

**FACTORS INFLUENCING THE FAILURE TO GRADUATE FROM
THE PACE DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY PROGRAM
AS IDENTIFIED BY SELECTED STUDENTS IN THE
HUMBLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

A Dissertation

by

REX WAYNE INMAN, SR.

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2006

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee, Robert Slater
Committee Members, David Erlandson
Linda Skrla
Patrick Slattery
Head of Department, Jim Scheurich

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ABSTRACT

Factors Influencing the Failure to Graduate From
the PACE Dropout Prevention and Recovery Program
as Identified by Selected Students in the
Humble Independent School District. (December 2006)

Rex Wayne Inman, Sr., B.S., California State University, Hayward;

M. Ed., Stephen F. Austin State University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Robert Slater

There has been a lack of information and research as to the reasons students did not graduate from high school with a diploma, or GED certificate, or certificate of completion, even though they were given the opportunity to attend an alternative drop-out or credit recovery program. This study identified the reasons why some students failed to complete an alternative education program in a K-12 school district in Texas. Of the 29 former PACE students failing to graduate with either a diploma or GED certificate that participated in this research, a little less than half either quit the program or were administratively dropped because they felt that earning money from their job was more important than graduating from high school. Each of the others had this excuse as well as many other excuses for not graduating.

Three inter-locking conclusions were reached by the researcher after interviewing 29 of the students that did not complete the PACE program. The first conclusion was that students did not understand the value of a high school

diploma at the time they were attending PACE. The second was that money, even in the form of a minimum wage job, was more important than an education. The final conclusion was that each student did not have a plan for their life beyond the coming evening or weekend. All students that failed to graduate or earn a GED had at least one of these misconceptions, while most had two, and a few had all three.

This research is dedicated to my God and my loving wife, Susan. Without both, this dissertation would have not been completed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Why do some students succeed in alternative education programs while others fail? Why do some students who are screened, accepted into a program, and agree to complete the program with a diploma or at least a GED certificate, fail to follow through and finish?

The purpose of this study is to identify the reasons why some students failed to complete an alternative education program in a K-12 school district in Texas.

The general literature does give a number of reasons that students do not complete high school throughout the country. Among the most common are factors of poverty, minority status, family attitudes, low self esteem, poor academic skills, economic responsibilities, pregnancy, and cognitive or emotional disabilities. To what degree do these factors play a role in the failure to graduate in alternative education programs? This study examined this question by way of research on the circumstances surrounding students dropping out of one alternative education program in a suburban Texas school district.

The Alternative Center for the Humble Independent School District (the Humble AC) opened its doors for the first time in 1986. The Humble AC was established as the centralized, campus removal, discipline center for the other 28 campuses in the district, including elementary, middle, and high schools. Initially, students that were

This dissertation follows the style of *Education*.

removed from their home campus were assigned to the Humble AC for three, four, or five days, solely at the home campus principal's prerogative. The length of the removal depended on the severity of the infraction listed in the district or campus discipline code.

In 1987 a long term component was added, where students were removed from their home campus from six weeks to eighteen months, depending on the severity of the disciplinary offense. Those in the program for three to five day removals were then referred to as being in Short Term, while the program for the longer removals was called Long Term. These programs and terms exist at present, though in modified form. In 1989, it was determined that some students performed better academically in the structured setting of Long Term instead of a regular high school campus. The district then expanded Long Term to include not only discipline removals, but individual students recommended by the home campus principal and counselor, with the approval of the student and the student's parents. Every course offered by any campus in the district was offered at Long Term. With nine teachers, that meant that each teacher taught up to twelve different courses, with student loads for each class ranging from one to as high as ten. As the numbers of class periods was limited, all high school math courses would be taught in one room during the same time frame, as well as all sciences being taught in one room during one period. All elective courses were taught, being dependent on what the students had as their class schedule when they entered Long Term. With approximately half the students being referrals and the remaining half being mandatory removals, the discipline

problems among the entire student body were markedly less than with just the discipline removal students in attendance. In 1994 the two discipline programs moved onto a new campus, along with twelve other discipline, drop-out recovery, and at-risk student programs. Long Term and Short Term remained as they had evolved and two new programs were approved to better serve the marginal students. One was Quest High School, a magnet school of choice, and the other was the Program for Accelerated Education, with the acronym PACE. PACE, along with Long Term, Short Term and the Elementary Discipline program, were then collectively known as the Structured Learning Center

PACE High School began in the fall of 1996 as a dropout recovery program on the new alternative, centrally located, campus. It was decided to designate PACE as a High School to lessen the administrative burden on the other high school campuses in the District. Because the magnet high school enrolment was lower than expected, it was felt that the registrar assigned to Quest could handle the requisite functions for both new high schools. For administrative purposes, PACE was placed in close proximity to other dropout prevention and recovery programs in the SLC, with a dedicated principal and attending counseling and support staff. The other programs of the SLC included the Long Term Discipline, Short Term Discipline, and Elementary Discipline programs and the Behavior Training Center (BTC), a special education compliance facility. This proximity allowed for a centralized in-school suspension (ISS) room, centralized and continuously monitored rest rooms, and a minimal

administrative staff and teacher work areas. PACE was the only true dropout recovery program.

The eligibility requirements to attend PACE were somewhat stringent to provide services to those that would best utilize the facilities, but somewhat lax compared to most regular school programs. To attend PACE High School, a student must have been older than seventeen, have dropped out of public school, and working full time or married or both. The student could have no more than six credits (one credit being a course for one academic year) to complete for either the 19, 20, or 22 credit state academic plan, depending on when the student began high school. The student had to be referred by a school counselor, be a resident in the HISD attendance area, and complete an application. The student was then contacted and given a time to attend an interview conducted by members of the PACE staff. If the student met the academic qualifications and appeared motivated by a subjective evaluation of the staff members, the candidate was accepted into PACE High School. The last step in the enrollment process was for the student to attend a half-day orientation program that included a detailed description of the student's duties and requirements and the processing of a color-coded pictorial name tag.

During the orientation, heavy emphasis was placed on the attendance requirement of a minimum of 20 hours every week. There were also a few common courtesy rules explained. The final admonition to the students was that there was a three strike rule. If the attendance requirement was not met, or made up in the following week, or any other infractions were not complied with, for a total of three

occurrences during the entire stay, the student would be dropped from the program. The student could petition for reinstatement one time. If accepted, the three strike rule was invoked once again. If a second removal was warranted, there was no remedy available through PACE.

There was collective applause from the HISD administration with the establishment of PACE High School. It was felt that PACE was the panacea that would cure all the dropout problems in the district. PACE was very successful at recovering dropouts and providing the opportunity for each and every one of them to graduate. In spite of this, some students chose to not attend and some chose to not complete the general education development, GED, certificate program or complete the requirements to earn a high school diploma. When these students who chose to not graduate achieved the age of majority at 21, they were removed from PACE consideration and were not eligible for public education services.

Statement of the Problem

Humble Independent School District provided a well thought out and well managed program that provided the opportunity for most students that had dropped out of the regular high school program to complete the requirements for, and earn, a high school diploma or general education development (GED) certificate. Certified teachers, computer aided instruction, and course materials that utilized auditory, as well as visual and kinesthetic teaching methods were available. Work could be completed at the student's personal speed, as long as minimum standards of speed were met. Attendance hours were flexible and minimal. Teacher assistance was

available up to 55 hours per week. In spite of all those positive attributes, in a spacious and inviting learning space, some students did not choose to attend. With all these positive incentives, the individually paced curriculum, and the individualized plan to certain graduation, why didn't every student achieve success? That is, why didn't every student that was screened, accepted into the program, and agreed to complete the program, receive a diploma, or at least a GED certificate?

Rationale for the Study

There are many students throughout the nation that drop out of the regular education setting, are then recovered, but still do not receive a high school diploma or GED certificate. The economic consequences of leaving high school without a diploma are severe (NCES, 2003). Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates and to earn less money when they eventually secure work (NCES, 2003). High school dropouts are also more likely to receive public assistance than high school graduates (NCES, 2001). Students that fail to graduate from high school comprise a disproportionately high percentage of the nation's prison and death row inmates (DOJ, 1994). The published percentage of 18- through 24-year-olds who had completed high school in the United States in 2001 was 86.5 (NCES, 2004), or a dropout rate of 13.5%. The dropout rate for the state of Texas was 5.0% for the class of 2002 (TEA, 2003, p. viii). The Humble Independent School District (HISD) dropout rate published by the Texas Education Agency was 1.5% for the 2002-03 school year (2004). In spite of the relatively low drop-out rate from the PACE program in HISD, the number of students not graduating was still considered unacceptably high. This

research addressed the reasons why those few did not take advantage of what PACE had to offer.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In the area of public education, though it was well documented that there were a percentage of students that did not graduate, there had been a lack of information and research as to the reasons students did not graduate from high school. Research has been missing on both general diploma and general education development (GED) certificate graduates. The Humble, Texas, Independent School District (HISD) developed a dropout prevention or recovery program labeled PACE, or Program for ACcelerated Education beginning with the 1996-97 school year. HISD developed the PACE Program in an attempt to increase the graduation rate and to recover those students that had already dropped out from the public school system. Originally developed as a 21-credit, drop out recovery, minimum competency graduation and GED preparation program, PACE has evolved into three sections; a Pre-PACE program, a program for pregnant students, as well as the original core program. All of the changes were in an attempt to induce more students to earn a high school diploma instead of becoming a dropout. This desire to reduce the dropout rate was an attempt to ameliorate the consequences of not obtaining a diploma.

The economic consequences of leaving high school without a diploma are severe according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002). On average, dropouts are more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates and to earn less money when they eventually secure work (NCES, 2003). High school dropouts are also more likely to receive public assistance than high school graduates

who did not go on to college (NCES, 2003), due in part to the fact that young women who dropout of school are more likely to have children at younger ages and are more likely to be single parents (NCES, 2002). According to data from the United States Department of Justice (DOJ, 2003), there are social implications associated with high school dropouts, including the fact that dropouts comprise a disproportionately high percentage of the nation's prison and death row inmates. The DOJ estimates four in ten Federal and state prison inmates had not completed high school or acquired a GED.

Retention Methods

Community and civic leaders have always had the legal responsibility to provide an equal access to education for all students. Ensuring that all students acquire that education is every person's responsibility. The retaining of public school students was, and remains, a policy goal that reaches to the highest levels in the United States of America. Part D, Section 1401(a)(3) of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, in reference to students at-risk of not earning a graduation certificate, stated succinctly that its purpose was

to prevent at-risk youth from dropping out of school, and to provide dropouts, and children and youth returning from correctional facilities or institutions for neglected or delinquent children and youth, with a support system to ensure their continued education. (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 2001)

Students that remained in the generally accepted model of public education were not dropouts and would obtain a diploma, upon completion of the educational requirements. There have been several techniques used, both alone and in

combination, to aid in student retention. What happened when, in spite of all efforts, the student still seemed to be at risk of not completing the requirements for graduation? One method was assigning the student to an alternative school. The alternative school could be a separate campus or building, or just a program within an existing campus. According to Kleiner et al (2002), what all alternative programs had, and still do have, in common was that the students were, and are

referred to alternative schools and programs if they are at risk of education failure, as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with early withdrawal from school.

(Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students at Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01, 2002, p.3).

Barton (2005) points out that alternative schools have been in existence since the mid 1960s and were originally established for those students that either could not or would not learn in a traditional educational setting. Although there were alternative settings that were of a punitive nature, there were also alternatives that provided innovation and curriculum extension. Other methods used in an effort to retain students through graduation included increased student counseling by certified counselors. Barton (2005) found that the use of one-on-one counseling was effective, but the ratio of students to counselors was often too high to be a successful tool in retaining students.

Reimer and Cash (2003) have grouped alternative schools into five models. Those five were the alternative classroom, the school-within-a-school, the separate alternative school, the continuation school, and the magnet school. This was not an exhaustive list, but would suffice for this research.

Lehr et al. (2004), Kerla (2003), and Wonacott (2002) found that for a dropout prevention program to be effective, whatever form it took, should include components that could be categorized into five main types with sub-areas associated with each.

The representative types and sub-types utilized by Lehr et al. are:

personal/affective (e.g., retreats to enhance self-esteem, regularly scheduled classroom-based discussion, individual counseling, participation in an interpersonal relations class);

academic (e.g., provision of special academic courses, individualized methods of instruction, tutoring);

family outreach (e.g., strategies that include increased feedback to parents or home visits);

school structure (e.g., implementation of school within a school, re-definition of the role of the homeroom teacher, reducing class size, creation of an alternative school); and

work related (e.g., vocational training, participation in volunteer or service programs).

(Increasing Rates of School Completion: Moving From Policy and Research to Practice, 2004, p.18)

Naysayers asserted that the recent adoption of high school exit exams would increase the drop out rate. Greene and Winters (2004) found that the institution of high school exit exams had no effect on either graduation or retention. In spite of all the programs and good intentions, some students did drop out of the educational system without earning a graduation certificate.

Dropout Rates

There is some question as to what constitutes the true high school dropout rate. Although the dropout rate, or its antithesis the completion rate, who is counted as a dropout, and what it means to graduate all seem easily defined, there have been several different methods used to compute the data. According to the National

Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), explain that there are many methods to graduation.

Most students receive a regular high school diploma. . . Some students complete high school by means of an equivalency test and receive an alternative credential such as the General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Still others receive a certificate of completion issued by the state in recognition of achieving requirements other than those of the regular curriculum, such as attending school regularly for 12 years or passing a test specified by the state (OERI 1996).

When it comes to graduation and dropouts, there is some variance also. Most educational entities compute graduation rates based on the number of students that receive “regular” high school diplomas, while high school completion rates usually count students that receive diplomas and certificates, according to OERI. The variation in defining what constitutes a dropout and differences in computing the dropout rate are even more varied.

According to OERI, some school districts may not count students as dropouts if the students depart after a school year ends or leave school to get married, while other districts do count these non-returnees as dropouts. Some districts maintain better records or are more diligent in tracking down non-returnees than some others. Some school districts have policies that take into consideration students that leave before graduation to enter penal institutions, enroll in GED preparatory or examination programs, or even enter college. With these variations, how can a valid and comparable dropout rate be computed?

The U.S. Department of Education, as well as the Texas Education Agency, can and does report three types of dropout rates, according to OERI.

**Event rates reflect the percentage of students who drop out in a single year without completing high school;*

**Status rates reflect the percentage of the population in a given age range who have not finished high school or are not enrolled in school at one point in time; and*

**Cohort rates reflect the percentage of a single group of students who drop out over time (OERI).*

The United States Census Bureau presented cohort rates for educational attainment (graduation rates) from 1960 through 1999 for all races of students that had completed four or more years of high school with the results shown in Table 1, below. These data indicate a dropout rate of approximately 16.6% in the school year ending 1999, the latest data available from the census bureau.

