “[O]ur students in the urban school districts have a lot of baggage. And in doing so, you have to approach that differently...” Similarly, Principal B alluded to having to be creative in addressing the deficits of his student population as he explained:

And so... our kids come with some stuff, I'ma tell you... they come with some issues, and baggage, and some things that I don't think as adults we could probably handle, but we're not doing our jobs effectively if we don't get to know them and their circumstances and then engage them on “How do I get your circumstance better?”

Consistent with Principals A and B, Principal C also recognized the deficits prevalent amongst her students, but she did not allow them to alter her self-perceived ability to successfully address them. She noted, “...you have to get super creative and come up with ways to keep these kids from dropping out. And, and just, you know... you have to work with them.” She also provided an example demonstrating how she worked to address such deficits, explaining, “[Student:] ‘I can't be here because I have a baby, I can't be here because of this, I can't...’ [Principal C] ‘Okay, so how can we make that work? What can we do with your schedule to make it work?’” In the face of deficit thinking, which threatens principals with a sense of hopelessness, the principals continued to engage anti-dropout efforts on both a personal and professional level, and new and creative approaches gave them hope, and consequently, helped them to maintain levels of efficacy.

The researcher determined there were various factors mitigating the effects of deficit thinking on the principals' levels of self-efficacy after considering deficit thinking comments in the broader context of the interview. One of the factors the researcher deemed to mitigate deficit thinking from impacting principals' levels of self-efficacy at a significant level was the backgrounds of the principals: each of the principals shared a past the same as, or commensurate with, the student population. Principal A explained, "I am one of those former students. You know, I feel that I know some of the barriers that our students face nowadays." He also noted, "I know what it's like to come from a low-income family because I came from a low-income family, a single-parent home, and so a lot of the struggles that I see... are the same ones that I didn't want to talk about or face..." Similarly, Principal B explained, "I grew up poor, we grew up on welfare... in the projects, all of that. And education was my ticket out of my situation... I just chose to be different. I chose... I wanted something different for me, and I know what these kids are like."

Although Principal C did not grow up in a minority family or in the projects, she recounted a background of growing up poor with a single parent in a small town and having to fight to find a way to get a scholarship to college so she could have a better life. She explained, "And so, people look at me and think, "Oh she came from..." No. I came from a very poor background. Very limited resources, you know. And, um, raised by a single dad, my mother died when I was seven, so, you know, it was like, not the same."

Another factor the researcher deemed to mitigate the effects of deficit thinking on the self-efficacy levels of the principals was empathy, or the ability to relate to or understand the feelings of others. The principals' empathy for students could be considered a direct function of having grown up with similar background experiences; however, growing up with similar

background experiences does not guarantee a certain level of empathy with students, so it cannot be taken for granted these two constructs automatically go hand in hand. All of the principals in the research study expressed a level of empathy for students. For example, Principal A commented, "...you have to have an understanding of some of the issues that are obstacles for our students and at least have a track record of showing them or be able to have a conversation of how you overcame those obstacles as examples so that you can try to get them to stay the course." In the same fashion, Principal B highlighted his ability to relate to his students, saying, "I mean, I know exactly what it's like when everybody else in your household is drunk or on drugs and... you don't have anybody in your corner. They need somebody in their corner, 'cause I had a few teachers that were in my corner that said, 'You know, you can do this! You can make this!'" While Principal C expressed having empathy for her students, she was also careful to explain how she tempered it:

Um... working with low SES, I think it's just about compassion, about empathy, about building relationships and about relating to the situation you are put in, you know? Um, so I... you know, I think, yeah. I understand low SES. I understand, you know, how to stretch a dollar, how to make resources out of stuff that's not there and, um, I think that the biggest thing is not having too much empathy but having a lot of grit. A lot of grit to say, "You can do this. Don't let anybody tell you you [sic] can't." People think because of where I came from, I didn't understand that.

The presence of empathy among the principals in the research study was considered by the researcher to reduce the impact of deficit thinking on the principals' level of self-efficacy, considering deficit thinking was indicated among all principals but levels of efficacy were not significantly affected by it. Rather than allow deficit thinking to discourage

efforts to curb dropouts, the principals engaged a sense of empathy to relate to what students were going through and to use this connection to develop creative ways to address unique challenges and help them remain in school.

### **What Additional Factors or Experiences have Influenced Principals' Perceived Self-efficacy over the Dropout Rates in Schools?**

Each of the principals discussed a number of factors influencing levels of self-efficacy to some extent. These factors (drawn from the literature) ranged from systemic and resource factors to student factors and factors surrounding the principals' own experiences and training (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2007). Each of the factors was determined to have either a positive or negative effect on the principals' sense of self-efficacy.

The factor the researcher interpreted as having the greatest positive level of influence on principals' self-efficacy was categorized under Experiences and Training under the criteria of Personal Background. Each principal's personal experiences while growing up with the same type of background (to some extent) as students increased his or her level of self-efficacy to be able to help them remain in school. Having a shared background and experiences led principals to feel a connection to what students were going through and subsequently increased each of the principals' self-efficacy to curb the dropout rates. For example, Principal A explained his ability to relate to students because of his background, saying:

I do [feel equipped to work with the low-income minority SES students]. I absolutely do. I feel that I'm equipped because of my background. So in other words, I know what it's like to come from a low-income family because I came from a low-income family, a single-parent home, and so a lot of the struggles that I see students not

wanting to talk about nowadays are the same ones that I didn't want to talk about or face with the friends that I had growing up in my small town.

Similarly, Principal B explained, "I grew up poor, we grew up on welfare... in the projects, all of that. And education was my ticket out of my situation... and I know what these kids are like." Principal C also related a story identifying with the hardships of her students when she shared the story of how she grew up poor and in a single-parent household, commenting, "I understand low SES. I understand, you know, how to stretch a dollar, how to make resources out of stuff that's not there."

As a result of growing up with similar backgrounds the student populations, even though the principals recognized strong external factors students faced outside of school made them highly likely to drop out of school (deficit thinking), the principals were able to reflect back on personal experiences as high-risk students, and this helped them to resist labeling the current population of students as inevitable dropouts. In a sense, because each principal came from a similar or commensurate background, they were able to use life lessons and how going from being branded as "high dropout risk", to high school graduates, to college graduates, to excelling in careers in the education arena.

The criterion of Empathy with Students under the category of Experiences and Training was another factor positively influencing principals' perceived sense of self-efficacy to help prevent students from dropping out of high school. This criterion is closely related to the criteria of Personal Background, because the principals grew up with a similar background as current students, empathized with many of the issues students were experiencing and offer resources and recommendations to help overcome the obstacles preventing them from remaining in school and graduating. Additionally, the capability to

empathize with students made them more compassionate, and consequently, more flexible in the approaches taken to meet the needs of students.

Principal A made a comment best summarizing the level of empathy the principals had for students as a result of shared experiences:

In most cases, you have to have an understanding of some of the issues that are obstacles for our students and at least have a track record of showing them or be able to have a conversation of how you overcame those obstacles as examples so that you can try to get them to stay the course. Um, because I come from such a background, I think that gives me more credibility to establish a better relationship with the students that we serve. They take what we tell them a little more literal, and they take it to heart, so they listen a little closer, and a lot of that stuff, they retain, so... because of my, uh, experiences and a similar background that I come from and the world that I was raised, I believe that it just gives me just that much more credibility to help our students that are in these situations.

