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An Evaluation of Programs and Leadership Practices for Effective Dropout Prevention

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by

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my late father, Rudolph Washington. This journey started nearly five years ago. For those who know me and my family, completing a doctorate was my father's vision for me. He always referred to me as Dr. Nicole C. West. A dream of his I deferred but vowed to complete at the right time. It turns out, there is never a right time. When I finally started, I was balancing getting my son, Cameron, off to college and my daughter, Chelsey, was starting her freshman year in high school. Six years after his death, I am standing here accomplished. This is as much his accomplishment as it is mine. I love you, Daddy!

Acknowledgments

Much has been afforded to me throughout this pursuit. I appreciate and acknowledge my dissertation committee members, starting with my chair, Dr. Lisa Hobson, who pushed me toward excellence, and Dr. Katherine Yeager, who encouraged me to challenge the very system I sought to fix and to boldly recommend change. I extend a heartfelt thanks to Dr. Andrew Lumpe, who supported me in the quantitative component of my research. By providing straightforward feedback, he taught me that a succinct analysis is easier to understand and pushed me and my research to the finish line. For this, I will be forever grateful.

In the nearly five years it took me to complete the program, the world was turned upside down with a global pandemic and civil unrest. I, along with my family, experienced many victories as well as a fair number of disappointments. I want to give honor to God, first and foremost, for making sure I persisted. God carried me when I didn't think I could keep going—suffering the loss of my Aunt Alberta Sinette, my Soror and friend, and one of my biggest fans. I can hear her say, "Girl you are doing it..." Well Auntie, I did it. I appreciate Aunt Joyce Samuel, another of my biggest fans, for her loving cheers.

I am so grateful and blessed to have a family who believes in me and encouraged me to start the program as they approached their own milestones. Words are insufficient to express my appreciation to my loving and supporting husband, Anthony West, who provided feedback, asked questions about my research, and served as an unofficial committee member; and my children, Cameron West and Chelsey West, who have been by my side—sometimes as study partners. It is so inspirational to watch my children grow into responsible young adults with Cameron graduating from Oklahoma University months before my defense and Chelsey completing her freshman year at Louisiana State University.

My mother, Norma Washington, is a strong woman who taught me that I could be anything I aspired to and inspired me to instill that same value into my children. I am grateful for her teachings and endowing me with her strength. I also acknowledge my mother-in-law, Margaret West, and my sister-in-law, Carisa West, who kept me focused on my dream. Lastly, I would be remiss if I didn't thank my village of friends, who are also my sisters. They gave me strength and reminded me every day to never settle for less than excellence. Our motto is, "We don't just have high standards, we collectively set the bar!"

I, Dr. Nicole C. West, especially acknowledge and dedicate my research to the community where I grew up, to those students who face the most insurmountable obstacles to realizing their potential, and to the servant leaders in our schools who are there every day, motivating and encouraging our students to persist in their education.

Abstract

This mixed-methods study explored a problem within dropout research which often fails to link characteristics of student subgroups with effective dropout interventions. Considering the characteristics identified in the literature of at-risk learners, the conceptual framework for this study combined the theory of self-efficacy and leadership with emphasis on servant leadership. The purpose of the study was to evaluate dropout intervention and prevention programs in two high schools by examining intervention and leadership practices for students at risk of dropping out of high school. Through causal-comparative and phenomenological approaches, this investigation focused on identifying dropout factors targeted in the intervention and prevention initiatives, differences in archived dropout rates over a period of 12 years, and differences in teachers' perceptions of their leaders' servant behaviors of stewardship, authenticity, standing back, and empowerment. The analysis of interviews with teachers and principals in a large school district in Texas resulted in three major themes and seven subthemes that described the nature of the intervention and prevention initiatives, factors targeted, roles of teachers, leadership behaviors, and types of services afforded to students. Hypothesis testing using a Mann Whitney U test resulted in no statistically significant differences in how teachers from two schools perceived the servant leadership behaviors of their school leaders. The comparison of dropout rates between the two schools revealed a statistically significant difference, although both schools' dropout rates increased postintervention. Recommendations for the district and schools included instituting on-the-job credit programs in conjunction with the vocational curriculum and flexible schedules for students to complete high school requirements.