Table 1
United States Composite High School Completion Rates

| Year | Graduation Rate (%) | |
|------|---------------------|--------|
| | Male | Female |
| 1960 | 39.5 | 42.5 |
| 1965 | 48.0 | 49.9 |
| 1970 | 51.9 | 52.8 |
| 1975 | 63.1 | 62.1 |
| 1980 | 67.3 | 65.8 |
| 1985 | 74.4 | 73.5 |
| 1990 | 77.7 | 77.5 |
| 1995 | 81.7 | 81.6 |
| 1997 | 82.0 | 82.2 |
| 1998 | 82.8 | 82.9 |
| 1999 | 83.4 | 83.4 |

Note. From U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000. Chapter 4 - Education p. 157

Dropouts

The problem of dropouts existed in every state in the United States, but the dropout rate varied from region to region and by race and ethnicity. Thurlow et al. (2002) stated that the high-risk areas of the country included the southern and

western regions, as well as the large urban areas. That geographical definition placed the state of Texas in the midst of the dropout problem. The reasons that students did not complete high school throughout the country were manifold. Egemba and Crawford (2003) showed that the financial burden for the state of Texas, to compensate high school non-graduates, as early as 1985 was \$253.7 million a year for Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Food Stamps and the cost for increased unemployment was \$17.6 million a year (p.12). The Texas Education Agency (TEA) defined a dropout as a student who enrolled in school at some time during the school year but either left school during the year without an approved excuse or completing the academic year and did not return the following year. In *Secondary School Completion and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools, 2001-2002* (TEA 2003), the TEA defined as unacceptable reasons for leaving, and thus being considered a dropout, any student that:

- left to enroll in an alternative program and had attendance deficiencies, or was not working toward a GED or diploma;
- left to enroll in college but was not pursuing a degree;
- had their enrollment revoked due to absences;
- was expelled, whether for criminal behavior or not, and could return but had not;
- left because of low or failing graded, language problems, exit exam failure or age;
- left to pursue a job or join the military;
- left because of pregnancy or marriage;
- left because of homelessness or non-permanent status;
- left because of alcohol or other drug abuse problems;

failed to return after completing a term in a Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program; or
left for another or unknown reason (p.31-32).

Davalos, Chavez, and Guardiola (1999) stated that one cause of students dropping out was the availability or lack of availability of extracurricular activities in schools. According to Rumberger and Larson (1998), student mobility is another cause of failure to graduate from high school. They state that even a single move that is not the result of a grade promotion during the high school years, results in a doubling of the likelihood of a student not graduating. Black (1998) asserts that the reasons students drop out are complex and include a combination of school and personal problems. Black states that the school problems include being held back a grade, being routed to low ability groups, habitual tardiness, and truancy. Personal problems, according to Black, include pregnancy, the inability to manage school and work or childcare, and living in unstable home situations.

Teenage pregnancy is the greatest single cause of failing to graduate from high school for young women, according to Brindis and Philliber (1998). They further state that the younger the girl is when she becomes a mother, the more likely that she will not graduate from high school. In addition, Brindis and Philliber maintain that the percentages of those young mothers who fail to graduate are even higher for those who first dropped out of high school and then gave birth to a child. Burdell (1998) concurs with Brindis and Philliber, adding that the day-to-day experiences of a pregnant or parenting student are not being met by the public school system.

Student membership in social gangs is also seen as a problem for student retention, particularly in urban schools, according to Kaplan (1999). She states that gang membership often supplants external academic, social, and personal support systems historically provided by the family and the school. Munoz (2002) asserts that

[s]tudents often attend large high schools that prevent them from receiving the attention they need from school personnel and their peers. Individuals are not able to identify with the larger social systems because they cannot exercise their own powers or express their own personality. (Alternative Schools: Providing a Safety Net in Our High Schools to Cope with the At-Risk Student Challenge. P.4)

Denti and Guerin (1999) profess that in addition to the factors of poverty, minority status, family attitudes, low self esteem, poor academic skills, economic responsibilities, and pregnancy contributing to students failing to complete high school, that the highest dropout rate occurs among those who are learning disabled (LD) or emotional disturbed (ED), Hispanic and African American, or from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Denti and Guerin also propose that high school dropouts are also often students with the lowest academic achievement within the LD community as well as students who have been held back and who are absent frequently. There does not appear to be any difference in graduation rate whether the dropout is under the umbrella of the Individuals with Learning Disabilities Act (IDEA) or is not included in that coverage, according to Kortering and Braziel (1998). They also assert that the LD student that fails to graduate from high school, just as a non-LD student, still faces problems of unplanned parenthood, higher levels of unemployment or underemployment and higher rates of imprisonment, along with a lower earning potential and lower quality of life.

Fry (2003) found that the percentage of Latino youth that were listed as dropouts may have been in error. Among Latino youth that did not graduate high school with a diploma, about 40 percent completed high school by earning a GED certificate as late as age 30. This was still below the Caucasian rate, which was approximately 50 percent (p.4-5).

Chan, Kato, Davenport, & Guven (2003) found that

dropouts from economically depressed environments were less likely to complete their high school education . . . Dropouts with limited English proficiency also remained out of education with higher rates, as did students with higher risk scores for dropping out. Also, educational aspirations appear to matter. (Analysis of Subsequent Educational Decisions of High School Dropouts and Their Life Outcomes, April 2003, p.16-17).

Dropout Rates and Computation Methods

There exist several methods of computing failure to graduate, or dropout, rates. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) allowed for substantial regulatory flexibility in the reporting of graduation rates and dropout rates. Swanson (2003) showed that the fifty states and the District of Columbia used four basic methods, while five states used other methods. The method used by 30 states and the District of Columbia was that developed by the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. Department of Education's statistical agency. Ten states used the true longitudinal graduation rate calculated using data from individual students tracked over time. Four states calculated completion ratios, while two used a dropout rate rather than a graduation rate. The remaining five used other methods including grade-to-grade promotion ratios (Swanson, 01 October 2003, p.2). On 06 June 2003,

the state of Texas was approved for the longitudinal method of computing the school dropout rate, which is calculated as the

percent of students from an entering 9th grade cohort who graduate with a regular diploma in four years. Adjustments to the original cohort may be made for students who join or leave the school at grade-level during the four-year period. (NCLB Implementation Report: State Approaches for Calculating High School Graduation Rates, 01 October 2003, p.4.)

Davalos, Chavez, and Guardiola (1999) point out that in 1992 the estimated dropout rate for Mexican Americans was 35.3% versus 8.9% for White Non-Hispanics and 13.6% for African Americans. These statistics are for entering ninth grade students who failed to graduate from high school. The published percentage of 18-through 24-year-olds who had completed high school in the United States in 2001 was 86.5 (NCES, 2004). The Texas Education Agency (TEA) declared that the state dropout rate was 5.0% for the class of 2002 (TEA, 2003, p.viii). The Humble Independent School District (HISD) dropout rate published by the Texas Education Agency (2004b) is 0.6%, or 51 students out of the 8,316 total students enrolled in grades nine through twelve. These statistics are for students that either failed to graduate with a regular diploma or a general educational development (GED) certificate while they remained eligible for public school services.

Greene and Winters (2002) used a method that calculated state and national figures using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data. Utilizing this newly defined version of the Greene method, the overall graduation rate in the United States was 69%, while that of Texas was 67% (p.8). They did concede that the variance between their figures and those of the NCES was

largely caused by the NCES counting recipients of GED certificates and other alternate credentials as high school graduates, and by its reliance on a methodology that is likely to undercount dropouts (Greene & Winters, 2002, Executive Summary).

In spite of the variety of methods used to calculate graduation rates, all concerned agreed there were some students that dropout of the educational system. Just because these students dropped out did not imply they would be forgotten.

Dropout Recovery

Students that dropped out of the educational system were not forgotten. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandated that those that had departed the educational umbrella were to be wooed back or recovered. Several opportunities existed for the non-graduate dropouts. Barton (2005) noted that although the federal funding for second-chance programs dropped from \$15 billion in the 1970s to \$3 billion in 2005, diminishing the opportunity for dropouts, there were still several options available (p.4). Those options included the General Equivalency Development (GED), the Job Corps, YouthBuild USA, and the Center for Employment Training (CET) (Barton, 2005 p.4). Federal funding was not the only source of finances available. Local and state funds were available as well as opportunities from faith-based and educational institutions. Kerka (2003) proposed three academic alternatives for dropouts; career academies, an alternative high school for out-of-school youth, and a program for homeless out-of-school youth.

The Humble Independent School District (HISD) had an alternative program available for dropouts that wished to earn a GED and/or a high school diploma. The

Program for **AC**celerated **E**ducation, or PACE. Even with this tax-payer funded and fully staffed program, some chose to not avail themselves of the opportunity to earn a diploma.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the question of why students failed to complete the PACE program this study utilized a constructivist grounded theory approach. A combination of interviews and survey strategies were used to gather, organize, and interpret data (Charmaz 2000). Triangulation of information from peers, former facilitators, parents, and anyone else available for interview was utilized to ensure validity of the research data. Likewise, the credibility of research data received was verified as much as practicable. The methodology utilized was suggested by Janesick (2000) who recommended that questions that guide the study, the selection of a site and participants, agreements with the participants, the selection of appropriate strategies, and the identification of appropriate informed consent procedures, must all be considered prior to the research and study being conducted (p. 384-85). Interviewing was selected as the major tool for gathering information because, "... interviews generate useful information about lived experience and its meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln 2000 p. 633).

The style of interview chosen for this study was the unstructured interviewing technique, as this method, "can provide a greater breadth of data than. . ." other types of interview practices, according to Fontana and Frey (2000 p. 652). Realizing that most respondents to this research were disinclined to the education system, it was decided to present the researcher as a representative from academia attempting to improve the education system that had not allowed the student to graduate or earn a

GED certificate. The interviewee was solicited for ideas that would improve the system. Having a common “enemy” assisted with gaining the trust of those that had not graduated, as well as establishing a rapport with the former students that helped the researcher gather more data and to better understand the viewpoint of the interviewees.

Because each person interviewed had a unique experience with the PACE program, the structured interview occasionally evolved to a variation of creative interviewing which allowed the former students to tell their, “. . .’life histories,’ with interviewing taking place in multiple sessions over many days with the subject[s]. . .” (Fontana & Frey p. 657). This variation increased the breadth and depth of the information given by the former PACE students. Each person interviewed was presented with eight discussion topics, or questions. These questions or topics were left as open as possible to allow the student maximum flexibility in responding. Follow-up or probing questions were inserted as required to induce the student to elaborate on some topics. The topics were:

When did you attend the PACE program?

Why did you originally attend PACE?

How long did you attend PACE?

What were your personal circumstances while you were at PACE:

What were your living arrangements?

Were you working or not?

Were you married or have children?

How many courses or credits were needed to graduate?

Why did you not graduate through PACE?

What would have kept you in the PACE program?

What would you change to encourage students to remain in school, either on the original campus or PACE?

What were your likes and dislikes about PACE?

(Interview Questions for Factors Influencing the Failure to Graduate from the PACE Program as Identified by Selected Students in the Humble Independent School District, Appendix C).

Analysis of the interviews included coding, finding themes, and marking interview transcripts. The categories and concepts that emerged were then linked into the substantive and formal theories of grounded theory

To identify and obtain contact information on all applicants to the Program for Accelerated Education, or PACE, that had not graduated or earned a general equivalency development (GED) certificate several divisions and offices of the Humble Independent School District (HISD) were consulted. The superintendent's office was contacted for permission, which was granted, to access student information from archived files. From the PACE program record of school years 1997-98 through 2001-02, student information sheets were individually scanned to determine the final disposition of each student. If there was no indication that the student had completed all the requirements for, and received, a high school diploma or a GED certificate, that student's information was added to a data base for further consideration. The contact

information on the forms for the non-graduate students consisted of name, student identification number, dates of contact or attendance, and notes about phone conversations, either with the student or a parent. After compiling the database of information, students that had no identification number were eliminated, leaving a total of 334 former students identified by PACE records (Guidry, 2002). The information was then forwarded to the Humble ISD Records Center (Document Development and Records, 2005).

Of these 334 students that had been recommended or initiated the procedure to enter the PACE program, 299 had contact information available from Humble ISD archived student data records. Student information that was returned included at least one telephone number, last known address, and parent(s) name(s). Each phone number was called, some many times. Many telephone numbers had rolled over to new subscribers. Many rang with no response or to automatic rollover, voice mail, or an answering machine, even after repeated attempts at varying times during the day and into the late evening. Some family members provided new phone numbers for former students. Approximately half of the passed-on numbers enabled contact with the student. Two parents provided electronic-mail addresses. One e-mail address was for a member in the U.S. Navy attached to a helicopter unit deployed on a ship in the Atlantic. The summary of the attempts to contact these 299 identified students yielded the results shown in Table 2, below. Note that the total number of contacts does not equal 299. Some contacts fell into more than one category, particularly those contacts when a message was left on an answering

machine and those to family members who stated they would pass on the contact information to the former PACE student. Some of these students returned telephone calls and were subsequently interviewed.

Table 2

Contact Results for PACE Non-Graduates

| Initial Contact | |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| Results | Number |
| Phone No Longer in Service (NIS) | 34 |
| Phone Disconnected | 34 |
| Busy Circuits Message | 8 |
| Fax Numbers | 4 |
| Phone Rang (No Answer) | 42 |
| Left Message (Person) | 24 |
| Left Message (Answering Machine) | 26 |
| Wrong Number | 74 |
| Former Student Died | 4 |
| Student Had Graduated or | |
| Earned GED | 14 |
| Answered – Former Student Will | |
| Return Call – Did Not | 16 |
| Agreed to Be Interviewed | 33 |

Note. Total does not equal 299 as some Messages to Answering Machines and to Family Members were returned and agreed to be interviewed.

Of the 33 former PACE students that agreed to be interviewed, 29 actually completed the process. The interviews were conducted informally either in the former PACE student's home, or in a small conference room in the Community Learning Center. A consent form, approved by the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board (IRB), was explained to and signed by each interviewee (Appendix A). As much as possible, it was explained that no one would hear or see the results of individual interviews except in the final form as an encoded entry that would not identify any individual.