The principals' abilities to understand the challenges and struggles of students helped increase, perceived self-efficacy and curb dropout rates among the students.

While the criterion of Personal Background and Empathy with Students under the Experiences and Training category had the most significant positive influences on principals' sense of efficacy, several other factors had a negative influence on principals' self-efficacy. The researcher determined the following factors had the greatest amount negative influence on principals' sense of self-efficacy: (a) District and School System factors; (b) Budget and Finance factors; (c) Home Life / Need for Money; and (d) Influences Outside of School.

First, District and School System factors, a criterion of the Systemic and Resource Factors category, had a negative influence on principals' sense of self-efficacy to prevent dropouts because the district imposed certain limitations upon them, either by placing certain guidelines and standards in place impairing them or by neglecting to place certain components in place to better assist efforts of curbing dropouts on campuses. For example, Principal A noted, "If you look at, I guess, the confines of what policy or laws that we have to follow or even just the funding that we have, that is what I see that poses limits to our organizations." Principal B made a similar observation about the district, saying:

[T]here are also external forces at the district level that are challenges with the demands on high-stakes testing, um... the budget, um... when you're looking at staffing, sometimes you're not staffed accordingly or appropriately for the population you're trying to serve...

As a result, the principals felt in some cases, the district or school system placed certain parameters on what could and could not be done in their efforts to reduce dropouts, and this consequently affected the principals' sense of efficacy.

Next, Budget and Finance factors, a criterion of the Systemic and Resource Factors category, also had a negative influence on principals' sense of self-efficacy to prevent dropouts. For example, Principal A noted the impact of financial resources on his dropout prevention efforts, explaining:

If you had unlimited resources, there's a lot you could do. Obviously, you could provide a lot more for students that are, you know, present causes of not coming, you know. It's simple as they didn't get any food or they didn't get enough rest because they might have been out working, you know, trying to help with the bills in the

home, or mom and dad are not home and they still haven't gotten... they don't know how to wash clothes or they don't have clean clothes. Or they have to watch somebody at home because, you know, little brother or little sister is sick and they're school age but they're not going to leave them by themselves. I mean, just so many of those scenarios come into play that if you were to really be a neighborhood community school with all those unlimited resources, we could provide that extra personnel that says, you know what, bring your little sister, we can watch them here. You know, bring your clothes, we'll wash them here or we'll have some clothes readily available for you – clean clothes. Meals and all of that, that's a given, right?

Principal C echoed the sentiments of the limitations lack of resources imposed on her efforts to prevent dropouts at her school, noting, “So, money always imposes limitations...,” and “... but, you know, a school like this that has 85% of free and reduced [lunch] is always going to have limitations.”

Because of the unique circumstances characterizing the lives of nearly all of their low-income minority student populations, the principals often referred to the need for additional resources, over and above those necessary on high school campuses in middle to upper income neighborhoods, to meet the special needs of the school populations. Without these budget and finance factors in place, principals were limited in addressing the non-academic needs of students, needs which were often the reasons why students dropped out of schools. The principals expressed if given greater access to these resources, assistance could be offered to address students' needs, like childcare, medical assistance, mental health counseling, substance abuse recovery groups, various welfare services, financial aid with materials students needed for school, being able to subsidize students' fees for school trips,



etc., and being able to provide these resources would have a significant impact on retaining students and keeping them from dropping out. However, because these budget and finance factors were lacking, there is a reduced sense of efficacy in what principals could do to help students remain in school.

Home Life / Need for Money, a criterion of the Student Factors category, was a significant factor having a negative influence on principals' perceived sense of self-efficacy to curb student dropouts on campuses. The home lives of the students comprised the populations of each of the schools were disproportionately marked by lack of parental/familial support and financial instability. As a consequence, many students were in the position of having to prioritize making money over academics. As Principal B explained, many students had to resort to becoming the breadwinner of the home because parents were not financially providing for the family. This led to a greater prioritization of making money, which led to a reprioritization of staying in school. He commented, "You know, it's like... and money is always a caveat. But it's really... what I've learned about our high school kids, money is important to them." The same concept was reiterated among Principal A, who spoke to the various causes of why students would need to either take a break from or leave school and get a job when he noted for example, "We have students that may be homeless due to their parents just, you know, getting involved in an accident, and the next thing you know, they are no longer around." Finally, Principal C made numerous references to how her students' home life and lack of money caused them to want to drop out of school to get a job and how her efforts as a principal, in large part, centered on helping them find jobs to accommodate school schedules while helping them to provide for the household. She explained:

Like, this morning, one of the students that helps me with announcements was telling me she worked until 12:30 am last night. You know? Another student came in yesterday and said he just got a job at Sam's and he had a Sam's tag on. So I'm like, "Why are you wearing that as your ID?" And he said, "Oh, I just forgot to take it off. I just got off at 6 am this morning. I work from 11 pm to 6 am." And then they come to school, you know?

The principals often referred to how an unstable home life and students' need for money were major challenges to contend with in efforts to keep students enrolled in school. Principal C shared, "[T]wo days ago, I had a kid that came in and said, "I need money. I'm gonna have to drop out. My dad's never home. I live by myself basically," and "[Y]ou know, the dad had said that he'd been missing for three days, and I found out that he'd been staying at somebody else's house just because he didn't have bus money to get across town where he was coming from!" The principals recognized without money, students could not survive, especially if these resources were not consistently provided by parents. Thus, on many occasions, rather than focusing on helping the students maintain academic focus, principals had to assist students with securing employment. Students' had to give extraordinary amounts of focus to earning money to support themselves, and in many cases, offsprings, which in many ways increased the likelihood of dropping out of school. For this reason, home life and the need for money were factors negatively influencing principals' sense of efficacy to prevent dropouts.

Influences Outside of School, a criterion of the Student Factors category, was another significant factor mentioned among all of the principals as a challenge students faced, which had a negative influence on principals' sense of efficacy to affect the dropout rates.

Principals and dropout prevention teams mentioned several ways in which various influences students faced outside of school – influences luring them away from staying in school – competed with the efforts principals engaged in on a daily basis to keep them in school.

For example, Principal A explained:

A lot of them, and I say “them”, the students that we serve in the inner city, come with a lot of baggage more so than, you know, the suburban areas. Not that the suburban areas don’t have similar problems, but in volume, I think that, um, our students in the urban school districts have a lot of baggage.

Principal B spoke of outside influences in terms of the external community’s pull on his students when he discussed influences outside of school, noting:

[T]hey’re gonna get tired, and they’re gonna want to give up, especially when some of the environments that surround them, everybody else is giving up, so [they ask,] “Why should I try so hard? And if I do, am I gonna be, you know, isolated from my peers in my community because I want something different, or should I just follow the status quo and be like everybody else?”

Again, similar to her counterparts, Principal C also spoke about the pull of the influences outside of school her students faced. At one point, she noted the negative influence of “...peer pressure from the students who have dropped out that they are friends with and that they see as a more tempting lifestyle that they want to create for themselves as well.”