Keywords: dropout, dropout prevention and intervention, dropout factors, at risk, self-efficacy, leadership

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Dropout rates, the effects, and the related causative factors are frequently discussed in schools, organizations, and society due to their impacts on these entities. The seriousness of the topic is evident in the frequency of dropouts annually. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the dropout rate decreased: (a) for all noninstitutionalized students ages 16–24 from 10.9% in 2000 to 5.9% in 2015; (b) from 13.1% to 6.5% for Black students; and (c) from 27.8% to 9.2% for Hispanic students (McFarland et al., 2017). Despite the declines, dropout rates for students of color remain higher than those of White students. This scenario is apparent as a local problem in the Southeast School District (pseudonym) where national and school data on the Internet show that African American students had the highest longitudinal dropout rate among the major ethnic groups. This rate represents a 2.5% difference in the 12.3% for White students. The impact of dropouts on the economy is among concerns seen in the literature along with intervention efforts to address student dropout.

High school dropouts became a concern during the 1960s after: (a) the appearance of comprehensive high schools, (b) diploma certification became an entry requirement for employment, and (c) rates of high school enrollment and completion increased (Chappell et al., 2015; Doll et al., 2013). The beginning conversations about school dropouts painted a negative view that remains today (Stark & Noel, 2015). According to early reports, dropouts represented a threat to society and were labeled as antisocial, rebellious, and mentally inferior (Doll et al., 2013). Leading educational organizations, sociologists, and others characterized dropouts as unwanted individuals and projected their future as becoming delinquents, drug addicts, illegitimate parents, and social service-dependents (Cervantes, 2016). Currently, personal, and

economic disadvantages associated with school dropouts continue to negatively impact communities. These disadvantages include abuse, poverty, low self-esteem, a shorter life span, and criminal activities (Latif et al., 2015; Meškauskienė & Guoba, 2016).

Although some early views remain regarding school dropouts, considering current views and definitions of dropout for planning interventions is important. Definitions vary according to the perspectives of governmental and other agencies, school officials, and some researchers (Child Trends, 2015; McFarland et al., 2017). The definition also varies based on specific indicators referenced in discussions. In describing high school dropout rates, Child Trends referred to dropouts as "individuals, ages 16 to 24, who are not currently enrolled in school and have not completed high school or obtained a GED" (Child Trends, 2015, para. 1). The NCES publishes a similar definition for the indicator of dropout rates. In addition to referring to 16– to 24–year–old students as youth, NCES specifies documents that indicate completion as a diploma or high school credential (McFarland et al., 2017).

Although definitions vary, the research addresses (a) factors contributing to students dropping out, (b) the impact of dropouts on the economy and society in general, and (c) interventions designed to deter high rates of dropouts (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; McKee & Caldarella, 2016; Ticuşan, 2016). Theories such as critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), self-efficacy, and social learning (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b) are associated with poverty, false identity, and poor self-esteem that influence school success; these factors are linked to students who leave high school before graduating (Garrett-Peters et al., 2016; McKee & Caldarella, 2016). Race and gender stereotyping along with socioeconomic status falsely identify people of color which often leads to poor self-esteem and poor self-

regulating behaviors that contribute to school expulsion and withdrawal (Cambron et al., 2017; Crenshaw, 2017).