The gender and race/ethnicity of the 29 former students in the sample are similar to that in the school district. The gender and racial/ethnic make-up of the 29 former PACE students, as well as a percentage comparison to the racial/ethnic student population of HISD, are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Gender and Racial/Ethnic Make-up of Interviewed PACE Non-Graduates

| Compared to Humble ISD | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|------|---------------|
| Racial/Ethnic Background | PACE | | District/PACE |
| | Female | Male | |
| Black | 2 | 2 | 12.4% / 13.8% |
| Caucasian | 8.5 | 8.5 | 65.6% / 58.6% |
| Caucasian/Hispanic | 5.5 | 2.5 | 18.2% / 27.6% |

Note: Decimal numbers indicate mixed race/ethnicity as identified by the student.
District data from TEA (2004a)

The percentage of females interviewed was 55.1, which was greater than the district student population percentage, but was explainable due to the inclusion of the students from the Community Class for pregnant and parenting students.

Each interview began with a presentation and discussion of the Consent Form. All questions were answered and all fears allayed. A sample of the Consent Form is included as Appendix A. Each person interviewed also had explained, and every one agreed to, the audio taping process. A copy of the Audio Tape Release Form is included as Appendix B. Audio taping afforded the researcher the luxury of carefully following the interview, to provide leading questions, and to ensure that each requested topic was covered to the fullest extent without the requirement of taking

voluminous notes. Every person interviewed seemed to not be intimidated by the unobtrusive micro-cassette recorder utilized for the interviews. Each interview was open-ended, with no limitation on time or topic, with guidance from the researcher only to ensure that the 8 basic questions were covered fully and that any hesitations or omissions were eventually answered completely. The time used for the explanations also allowed for the dissipation of any tensions. A very informal and conversational tone was used by the researcher, to make the former student as comfortable and open as possible. Without exception, all those interviewed were very frank and open with their opinions. Every person interviewed seemed impressed that their opinion was valuable and would be utilized as part of a research project. Every person interviewed received a copy of the Consent Form and the Audio Tape Release Form, for future reference.

After each session, the researcher transcribed each interview into line-numbered word files. The names of each student were exchanged for a two letter identifier, followed by another two letters designating race/ethnicity and gender. An example would be WRCM, which would translate as subject WR who was a Caucasian male. The other race/ethnic identifiers used were H or Hispanic and B for black. Of course, F and M were used for female and male. There were two students interviewed who insisted on being described with two ethnicities. Each of their identifiers might have been WRC/HM, which would be interpreted as a mixed Caucasian and Hispanic male.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

PACE, the Original

PACE (**P**rogram for **AC**celerated **E**ducation) High School was established in 1996 by the Humble Independent School District (HISD) as a student dropout recovery program. PACE was designed to meet TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) and the basic requirements to earn academic credit in those classes required for a high school diploma, using a combination of specific modules and computer programs. To attend PACE High School a student must have been older than seventeen, have dropped out of public school, and working full time or married or both. The student could have no more than six credits (one credit being a course for one academic year) to complete either the 19, 20, or 22 credit state academic plan. The student had to be referred by a school counselor, be a resident in the HISD attendance area, and complete an application. The student was then contacted and given a time to attend an interview conducted by all members of the PACE staff. If the student met the academic qualifications and appeared motivated by a subjective evaluation of the staff members, he or she was accepted into PACE High School. The last step in the enrollment process was for the student to attend a half-day orientation program that included a detailed description of the students' duties and requirements and the processing of a color-coded pictorial identification tag. During the orientation, heavy emphasis was placed on the attendance requirement of a minimum of 20 hours every week. There were also a few common courtesy rules

explained. The final admonition to the students was that there was a three strike rule. If the attendance requirement was not met or made up in the following week, or any other conditions were not met, for a total of three occurrences during the entire stay, the student would be dropped from the program. The student could petition for reinstatement one time. If accepted, the three strike rule was invoked once again. If a second removal was warranted, there was no remedy available through PACE.

The PACE spaces were taken from Quest High School, the Humble ISD magnet high school of choice, when the initial Quest enrollment proved to be approximately fifty percent of anticipated. Because Quest had designated their classroom suites as houses, the term was retained for the newly designated PACE High School. The House originally occupied by PACE was a four room suite of rooms approximately 35 feet by 35 feet each with twelve foot suspended ceilings fitted with acoustic tile squares. The House could be divided in half using a floor to ceiling, sound-proofed, movable wall. The faculty assigned to PACE decided to leave the space as open as possible. This not only gave the appearance of spaciousness, it allowed a minimum of staff to monitor the entire area. The original staff consisted of two teachers transferred from Quest, because of the reduced enrollment, one other certified teacher that transferred from another high school in the district, and one administrative aide. Each teacher was responsible for a different academic area. One teacher facilitated social sciences, one handled all the English courses, and the third assisted with the math and science curriculum. The Aide monitored students' attendance time, proctored examinations, and dispensed learning materials and

course modules. The room was ringed with 24 desktop computers in a non-networked configuration. The House had been constructed with built-in computer stations around the entire area, with the exception of a floor to ceiling book storage cabinet adjacent the movable wall storage area and a sink area, opposite the cabinet. The computers were for composing and editing assignments, accessing the internet for research data, and for the technology component of the state education requirements. Each computer also had installed a stand-alone version of the PLATO computer aided instructional software. The software had been aligned with the Texas state education requirements and allowed the students to complete English, Writing, Reading, Science, and Mathematics courses at their individual speed.

The teacher stations were strategically placed at distant intervals around the house to limit student congregation. The walls were covered with course materials for student reference and to provide a variable colored environment. A six foot by twelve foot progress chart was on the wall adjacent the main entrance so each student could check their individual progress toward their ultimate goal. The progress chart also was a visual prod to the students that were not keeping pace with their contemporaries. Adjacent the progress chart was a wall of honor that listed the graduates, GED (general educational development, high school equivalency diploma) completions, and job acquisitions of the students. Trapezoid-topped tables with chairs were paired throughout the PACE space to provide student proximity, but to discourage non-productive visiting. Over-stuffed sofas and loveseats were strategically scattered in the space, usually in front of the TV/VCR stations. The west

wall was glass block, providing ample natural light, especially in the afternoons. The neutral ecru walls and pastel mauve pillars provided a soothing atmosphere for the students. Industrial grade carpet in the same tones as the walls helped maintain the studious atmosphere and assisted with sound deadening. The focal point of the space, and the first and last location each student visited each day, was the student check in/out station, dominated by a time clock that was monitored by the program aide. The learning space was arranged to accommodate up to 75 students at any one time.

Before students could begin working on courses to complete the requirements for his or her diploma, they had to pre-test, prepare for, and pass, the general educational development (GED) high school equivalency diploma test. The GED preparation was supervised and monitored by a fourth certified teacher, formerly with the Even Start program, that utilized one quarter of one room (a sixteenth of the total space) utilizing four computers and a central round table with six work stations. The PACE program utilized a combination of written assignments, computer aided instruction utilizing a curriculum program from the PLATO Company, and audio and/or visual media as instructional aids. The teachers were available to answer questions, provide direction, encourage the students, monitor student progress, and ensure that teaching materials were current and followed the state of Texas guidelines.

Each week students were required to complete a minimum of one module, or the equivalent of six weeks of course material on a regular high school campus. At the beginning of each course, the student was evaluated, using computer aided

materials, to determine in which portions of each academic course there was a deficiency. For the student to earn credit for each course, only the deficient material had to be completed, followed by a comprehensive, written and oral course examination. Table 4, below shows the total district enrollment, dropout rate, and number of students for the school years 1992-93 through 2002-03, the latest data available.

Table 4

Humble ISD Enrollment, Dropout Rates, and Number of Students

| School Year | Total Enrollment | Dropout Rate | Number of Students Dropping Out |
|-------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| 1992 – 93 | 20,765 | 2.3% | 478 |
| 1993 – 94 | 21,624 | 1.7% | 368 |
| 1994 – 95 | 22,159 | 0.3% | 66 |
| 1995 – 96 | 22,650 | 0.5% | 113 |
| 1996 – 97 | 23,192 | 0.3% | 70 |
| 1997 – 98 | 23,855 | 0.4% | 95 |
| 1998 – 99 | 24,135 | 0.4% | 97 |
| 1999 – 2000 | 24,684 | 0.2% | 49 |
| 2000 – 01 | 25,239 | 0.3% | 75 |
| 2001 – 02 | 25,936 | 0.1% | 26 |
| 2002 – 03 | 26,832 | 1.5% | 402 |

Note. From Texas Education Agency: Academic Excellence Indicator System (1992-93 through 2002-03).

During the first year of PACE High School (school year 1996-97) there were twelve students that graduated with diplomas, while 69 passed all sections of the GED (Guidry, Spring 2002). This number of successful graduates was from a total district student enrollment of 23,192. PACE High School continued in this manner through the spring of 2001. The number of attendees, along with the number that earned diplomas and GEDs also increased, as shown in Table 5, below.

Table 5

PACE Enrollment, Graduates, and GED Completions 1996 - 2001

| School Year | PACE Enrollment | Number of Graduates | GED Completions |
|----------------|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1996 – 97 | No Record | 12 | 69 |
| 1997 – 98 | 207 | 47 | 120 |
| 1998 – 99 | 173 | 75 | 103 |
| 1999 – 2000 | 146 | 56 | 91 |
| 2000 – 01 | 194 | 64 | 126 |

Note. From Pink Sheet for PACE High School (Guidry 2002). A tabular listing of students who graduated and/or completed GEDs.

PACE, the Present

During the summer of 2001, it was decided that Quest High School would expand enough to warrant taking the PACE High School space back. Though the

increased enrollment did not materialize, PACE was, never the less, moved into five traditional, separated classrooms that, up until that time were occupied by Long Term Discipline Program students. This chain move required Humble ISD to purchase and erect three portable buildings to house the Long Term students. Because of the perceived indifference to the PACE program demonstrated by HISD, one PACE teacher retired and one moved to another state. In the midst of the physical move, three major changes to the PACE program were made. The first change was the Community Class, a drop-out prevention program for pregnant and post-partum students, was combined with PACE, bringing twelve high-maintenance students and two teachers from another part of the Community Learning Center into the same five room area now occupied by PACE. The second major change was the splitting off from PACE, a new program labeled Pre-PACE for students that had more than six credit hours to complete to graduate with a high-school diploma. The Pre-PACE program was essentially a remediation program to prepare students for PACE. The third major change was that PACE High School was abolished and PACE became a program. Students were to complete all the academic requirements at PACE and would then graduate from their original home campus. All three of these programs came to be called the Accelerated Learning Center, or ALC. At the same time there were several changes to Long Term, as well. These changes, with the exception of the combining of the Community Class, came on the heels of a Texas Education Agency periodic audit of PACE and Long Term. In addition, PACE instituted a minimum reading level as an entrance requirement. It had been found in the recent

past that students that could not read at a ninth grade level or higher, had little chance of successfully completing the PACE program.

The configuration of PACE was then turned into that of a more traditional school classroom suite. There were three rooms on one side of a central hall and two rooms across from them. None of the rooms had any windows. Adjacent pairs of rooms were connected by a common door, while all rooms opened onto the central hall. One room was not paired, so was self contained. The central hall became the community site for the PACE progress chart and, because of the addition of Pre-PACE, the Pre-PACE progress chart. The Wall of Fame was also moved to the central hall. Baby strollers and other paraphernalia were added to one of the rooms to accommodate the new mothers. Feedings for the infants was periodically and irregularly done by the new mothers, as well as a few of the fathers. Refrigerators and microwave ovens were added to assist in the storage and preparation of baby formula and other foods. The color schemes in the new classrooms were the same as the original PACE area, so the addition of the sofas and love seats did not decoratively clash. Nine adult facilitators were now needed to adequately monitor the five classrooms. Three remained from the original PACE cadre and two came with the Community Class. This necessitated the hiring of four new people. The self-contained room would have two new PACE faculty members, a Math specialist and a half-time certified Special Education teacher. The GED specialist, along with a newly hired aide handled testing and GED preparation, as well as adult literacy for non-English speaking GED candidates. The requirements for GED completion changed

as of 1 January 2002, so that GED preparation, as well as the requirement that every ALC student earn a GED first, had to be abandoned. This turned the former GED room into the ALC Testing and Family Literacy room.

Adjacent, and connected to the Testing and Family Literacy room, was the central room that housed the certified Science facilitator and another aide who handled the time-clock and distributed audio-visual materials. Across the central hall from this pair of classrooms was the classroom that housed the English/Technology and Social Science certified facilitators, both new hires to the program. Adjacent to this room was the room for the certified Art facilitator and the Community Class teacher, who doubled as an English facilitator. That was the configuration in place as of the time of this research, with one exception. Because the CLC had a licensed infant care facility, the new-born babies of the Community Class students were now cared for there, instead of in the ALC class rooms. The babies had to be at least six weeks old to be cared for by the licensed caregivers. This requirement caused some Community Class members to extend their time in the ALC, because of the lack of child care for their new-born until the baby was six weeks old. Baby and child care was also provided for district personnel in the CLC, first to any student in the district, and then to district staff and faculty as room allowed.

The five teaching areas had arranged the furnishings in an attempt to maintain the same student density as the original PACE area. Three pairs of tables with four chairs surrounding them were usually centered in each room with one or two sofas or loveseats against a wall conveniently located next to a TV/VCR device or as a silent

reading area. Five to ten computers were located in each room. Each room had at least two computer work-stations that were connected to the internet through the HISD wide area network (WAN) through a fiber optic triple T-1 connection provided by the local telephone company. Each room had at least four computers networked through a local area network (LAN) that contained the PLATO educational software, as well as a suite of software that allowed word processing, spreadsheet, data-base, and presentation software. In total there were 38 computers in the five rooms. Two machines were primarily for administrative tasks in each room, but every computer was for student use if needed. Two centrally located, and facilitator monitored, networked laser printers were available, one for HISD WAN computers and one for the PLATO networked machines. At least one administrative computer in each room had a stand alone, inkjet printer attached that allowed simultaneous printing and student monitoring.

The ALC, had adopted as their Mission statement,

The Accelerated Learning Center (ALC) will create a student-centered alternative educational environment which promotes a climate of openness and respect. The program will reflect the individual needs of diverse learners through a self-paced curriculum utilizing a variety of instructional methods. (The PACE Program, Special Programs Accountability and Funding. A program description of PACE, 2005)

The entry criteria for the PACE program now had four components. The first criterion was that the student must be at risk of not graduating. Utilizing criteria from Druian and Butler (2001), a student would be considered at risk if he or she met one or more of these conditions: living in high-growth states; living in unstable school districts; being a member of a low-income family; having low academic skills (though

not necessarily low intelligence); having parents who are not high school graduates; speaking English as a second language; being single-parent children; having negative self-perceptions; being bored or alienated; having low self-esteem; pursuing alternatives, males tend to seek paid work as an alternative, females may leave to have children or get married (p. 3). The other three criteria to enter PACE were; the student must have been within 6 credits of graduation, have a demonstrated ninth grade reading level, and be at least 17 years of age, but still eligible for public education benefits.