On a number of occasions throughout interviews, principals commented about the difficulties of trying to counteract the negative pull students’ environmental influences outside of school had on them. The fact students spent significantly more time away from school and around these strong negative influences than they spent in school under the

positive voice and guidance under the principals and dropout prevention teams was a primary contributing factor to why students' influences outside of school were deemed to have such a strong negative influence on principals' sense of efficacy.

### **How does Principals' Perceived Self-efficacy over the Dropout Rates relate to the Effort Invested in the Prevention of High School Dropouts on Campuses?**

Principals' perceived self-efficacy over the dropout rates was consistent with the levels of effort exercised to prevent high school dropouts among student populations. Principals with high self-efficacy do not solely rely upon external and institutional bases of power, or professional efforts; but, also rely on internal power to achieve goals, or personal efforts (Lyons & Murphy, 1994). Various indicators, which emerged from the data, highlighted the various professional and personal efforts principals engaged in for the purpose of preventing dropouts on respective campuses.

The principals collectively maintained a moderate-to-high level of self-efficacy to impact dropout rates in high schools. This level of efficacy was reflected in descriptions of the various professional efforts undertaken to curb dropout rates. Because of a moderate-to-high perceived sense of self-efficacy, the principals were operating a number of programs and initiatives on a professional programmatic level to keep students from dropping out of school. Among the various programs and initiatives principals engaged in schools were using school caseworkers and counselors to track student attendance and work with students who showed signs of potentially dropping out, using formal mentoring programs, employing graduation support initiatives, offering credit recovery programs, using attendance programs and appeals, and others. The implementation of such programs aimed towards preventing students from dropping out nurtured a sense of excitement among many students, because the

administration cared about them and was willing to provide whatever support was necessary to graduate. For example, Principal B spoke of how after he established a program in which each student received his or her transcript at the beginning of the semester, they were motivated at a greater level to take advantage of the credit recovery program the school offered, called GradLab. He recounted a typical conversation he would have with students after teaching them how to read transcripts:

[Student:] Okay, can I come to GradLab? Because I need to make up this class!

[Principal B:] Yeah, we'll have GradLab over Christmas break. We're gonna have six days: three days next week, three days the week after. [Student:] Okay! Where do I sign up? [Principal B] Now these are the kids... you couldn't have *paid* them to come before. But now that it's getting close to crunch time, they're like... it's a sense of urgency now, like, I've got to get my *transcript* right!

Principal C also spoke of her unrelenting efforts to encourage her students to recover missed credits through the GradLab program. She explained:

We had 87 students who didn't graduate last year, okay? And they had still, till August 15<sup>th</sup> to graduate, and then now, it's till December. This is the first year they're extending it to the December, so I'm looking for these 87 kids all summer, right? We were bringing them in, serving them breakfast and lunch, and keeping them here in Grad Lab, and getting them to finish it!

Additionally, because the principals had a moderate-to-high level of perceived self-efficacy to impact dropout rates, personal investments were made, engaging in various efforts not required of them through formal job descriptions. Instead, personal efforts were undertaken because of the belief additional efforts would contribute to level of effectiveness

in preventing dropouts, a goal principals felt confident in accomplishing. Efforts the principals reported undertaking on a personal level included such endeavors as building relationships with students, taking personal steps to enforce attendance, ensuring teacher quality and accountability, having a presence at extracurricular events, going the extra mile to foster parental engagement, informal mentoring, welfare assistance, and offering students motivation by inspiring a vision for the future.

For example, Principal A and his team reported offering to wash students' clothes, buying them clothes, buying them school supplies and backpacks, and offering other resources so students could have what was necessary to remain in school. Additionally, Principal A was driven through his own personal efforts to create a culture of safety leading to student success. He explained:

...creating a safe culture for students and a culture of not really looking at where they have been but what their goals are, their new goals to try to make sure that they can finish what they started. I think that that makes a safe environment overall for students to come in and feel like they have a new start, and uh, they can definitely get a second chance at trying to finish something that is going to be beneficial for them.

Principal B engaged his personal efforts by building close and significant relationships with his students, offering to be a dance partner at school dances so students would attend the events, taking the time to motivate and inspire them through conversations, and showing up to extracurricular events. For example, he commented:

For the basketball team, they... they were like, okay, you gonna come to our games this year? I'm like, I'm not coming to all y'all games, but I'm gonna come to a lot of them. Okay. And so when they saw me at the games, they were like, oh, okay. He

really showed up! You know, it's like, he showed up! And you know, it's stuff like that, I think, that will help some of our kids realize that not only am I their principal, I am going to help them walk through this. You know, I'm going to do my very best to help them do that. And I'm gonna put people in front of them that are gonna try to do the exact same thing consistently.

Principal C also engaged her personal efforts to help her students in a number of ways. For example, she explained, "So, um, we had several students that still didn't have their laptops cause they didn't have \$25 so then we put them on payment plans so they could pay \$10 a month and then \$5 the last month and get it paid for." When students could not meet these reduced financial demands to pay for laptops, she sought assistance outside of the school by going to the local civic center, which donated \$2,000 to go into a fund to help students pay for equipment. On many occasions, she and her team also engaged personal efforts in helping students find employment so students would not be forced to drop out of school. She explained, "And I'm like, he wants a job, he needs something part time. He's not doing anything after school anyhow. Let's see if we can find something for him! And so, between him and our CTE classes and what they can be involved in here, we find jobs for our kids." Principal C also engaged her personal efforts to prevent dropouts by making home visits and job visits to find and talk to her students and even picked them up in her car as she ran a carpool to get kids to attend credit recovery programs during the summer months.

## **Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature**

### **Relationship between the Results and the Theoretical Framework**

**Self-efficacy theory.** The findings of this research study are consistent with self-efficacy theory, which is defined as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1989, p. 1) and the level of competence perceived to be necessary to execute given tasks (Bandura, 1986). According to this theory, people’s beliefs about personal abilities to accomplish a certain goal directly affect one’s motivation to do so. The findings of this research study suggest the principals’ general sense of self-efficacy had a strong influence on the motivation to engage in executing the programs, tasks, and behaviors necessary to curb dropouts on both a professional and programmatic level. At no point during the interviews did the principals suggest curtailing or trimming back commitment, energy, time, enthusiasm as a result of the various obstacles and challenges presented with on a daily basis. Instead, the principals had to contend with various hindrances while trying to keep students in school, and discussed the efforts employed to combat the obstacles. This demonstrated the principals’ persistence in meeting the given task of reducing dropouts, in the face of internal and external factors threatened by abilities to do so.

Bandura (1989) also wrote concerning how self-efficacy was a critical factor in the self-regulation of motivation. Although principals’ levels of self-efficacy might have been minimally affected by the presence of the various obstacles inherent in working with low-income minority of students, motivation and belief in the ability to affect dropouts remained unshaken. Throughout the interviews, principals continued to express capability of



overcoming the various obstacles competed with to keep students enrolled in school, and belief capabilities were a primary source of motivation.