Family and school demographics are linked to student performance or school withdrawal (Branson et al., 2013; Cambron et al., 2017). This linkage is illustrated through the theoretical framework of *pushed, pulled, or fall* out that Jordan et al. (1994), and Watt and Roessingh (1994) developed. The premise of the framework is that the school is the agent of students being pushed out of school because of environmental factors and adverse situations, including attendance and discipline policies (Doll et al., 2013). Students pull themselves out of school because of family conditions and needs, illness, or financial concerns (Doll et al., 2013). Students fall out because of circumstances that may include poor academic progress and academic disengagement (Doll et al., 2013). Such circumstances as school demographics that do not encourage student engagement or illustrate the expectation for successful performance, and adverse childhood experiences, including physical abuse within the family, influence student behavior and self-esteem (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; Iachini et al., 2016).

The view that absenteeism and academic failure indicate the likelihood of students leaving school early prevails in the research literature (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Tanner-Smith & Wilson, 2013). After reviewing the literature, Ticuşan (2016) suggested that student absence and performance are related. Research findings illustrating the negative impact of irregular attendance and chronic absenteeism on academic performance support this observation (Rickinson et al., 2018). Ticuşan is among the researchers who identified the student, family, and teacher as causal factors to student performance and absence. The student as a factor related to absenteeism refers to the student's decision not to attend school regularly, an example of the pulled dropout concept (Doll et al., 2013). The literature reveals that such decisions made as

early as middle school result in the likelihood the student encounters academic problems in high school (Kieffer et al., 2014). Kieffer et al.'s (2014) study in which increased absenteeism in upper elementary and lower middle school levels predicted the on-track graduation indicator score for ninth grade, illustrated the relationship between absenteeism and performance, as measured by students being on track for graduating high school. The results revealed that greater declines were associated with the likelihood of those students being off track for graduating high school.

The role of teachers and school leaders as creators of the school's environment that supports positive teacher-student relationships is implicit in some studies reviewed. Students who feel teachers are not approachable or respond inappropriately to their questions often fail to acquire clarity on concepts, and thus, perform poorly (Ticuşan, 2016). Studies also present the argument that enhanced teacher knowledge of testing and student motivation factor in students' decisions about remaining in school. Meškauskienė and Guoba (2016) supported the view that teachers contribute to student performance through the type of assessments they use. Findings from their qualitative study revealed that informal assessments such as praise contributed to building self-esteem when directly related to a specific assignment (Meškauskienė & Guoba, 2016). Additional findings revealed meaningful formal assessments aided the student to self-assess progress on established standards. Meškauskienė and Guoba (2016) linked the nature of assessments with contributing to a student's positive or negative self-esteem, thus, performance, but cautioned that although forms of assessments motivate student learning, they can be disadvantageous if used inappropriately. Despite claims of possible causes for students exiting school early, many researchers (Branson et al., 2013; Campbell, 2015; Doll et al., 2013; Garrett-Peters et al., 2016) suggest that definitive causes are unknown and recommend that further

research should be conducted to acquire reasons from dropouts, returning completers, and students at-risk of dropping out.

The impact of dropouts on the economy and society in general is frequently discussed in terms of money lost because of the inability of many dropouts to secure jobs and to command an income that will substantially contribute to the U.S. economy (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). High school dropouts are likely to experience poor self-esteem and encounter personal and economic disadvantages (Meškauskienė & Guoba, 2016). Associated with inadequate employment is the inability of some dropouts to afford appropriate housing and healthcare; they may more frequently commit criminal acts than nondropouts and become victims of the prison system (Meškauskienė & Guoba, 2016; Zaff et al., 2016). The impact of dropouts is further seen in Zaff et al.'s (2016) conclusion that factors associated with dropouts such as low socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and gender, reflect the social, historical, and cultural contexts shaping the views of society about young people and views that young people have of themselves.

Interventions designed to deter dropouts vary in design and approaches. Some interventions focus on career or vocational training, teen pregnancy, mentoring and monitoring, academic skill training, and other need areas. Interventions also vary in structure, such as a school within a school arrangement, as in academies (Career Technical Education Consortium, CTEC, 2013); separate schools such as alternative schools that address behavioral and other needs (Wilson et al., 2011); and arrangements that represent a combination of the school, parent, and community in the delivery of services as in the ALAS Dropout Prevention model (Raise Inspired Kids, 2010). Governmental agencies may also mandate interventions for public schools, while others are supported through grants and foundations.