PACE had three main objectives in attempting to meet its mission. The first objective was to provide students the opportunity to earn 19, 20, or 22 credits through a core curriculum and selected electives. The variance in credits was due to the changing requirements from the Texas state legislature. The second objective was to provide support for mastery of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The third, and the most diverse objective, was to provide alternative methods for students to receive credit for courses. PACE provided or proctored credit by examination, correspondence courses, and accelerated instruction. Accelerated instruction included computer assisted instruction, mainly through the use of the PLATO computer software, teacher directed printed modules, self paced instruction, and the use of the inquiry approach to learning.

The criteria for other programs in the Accelerated Learning Center varied with the program. To gain entry into Pre-PACE, students must have been at risk of not graduating, had more than six credits left to graduate, had a demonstrated eighth

grade reading level, and had completed at least one year of high school. For entry into the Community class, students must have been pregnant or parents, either male or female. For the Family Literacy, or GED preparation program, applicants had to show proof of having seven or fewer high school credits.

On a typical day in the Art/Community Class room several different activities were in evidence. Two girls, one very obviously pregnant, were at an art station. The pregnant student was putting the finishing touches on an exquisite, hand made, clay figurine of a ballerina. The glazing paint was meticulously being applied to the many folds of the delicate tutu. The girl next to her was finishing a wood burning project, applying the shading to the horse's head that had been suggested by the art facilitator. The curls of smoke were captured by a home-made exhaust fan enclosure that was also utilized for containing wood residue from the mechanical carving tools. The odor of singeing wood was still evident in the immediate area of the art station, in spite of the quiet hum of the fan motor. A male and female student were logged into the PLATO network system, the young man completing a lesson on Business Communication and the young lady a tutorial on Literary Styles. They each wore headphones so the audio portion of the lesson would not interfere with any other student. Three additional girls were gathered around a table rehearsing and critiquing speeches that had to be delivered before the English facilitator that afternoon. The trio was all business with two minor deviations for personal gossip. The three were very good at self-monitoring to keep on task with their speech practice. Two males were being given instructions on the basics of wood carving by the Art facilitator.

They were both very intent on wielding the razor-tipped carving tools to remove unwanted detritus, while practicing techniques that would not cause personal injury. The Community Class/English facilitator was casually monitoring the students in the room while she entered completion grades into her electronic grade-book. What initially appeared to be chaos was in actuality individual learning, at the learner's own pace.

Across the central hall two students, having just returned from lunch and punched back on the time clock, traded in their PACE Bucks (reward "money" earned for course or module completions) for a packet of microwave popcorn and thirty minutes of free video time. As the popcorn cooking cycle was ending, the mouth-watering aroma of freshly popped corn kernels permeated the rooms and central hall. The dozen or so other students returning from lunch punched back in to PACE and dispersed to their selected learning stations. Two male students went back to their slouching positions in opposite corners of a sofa to complete different required video viewings for separate history modules. Four students returned to traditionally arranged individual tables to complete science and math assignments. Three young women logged on to the PLATO network to complete tutorial, review, and mastery test assignments. The remaining four students queued up to check out texts and modules for their next assignment. The educational aide quickly located and dealt out the required materials to maximize the students' learning time while on the clock.

In the adjacent room, the Family Literacy facilitator was explaining in Spanish the requirements and obligations of the GED preparation program to a new applicant.

The apprehension on the face of the new arrival was evident. As the explanation continued, the stressful facial expression and physical posture noticeably relaxed. The initial frown slowly changed to a wide smile as the fifteen minute clarification session drew to a close. At a table directly in front of a certified teacher, four PACE students were in the process of completing their written examinations for module completion. The teacher was a very attentive proctor. Signs posted on three sides of the testing section warned all test-takers to not talk to another student and to keep their eyes and writing implements to themselves. As the afternoon wore on, a tangible tension was evident in the central room. Four adults and three pre-teen offspring arrived and were escorted to the SLC administrative office. Their daughter, niece, or sister was in the process of completing the last test of the last module of her last course. When the test was graded and announced as a passing grade, the tension instantly turned to celebration. A quick call to the administration office brought the program principal, the campus social worker, counselor, all the PACE facilitators, and all the students to the center room. A maroon mortarboard hat was placed on the beaming graduate's head and her family members gathered around for a graduation picture. Pomp and Circumstance was played from a portable tape player as the announcement was made to all within earshot, "We have a new high school graduate." A certificate of completion was presented in lieu of the diploma for photographic purposes. It was explained to the graduate and parents where the official diploma could be obtained, along with the HISD contact information. A printed copy of the information was also given to each parent, as well as the graduate. It was

explained later that the excitement of the moment often caused memory lapses, and the written information saved a lot of time on the telephone in the days following the graduation celebration.

PACE had intake orientation for new students every third or fourth Friday, depending on the number of students that had applied and been approved for admission, how many had graduated, or how many had ceased to attend and had been dropped from the program. All was not sweetness and light. In spite of all the assistance, the application process, and self-paced progress, not all students completed the program and earned a diploma. There were some students that did not take advantage of the GED preparation portion of PACE. Why did not all students that entered PACE successfully complete the course of study in this educational Eden? The reasons for non-completion were as numerous as the students.

Analysis

As the former students of the Program for Accelerated Education, PACE, were located, each was asked to participate in the research exploring why they had not completed the program to obtain a high school diploma or a general education development, or GED, certificate. Appendix C is a duplicate of the questions asked of each former PACE student. The first four questions were not presented so much to gather information as to assist in making the young adult more relaxed and thus more likely to be candid. Those questions were; when did you attend the PACE program; why did you originally attend PACE; how long did you attend PACE; and, what were your personal circumstances while you were at PACE. The last of the topics was

expanded to include living arrangements, whether the student was working or not, whether the student was married and/or had a child or children, and how many courses or credits were needed to graduate.

The questions that helped explain why the young adults had not graduated or earned a GED while in public school were the final four of the questions presented. These four questions were; why did you not graduate through PACE, what would have kept you in the PACE program, what would you change to encourage students to remain in school (either original campus or PACE,) and what were your likes and dislikes about PACE. Although it was assumed that the first four questions were for tension relief and not necessarily information gathering, some interesting results were observed from question two and four. Those interviewed were identified by a four or five letter identifier to retain anonymity. The first two letters were random initials. The last two denoted race or ethnicity and gender. The race/ethnicity identifiers were those selected by the interviewees. Table 6 shows the matrix utilized.

Table 6
Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Matrix

| Race/Ethnicity | | Gender | |
|----------------|--------------------|------------|---------|
| Identifier | Meaning | Identifier | Meaning |
| B | Black | F | Female |
| C | Caucasian | M | Male |
| C/H | Caucasian/Hispanic | | |
| H | Hispanic | | |

The Professional Golfer

DSCM, a golf course manager, stated that he had attended PACE, “because it gave me the opportunity to go to school on my own time. I only had to go 20 hours a week and it gave me more freedom than a regular high school (DSCM line 11).” DS attended PACE during the fall of 1996, the inaugural year of the new High School. He had four credits left to complete for graduation and worked on weekends at a local golf course. He found PACE a good fit to try to graduate and still have free time. He lived at home with both his parents and was not married or have any children. DS eventually did earn a GED and entered the U.S. Marine Corps for a single two year

active duty tour. After completing his military tour and becoming a golf course manager, he had decided to use his military educational benefits to complete a two-year professional golfer certifying course, until he discovered that the course was not covered by the program. At the time of the interview he was happily married with no children and had been self supporting since entering the Corps. He appeared very sure of himself, without being cocky. DS was forthright in all his responses, not seeming to be embarrassed or nervous, as he thoughtfully addressed each verbal prompt. He had taken part of a day off to go shopping with his wife and her mother and had arranged the time to be interviewed while the two women got facials and hair-dos.

DS had abandoned his original campus because of large class size. He stated, "When I was at Kingwood [High School] there were 40 people per class so there's not much one-on-one teaching. . .I was happy to come [to PACE] because the class size was more individualized and was more on a one-to-one basis and I learned a lot more (line 38)." He liked the way PACE was goal oriented and that students could come and go as they desired and pace their time. Other positive attributes of PACE that DS observed were the relaxed atmosphere and the ability of the students to choose where they wanted to study and learn. DS took on a more serious demeanor when he discussed his dislikes of PACE High School, as he said,

My dislikes were teachers weren't really involved. . .[A lot of the students] were gang members, too. . .Every time you left the class that stopped your time. If you had an emergency, or even on a bathroom break. . .Most of the people in there were 17 years old or higher, so they're coming as adults so you need more freedom to come and go as you want, and if that happened, I probably would have stayed (line 51).

When questioned on why he had not graduated through PACE, DS responded, “I thought there wasn’t enough teacher support. It was more like learning at your own pace, but with learning at your own pace, you still need some teacher guidance, and I thought they didn’t help me enough (line 23).” He also stated that with more teacher support he probably would have stayed with PACE High School and graduated. DS thought that the teachers, “were there to just fill a spot; just to sit there and watch students (line 32).” When asked if there was anything else he wanted to say about PACE, DS answered,

With this, it’s an alternative to high school and people will like it because a lot of people get lost in the system over at Kingwood, Humble, or the new Atascocita [High School]. Still they’ll be huge schools. If they had a program they could go to that’s more individualized in structure and it’s on their own time. . . I think it’s a great program, it just needs to be restructured a little (line 71).

Shy and Withdrawn

WCCF was a quiet and introverted young woman still living at home with her parents and three older sisters. She was not working, did not have a boy friend, had no plans for her future, and seemed to have no ambition to change her current situation. WC’s parents were both high school graduates, with no further education or training, other than that offered by their jobs. Her demeanor and personality were very bland. Though she was articulate, WC exhibited no emotion or enthusiasm at any time during the interview conversation. She had difficulty maintaining eye contact, preferring to keep her head slightly bowed with her eyes on her folded hands in her lap. WC had attended PACE during the spring semester of 1999 because she

had more unexcused absences than Texas allowed for course credit and needed only a Government course to graduate with a diploma. She took the placement test at PACE and found that she was required to complete only one module, the equivalent of one six weeks of course material to complete the course. WC was living at home while attending PACE and working part time at a local retail store. She was not married or have any children. She found everything at PACE to her liking, with nothing she disliked. WC attended PACE for less than two weeks, then left. She could offer no reason why anyone, including herself, could not complete the requirements and graduate through PACE. When asked what could be done to encourage students to remain in school and graduate, WC said, "I think it's completely worth it to stay in school, no matter what your circumstances are because you don't get anywhere without it. I don't know if there's anything I could change to make people stay in school (WCCF line 28)." Despite her avowed statement on the value of education, she had not graduated or earned her GED certificate as of this research.

The Non-Graduate Parents

MJHM was married with two children and living in a double-wide mobile home across the street from his parents in a subdivision for modular housing. The home was in need of external cosmetic repairs as well as repairs needed to the entrance stairs that were unevenly canted toward the entrance door. MJ was watching his two daughters while his wife was working. The interior of the home was sparse but clean and neat. As in a large number of this type of housing, wood-grain wall paneling was installed throughout. The large screen television set dominated the living area and

was also visible from the dining area and kitchen. The door to the hallway leading, presumably, to the bedrooms and baths, was closed as the two little girls were politely directed to go to their rooms and play quietly, which they did. MJ indicated that the interview would take place around the ornate wooden dining table. After the initial pleasantries, he explained that the reason he considered PACE was towards the end of his public education,

I was failing bad, when I decided to quit. I was failing a lot of credits. Before I went to any one of those, I had went to the STEP program at Humble [High School] to try to get my GED, cause I was already considering to get out due to family, you know. It was a family matter; my parents wanted me to go ahead and get my diploma. So I went and stepped back into school, had to go through a couple days in AC [Short Term Discipline Program] which I ended up not getting credit for. I ended up in Long Term [Discipline Program] for it. . . I quit school before the semester ended. I got grades for the first six weeks, if that. I may have quit before the first six weeks (MJHM line 13).

MJ stated that he liked the general idea of PACE, being required to take only the courses that were lacking. He preferred PACE to the idea of summer school. He thought, "Summer school is too much. I'd rather go to PACE and go there than have to pay for summer school (line 46)." MJ asserted that PACE was superior to summer school, or any other credit recovery method, because

everybody is such in that state of mind that it's time for school. Whenever you're in Summer School, you're wasting your summer. You're mad because you got to go to Summer School. You don't have free time, instead you're there. If you can go there around school time, and get the credits you need to get done with (line 51).

MJ's wife had a problem graduating from high school that involved at least three school changes and a course credit dispute during her last semester. She would have had to wait until the fall semester to earn the final credit for graduation.

She decided to forgo the course and had not graduated as of the date of the interview. MJ declared, "That's one of the things I'm glad about PACE, because people like that, if you do need that one credit, you can always go to PACE without waiting for that next year to come around (line 71)." MJ did not complete the courses required to earn his diploma, or earn a GED.

Right after school, right around May, I ended up getting with my wife. I was working as a supervisor at a Mister Car Wash. I was making money so the money felt much better than the school did, especially at that time when I was pretty much in trouble all the time. I wasn't married then. I had the girl friend with the child. . . I think I needed 12 credits, 'cause I didn't do so good. . . I wanted to get away from the kids that were a bad influence. I won't say they were a bad influence; I was pretty much a bad influence, too. I just wanted to get away from that, maybe. Because I had friends that went to PACE, got their GED and started their PACE and got their diploma (line 32).

Same Story, Different Ending

The reasons for non-completion or non-graduation from other former students were varied and, in some instances, quite sad. Two instances were particularly heart rendering; Paul K and Stan C. Mrs. K, mother of Paul, returned a phone message that had requested contact information for Paul. Mrs. K explained that Paul had started PACE, but attended only a short time before his involvement in drugs took over his life. He moved out of her home, dropped out of the PACE program, and was not heard from for approximately 18 months. Sounding as if she were about to break into tears, Mrs. K told how Paul had called her one afternoon asking for help. Before she could find out any contact information or set up a location for a rendezvous, Paul hung up the telephone. She was notified by the police the next morning that the previous evening Paul had been found dead from an apparent drug overdose. At that point in

the conversation with the researcher she did begin to cry as she struggled verbally through all the things she should have done and all the things Paul should not have done. She did praise PACE for trying to help Paul straighten out his life, but concluded that Paul just wasn't ready at that time to move on with his life. Mrs. K thanked the researcher for caring enough to attempt to contact Paul and for listening to her story (A. K., personal communication, 19 October 2005).