Henson (2001) explained self-efficacy beliefs are “powerful predictors of behavior.” This assertion is consistent with the findings of the research study. Because the principals had a moderate-to-high perception of self-efficacy to influence dropout rates, one would predict principals would engage in as many behaviors manageable to accomplish this goal, and this prediction was fulfilled; principals engaged many programs, initiatives, and personal efforts to reduce dropout rates simply because of the belief in the extent of abilities. This finding was also consistent with Lai and Chen (2012), whose research found positive associations between self-efficacy, effort, and performance.

Locke et al.’s (1984) research on self-efficacy highlighted the notion people with a low perception of self-efficacy are more likely to give up, while people with a high perception of self-efficacy are more likely to exert more effort and intentionality into mastering the challenge. The findings of the research study were also consistent with this notion, because despite the challenges principals faced when trying to combat the negative home and environmental influences pulling students out of school, the principals never showed any sign of giving up. Instead, harder and more exerted efforts and intentionality efforts to effectively retain students were devoted. This is also consistent with Bandura’s (2000) research when faced with challenges and difficulties, those with a “strong belief in their capabilities redoubles their efforts to master the challenge” rather than giving up (p. 120).

Research findings were also consistent with Federici and Skaalvik (2011), who explored the relationship between principals’ self-efficacy, burnout, job satisfaction, and

motivation to quit; the higher the self-efficacy, the lower the tendency of experiencing burnout and motivation to quit, and the higher the level of job satisfaction. This research study found principals, who had moderate-to-high levels of self-efficacy did not exemplify symptoms of burnout or motivation to quit. Instead, despite the challenges faced, principals maintained internal motivation. Although only one of the principals made overt statements about her level of job satisfaction, Principal C, the other two principals sent non-verbal cues communicating enjoyment of jobs and experienced high levels of job satisfaction in the face of the difficulties of curbing dropout rates.

Osterman and Sullivan's (1996) research investigated the impact of efficacy on principal leadership behavior, noting when principals have a strong or high sense of perceived self-efficacy, they are more effective at producing desired outcomes within the school context and tended to be more flexible and willing to adapt strategies based upon the needs or conditions of the operating context. The findings of this research align with Osterman and Sullivan's (1996) discoveries, as the principals in this study showed high willingness to adapt new strategies when noticing other strategies were not effective. Rather than utilizing the same failing approaches and producing dismal results, the principals developed new and creative means to address the issues students faced instead of continuing to do what was not working, . Before operating simply based off of what the district or the school system outlined for to curb dropout rates, the principals engaged personal initiatives to do what was best to keep students in school, even if it meant going above and beyond job requirements.

Finally, Lyons and Murphy's (1994) research found self-efficacy affects principals' performance in leading high schools. Principals with a strong sense of self-efficacy were

more likely to access internally-based personal power to fulfill roles rather than access external sources of power. This notion is consistent with the findings of this research study as relying on the external sources of power, like petitioning the school district for more money, asking the school system for better resources, waiting for the parents to become more supportive of children's academic careers, or any other external factor outside of themselves, principals relied on internally-based personal power. They took the responsibility on themselves to bridge the gap between what the external sources of power could provide and what students needed. Thus, the principals engaged some very personal efforts to ensure the needs of students were met to keep students in school. The act of engaging in personal efforts goes far beyond the realm of job responsibility. Personal ownership was demonstrated and communicating a sense of commitment to students becoming motivating. A principal dedicating personal time shows full commitment to explore various options leading to student success.

**Deficit thinking theory.** Deficit thinking is the belief “students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies, such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations, or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster – such as familial deficits and dysfunctions” (Valencia, 1997, p. xi). Often used in the same context to refer to students who are at-risk, deficit thinking refers to students who are considered to be at greater risk of realizing negative academic outcomes than the general population of students (Valencia, 2015). Further, research supports the notion deficit thinking is present to some extent in the mind of everyone – even leaders, and even in principals (Valencia, 2015), because each of the principals made comments indicating the presence of deficit thinking. This supports the deficit thinking research of Archambault and Garon (2011), who found principals might be

open to candidly expressing mentalities about low-income minority students without realizing thoughts and opinions and are actually grounded in a deficit thinking mindset. However, unlike the findings of Archambault and Garon (2011), the principals in this study did not report lowering expectations for low-SES student populations.

The findings of this research study supported some thoughts in the literature concerning deficit thinking but contradicted others. First, the study supported the thought deficit thinking is present to some extent in everyone, including principals. Although two of the principals were minorities (Principal A and Principal B), each made several comments throughout interviews showing evidence of the presence of deficit thinking, although only to a limited extent. Principal C, a white female, also made comments showing evidence of the presence of deficit thinking, again only to a limited extent.

However, Valencia's (2015) research on deficit thinking found deficit thinking fails to take into account the competencies, promise and strengths of low-income minority children and parents. In this study, although the principals held some beliefs characterized as deficit thinking, they were still able to maintain a solid focus on the competencies, promise, and strengths of students, taking all of these factors into account, and in fact, using these considerations to maintain a sense of motivation to inspire the students to set academic goals and pursue them. Deficits students faced at home were not allowed with external associations or intrinsically to sway beliefs in students to stay in school, succeed academically, and graduate. Thus, not only were students' abilities taken into account, these abilities were nurtured, supported, and cultivated in various ways and at every opportunity.

Another aspect in which the findings of this research study do not align with the literature surrounding deficit thinking is while the principals exhibited some characteristics

of deficit thinking, not all were exhibited; in some cases, the features conflicted with them. For example, according to Valencia (2015), the first of the six characteristics of deficit thinking is *Victim Blaming*, a practice in which a student's failure in school is attributed to the student's alleged cognitive and motivational deficits, allowing the blame for poor performance to be attributed to the student rather than the school. However, in this research study, the principals acknowledged many students had motivational deficits, oftentimes identifying these deficits through talking to the students and hearing the students make motivated statements; however, the principals simultaneously accepted responsibility, on behalf of the school, for remedying these motivational deficits. In taking such responsibility, the principals did not take an either/or approach in which the responsibility was placed either upon the student or the principal. Rather, the principals considered themselves to be partners in the process with the students, a process in which both parties bore responsibility for the students' academic success.

Another area in which the findings of the study do not align with the literature is regarding another of Valencia's (2015) six characteristics of deficit thinking, *Temporal Changes*, a mindset establishing because students are considered genetically and socially inferior, if they do manage to achieve any academic success, these changes are isolated, and the student's low-performing tendencies would still be passed on to future generations. The findings of this research study show while the principals do not consider students genetically inferior in any way, some social deficits pre-dispose them towards having a more difficult time staying in school. Further, when students do experience academic success, the principals did not consider these to be isolated incidents. In fact, principals operated with a mindset if \students experienced academic success, principals would be helping to break the cycle for

future generations, ensuring a better future for all. Again, the findings do not represent an either/or surrounding the construct of deficit thinking but rather a both/and approach.