Statement of the Problem

Low high school graduation and high dropout rates remain issues in the United States that attract the attention of researchers and policymakers evidenced in many publications (Meškauskienė & Guoba, 2016; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). Researchers are among individuals who describe school dropout as a pervasive economic, social, and personal issue in secondary schools (McKee & Caldarella, 2016) that presents disadvantages for the economy and for dropouts (Latif et al., 2015).

This problem is important and relevant due to the personal, social, and economic effects of dropping out on the learner as well as the community. Dropouts add to low rates of literacy, thereby affecting the productivity of communities (Latif et al., 2015). Additionally, high school dropout rates negatively impact local and national economies through the loss of income from individuals who are inadequately prepared for the job market (Latif et al., 2015; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics , 2017).

However, continuing differences in rates among ethnic groups imply the following: (a) the need to consider factors associated with dropping out, and (b) leaders' responses for creating knowledge-based prevention strategies (Campbell, 2015). Factors inherent in critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and social learning theories (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b), as well as a framework for dropout factors (Jordan et al., 1994; Watt & Roessingh, 1994), include poor academic performance, attendance, poverty, and low self-esteem, and indicate the likelihood of students leaving school early (Meškauskienė & Guoba, 2016; Ticuşan, 2016; Zaff et al., 2016). Identifying effective interventions is supported through recommendations to investigate students' social and emotional learning competencies (McKee & Caldarella, 2016; Zaff et al., 2016) for closing the gap regarding precise causes of dropping out, understanding the influences of

dropping out on student outcomes, and designing interventions that consider students' characteristics (Campbell, 2015).

In practice, dropout prevention programs have primarily incorporated support groups and counseling with less than half of them incorporating academic support groups (Knesting-Lund et al., 2013). Additional information and research are needed about effective preventive strategies and leadership models to reduce personal and economic disadvantages associated with school dropouts. Therefore, factors influencing dropout rates including contextual factors in a community (Chen, 2015, p. 27) are important to leaders in guiding prevention efforts.

The Southeast School District (SSD), the site of the two schools in this study, is a large urban school district in Texas and is among the largest school districts in the United States. The dropout problem in the district was especially evident among students of color where they represented the highest rate of dropouts among major ethnic groups.

The problem investigated was that dropout research on student subgroups often fails to link characteristics of students with effective dropout interventions (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015); therefore, a need existed for an evaluation of dropout interventions and leadership practices for students placed at-risk of dropping out of high school districts in Texas to determine the effectiveness of dropout programs for this population. The average state-wide dropout rate for students of color (specifically African Americans and Hispanics) for the 2017 cohort year was 8.0% compared to 3.2% for White students, according to the Texas Education Agency (2019c). The dropout rate in the Southeast School District in Texas has declined since 2007 where the dropout rate for the 2017 term was 14.8% for African Americans compared with 12.3% for their White counterparts (Texas Education Agency, 2017c).

Recommendations for addressing the problem focus on factors contributing to students leaving school. The problem in SSD was ameliorated in part through efforts of district personnel canvassing neighborhoods to identify students for reentry every year. In the study, I addressed components and goals of their dropout prevention programs that linked to students' dropout factors and solutions.

Purpose of the Study

This research study was an examination of intervention and leadership practices used in two high schools' dropout prevention programs, the central phenomenon, in an urban metropolitan school district in Texas designed to address factors associated with students placed at risk. The purpose of the research was to compare dropout rates within and between the two programs 6 years before and after dropout intervention strategies and to compare teachers' responses on four constructs of servant leadership practices across the two schools based on the influence of their supervisors. The intent was to determine which dropout factors were targeted in both programs, whether practices associated with elements of servant leadership differed among the two schools and evaluate whether there was a significant difference in dropout rates between the two programs, which may suggest one program was more effective in reducing dropout rates.