Stan C's story began in a similar manner to that of Paul K. Again, the mother returned a recorded request for contact information, but with better news. Stan, at 25, had finally turned his life around. He had successfully completed a drug rehabilitation program, had connected with a deeply religious girl friend, had a good steady job, and had decided to study for and complete the GED program at the local community college. This was in preparation for beginning an 18 month certificate program at the same community college. Mrs. C was very pleased with the PACE program. One of Stan's younger siblings had successfully graduated through PACE and was doing well. She said she was at first saddened and a little fearful that Stan had not graduated through PACE, but was thankful that he had finally found a direction for his life and appeared to be growing up (K. C., personal communication, 05 October 2005).

The Parents and Parents-to-Be

There were eight young women that were either pregnant or had children when they decided to enter PACE or abandon their public education. The young women were WKCF, MTBF, PIHF, CJCF, BXBF, VJC/HF, WACF, and WRCF. Approximately

half of the young women entered PACE through the Community Class, a program for pregnant and post-partum student parents, The remaining parents or parents-to-be came directly from their home campus and entered straight into the PACE program.

WKCF was a small, and very quiet young woman that had become pregnant and decided to leave the regular campus and graduate through PACE. At the time of the interview, she was living in an apartment with her boyfriend, the father of her baby. WK stated that another reason she left Kingwood High School was because, “My dad got cancer and I had to be the caregiver until he died. So I had to stop the eleventh grade in Kingwood High School. . . (WKCF line 18)”. While she was attending PACE she had trouble maintaining the mandatory minimum 20 hours each week because she had to take her mother to doctors and treatments as her mother had contracted cancer also. WK was very appreciative of PACE. “I’m glad I had another chance to come back to school and try to finish. I was just going to drop out (line 33).” When her husband got a raise in pay from his job, WK decided to abandon her education temporarily and care for her baby. She stated that she would complete her GED when the baby was older and she had more time.

When she became pregnant, MTBF decided to enter the PACE program in order to try to graduate on time with her classmates. While attending PACE, MT, though married as well as pregnant, lived at home with her mother. The educational hurdle she faced was that she needed 19 credits, out of 22 required by the state of Texas, to complete the requirements for graduation. She came to PACE, “To get better help. At the regular high school it was, like, too big of a group and I needed to

be somewhere smaller where I could get the extra help I needed (MTBF Line 16).” MT had a difficult time managing time for PACE with time for her baby. With the task seeming overwhelming, she left the program. Her husband had a minimum wage job, but with MT living at home she thought that was all she needed. The marriage and still living with her parents were never explained, even after repeated questioning. She had no plans for continuing her education.

PIHF left the regular campus and entered PACE when she became pregnant, mainly because of the available district provided day care for students. While attending PACE, she had a job at a local delivery pizza franchise and lived at home with her mother. Her rationale for leaving her high school and entering PACE was,

I stayed until I was, like, nine months, but then I went to the counselor and asked them what was going to happen after I had him, and they told me to [go to PACE]. . . If I would have known [about PACE] I would have come earlier. I came just like one day and the next day I had my baby (PIHF line 18).

PI returned to PACE after a six-week hiatus following the birth of her baby. She had continued working at her job, beginning two weeks after birth because she thought she needed the money to help with expenses. Earning money at her job and playing with her baby became more important than her education. Even though PI had ten credits left to complete the requirements for graduation, as of the time of this research, she had not completed them or earned a GED certificate. She was still working at a minimum wage job, though she had recently begun working in a retail dry cleaning establishment.

CJCF had completed her sophomore year of high school in a neighboring city, moved to Humble ISD, and then dropped out of school when her daughter was born. She missed her entire junior year, but wanted to complete the course work for graduation. She was married, but was in a marital separation in preparation for a divorce. While the husband moved out of state, CJ lived with her best friend of six years and her friend's family. She stated that another reason she left Humble High School was,

On the regular campus, there were some kids who like to be the bullies and some kids that just like to... Especially at Humble [High School], that was my home campus, they were so loud. Black people are so loud. And that frustrates me, people being loud. Screaming and running around, and acting stupid (CJCF line 41).

While at PACE CJ completed three of the twelve credits needed to graduate. Due to time conflicts, because of her baby, she left PACE to study for the GED program. She had completed the requirements and earned her GED certificate six months after leaving PACE. CJ planned to apply at the local community college at the beginning of the next semester after being interviewed.

BXBF had completed 9-1/2 credits of the required 22 when she entered PACE. "I was behind in school and got pregnant. At the home campus I stopped going. And then they told my mom and I about [Pace]. I got pregnant in my sophomore year and had my baby in my junior year (BXBF line 6)." She stated further that another reason for leaving her home campus was, "It's more of on the home campus, if you're behind, you're just behind. You have to catch up on your own. You don't have any of that support that you need to catch up (line 19)." Because her son had many medical

issues, she missed too much class time to meet the minimum attendance requirement for PACE and was administratively removed from the program. Initially BX had planned on completing her GED, but she felt that too much time had passed and she was stuck with her current situation.

WACF entered PACE when she became pregnant. She needed 11-1/2 credits to graduate with a diploma. WA lived at home with her mother and father, was not married, and she did not work. In addition to the pregnancy, WA disliked attending classes on her home campus. "I didn't like it because it was so crowded and loud. [At PACE] it's peaceful and you don't have nobody bothering you. It's just really crowded at Humble [High School] (WACF line 24)." WA attended the Community Class for pregnant students prior to entering PACE. With the emphasis in the Community Class on parenting skills rather than academics, she felt she was not gaining ground toward her graduation. After transitioning to PACE, she felt frustrated, fell even further behind, and quit. At 23 she had not planned on finishing her GED program, and saw no time in the immediate future that she would do so.

VJC/HF also left her home campus because of pregnancy. She was very proud of her mixed ancestry and insisted on being tabulated as both Caucasian and Hispanic. "I was pregnant my junior year at Kingwood [High School] but I had him September 7th. I was only at PACE for two weeks then I had him (VJC/HF line 6)." VJ originally left her home campus, "Because I didn't want to go to school that full pregnant and I had no one to watch him and I heard about the daycare [at the CLC]. So, I decided to come to PACE (line 20)." Even though she liked the teaching

methods employed by PACE and the self paced aspect, VJ disliked the policy at PACE abolishing idle socializing. She missed the social aspect of a regular campus. “You know, talking between classes, seeing your friends every day, going to school functions, things like that. . . I love to be social (line 23).” With 4-1/2 credits to complete for graduation, VJ left PACE because she felt isolated and somewhat alone. She did earn her GED certificate as her twenty-second birthday present.

WRCF was living at home when, “I got pregnant. I didn’t want to stay on my home campus (WRCF line 6).” She had 7-1/2 credits, about one academic year, left to complete to graduate. WR started PACE but decided to leave because of the personally restrictive time requirement. “You have to clock out to go to lunch. Clock out to, like, go to the snack machine (Line 31).” This time obligation proved to be too constraining and WR left the program. At the time of this research, WR was still living at home with her parents and three-year-old son and working part to full time at a local fast food restaurant. She had been studying and planned to take her GED within the month. In a follow-up interview, WR was enthusiastic about her life as she had just earned her GED and was planning her community college career in nursing. She planned to begin taking basic and core requirement courses at the beginning of the next semester, with clinical classes to follow.

The Women

Seven other females participated in the research into why students did not graduate from PACE with a diploma or GED certificate. They were designated VACF, ZMHF, LAHF, MTHF, HKCF, KACF, and CBHF. Though pregnancy was not a factor

for not graduating with this group of young women, they each had other unique hurdles to clear. None of these women were married or had any children and they all lived at home with their parent(s) while attending PACE. The rationale for attending, and eventually leaving, PACE varied with each former student.

VACF began attending PACE because, “. . .my assistant principal thought because I had trouble at Kingwood High School with grades, because it’s a very competitive school there. Really hard. So he put me on a waiting list for, I’d say, about two months and then I got in (VACF line 6).” When she started PACE, VA needed 15 credits to graduate. She had completed approximately seven credits before difficulty with the course modules began. “We had to do a module a week. And a lot of people work a lot slower than that, I think. With me, I like to take my time and make sure my work is quality and very well done. I felt rushed a little bit with the module a week thing. It was really hard (line 30).” With eight credits remaining, VA dropped out. At 23 she had not yet earned her GED, or planned on doing so within the foreseeable future.

ZMHF originally attended PACE, “Because I was falling behind on my credits, and I just wasn’t doing well in the classroom (ZMHF line 6).” Another reason PACE seemed an alternative to her regular campus was, “I would get distracted easily at the home campus. My friends would be like, ‘Come on, let’s go over here, let’s leave.’ I was stupid. ‘Ok, I’ll go with you.’ Or I just didn’t wake up early (line 21).” In addition, ZM wanted to leave her home campus because, “There’s just too much people there; I couldn’t concentrate. Some of the teachers I didn’t like and I could tell they didn’t

like me. So I would just slack off in that class or go in there and go to sleep (Line 34).” In addition to changing to the PACE program, she had taken a job at a local regional mall so she could help her mother with expenses at home. When she became sick and missed a week’s time, she became discouraged with the requirements of providing a doctor’s note and making up the lost time. She dropped out with a few credits remaining, “Probably six or ten (line 19).” When she was 24, ZM completed her GED because it was required if she was to move up to store manager, the position she held at the time of the research interviews.

LAHF came to the PACE program because, “It was my senior year and I knew I wasn’t going to make it as far as May so I wanted to come to the PACE program. I was lacking nine credits (LAHF line 5).” Just before she began attending PACE, LA also began a forty hour per week retail sales career at a local regional mall. She was living at home, but had plans to move into her own apartment upon graduation. The problems began on her home campus when, “I was on the drill team and a student council representative. That’s what wanted me to stay there, but I knew I wouldn’t make it. I started working a lot and a little too much and then didn’t focus on my homework (line 15).” The apparent lack of space at PACE was the beginning of the end for LA. “There was not a lot of space that you could relax. I know they used to have the one big old room that they have at Quest [High School] and then they took that away. Some thing like that would have been really really good and more spacious (line 26).” Feeling the assumed pressure, plus the long working hours at her job, prompted LA to leave the PACE program. She earned her GED just after her

twenty-first birthday and has completed a certificate program at the local community college in business management.

MTHF began PACE, “To get my credits a little bit faster than I would at Humble [High School.] I thought it would be faster and a little bit easier. I was short a few credits (MTHF line 6).” She also asserted that, “I never liked Humble. Like, when I was there, I just didn’t like Humble (line 31).” MT was an assistant manager at a local major grocery store working approximately 30 hours per week. When she entered PACE she needed approximately six half credit classes to fulfill the requirements for a diploma. She had completed four half credits and was working on a history course when the lure of money won out over education. When she left the PACE program the remaining courses to complete her diploma were, “. . . 1/2 math and an English, then Economics [module] 3 (line 17).” MT was still working with the same grocery chain and saw no reason to continue her education when this research ended.

An uncomfortable environment at her home campus was the primary reason HKCF decided to attend PACE. “. . . I didn’t really like it there. It was uncomfortable; too many bad stuff happened (HKCF line 17).” A secondary rationale was that HK wanted to graduate with her sister and go to the same college together. Because HK was the younger sibling, she would have to graduate early. It was unclear how HK was allowed to enter PACE under these circumstances. No one at the home campus, PACE, or HK herself had any specific recollection. While attending PACE, HK lived at home with both parents and three siblings, one older and two younger than she. HK needed 14-1/2 credits to graduate in the one school year she had allotted to be able

to graduate with her sister. A typical load for high school students in the Humble ISD was eight course credits for each school year. This excessive course load proved too great a challenge and HK felt overwhelmed and quit the PACE program. She did earn her GED, attended the local community college, transferred to her sister's university, and did graduate one summer session after her older sister.

KACF petitioned her assistant principal and was allowed to attend PACE because she was fearful of the environment on her home campus. "There was too much stuff going on, like gangs. I didn't like things that were happening at the school. A lot of people were, you know, people talk and I didn't like that (KACF line 18)." When she entered PACE, KA needed seven or eight credits to complete her graduation requirements. She had a job that required her to work eleven hour shifts on Thursdays and Fridays, which required her to attend PACE a minimum of eight hours a day on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, as well as the four hours available on Mondays because of the 1200 student start time. The lack of freedom imposed by the rigid schedule became intolerable for KA and she left PACE after two weeks to be able to have more hours to work. KA had not completed her GED requirements as of the time of this research. She was still employed, but with a competing company, and had no plans for furthering her education.

When CBHF entered PACE she had eleven credits to complete to be able to graduate with a diploma. She interviewed and was accepted to PACE, "Because I had missed a lot of school when my dad passed away. That left me behind and all my school work went down (CBHF line 16)." She was working full time, 40 hours per

week, at a local fast food establishment while living at home with her mother and step-father. She preferred PACE to her home campus because, “It did change me like the way I think and I got more mature about it and I started thinking more and working with my teacher, working with myself. Working harder, putting in more effort (line 27).” In spite of the personal growth and maturation, CB became overwhelmed and discouraged. She left the PACE program after completing approximately half of her remaining credits to concentrate on her fast food career. She did successfully pass the GED tests shortly after leaving PACE.

The Men

In addition to those discussed above, there were eleven other male former students of PACE High School and the PACE program. These gentlemen are designated BACM, KNCM, VTCM, HFCM, MACM, MJCM, DDHM, FGC/HM, TCBM, SABM, and AACM. None of the members of this group were married or had any children. They also lived at home with their parent(s) while attending PACE. With those few elements in common, each former male student had unique circumstances that affected his educational objectives.

BACM left his home campus because of the chaotic environment and entered PACE because he, “. . .thought It would be a better learning environment than Humble [High School.] I need more of a quiet place to learn. I would rather be in a classroom with a one-on-one teacher than be in a classroom with 40 students (BACM line 6).” Before he attended PACE, BA.

. . . was flunking my classes, making, like, straight Fs. The second I came to PACE I started making straight As. . . I’ll tell you the truth, I felt

like dropping out before I came [to PACE.]. . . If I would have stayed at Humble, I would have been in there for at least a year and a half longer (line 47).

BA needed 7-1/2 course credits when he entered PACE, the equivalent of almost a school year on his home campus. He claims he would have remained on his home campus if two currently non-existent programs were instituted.

I think if they had something like a better [credit recovery] program like that at Humble, probably more people would stay or more people would have given it a better chance. Or they could have had that afternoon tutoring, like they said they were, the afternoon classes that they were going to put in. That would've helped out (line 21)."