It was nearly impossible for principals to discuss the realities faced when dealing with \ low-income minority student populations without making statements interpreted by the researcher as deficit thinking. The reality exists there were pathologies present in the individual family and community placing students at a real and evident deficit. However, after discussing these deficits, the principals would always go on to explain the various approaches taken to mitigate them, expressing an unyielding commitment to helping students overcome very real deficits and espousing belief in students to stay in school and achieve academically, regardless of what challenges were faced at home or in the community.

Bieneman (2011) asserts deficit thinking carries with it educational assumptions masked by organizational and social issues overshadowing the abilities of students. Again, the findings of this research found it is possible for principals to acknowledge the deficits of students without allowing the identification of these deficits to mask the organizational and social issues contributing to them and even helping to perpetuate the deficits. Principals at all three schools were diligent in overturning the structural, organizational and systemic factors increasing the likelihood of students becoming dropouts and engaged every program, initiative, and resource, personal and professional effort possible to make students academically successful. Each principal remained committed to the idea students could succeed no matter what, and based upon interviews, the principals never gave up on a student, regardless of the circumstances a student faced.

Archambault and colleagues' (2011) research promoted the need for principals to become actively engaged in transformational leadership with a social justice emphasis in

order to bring awareness to the prejudices existing towards low-SES students in schools and to serve them more effectively. However, the principals in this research study demonstrated no evidence of showing prejudice, marginalizing students, and limiting opportunities for the success of students. While the principals made comments suggesting the presence of deficit thinking, all did not fall victim to the effects of it. Instead, while understanding the deficits characterizing many of the lives of students, the principals remained actively engaged in championing the social justice and educational opportunities necessary on a district, school, and personal level for students to succeed in school.

Finally, the findings of this research study were consistent with the research of Reister and colleagues (2012), who examined the role principals play in schools highly successful while being primarily comprised of students from low-SES homes. Reister and colleagues (2012) found the key influencing factor in the success of students who attended such schools was the principal him or herself, who was responsible for: (a) promoting a democratic culture; (b) adopting a prescriptive approach to literacy and academic success; and (c) demonstrating a stubborn persistence in meeting established goals. In this study, it was evident the principal was the key factor or driving force behind keeping students enrolled in school, and each of them displayed an unrelenting tenacity, or “stubborn persistence in achieving goals” despite the various obstacles and challenges presented to them by students. Similarly, Riehl’s (2000) research found the most significant factor in overcoming deficit thinking in schools serving low-SES children was the leadership of the principal, particularly the principal’s belief system about what and how much children can learn and what children can accomplish. In each of the interview, conducted with the principals in this research study, the principals’ belief system about what students could

achieve despite home and environmental circumstances and lower-SES, each principal's efforts to ensure students' potential was translated into academic progress, made the difference in whether or not students remained in school and graduated.

### **Relationship between the Findings and the Literature Reviewed**

In general, the findings of the research study tended to support the literature reviewed on self-efficacy, particularly in terms of how self-efficacy affects the motivation and behavior of educational leaders. Regarding the literature reviewed on deficit thinking, the findings of the research study contradicted, in some ways, thoughts on how deficit thinking impacts educational leaders. Thus, the relationship between the findings and the literature reviewed generally support the published research on principals and self-efficacy while offering alternative considerations for the published research on principals and deficit thinking.

Regarding the literature on principals and self-efficacy, there was strong support for Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2007) research, as well as other similar research (Bandura, 1982; Cervone et al., 1991; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998), found perceived efficacy is directly related to a person's confidence to be able to achieve a certain outcome as well as the behaviors engaged in to realize the outcome. The findings of this research study demonstrated strong support for this assertion; because the principals believed they could achieve the outcome of helping students stay in school and graduate, by maintaining an unshaken confidence in abilities to do so, and consequently, persisting in efforts to help students graduate on both a programmatic level (as required by job descriptions) and a personal level (going above and beyond job descriptions). Even though obstacles are introduced on a daily basis by students' contexts, giving up on students was not an option;



instead, principals used more exerted efforts and intentionality into mastering the challenge. This finding was consistent with Locke et al. (1984).

There was also strong support for the assertion educators working with low-income minority students should have a certain special sense of efficacy (Siwatu et al., 2011), which is needed for the effective leadership of this unique population and the challenges accompanying it – a type of efficacy different from what is required of educators who work with mainstream, middle-class students. This unique type of efficacy goes beyond basic educational and leadership skills and requires leaders couple these skills with a sense of efficacy to keep them motivated for helping students succeed despite the challenges faced both in and outside of the classroom.

One of the only findings of the research study contradicted the literature on principal leadership and self-efficacy was how external factors influenced principals' self-efficacy. When examining the factors affecting the self-efficacy of principals leading low-income students, Tschannen-Moran and colleagues (2007) identified several factors having significant relationship to principals' efficacy. Contrary to the findings in this study, Tschannen-Moran and colleagues (2007) discovered the strongest predictors of principals' self-efficacy were the set of interpersonal support variables available to them, which was comprised of teachers, support staff, students, and parents, followed by the principal's level of preparation, interpersonal support from the superintendent and central office staff, and resource support. The findings of this research study suggested t while it was true principals' self-efficacy was positively influenced by support staff, particularly dropout prevention teams in the school, the lack of support of students, parents, central office staff, and resource support did not significantly decrease sense of self-efficacy to curb dropout rates.

Consequently, principals maintained a strong sense of efficacy despite lack of support and developed creative and innovative ways to compensate for lack of support and to meet the needs of students.

Regarding the literature on principals and deficit thinking, according to the literature, when principals engage in deficit thinking, such a mindset shifts the attention from the administrative, organizational and systematic shortcomings led to student academic failure and shifts the attention to the shortcomings of the low-income minority student, including lack of intelligence, environmental factors, low value for education, and other student-centered explanations for why the student is not academically successful. Bieneman (2011) reports the educational assumptions accompany deficit thinking “mask organizational and social issues often overshadowing the abilities of teachers and students” (p. 231). However, while the findings of this research study support the notion deficit thinking was present at some level among all of the principals (Valencia, 2015), this is where the support for the deficit thinking literature ended. The findings of this research study suggest acknowledging student deficits like environmental factors, low value for education, lack of motivation, dysfunctional home lives, teenage motherhood and fatherhood, a lack of parental support, and even a lack of systematic support from the district or school system, did not translate into principals shifting focus away from the administrative, organizational, and systematic shortcoming, and blaming the students for academic failures. Likewise, the findings of this research study showed principals faced the administrative, organization, and systematic shortcomings uncompromisingly, championing the causes of students with external influences to petition for the resources towards increasing the likelihood of students’ success. Thus, while it is true deficit thinking might lead to a shift to focusing on the student’s

shortcomings rather than the school district's shortcomings in some cases, in this research study, the findings suggested quite the opposite, as each principal spoke candidly about the need for systemic shortcomings to be remedied.