These two schools were chosen because of differences in their performance ratings by graduation years for the 2017–2018 school term, and for similarities in their status on meeting the state's standards. According to school profile data (Texas Education Agency, 2019b), the dropout percentage rate for School AM ranged from a low of 9.4 to a high of 19.2; the at-risk percentage ranged from 75 to 89, and 88.1% was the highest 4-year graduation rate. The majority school population was Hispanic. The dropout percentage rate for School BW ranged from 22.4–

8.2; the at-risk percentage ranged from 81 to 89, and 70.1% was the highest 4-year graduation rate (Texas Education Agency, 2019b). The majority of the school population was African American; however, both schools were listed as needing improvement on the state's accountability standards during three school years: 2012–2013, 2014–2015, and 2015–2016. The gap between the two schools was narrower during the 2016–2017 school year, suggesting that the study could reveal practices that may be useful for these schools and others in the district.

A mixed-methods design (Mertens, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019; Terrell, 2016) constituted the basic research paradigm; however, multiple approaches were used for the qualitative and quantitative components of the study. The explanatory-sequential, mixed-methods approach of this study required data for the quantitative research question to be collected first. Therefore, I gathered dropout rates and responses to the servant leadership survey (Appendix A), then followed with the collection of qualitative data as informed by the quantitative findings per research methodologists (Mertens, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019). Qualitative data was gathered by conducting interviews and examinations of program documents. The quantitative component utilized a causal-comparative approach in nature (Mertens, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019) to examine trends in dropout rates 6 years before and after instituting the national dropout prevention strategies. Nonparametric testing determined differences in leadership practices between the two schools. The phenomenology approach (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994) constituted the qualitative design component and included phenomenological analysis of interview and program review data.

Research Questions

The research addressed the following qualitative research questions (RQs 1–3) and quantitative (RQs 4–5) research question and hypotheses:

RQ1: What features of the dropout prevention programs do participants perceive as appropriate for addressing factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school and that will increase completion rates?

RQ2: What leadership practices do participants identify that target factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school?

RQ3: What do teachers and leaders perceive as their role in intervention efforts?

RQ4: Is there a difference in levels of empowerment, stewardship, authenticity, and standing back between teachers in School AM and School BW as measured by the servant leadership survey?

RQ5: Is there a difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies?

$H_{1:}$ There is a difference between dropout rates of schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies.

$H_{0:}$ There is no difference between dropout rates of schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies.

A Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate differences in the dropout rates (dependent variable) based on time (independent variable) for research question five. Measures tested for the fifth research question also determined program effectiveness.

Delimitations

According to Simon (2011), limitations are features or events that place constraints on the study, but delimitations are the parameters that the researcher sets for the study. The study compared the dropout prevention programs in two high schools in one large district to determine their effectiveness in reducing dropout rates based on their dropout rates over time. The study was not designed to compare the performance of other dropout prevention programs within the district. Data for the study only included 12 years (2006–2018) of dropout rates and self-reports of a purposive sample of teachers and administrators affiliated with the programs. Criteria for participation included: (a) personnel must have worked two years in the program, (b) the program had been in existence for at least five years, and (c) the school's student population consisted of a large percentage of African Americans and Hispanics from low socioeconomic status homes. The quantitative component of the study used a causal-comparative design, which permitted the implications of possible causal relationships between time periods and dropout rates. The study consisted of an inquiry of program features and leadership practices with an emphasis on servant leadership that targeted factors placing students at risk of dropping out; the parameters of the study did not extend to the general population of students enrolled in the schools.