Even though he was plodding through the required course modules at a steady pace, BA began losing interest and missing days. He was eventually dropped from the PACE program because of lack of attendance. He could provide no rationale for his actions, but vowed to complete the GED preparatory course and pass the examination "soon."

KNCM was introverted and shy. Efforts to elicit responses longer than one syllable were generally unsuccessful. Though not seeming to be anti-social, KN was a self-avowed "loner." His terse response to his rationale for attending the PACE program was, "So I could graduate (KNCM line 6)." He required 9-1/2 credits to attain his graduation goal when he entered the PACE program. He claimed there were no negative aspects with attending PACE, but after five weeks of attendance, he decided he didn't want to go through with the course requirements and dropped out. Like BA, above, KN claimed he was planning on completing the necessary steps to complete and earn his GED certificate some time in the near future.

VTCM interviewed and was accepted at PACE because of the learning environment. “A lot of people learn in a lot of different ways, and at school they try to put you in one way, so you’re categorized as someone who has ADD or you need to go to a special class, just because they don’t know your type of need of learning (VTCM line 36).” He left his home campus, “Because I thought it was more my style of learning. Easier than going about through the regular high school program. It was at my pace and I felt I could learn better. . . (line 6).” While attending PACE, VT was also working with his father, but was trying to find a job in the retail clothing business. When he abandoned his home campus and began at PACE, VT had 11 credits, approximately half of the Texas requirements, remaining on his academic plan to graduate. Initially, though the commute to PACE was considerable, VT was willing to make the sacrifice. “It was far for me to get here, but that’s no problem to an education. I’d rather have gone a far distance to get here than gone a short distance to Kingwood High School and fell back a year (line 32).” As with others in this research, the lure of money from the minimum wage job lured VT away from PACE and he dropped out of the program after eight weeks of attendance. He did earn his GED certificate, but not until he was 23. Since earning his certificate, he had been attending a local community college and had plans for seeking admission at a local university in the fall following this research.

HFCM had serious personal medical problems that prompted him to attend PACE. He received no guidance from his campus counselor or assistant principal; he applied as a last resort. “I didn’t really hear about [PACE,] it was kind of just a last

option thing. Either that or drop out. Because I had missed a year and a half of school so they recommended I come [to PACE] to catch up. . . I was diagnosed with depression. . . (HFCM line 6).” When he entered PACE, HF had roughly half of his diploma plan remaining to graduate. He had completed 6-1/2 credits when the depression overwhelmed him, even with medication. The illness combined with some difficulty earning elective credits provided HF with sufficient incentive to leave PACE. At the time of the research interview, there was no plan to continue with his education. He suggested that PACE, “Maybe add a few more [elective courses] like technology classes or maybe another year of Spanish onto it, or something like that; just to keep more options available (line 34).”

Difficulties with the campus administrators caused MACM to leave his home campus. He left,

Because Humble [High School] was giving me problems. I kept getting in trouble at Humble. It just wasn't working out at Humble. . . I was a trouble maker at Humble. . . It's ran totally by [the Principal.] I just didn't like the way he ran things. I just couldn't comply with him. I can comply everywhere else, but not to Humble (line 6).

MA stated that he was angry a lot while attending PACE, but he would not go into any details about his personal or family situation at that time. MA needed three credits to graduate when he entered PACE, and had completed one when everything seemed to overwhelm him and he dropped out of the program. One major complaint he had with PACE was the inability to go outside into the wooded area on the campus. “Only thing is, I wish during lunch break we could have gone and walked the new trail. I'm just in here doing a whole bunch of work; I would have liked to go and walk the trail

and relax for a little bit (line 30).” The unnamed pressures lifted for MA two years after leaving PACE and he earned his GED. He had no plans for any further education.

Campus size was the motivator for MJCM to seek out the PACE program. He was attracted to PACE,

Because Humble [High School] was too big an environment for me and I needed a smaller environment where I could do my work at my own pace and maybe graduate quicker. Do stuff like that. That’s why I got in the PACE program. . . [Humble is] way too big of a school. That’s the main problem; it’s too big of a school. There’s not enough authority to discipline the kids. . . the teachers wouldn’t even notice you. You didn’t even have to go to school. You could skip or do whatever and they wouldn’t even notice you were gone. So it was like impossible to make good grades there (MJCM line 6)

MJ was lacking 12 course credits to graduate when he entered PACE. He didn’t have a job but was continually looking for one. After completing six course credits, MJ found a job that he liked and began spending more and more time on the job and less time with PACE. He was dropped from the program for lack of hours after attending for 15 weeks. There were no plans to continue his education as MJ was currently a manager at a national fast food restaurant and was earning an adequate income. He was still living at home with his parents, but spent most of his free time with his girl friend.

DDHM had a long period of apathy before he decided to take his high school education seriously.

For the first three years of high school, I just didn’t go. Around my twelfth grade year, I finally got serious about school and finally started it and they told me about PACE. After the first semester I decided it was

what I wanted to do and it would help me do stuff a lot faster. (DDHM line 6).

DD further stated that he would have graduated from his home campus but for time conflicts. "I would have [graduated from my home campus,] but honestly, in my situation it just would have took longer, more work, more time. I had just got my job and I needed more flexible hours (line 21)." When he entered the PACE program, DD required eight or ten courses to graduate with a diploma. As he earned more money and needed more hours for his job, he began to neglect PACE and was administratively removed for lack of hours. At the time of the interview, DD was making a substantial salary in an industrial controls company and saw no need for further education. He had recently married and had bought a house within the past year.

FGC/HM, like VJC/HF, insisted on being classified as both Caucasian and Hispanic. FG had fallen behind his classmates on his regular campus and was recommended to attend the PACE program, "Because I wasn't doing good in regular school; Humble High School. I was a junior. I was 7.5 credits short. I wasn't going to graduate at Humble. I couldn't go to Humble. . . I just couldn't go (FGC/HM line 6)." He had considered completing his education at his home campus, but he required one change. "A new principal at Humble (line 25)." After attending PACE for six weeks and completing two courses, FG resumed his lethargic ways of early high school and was released for non attendance and failure to maintain the minimum hours. At 24 he was still living with his mother, but was now the primary wage earner in the family. He was working as a stocking supervisor at a distribution warehouse.

He said he would eventually complete the requirements for his GED certificate, but had no definite plan.

TCBM had a problem with a criminal record that prompted him to petition for and enter the PACE program. He had to leave his home campus, "Because I had a felony case. Whenever I went down to that school house, that's where I caught my felony case at. I missed so many days of school, I basically would have had to do a whole new year all over again, so I dropped out for a year (TCBM line 8)." He needed three and a half or four credits to graduate when he was admitted to PACE. Living at home with his father, TC was looking for a job while at PACE. He did find one and still had that job at the time of the interview. After being at PACE for four weeks, TC was having trouble with a difficult module in the U.S. Government course, became frustrated, and left PACE. He had not been in any more trouble with law enforcement agencies since his departure from PACE, but did concede he had a side business that earned him more than his regular job. His advice to students, as a reason to remain in school and graduate was, "Leave drugs alone. If you can, leave them alone while you're in school. Don't bring them to school. Don't be ignorant. Don't be stupid (line 27)." TC saw no reason to complete his high school education as he was making a substantial income.

Trying to complete the last few credits for graduation was the reason SABM entered the PACE program. He stated that he had been in PACE because, "I was behind on a few credits. . . I believe it was nine credits. . . Trying to graduate at my own pace (SABM line 6)." He lived at home with both his parents and had a part-time

job at the local regional mall in a kiosk stand. Another reason for attending PACE, and the reason he was behind in his credits was, "I skipped a lot. I want to say, starting with my sophomore year. Most of the time it was over a girl; a girlfriend I had at the time (line 16)." After attending nine weeks and completing three courses, SA decided the money from the job was more important and ceased attending PACE. He was administratively dropped for failure to maintain the minimum hours. At 24 he was a regional supervisor for a cell phone company and saw no need to complete the requirements for a GED certificate.

AACM had been a student in every program in the Structured Learning Center, with the exception of the Community Class for pregnant students. He had been a regular attendee in the Short Term and Long Term Discipline programs since his seventh grade year. The discipline referrals for infractions from his home campuses were varied, but mostly were drug related. An inquisitive and articulate student had over the years become listless and lethargic. The mental capacity was evident, but the physical body was slowly deteriorating. AA lived alone with his father and had no ambition to work. He was removed from his home campus at the beginning of his junior year of high school for repeat offenses involving drugs, but was referred to the PACE program. In his words,

I just wanted to get away from the normal structure of the classroom and go at my own pace and sort of graduate early. Because I knew I was capable of doing it. . . There was nothing they could do to give me more freedom; not expect so much of me. . . I understand this is the last resort for some people (AACM line 6).

He had managed to earn half the required 22 credits for graduation prior to attending PACE. He did complete nine of the remaining credits before the lure of drugs became too great. At 23, AA was a hollow, empty shell of the vibrant seventh grader of Short Term days. There was no ambition evident in either his speech or demeanor and no aspirations to continue with an education plan. His father had given up on AA long ago and saw no reason to amend the situation.

Summary

Of the 29 former PACE students failing to graduate with either a diploma or GED certificate that participated in this research, a little less than half either quit the program or were administratively dropped because they felt that earning money from their job was more important than graduating from high school. Twelve former PACE students successfully completed the requirements and earned the General Educational Development high school equivalency certificate. Of the twelve, nine were women while three were men. The summary of the rationale for leaving PACE by the 29 research participants varied with the individual but can be classified into four general categories.

By far, the largest number of students failing to graduate or earn the GED did so because they had a job that they felt was more important than their high school diploma. For some, the job provided the impetus to quit while another factor was the prime motivator. MJHM was working at a carwash, had a girlfriend and a daughter, and decided that school was too much of a hassle when he had all the money he needed. MTBF was married, though still living with her parents, and was receiving

adequate income from her husband. PIHF was working full time while her mother cared for her pre-school child. VTCM was lured away from public education by a minimum wage job, though he had earned his GED, completed some community college courses, and was planning to apply at a university. LAHF left the PACE program because of her seeming high paying job. TCBM had trouble with one course module which provided his excuse to select working over studying. Not having enough time for school and her baby while her husband was earning a substantial income prompted WKCF to leave PACE. CBHF had a good paying that she eventually turned into a career, but departed PACE because of the overwhelming and discouraging number of courses remaining to complete for her diploma. Other students with similar reasons for departing PACE were MJCM, DDHM, MTHF, SABM, WRCF, and KACF. Even though earning money was the most common reason for leaving PACE, lack of interest or apathy was a close second with eight former students.

WCCF was a dispassionate young woman with no apparent ambition or desire. WC declared that education was important, but had declined to complete the one course module needed to graduate from high school. KNCM and BACM both just lost interest in education. Though they both claimed they preferred the relative small size and quietness of the PACE program, neither could explain why they had decided to leave. FGC/HM started his high school career in a lethargic manner, then had a burst of enthusiasm during his senior year. The flame burned out for FG after a short time in PACE. HKCF was overwhelmed with the unreasonable course load she imposed

upon herself at PACE in order to graduate with her sister. HK did come to grips with educational reality, however, and eventually graduated from college. WACF became frustrated and perceived her remaining high school requirements as unattainable. WA, at the time of this research had still not resolved her frustration and completed her GED. AACM lost all ambition due to his heavy use of self-administered non-prescription drugs. AA stated that he saw no use for an education when he had all he wanted already. Although lack of interest and apathy accounted for the second largest grouping of students not completing PACE, time for children was evident for a few former students.

CJCF and BXBF both decided to leave the PACE program because of the lack of time with their respective babies. Even with child care available, adequate available to maintain the minimum 20 hours of attendance a week, each of these young women decided they would rather spend more time with her child. BX's baby had a chronic medical condition that required her to spend a large amount of time with her son during the school hours. The facilitators at PACE realized the situation and granted BX a leniency on the attendance requirement, but she was unable to meet the lesser time obligation and she was administratively dropped from the program. She was notified that she could resubmit her application and she would be given priority, if she decided to return, but she declined to take that offer. CJ wanted to spend more time with her daughter, especially since she was going through a divorce while attending PACE. She eventually decided it was more important to be with her child than to finish her education at that time. After being removed from PACE for

non-attendance, CJ did successfully pass all parts of the GED and was planning on attending a local community college. Not all former PACE students left because of easy money, lack of ambition, or to care for their children. The last group contains all those students that would not fit in the three categories above.

The remaining category contains six students that left PACE without completing the requirements for either a diploma or a GED certificate while attending PACE. DSCM felt there was not enough teacher support for his style of learning, although no one else shared that opinion. DS did earn his GED certificate and entered the U.S. Marine Corps. He later confirmed that the only reason he completed the requirements for the GED was so he could enlist in the Corps. At that time in his life, the prime motivator was joining the Corps and the only method available to him at that time was to earn his GED. After the minimum two years, with no overseas deployments, DS left the Corps to resume his passion of golf. The story of DS was in contrast to that of VACF.

Wanting to be thorough and complete, VACF found the requirement of a minimum of one course module a week too stressful. The internal stress caused by this requirement caused her to leave PACE with approximately one year's course credits remaining for graduation with a diploma. This personal drive for perfection was the main reason she had fallen behind and entered PACE initially. The trauma of having to work at an accelerated pace was evident during the interview process. VA had not earned her GED certificate, or had any plans to do so. The Community Learning Center (CLC) licensed social worker, as well as the facilitators from PACE

each encouraged her to take the tests needed to earn the GED. Even though it was pointed out to VA that the test was easier than she had imagined and she had shown that she had the skills required to successfully pass each section, she had refused to enroll in a GED preparatory course or sign up to take the tests.

ZMHF became frustrated and thought it was unfair that when she missed a week of attendance at PACE due to illness and was required to make up the 20 hours from the missed week, as well as bring in a physician's statement to verify the missed time. At the time ZM was in attendance, PACE was available to the students from 0700 to 1800, five days a week. Not wanting to attend more than the four hours a day to which she had become accustomed, she dropped out of the PACE program. Five years after departing PACE, ZM did earn her GED certificate, but only because it was required for her to assume a management position at the retail clothing shop in the local regional mall.

Diagnosed clinical depression proved to be the downfall for HFCM with the PACE program. HF had missed three semesters at his home campus due to the illness, and seemed to have finally found the proper dosage of the correct medication when he entered PACE. He claimed at a later interview that the medication could have been marginal, or he could still have hormonal fluctuations due to normal growth progression. In any case, the depression returned, attendance at PACE became spotty, and he was administratively dropped from the program. At 22, HF thought the current medical regimen seemed to be working sufficiently to allow him to complete his GED. At the time of the follow-up interview, there was no definite plan to continue

with his education, but HF conceded that there was still time for him to move on with his life and not stay trapped with his illness.