Additionally, the principals interviewed in Archambault and Garon's (2011) research admitted to lowering expectations for low-SES students and operating out of prejudices and false beliefs. Again, this research study revealed different findings; although deficit thinking was present among them, the principals also had a high sense of efficacy to be able to address the academic challenges of students to keep them in school. As a result, rather than lowering expectations, high expectations were maintained, and rather than operating out of prejudices and false beliefs, they advocated for the equal treatment of students, recognizing the capacity to succeed was just as high as students in mainstream schools. Because of external low-SES environment, only additional resources , focus, and energy was needed to become as academically successful as middle-class, mainstream counterparts.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this research study was the small sample size, which could potentially result in limiting inferences from the research findings to be made to the general population of principals leading populations of low-income minority students. Another limitation was the homogeneity of the background of the principals participating in the research study. Each of the principals shared a similar background, to some extent, as students, which had a direct influence on the level of self-efficacy. A more diverse sample of principals, including those who do not share the same backgrounds as low-income SES students, could potentially have produced different levels of efficacy than those found in the findings of this study. The final limitation of this research study was the nature of the study,

which called for self-reporting in face-to-face interviews and focus groups. Self-reporting on constructs like self-efficacy and efforts undertaken to accomplish professional goals might be selective, resulting in subjectivity and less-than-transparent reporting in the data.

### **Implication of the Findings for Practice**

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2007) explain the construct of self-efficacy “has the potential to offer insight into the complex, challenging, and critically important role associated with the principalship in present-day schools...”; however, despite this potential, “principal self-efficacy is a promising yet largely unexplored construct for understanding principal motivation and behavior” (p. 90). Siwatu and colleagues (2011) recommended there should be certain types of efficacy developed in educators working specifically with low-income minority students. This research study on principals and self-efficacy yielded some significant findings about how deficit thinking affects principal motivation and behavior, which carry strong implications for practice in terms of the selection of principals chosen to lead school comprised of low-income minority student populations.

The existing literature on self-efficacy, deficit thinking, and principal leadership tended to represent deficit thinking as a construct hand-in-hand with academic failure of low-income minority students because of forces outside of the principal’s control significantly increasing the chances of students dropping out of school, level of self-efficacy to keep students from dropping out of school is reduced, lowered expectations of students graduating, and consequently, not investing the time, attention, and effort necessary to keep students enrolled in school and realize academic success. The findings of this research study suggest this is not always the case.

This research study suggests although deficit thinking may be present in principals leading low-income minority student populations, this type of thinking does not automatically translate into a lowering of self-efficacy, a reduction of academic expectations for students, or reduced efforts among principals to help students stay in school and graduate. The difference between principals who engage in deficit thinking and allow it to affect efficacy, expectations, and subsequently, efforts and those who do not allow it to affect efficacy, expectations and efforts is the presence of a mitigating factor, which has a significant bearing on responses to the presence of deficit thinking. In the case of this research study, the strongest mitigating factor appearing to be a moderate-to-high level of self-efficacy was robustly influenced by principals' having a shared background with students combined with the use of these experiences to empathize with the current situation of students. Because principals had been at-risk of not succeeding academically and had managed to overcome the challenges of upbringing to stay in school, graduate, and attain successful careers as high school principals, personal experiences were proof positive for students with similar backgrounds capable of doing the same. Thus, while working with students, the principals remained undeterred by the external obstacles, excuses, and environmental resistance presented to them by students and the contexts in which the students lived. Furthermore, the principals empathized with students and worked incessantly to find creative ways to remedy both the academic and non-academic challenges of students – some of the same methods used by them to overcome challenges.

Siwatu and colleagues' (2011) research described how preparation techniques like increasing educators' multicultural attitudes, increasing educators' culturally-diverse knowledge base, and helping educators to develop the skills needed to teach African

American students effectively were necessary and increased the odds of teacher success, particularly when coupled with a strong sense of efficacy. The benefit of the principals already having a shared background and having overcome similar experiences is more effective than having to be formally trained and prepared with the techniques referenced by Siwatu et al. (2011), preparation with these techniques organically had been use, which could have been a strong factor in building self-efficacy to help students overcome the obstacles faced regarding staying in school and graduating.

Practitioners, particularly school districts and administrators directly involved in the selection process of principals who will lead low-income minority school populations, would be advised to strongly consider principal candidates' backgrounds in the selection process, as this research demonstrated the significant impact a shared background is characterized by some level of hardship, struggle, or environmental resistance towards academic success, particularly a principal candidate's history in overcoming such a background, has on his or her level of efficacy to help the students in a high school to do the same. Without a personal, organic experience of having overcome many of the obstacles low-income minority students face, a principal from a less-challenging background could potentially allow deficit thinking, coupled with the numerous challenges faced when working with students from such a context, to lower his or her sense of efficacy, expectations, and efforts to help students remain in school and graduate. Essentially, principals without some level of shared experiences with students of a low-income minority population might be more prone to feel powerless to prevent what is considered to be inevitable dropouts, while principals who do have some level of shared experiences with this population maintain a sense of power – or

efficacy – to prevent students from dropping out, regardless of the challenges faced as a result of low-SES conditions.

Finally, there are several constructs associated with the actual school setting practitioners, researchers, and policy makers must consider. First, the study focused on an urban population but there are may be different variables when comparing an urban and rural district. The geographical location rather urban or rural could have a tremendous bearing on a school population and could potentially lead to deficit thinking of principals if the appropriate actions are not taken by school personnel. Second, parent participation within a school environment could serves as a huge contributing factor to deficit thinking because lack of parental support could affect collaboration with school personnel. The study gave various examples of how principals attempted various strategies to prevent student from dropping out. Potentially developing a successful parental outreach and collaboration initiative could improve student achievement drastically. The collaboration of parent could improve the self-efficacy of principals and reduce opportunities for deficit thinking transpire. Building relationship is the last construct but it involves the previous two constructs discussed. The study considered each principal's ability to facilitate relationships on campus but the ability to build relationships with parents and local businesses could have huge implications. The corporate relationships built within a community rather rural or urban could provide a strong partnership enabling students to thrive and discourage dropouts if effectively implemented. Various partnerships could minimize a principal's feeling of powerless when considering support from the community to help students.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Research on the role of deficit thinking, self-efficacy, and principal leadership in low-SES schools remains limited. This research study sought to examine the intersection of each of these constructs for the purpose of determining how administrators could more adequately prepare candidates targeted to lead low-income minority school populations with the unique type of self-efficacy necessary to be effective in keeping students enrolled in school. During the study, the data revealed each of the principals had a moderate-to-strong level of efficacy to prevent students from dropping out of school and the strongest influence on levels of self-efficacy was shared similar backgrounds and experiences of current students and these shared experiences gave them a level of optimism, confidence, and hope students could overcome the same obstacles to stay in school and be successful. Based upon these findings, there are two recommendations for future research.

The first recommendation for future research is to increase the sample size and diversity level of principals engaged for the research study. With a larger and more diverse sample of principals, the likelihood of encountering principals not sharing a similar background as of current low-SES students increases, which would allow the researcher to compare and contrast the self-efficacy levels of principals with shared backgrounds against the self-efficacy levels of principals without shared backgrounds as students and to investigate how these levels of self-efficacy impact the principals' efforts towards preventing dropouts.

The second recommendation for future research is to directly measure the principals' levels of self-efficacy against dropout rates while taking deficit thinking into account in order to quantitatively determine the relationship between the various constructs. A quantitative



examination of the intersection of these constructs would offer greater insight into how significantly deficit thinking influences self-efficacy and how this self-efficacy is related to the numerical dropout rates in a high school population comprised of low-income minority students.