Rationale for the Study

A number of interventions are designed to deter high rates of dropouts. Contributions to the literature focused on dropout and prevention (Knesting-Lund et al., 2013) that support the need for research involving different audiences including teachers and students. Researchers also recommend conducting studies that capture best practices for addressing the complexity of

factors that place students at risk of failure (Chappell et al., 2015; McKee & Caldarella, 2016; Ticuşan, 2016).

The district in this study, SSD, did not meet the description as having dropout factories or "low-graduation-rate high schools – those graduating 67 percent or less of students" (DePaoli et al., 2016, p. 10). However, compelling reasons for studying intervention program practices in two of the district's largest high schools included that they had high percentages of students of color, there remained negative consequences of school dropouts, and the literature revealed that although progress was being made, there were few proven strategies for correcting the dropout problem (Chappell et al., 2015). Further, the schools targeted for participation may benefit from the examination of their interventions through identifying areas that may better assist students placed at risk of dropping out as they had not met the state's accountability standards for all age groups they served (Texas Education Agency, 2019c). Such benefits may have implications for the district's long-range planning and professional development aimed at closing the dropout gap among students served. The rationale for the study included references to high percentages of students of color in the district and the targeted schools whose dropout rates were higher than other ethnic groups; therefore, illustrating a need to examine practices for closing the gap in dropout rates.

Definition of Key Terms

Annual dropout rate. According to the Texas Education Agency, this term "is the number of Grade 9–12 students who dropped out in a school year divided by the cumulative number of Grade 9–12 students enrolled at any time during the school year" (Texas Education Agency, 2017b, p. 90). The annual dropout rate is "the percentage of students who drop out of school during a school year [if an individual] is at least 18 years of age as of September 1 and

has satisfied the credit requirements for high school graduation; has not completed his or her individualized education program (IEP); and is enrolled and receiving IEP services" (Texas Education Agency, 2020a, p. 8), is among criteria that prohibit including the individual in calculations of dropout rates. The formula for calculating annual dropout rates is dividing "the number of dropouts in grades 9–12 during the 2012–19 school year" by the "number of students in grades 9–12 in attendance at any time during the 2018–19 school year" (Texas Education Agency, 2020a, p. 9).

Dropout. This term refers to "a student enrolled in public school in Grades 9–12, does not return to public school the following fall, is not expelled, and does not: graduate, receive a (GED), continue school outside the public school system, begin college, or die" (Texas Education Agency, 2017b, p. 90).

Dropout rate. According to the federal government, the dropout rate for high school is based on percentages of non-enrolled students who have not graduated and are between 16 and 24 years of age (McFarland et al., 2017).

Education service center regions (ESC Regions). These designations refer to 20 geographical regions in Texas with centers that serve school districts. The site of this study is located in Houston and is served by Region 4 ESC (Texas Education Agency, 2017b).

Falling out factors. These types of factors are influences that contribute to school dropouts, such as insufficient support, whereby the student becomes disengaged with school (Watt & Roessingh, 1994).

Formal dropout prevention program. In this study, a formal program is one in which procedures are established for providing forms of interventions aimed at student improvement to

deter them from exiting high school without a diploma and for reentry of dropouts to complete high school.

Interventions. These are planned strategies designed to help students improve and stay in school until graduation (Burrus & Roberts, 2012).

Longitudinal dropout rate. In the Texas Education Agency this rate "is the number of students from a class of beginning ninth graders who dropped out divided by the number of students who graduated, continued in high school, received General Educational Development (GED) certificates, or dropped out" (Texas Education Agency, 2017b, p. 90).

Pull factors. Out-of-school influences that are student controlled such as employment and family-related conditions represent pull factors. They include illness, marriage, and pregnancy which previously ranked highest among the factors: push, pull, falling out (Doll et al., 2013; Jordan et al., 1994).

Push factors. These factors are school-related influences contributing to school dropouts where the school is the deciding agent to remove the student for reasons such as attendance, discipline, or in-school problem behaviors; these factors currently represent the overall highest of the three: push, pull, falling out (Doll et al., 2013; Jordan et al., 1994).