Internal anger with no specific root cause was the reason MACM left the PACE program. The focal point of the anger while at PACE was the inability to walk alone in the wooded park area of the campus. MA admitted at a follow-up meeting that he had conquered his non-disclosed demons and had earned his GED certificate. He had a job with an adequate wage and at 21 saw no reason for any further education.

VJC/HF, even with the sometimes crowded conditions at PACE, felt isolated since she was not allowed to interact with the other students as she had become accustomed. This sense of isolation eventually led to VJ leaving the PACE program. She did not graduate with a diploma, but did successfully pass all parts of the GED test and earn her certificate when she was 22. She said that she preferred the GED preparatory classes to PACE because it was all verbal interaction between the instructor and the students. At the age of 23, VJ was undecided on her life course. She was still living at home, did not work, had a steady boyfriend who had the approval of her parents, and had a car and insurance that were paid for by her parents.

A tabular summation of the students that failed to graduate from PACE with either a high school diploma or a General Educational Development certificate is shown in Table 7.

Table 7
Reasons for Failure to Graduate from PACE

| Identifier | Reason for Leaving PACE | Earned GED |
|------------|---|---------------|
| DSCM | Lack of T support | Yes |
| WCCF | Lack of interest | No |
| MJHM | Had job earning money | No |
| VACF | Worked slowly; internal pressure | No |
| MTBF | No time for baby; husband had a job earning money | No |
| PIHF | No time for baby; had job earning money | No |
| WRCF | Time restrictions; had job earning money | Yes |
| KNCM | Lost interest in education; lack of hours | No |
| BACM | Lost interest in education; lack of hours | No |
| VTCM | Had job earning money | Yes |
| ZMHF | Did not make-up missed hours; had job earning money | Yes |
| HFCM | Clinical depression; difficult module | No |
| MACM | Internal Anger | Yes |
| LAHF | Not enough space; job earning money | Yes |
| MJCM | Had job earning money | No |
| DDHM | Lack of hours; had job earning money | No |
| MTHF | Had job earning money | No |
| CJCF | Baby required too much time | Yes |
| BXBF | Sick baby; lack of hours | No |
| FGC/HM | Apathy; lack of hours | No |
| TCBM | Difficulty with course module; had job earning money | No |
| SABM | Lack of hours; had job earning money | No |
| VJC/HF | Felt isolated | Yes |
| WKCF | Not enough time for baby; husband had job earning money | Yes |
| HKCF | Overwhelmed | Yes |
| KACF | School/Job time conflict | No |
| WACF | Frustration with being behind | No |
| AACM | Drugs | No |
| CBHF | Overwhelmed and discouraged | Yes |

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

PACE had proven to be a very good drop-out prevention program for Humble ISD. The relatively low drop-out rate reported by the district from school year 1996-97 through 2001-02 has been displayed in Table 4, above. The number of students that became high school graduates or had earned their General Education Development (GED) certificates is shown in Table 5, above. By combining the graduates or certificate earners with the number of district dropouts, the possible district drop-out rate can be calculated. That information is displayed in Table 8, below. The Total Drop-Outs were computed by combining the HISD reported drop-puts with the PACE diploma and GED earners. The Drop-Out Rate Without PACE column was computed by dividing the Total Drop-Outs by the District Enrollment for the appropriate school year. The Rate Increase was computed by subtracting the district Reported Drop-Out Rate by the Drop-Out Rate Without PACE, dividing by the Reported Drop-Out Rate, and converting to a percent.

Table 8
Potential Increase in Drop-Out Rate if the PACE Program
Were Not Available for Students in Humble ISD

| School Year | Total Drop-Outs | District Enrollment | Reported Drop-Out Rate | Drop-Out Rate Without PACE | Rate Increase |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1996-97 | 151 | 23192 | 0.3% | 0.65% | 117% |
| 1997-98 | 262 | 23855 | 0.4% | 1.10% | 175% |
| 1998-99 | 275 | 24135 | 0.4% | 1.14% | 185% |
| 1999-2000 | 196 | 24684 | 0.2% | 0.79% | 295% |
| 2000-01 | 265 | 25239 | 0.3% | 1.05% | 250% |

Note. From Texas Education Agency: Academic Excellence Indicator System (1992-93 through 2002-03), and a tabular listing of students who graduated and/or completed GEDs from Pink Sheet for PACE High School (Guidry 2002).

Without the PACE program, the number of students that failed to graduate would have been increased substantially. The increase in the percentage of students failing to graduate from the Humble ISD would have increased from 117% to 295%, depending on the school year being compared. The PACE program was proven to be successful. Never the less, there were still some students that did not graduate from their home campus, did not graduate through PACE, or did not earn a GED while eligible for public education. Of the 29 former students that participated in this research out of the 299 students that failed to graduate or earn a certificate from

PACE that had contact information available, a dozen did earn a GED after departing PACE. Extrapolating that ratio of GED completion to the entire 299 members, approximately 124 students could have earned their certificate. That left roughly 175 students out of the pool of 299 that could not be confirmed to have earned a GED certificate.

Conclusion

Many students that were screened, agreed to complete the PACE program, and were selected into the program chose to not attend, and did not achieve academic success by receiving either a high school diploma or a GED certificate. This research attempted to address these problems, as related by students that went through the process but did not graduate or earn a GED. Three inter-locking conclusions were reached by the researcher after interviewing 29 of the students that did not complete the PACE program. The first conclusion was that students did not understand the value of a high school diploma at the time they were attending PACE. The second was that money, even in the form of a minimum wage job became more important than an education. The final conclusion was that each student did not have a plan for their life beyond the coming evening or weekend. All students that failed to graduate or earn a GED had at least one of these misconceptions, while most had two, and a few had all three. In addition to attitudes of the students, it was found that there were some modifications that could be made to the PACE program to reduce the students' frustrations with formal education.

Instilling into students the value of completing a high school education, and earning either a diploma or GED certificate, is beyond the scope of this research and of the PACE program. Students attending PACE were at the end of their public education, with most attending with personal reluctance. The importance of education must be inculcated by parents and professional educators beginning in infancy and continually reinforced throughout the student's school career. Though not able to change the minds of the students, PACE had to contend with these students and the attitudes toward education each brought to the program. All PACE staff and faculty were positive about the value of education, and passed that attitude to each student. The students were not in a receiving mode while attending PACE.

Earning and having money to spend was very important to approximately 38% of the students interviewed for this study. It was so important that it was the primary, or at least the secondary, reason for student's not completing the PACE program. The underlying cause for this perceived need is for another study. Most, if not all, students interviewed lived at home and were supported by their parent(s). None of the interviewees seemed wanting for money by their physical appearance or their dress. Only three of those that participated in the study were on the free or reduced meal program while attending PACE. It appeared that the ability to earn money and have that money to spend was the motivation to work instead of attending school. Few needed to work while attending PACE, but several chose to.

The third decision shared by virtually all students that failed to graduate from PACE was that they had no plan for their life. While attending PACE virtually all

students were doing so to please their parents, their significant other, their peers, anyone but themselves. Most PACE non-graduates found a life direction within two to five years after leaving the program. Twelve of the twenty-nine study participants eventually earned their GED and half of those eventually attended college. Again, the reasons for this lack of direction is beyond the scope of this study, but can probably be attributed to a lack of communication between the students and their parents and educators.

PACE has proven to be an excellent program for the recovery of students that have departed the public education system. Even though PACE has shown some positive results, some changes could be made to improve the program. Using hindsight and the fact that anything can be improved, the next section recommends some changes to enhance an already excellent education program.

Recommendations for Practice – The Future PACE

As noted above, there were several reasons why students did not graduate with either a high school diploma or GED certificate from the Program for ACcelerated Education (PACE). To ameliorate the factors that influenced the failure to graduate from the PACE program as identified by selected students in the Humble Independent School District, these eight major changes should be made. These eight reasons would require both a one-time and a continuing monetary commitment by the school district administration, as well as a realignment of several programs by the campus administration to implement these recommendations:

1. Move the PACE program into a larger and more open space.

Moving the PACE program into a more open area, such as a Quest House, while retaining at least two of the current self-contained classrooms, would increase the physical space available, give the perception of spaciousness for the students, and allow for reduced staffing if the current student load of 50 to 75 is maintained.

2. Increase the staffing for the PACE program.

By changing the staffing from the current 7-1/2 certified teachers and two administrative aides to a new staffing of 8-1/2 certified teachers, one administrative aide, one instructional technologist, and one combined registrar and counselor, the PACE student enrollment could easily be increased to 125 to 150 active students.

3. Increase the hours of operation of the PACE program.

Adding another seven or eight hours to the daily PACE program would increase the number of students able to be served. Having the availability of service students from 0700 to 2300 daily, with decreased hours for Friday afternoon or evening, may require an incremental increase in staffing. The small increase in staffing would produce a significantly larger increase in the number of students served by the program.

4. Decrease the administrative functions of the PACE facilitators.

The addition of a counselor/registrar would alleviate one or more facilitators from having to perform those administrative functions, while providing a trained professional to execute those legal duties. The facilitators could then concentrate on course completion requirements for the PACE students.

5. Increase the number of course-ware licenses.

The increase of students attending PACE would require a requisite increase in the number of software licenses for the math, science, reading, Language Arts, and social science courses.

6. Provide more student workstations and change the course requirements.

Just as more software licenses would be required with the increased PACE enrollment, an increase in the number of student workstations would also be needed. By allowing every student in every course to complete a minimum of modules or sections of a course, some frustrations among the students would be reduced. If each student were allowed to test for each course and complete only deficient areas, courses could be completed more rapidly. Changing from the thinking of seat time verses assimilation and comprehension could decrease the time students would attend PACE. This quicker pace would allow more students to attend using the same space and personnel.

7. Ensure child care availability during all PACE hours of operation.

To retain the young women with children in the PACE program, child care must be made available during all hours that PACE is available. The lower age limit for child care would remain at six weeks while the upper age limit would be unlimited, but practically speaking probably no more than seven years. Current child care facilities in the CLC could be utilized with minimal impact on existing child care programs.

8. Ensure that adequate technology support is available to all users in the PACE program.

The increase in the numbers of software licenses and student work stations would be hollow without adequate software and hardware support. One person working no more than forty hours per week would be adequate. If that person is a certified teacher, as all campus Instructional Technologists in the Humble ISD are, additional assistance would be available to the PACE students. The recommended hours for the IT are 1000 to 1800 Monday through Thursday and 0800 to 1600 Friday. This schedule would ensure technical support during the hours when the most students would be in attendance, requiring the highest technical availability.

The computer hardware and software increases would be a one-time expense, with periodic upgrades as required by changes in technology or curriculum. The expense impact of the addition of two new staff members would be justified, as would the computer expense, by the almost doubling of the number of PACE students that could attend at any one time, with a marginal increase in continuing cost to Humble ISD.

While these changes would substantially reduce the dropout rate for Humble ISD, neither these alterations to the PACE program nor any other changes will completely eliminate the tendency for some students to drop out of the public education system. As each individual is unique, so is the rationale for completing or not completing an undertaking, especially one that is externally imposed on the individual. The former students that participated in this research, as well as the staff

members of PACE, had several recommendations for alterations in the PACE program that would reduce the minor irritations some felt were detrimental to the students not graduating or earning a GED.

Although the lure of a job, even a minimum wage one, was the most popular reason for dropping out of PACE, most students that failed to graduate had one or more alternative reasons for not graduating or earning a GED. These eight major points of irritation given during the interviews for not graduating from PACE are listed below, along with student comments.

1. Larger area for the program or a more open learning environment.

PIHF thought an improvement to PACE would be, "Maybe more room. Sometimes there were so many people, and then it got crowded (line 31)." LAHF offered the opinion that PACE could be improved by making the space, "[b]igger, as far as classroom wise. . . There's not a lot of space that you can relax (line 24)." Though that change would be possible with minimal monetary impact on the school district, the probability of PACE having more space was remote, unless the magnet high school were condensed from eighteen to fourteen classrooms, freeing up one house of four classrooms. Maintaining at least two of the current classrooms for Community Class and a math/science lab, in addition to the suite of four rooms, would increase the space for PACE, as well as provide the openness requested by those who departed PACE because of the closeness or claustrophobic feel. The addition of the two classrooms adjacent the house suite would provide benefits to two portions of the PACE program. One benefit would be a quieter area for math and science

tutoring in one room with PLATO software and a certified math teacher. The other benefit of keeping the two self-contained classrooms would be to provide privacy for the Community Class students when discussions of child care and prenatal courses are taught by the facilitator.

Compressing the Quest students into the remaining fourteen classrooms would increase the average student density to eighteen per room from the current average of fourteen. This reduction in Quest classrooms could produce monetary savings due to the requirement for fewer facilitators to monitor the students in the smaller space. This loss of classroom space would not hamper the Quest requirement for infrequent large group meetings or presentations as the Community Learning Center Dining Room and outdoor patio areas would be available. The Wellness, or physical, activities required of all Quest students would not be impacted by the loss of space since the outdoor areas and two wellness class areas would still be available.

By moving three current PACE classrooms into the four room suite of a house, the three classrooms become available for the Structured Learning Center programs. Several of the components currently housed in ageing portable buildings could be moved into the hallway classrooms adjacent the administrative offices. Possibilities of utilization of the inside classrooms freed up by PACE would be the special education content mastery room, the Elementary Discipline program, the Long Term Discipline Program (LTDP) compliance room, or an LTDP credit recovery program. By moving one or more of these programs from the portable rooms, the continually crowded Short Term Discipline Program would gain additional space. The computers currently

on the PLATO computer aided instruction network could be physically moved to the new House and reconnected to the proprietary computer server in minimal time and without any expenditure of capital. If this change were to be effected, the magnet high school would have minimal adverse affects while three, or perhaps four, other programs in the Community Learning Center would benefit with the increase or upgrade of educational space.

2. Access to the outside.

As mentioned by some former PACE students, a large number of students that attended PACE had attention deficit disorders or were hyperactive. This attention deficit and hyperactivity was not adequately addressed at the home campuses, which caused the students to leave, and was only minimally addressed at PACE. At various times throughout the life of PACE, organized physical education activities and outside science experiments had been tried. They were usually short lived. Because the activity required the presence of at least one PACE facilitator, scheduled times were set up. These sessions were initially set up to provide the students the opportunity to earn physical education course credit or to participate in actual and real time physical science experiments. Because these sessions were at scheduled times, the students were required to adjust their attendance so as to be present at times that may not have fit the student's schedule. The student attendance dwindled to a low enough level that the sessions were discontinued.