### **Conclusion**

This research study sought to examine the impact of deficit thinking on principals' levels of self-efficacy, and the impact of self-efficacy on principals' efforts to prevent students from becoming high school dropouts. The findings of the study revealed although deficit thinking was present to some extent in all of the principals, it did not have a significant impact on principals' levels of self-efficacy; principals' levels of self-efficacy remained moderate-to-strong despite the challenges dealt by the deficiencies in students' external environments threatening to compel them to drop out of school. The strongest factor determined to mitigate the effects of deficit thinking on principals' sense of efficacy to prevent students from dropping out of school was each principal's personal background, which was similar to the backgrounds of students, to some extent. Principals' abilities to empathize with the challenges students faced as a result of these shared backgrounds made them resistant to feelings of powerlessness and increased confidence in abilities to help students overcome the challenges posed by environments allowing them to remain in school, graduate, and be successful.

The findings of this research study make a significant contribution to the literature, in which there is a void of knowledge surrounding the impact of deficit thinking on self-efficacy and self-efficacy on principals' efforts to prevent dropouts among low-SES students. The findings are also significant for practice, because education practitioners and

administrators are empowered with intelligence about factors considered in the selection process for potential principal candidates who will be tasked with the challenge of preventing high school dropouts. These considerations are particularly relevant for increasing the effectiveness of principals in low-income minority high schools, which deficit thinking has systematically infiltrated, in order to reduce the national high school dropout rate disproportionately affecting this unique population of students.

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## APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What three major factors contribute most to your effectiveness to help a student stay in school and not drop out?
2. What three major factors fight against your abilities to effectively help a student stay in school and not drop out?
3. Do you feel that you can make a *significant* difference in the lives of your students to help them stay in school? Why or why not?
4. If you had to attach a percentage to the amount of influence that a student's home environment has on his or her motivation to stay in school versus the impact that your mentoring has on his or her motivation to stay in school, what kind of weight would you give these two influences?
5. What strategies, tools, and activities do you engage to influence students to stay enrolled in school, and how do you evaluate the effectiveness of these methods? Give a few examples of how they have or have not worked in the past.



IRB NUMBER: IRB2015-0747D  
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 12/15/2015  
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 12/15/2016

## APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about the programs and initiatives that you are currently using at your school to prevent and/or reduce dropouts.
2. What is your particular day to day role and responsibility in working with these dropout programs and initiatives? Give some specific examples.
3. On a typical day, how much time and energy would you say that you dedicate specifically towards dropout prevention of your students? In what areas do you dedicate the balance of your time and energy on a typical day?
4. How do you decide which students to invest most of your energy into? What are the criteria for students that you invest more energy into helping versus less energy into helping?
5. What types of additional efforts would you like to see implemented in your school to prevent or reduce dropout rates from the dropout prevention coach / principal? Any recommendations or suggestions for new efforts or initiatives?



IRB NUMBER: IRB2015-0747D  
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 12/15/2015  
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 12/15/2016

## APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

DIVISION OF RESEARCH



**DATE:** December 15, 2015

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Mario Torres  
TAMU - Texas A&M University - Not Specified

**FROM:** Dr. James Fluckey  
Chair, TAMU IRB

**SUBJECT:** Expedited Approval

**Study Number:** IRB2015-0747D

**Title:** FEELING POWERLESS TO PREVENT THE INEVITABLE? EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN DEFICIT THINKING AND PRINCIPALS' PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY TO INFLUENCE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN AND HISPANIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TEXAS

**Date of Determination:**

**Approval Date:** 12/15/2015

**Continuing Review Due:** 11/15/2016

**Expiration Date:** 12/15/2016

**Documents Reviewed and Approved:** Only IRB-stamped approved versions of study materials (e.g., consent forms, recruitment materials, and questionnaires) can be distributed to human participants. Please log into IRIS to download the stamped, approved version of all study materials. If you are unable to locate the stamped version in IRIS, please contact the IRIS Support Team at 979.845.4969 or the IRB liaison assigned to your area.

Submission Components			
Study Document			
Title	Version Number	Version Date	Outcome
Participant Consent Letter IRB	Version 2.1	12/07/2015	Approved
Email to Principals	Version 1.0	11/13/2015	Approved
Email to Dropout Coaches	Version 1.0	12/07/2015	Approved
Email to Principals 2	Version 1.0	12/07/2015	Approved
Participant Consent Letter IRB	Version 1.0	11/13/2015	Approved
Toron Wooldridge Proposal Draft- IRB	Version 1.0	11/13/2015	Approved
principal interview questions	Version 5.0	11/13/2015	Approved
focus group questions	Version 4.0	11/13/2015	Approved
District Consent	Version 1.1	11/13/2015	Approved

750 Agronomy Road, Suite 2701  
1186 TAMU  
College Station, TX 77843-1186  
Tel. 979.458.1467 Fax. 979.862.3176  
<http://rcb.tamu.edu>

**Document of Consent:** Written consent in accordance with 45 CF 46.116/ 21 CFR 50.27

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- Comments:**
- This protocol has been approved.
  - Research is to be conducted according to the study application approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
  - Any future correspondence should include the IRB study number and the study title.
- 

Investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The study must be renewed by the expiration date in order to continue with the research. A Continuing Review application along with required documents must be submitted by the continuing review deadline. Failure to do so may result in processing delays, study expiration, and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** Upon completion of the research study (including data collection and analysis), a Completion Report must be submitted to the IRB.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Unanticipated problems and adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-compliance:** Potential non-compliance, including deviations from protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol and/or study documents must be requested by submitting an Amendment to the IRB for review. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form or information sheet, the IRB stamped approved version must be used. Please log into IRIS to download the stamped approved version of the consenting instruments. If you are unable to locate the stamped version in IRIS, please contact the IRIS Support Team at 979.845.4969 or the IRB liaison assigned to your area. Human participants are to receive a copy of the consent document, if appropriate.
7. **Post Approval Monitoring:** Expedited and full board studies may be subject to post approval monitoring. During the life of the study, please review and document study progress using the PI self-assessment found on the RCB website as a method of preparation for the potential review. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate study records and making them available for post approval monitoring. Investigators are encouraged to request a pre-initiation site visit with the Post Approval Monitor. These visits are designed to help ensure that all necessary documents are approved and in order prior to initiating the study and to help investigators maintain compliance.
8. **Recruitment:** All approved recruitment materials will be stamped electronically by the HRPP staff and available for download from IRIS. These IRB-stamped approved documents from IRIS must be used for recruitment. For materials that are distributed to potential participants electronically and for which you can only feasibly use the approved text rather than the stamped document, the study's IRB Study Number, approval date, and expiration dates must be included in the following format: TAMU IRB#20XX-XXXX Approved: XX/XX/XXXX Expiration Date: XX/XX/XXXX.
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the FERPA administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.
10. **Food:** Any use of food in the conduct of human research must follow Texas A&M University Standard Administrative Procedure 24.01.01.M4.02.
11. **Payments:** Any use of payments to human research participants must follow Texas A&M University Standard Administrative Procedure 21.01.99.M0.03.
12. **Records Retention:** Federal Regulations require records be retained for at least 3 years. Records of a study that collects protected health information are required to be retained for at least 6 years. Some sponsors require extended records retention. Texas A&M University rule 15.99.03.M1.03 Responsible Stewardship of Research Data requires that research records be retained on Texas A&M property.