The students that departed PACE because of the inability to move about outdoors were the more vocal petitioners for this activity. MACM desired the ability to,

“I wish during lunch break we could have walked the trail (line 30).” Other former PACE students mentioned that the ability to move about and clear their heads would have been a benefit for them, also. MJCM had a slightly different version of the request, “I think we should be able to go walk the park and do whatever (line 35).” All other programs at the Community Learning Center were able to utilize the trail and park area, with two exceptions. Short Term Discipline students were restricted to their assigned classrooms and Quest High School chose not to utilize the available outside area.

The Long Term Discipline Program students had begun building an annotated nature trail and amphitheater complex as the youngest of the research participants were departing PACE. The PACE students saw the potential of being able to walk in a cleared and safe area, while the facilitators saw the potential for illicit behavior of the students. The fear from the PACE staff was that smoking, ingestion of non-prescription drugs, or some other illegal activity could easily have been participated in by the students. It was decided by the PACE staff and administration that the outside activities would not occur and that PACE students would not be allowed to utilize the school property for exercise while the PACE students were on the clock, or while on lunch or break times. The inability to move around the grounds of PACE was not the only complaint concerning the requirement for students to remain essentially sessile.

3. Fewer restrictions on movement during the academic day.

CJCF was frustrated because, “I don’t like the fact that you can’t talk. . . I think you should be able to talk a little bit (line 32).” SABM thought that a negative aspect

of PACE was, “I want to say sitting around all day. We didn’t really move. But, then again, where would you go? It’s just one hallway (line 31).” There are no easy solutions for this negative aspect of PACE. VJC/HF missed the social interaction, “You know, talking between classes, seeing your friends every day . . . (line 23).” She also mentioned that she didn’t like PACE because, “. . . you can’t be social, but I mean, you’re not there to be social (line 40).”

The requirement for minimal intentional noise in the PACE spaces was originally instilled to allow those students that can not tolerate any distraction the chance to be successful. The low noise level also allowed for better monitoring of the students by the staff and faculty of PACE. The balance between maintaining quiet for the distracted students and allowing talking for the social students was very difficult. It was decided that the silent majority would prevail, and the requirement of almost-library silence was enforced.

As the students that are attending PACE have a primary facilitator that mentors and monitors the student through the required course work, it would be difficult for the teacher to watch over the student if the student was not in the same room as the facilitator. One possible problem with allowing student to roam from room to room could result in more students in a room than could be adequately monitored by the one or two facilitators assigned to that room. Some movement is currently allowed, on a case by case basis, for students who need assistance with math, science or technology courses. If PACE were once again housed in a four room Quest House, this irritation could go away. Because of the size of the four-room House, student

movement within the suite could be affected without losing the monitoring capability of the primary facilitator, or even allowing for fewer facilitators to monitor the current enrollment. By maintaining the current level of staffing, and utilizing the House spaces, more students could be enrolled at any given time without the loss of the mentoring and monitoring ability of the facilitators.

As was pointed out by some former students of PACE that did not graduate or earn the GED certificate, a large percentage of the students have attention deficit problems or are more active than the general population of students. Having a physically larger classroom space in which to complete the required course work might even mitigate the need to go outside and walk the trail or wander through the park, as some students above have suggested. As pointed out above, the move of PACE to a current Quest House would allow a chain of moves for three other programs at the Community Learning Center, benefiting a total of four CLC programs while having a minimally negative affect on only one program, Quest High School.

4. Changes in the academic offerings.

HFCM thought that more courses in, “technology . . . or maybe another year of Spanish,” should be added to the available curriculum (line 35). AACM felt that more courses in, “Maybe pre-cal[culus] and chemistry,” should be added (line 37). Because PACE has evolved into a minimum competency high school program, many elective courses are not offered. Students could still earn credit in several elective courses, but the courses had to be taken by correspondence from an accredited

institution acceptable to the state of Texas. Other course additions may be forthcoming because of state requirements.

The state of Texas, in attempting to stay current with national trends and the evolving state of technological advances, is continually adding to the minimum requirements for graduation from public high school. Currently, the only technology course required by the state of all students is Basic Computer Information Systems (BCIS). Humble ISD, in an attempt to stay ahead of the state mandate, is planning to increase the number and depth of the required courses in technology for the graduation requirements of all students. As mentioned above, the addition of physical education as a facilitator directed course would increase the number of academic electives offered. A problem with this course addition is the availability of a qualified and willing facilitator to monitor and maintain the attendance or participation records for such a course. But, as with any educational program, change, even in curriculum, is continual and ever expanding.

If the PACE program were allowed to occupy a House suite of four rooms, in addition to two other classrooms, the addition of elective and technology courses would become feasible. The six rooms would require a minimum of six faculty and staff to maintain the current course offering. With the addition of two more faculty, physical education and other outdoor activities, as well as monitored free time, could be made available. A certified ROPES (Reality Oriented Physical Experience Sessions) course, or a system of "initiatives" and games on the ground which challenge an individual or group to work together or to figure out problems and tasks

in a fun and unique forum, would be a desirable addition to the PACE curriculum.

Individual instructor certification is not difficult and the benefits of the course could be highly beneficial to the typical PACE student, as well as providing the capability for a physical education credit for the students.

5. The ability to spend more time with new born children.

Only one male attendee of PACE mentioned the inability to spend time with his child as a reason for not graduating. PIHF had an internal time conflict between her new baby, a job, and PACE. She felt the need to relieve herself of the responsibilities of one of the three and chose the baby and job over PACE. A congenitally ill child took precedence over PACE for BXBF. Even with the availability of child care at the Community Learning Center, she could not find the time for PACE when her child required so much medical and personal attention. The child care facilities, by charter, could not keep a child that required the medical attention BX's child required, even though there was a registered nurse on staff and present throughout each school day. Even though she had her mother for support, the mother's job required BX to be at home during most of the hours that PACE was available. CJCF wanted to spend more time with her daughter, especially since she was going through a divorce while attending PACE. She eventually decided it was more important to be with her child than to finish her education. Not all perceived problems with PACE involved the direct needs of the students.

6. A more streamlined track to course completion.

Because of the at risk factors of most of the students enrolled in PACE it was felt that a return to the nineteen credit hour requirement from the current twenty-two credit prerequisite would be a desirable modification to the state of Texas' and Humble ISD's requirements for graduation. The ability to assign a PACE student only a portion of a semester class to accomplish a satisfactory completion of the educational credit already helps many students. WCCF was very pleased with the ability to, ". . . get in there, take the placement test, find out exactly where you need to be, and do what you need to do to get done with the [PLATO] program to get your credit and get out. . . (line 31)." If a PACE student could take a placement evaluation for each needed course and complete only the sections that show a lack of comprehension, whether the student has taken the course previously or not, could reduce the amount of time required for the student to complete the requirements for graduation. This could reduce the time required for attendance and increase the completion rate of high school diploma requirements of PACE students. In effect the student could test out of a course without having completed the individual lessons usually required for satisfactory course completion, or repeating a failed course.

7. The addition of administrative and technical support staff.

The primary recommendation from PACE staff and faculty members was for an increase in facilitators and staff to twelve, predicated on an increase to the equivalent of six classrooms from the current five learning spaces. Currently the Community Learning Center registrar manages the required documents for transfers of students

from their home campus to PACE. If the student completes all the requirements for graduation, the registrar effects the transfer back to the home campus for graduation purposes. If a student leaves the PACE program to complete a GED, the registrar handles the district termination requirements. If a student departs PACE for any other reason, typically to drop out, the registrar notifies the appropriate district and state entities. Currently a facilitator assigned to PACE evaluates each student transcript to arrive at a curriculum for the PACE student involved. There are enough students in PACE as it currently exists to require another person that could perform the functions of both the registrar and the transcript evaluator. This additional person would increase the efficiency of the student entry and exit procedure as well as provide a single contact for district high school and administrative personnel, as well as parents of potential and existing PACE attendees.

Because of the heavy dependence on computer hardware and software in the PACE program a full time technology person is required. In the current configuration of a local area network (LAN) computer server and seventeen workstation computers with computer aided instruction software installed, any individual machine failure immediately causes an almost 6% decrease in instructional capability. The loss of one network workstation may cause a student to move to another room exacerbating the facilitator monitoring and crowding problems. Even though paper modules are currently used, most, if not all, of the modules could be entered into the LAN server greatly reducing the quantity of paper and reprographic use currently utilized by PACE. An Instructional Technology (IT) person would ensure that the server and

workstations function at maximum capacity. In addition, the task of entering new students into the PLATO software and assigning appropriate assignments would be completed by the IT instead of each facilitator, freeing the facilitators to better serve the PACE students. Routine machine maintenance and software upgrades would be occasional duties of the IT in this new staff alignment.

8. Get bigger and stay later.

There are many more students wanting to attend the PACE program than there is room to accommodate at any one time. To increase the capacity of the PACE program would require an increase in two areas, staffing and space. The current student load for each facilitator in PACE is between ten and twelve, depending on the date of the last intake of students, how many students have completed the requirements and graduated, or how many students have dropped out of the program. The current limitation on the number of students to each facilitator is the physical space available for instruction. Each facilitator could easily manage fifteen to twenty students, if the space was available and the admissions and evaluation administrative chores were eliminated. Another method of increasing the capacity of the program is to have more networked student workstations available with PLATO courseware installed. An increase in licensure to 50 would allow not only the PACE program to maximize student course completion, but would allow Long Term Discipline Program (LTDP) students that require partial credit completion the ability to complete more credits toward graduation requirements. Though not thought of as at risk as much as the PACE students, many LTDP students are but a campus removal away from

meeting the requirements for entry into PACE, or even departing the public education arena altogether.

Another method of increasing the capacity of PACE is to increase the hours available to students. This is discussed in item 3 (Increase the hours of operation of the PACE program), above.

As of this date, these would be the recommendations to decrease the dropout rate and increase the graduation rate from Humble ISD of students that enter the PACE program.

Recommendations for Further Study

This research addressed the reasons why some students failed to complete an alternative education program in a K-12 school district in Texas. As important as a high school diploma is for entering the current work force, or as preparation for technical or baccalaureate programs, some students do not earn one or the other. More study is required to address each rationale given by non-graduating students to determine what changes can be made to the school setting, the curriculum, the staff and faculty training, or whatever factor may be impeding the graduation of a student. Because life is constantly evolving and students have a varying background, the reasons for not graduating will continue to change. Study and research should be conducted periodically and regularly to identify the volatile reasons given for not graduating from high school. Even though the graduation rate is steadily increasing, as seen in Table 1, the goal is always perfection. Identifying the imperfections and correcting or eliminating them is also an area that should be continually researched.

Another field that deserves study is the variance in dropout and graduation reporting. There should be the one true method of accounting, computing, and reporting data by each educational entity and system that would allow relevant and valid comparison.

Two follow-up research projects should come from this research. One path of research would follow up on the 29 research participants to provide longitudinal data on continued educational success and failure as well as the changes in attitude toward education of each of the students. A second strand of research would investigate the PACE program periodically as changes are implemented to evaluate the change in the success rate of graduation.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Factors Influencing the Failure to Graduate from the PACE Program as Identified by Selected Students in the Humble Independent School District

I have been asked to participate in a research study on the factors influencing the failure to graduate from the PACE Program. I was selected to be a possible participant because I attended the PACE Program, did not graduate or obtain a GED, and am over 21 years old. A total of up to fifty people have been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to provide research in the area of student failure to complete the requirements for a high school diploma or a general equivalency development diploma. This information will fulfill the requirements for a doctoral dissertation in order to obtain a degree from Texas A&M University.

If I agree to be in this study, I will be asked to discuss in my own words the reasons that I did not complete the requirements for a high school diploma or a general equivalency development diploma. I will be asked if my statements can be audio taped for accuracy. If I do not wish to be audio taped, manual field notes will be taken to record my responses. This study will continue until no later than May 2006. There may be follow-up interviews for clarification. The risks associated with this study are minimal. Some answers may be personally uncomfortable and some interview sessions may be longer than I want. There are no benefits for me for participating in this study, there will be no monetary compensation to me, and I may stop at any time I choose.

This study is confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking me to this study will be included in any sort of report that may be published. Research records, both audio and hand written, will be stored securely and only Rex W. Inman, Sr. will have access to the records. My decision whether or not to participate will not affect my current or future relations with Texas A&M University. If I decide to participate, I am free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make me uncomfortable. I can withdraw at any time without my relations with the university, job, benefits, etc., being affected. If I have any questions about the study, I can contact:

Researcher
Rex W. Inman, Sr.
18901 Timber Forest Dr.,
Humble, TX 77346

281.650.3777
rex-inman@tamu.edu

Research Advisor
Dr. Robert O. Slater
Texas A&M University
511 Harrington Tower 4226 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-4226
979.845.2764
ros505@aol.com

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms Angelina Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President for Research, at 979.458.4067 or araines@vprmail.tamu.edu.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this consent document for my records. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Investigator Signature _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B**Audio Tape Release Form****Consent to be Taped**

I voluntarily agree to be audio taped during a research study on the factors influencing the failure to graduate from the PACE Program conducted by Rex W. Inman, Sr., who will be the only person with access to the tapes. These tapes will be identified by coded subject names. The tapes will be kept for three (3) years and will be stored under lock and key in the residence of Rex W. Inman, Sr. At the end of the three years, the tapes will be erased and destroyed.

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

Refusal to be Taped

I do not agree to be audio taped during a research study on the factors influencing the failure to graduate from the PACE Program conducted by Rex W. Inman, Sr. I understand that there is no negative impact by my refusal to be taped. By refusing to be audio taped, I understand that I may continue to participate in the research.

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Factors Influencing the Failure to Graduate from the PACE Program as Identified by Selected Students in the Humble Independent School District

1. When did you attend the PACE program?
2. Why did you originally attend PACE?
3. How long did you attend PACE?
4. What were your personal circumstances while you were at PACE:
 - a. Living arrangements
 - b. Working or not
 - c. Wife and/or children
 - d. How many courses or credits needed to graduate
5. Why did you not graduate through PACE?
6. What would have kept you in the PACE program?
7. What would you change to encourage students to remain in school, either original campus or PACE?
8. What were your likes and dislikes about PACE?

Subject: _____

Date: _____

Start: _____

Stop: _____

VITA

Name: Rex Wayne Inman, Sr.

Address: Community Learning Center, 18901 Timber Forest Dr., Humble,
TX 77346

Email Address: sandrinman@earthlink.net

Education: B.S., Business Administration. California State University,
Hayward. 1976

M.Ed., Educational Administration. Stephen F. Austin State
University. 1992