This electronic document provides notification of the review results by the Institutional Review Board.



APPENDIX D: SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEARCH CONSENT LETTER



**HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center  
4400 West 18<sup>th</sup> Street • Houston, Texas 77092-8501

Terry B. Grier, Ed.D.  
*Superintendent of Schools*

[www.HoustonISD.org](http://www.HoustonISD.org)  
[www.twitter.com/HoustonISD](https://www.twitter.com/HoustonISD)

Carla J. Stevens  
*Assistant Superintendent*  
*Research and Accountability Department*  
Tel: 713-556-6700 • Fax: 713-556-4730

December 11, 2015

Toron Wooldridge  
11540 Chimney Rock apt. #220  
Houston, Texas 77035

Dear Mr. Wooldridge:

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) is pleased to approve the continuation of the study "Feeling Powerless to Prevent the Inevitable? Exploring the Link Between Thinking and Principals' Perceived Self-Efficacy to Influence High School Dropout Rates Among African American and Hispanic High School Students in Texas". The study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of doctoral degree requirements at Texas A&M University. The projected date of study completion is August 30, 2016.

Approval to conduct the study in HISD is contingent on your meeting the following conditions:

- The target population is principals and dropout coaches at \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ high schools. It is at the principals' discretion to participate in this study.
- Principals and dropout coaches will be asked to engage in a one-hour focus group to discuss district support, credit recovery, challenges, and strategies for managing the student dropout issue at their school.
- Principals will be asked to provide the researcher with the number of students who dropped out of school at their campus.
- The researcher will ask principals to observe/tour the school facilities.
- Voluntary consent is required of principals and dropout coaches who participate in the study.
- The researcher must follow the guidelines of HISD and the Texas A&M University regarding the protection of human subjects and confidentiality of data.
- The HISD Department of Research and Accountability will monitor this study to ensure compliance to ethical conduct guidelines established by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP) as well as the disclosure of student records outlined in Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- In order to eliminate potential risks to study participants, the reporting of proposed changes in research activities must be promptly submitted to the HISD Department of Research and Accountability for approval prior to implementing changes. Noncompliance to this guideline could impact the approval of future research studies in HISD.
- The final report must be submitted to the HISD Department of Research and Accountability within 30 days of completion.

Any other changes or modifications to the current proposal must be submitted to the Department of Research and Accountability for approval. Should you need additional information or have any questions concerning the process, please call (713) 556-6700.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Carla J. Stevens in cursive script.  
Carla Stevens

CS:  
cc:

## APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

### TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Feeling Powerless To Prevent the Inevitable? Exploring the Link between Deficit Thinking and Principals' Perceived Self-Efficacy to Influence High School Dropout Rates among African American and Hispanic High School Students in Texas

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Toron Wooldridge, a doctoral student and researcher from Texas A&M University, and Dr. Mario Torres. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

#### Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to explore the link between deficit thinking and principals' perceived efficacy to influence high school dropout rates among African American and Hispanic high school students in Texas.

#### Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are either a principal or a dropout coach in an urban school with a student population primarily comprised of African American and Hispanic high school students.

#### How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?

6 people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study locally. This number includes three high school principals and three dropout coaches.

#### What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?

The alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

#### What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?

As a principal, you will be asked to participate in a one-hour interview and participate in a one-hour roundtable focus group with the researcher and your dropout coach. You will also be asked to provide the researcher with the total number of dropouts at your school. The total time for your direct participation will be 2.0 hours.

As a dropout coach, you will be asked to participate in a one-hour roundtable focus group with the researcher and your principal.

#### Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?

The researcher will make an audio recording during the study so that your responses from the interviews and roundtable focus group discussions can be later transcribed, coded, and analyzed. If you do not give permission for the audio recording to be obtained, you cannot participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.



**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM  
CONSENT FORM**

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

**Are There Any Risks To Me?**

The things that you will be doing are no more/greater than risks than you would come across in everyday life. Although the researcher has tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to. There could also be a risk to privacy, given the nature of focus group discussions where multiple participants are present during interviews. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable discussing in the focus group.

**Will There Be Any Costs To Me?**

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

**Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?**

You will not be paid for being in this study.

**Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?**

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the records. Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

**Who may I Contact for More Information?**

You may contact the Protocol Director, Toron Wooldridge, to tell him about a concern or complaint about this research at (713) 498-9164 or [twooldridge51@sbcglobal.net](mailto:twooldridge51@sbcglobal.net). You may also contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Mario Torres at (979) 458-3016 or [mtorres@tamu.edu](mailto:mtorres@tamu.edu).

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to provide input regarding research, or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

**What if I Change My Mind About Participating?**

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your relationship with Texas A&M University.

Version Date:

Page 2 of 3



IRB NUMBER: IRB2015-0747D  
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 12/15/2015  
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 12/15/2016

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM  
CONSENT FORM

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:**

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Presenter

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Version Date:

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IRB NUMBER: IRB2015-0747D  
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 12/15/2015  
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 12/15/2016

## APPENDIX F: CAMPUS OBSERVATION NOTES

### Campus A

Upon entering, I was met at the gate by school personnel. School facilities were neat and students were transitioning to class. I asked personnel the location of the principal and I was quickly directed to the main office. Supervision was adequate around campus and the principal arrived 15min later. All interaction between the principal and staff was professional. There was a disgruntled parent in the main office that was immediately addressed when questioned.

### Campus B

The school is located in a historic area of the city. Upon entering the campus, I approached a gate that was locked. I pressed the intercom and was granted entrance after I provided identification. The campus was secure and there was evidence of constant supervision. The halls were clean and facilities well kept. There were no students transitioning in the hallways and all personnel communicated in a respectful tone. There was also a lot supervision.

### Campus C

As I entered school, I was greeted by two policemen. The policemen were very cordial and they told me to have a nice day. The school campus was very clean and the floors shined. There were campus expectations that were hanging from the ceiling. As I entered the main office, I was greeted by a receptionist. I asked to speak with an administrator and I was quickly prompted to Mr. M, a campus administrator. We toured the hallway and all floors were clear and there was fresh paint on the walls. As I spoke with the assistant principal, there seemed to be a sense of ownership with keeping the school clean and monitoring students. All communication was respectful and personnel was visible and students were supervised. The building was inviting and all facilities were clean and the building interior was as meek as a hospital. The whole culture was happy and it was the High School that I have ever attended.



Richmond, TX

November 2006- June 2010  
District

**Tutorial Facilitator**

Houston Independent School

**Glenshire Village Homeless Shelter**  
Houston,

TX

October 2005- June 2010  
District

**Behavioral Services Teacher**

Houston Independent School

**Herod**

**Elementary**

Houston,

TX

**Affiliations:**

**Delta Kappa Gamma**  
**National Alliance of Black School Educators**  
**Houston Alliance of Black School Educators**