Summary

The literature reveals high rates of school dropouts are associated with low socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and gender. The literature also reveals the need to identify reasons students drop out from students at risk of dropping out, dropouts, and leadership personnel in efforts to plan more effective preventive measures. According to Zaff et al. (2016), there is a need for additional understanding of characteristics of dropouts as "fewer studies fully address the multilayered ecology within which the youth are embedded, including their social

context, and the historical and cultural contexts that shape how society views young people and how young people view themselves" (p. 29). Although definitions of dropouts and contributing factors vary, there remains a concern for students to complete high school. An examination of intervention programs was significant for determining the effectiveness of the content and how the intervention was implemented (Knesting-Lund et al., 2013).

As an introduction to the study, this chapter included the problem and purpose of this examination of dropout prevention programs in two schools in a large urban school district in Texas. As the researcher, I used mixed methods to seek answers to five research questions and two associated hypotheses to determine the effectiveness of the programs in reducing dropout rates. Chapter 2 to follow contains a synthesis of literature supporting the need for the study and the combined conceptual and theoretical framework upon which the study was founded. The procedures for conducting the study are presented in Chapter 3. The results of the study appear in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 includes implications from the results and recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Findings in the dropout research on student subgroups reveal there is often a failure to link characteristics of students with effective dropout interventions (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). The average state-wide dropout rate for students of color in Texas, the site of the study, was observably higher than for White students (Texas Education Agency, 2019c). Therefore, a study of the interventions for students placed at risk of dropping out of high school examined features of dropout programs for this population. An examination of program and leadership practices employed in two high schools' dropout prevention programs in an urban metropolitan school district in Southeast Texas identified practices designed to address characteristics of students placed at risk and compared the effectiveness of programs' outcomes based on dropout rate data for 12 years.

This chapter is a synthesis of published research and practices that supported the need for evaluations of high school dropout prevention programs. In this chapter, discussions address the complexities associated with identifying influences on the secondary learner's decision to leave school early and attempts of school leaders to decrease instances of dropping out. The review illustrates the problem that high rates of high school dropouts present for the dropout and the society at large.

Literature Search Methods

This literature review contains select peer-reviewed and other scholarly publications that describe best practices in addressing the dropout problem and the gap between dropout factors and prevention programs. The retrieval sources included the Abilene University Library, the Internet, and such databases as ERIC, EBSCO, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, and ScienceDirect. Key terms for the search included *high school dropout*, *dropout*

prevention and intervention, *dropout programs*, *dropout factors*, *at-risk students*, and *leadership practices*.

Literature Review

A logical discussion following interventions and the role of leadership is the result of these interventions that focus on dropout program evaluations. This overview provides the beginning story of perceptions of the dropout and the impact on society. The topic of dropout factors begins to conceptualize the dropout problem by providing categories of reasons why students drop out of high school (Adam et al., 2016; Burrus & Roberts, 2012; Tomaszewska-Pękała et al., 2019). These reasons include descriptions of *push, pull, and fallout influences* that focus on the individual and school as agents of dropping out (Doll et al., 2013).

Conceptualization of the problem continues with discussions of efforts to intervene in the progression of students dropping out. Interventions consider program and leadership practices that address different factors associated with high rates of students dropping out of high school with implications that characteristics of servant leadership are associated with motivating students to remain in school. A logical discussion following interventions and the role of leadership is the result of these interventions that the focus of dropout program evaluations. The review then illustrates the link between identified dropout factors and the study's conceptual framework, self-efficacy according to Bandura (1977a), combined with the concept of servant leadership. The review is intended to illustrate the importance of intervention programs and leadership linked to dropout factors and characteristics of high school students at risk of dropping out.

The Dropout Profile: Historical and Current Representations

This discussion illustrates how beginning conversations of the term dropout continue to influence society and responses to the dropout problem on local, state, and national levels. Conversations regarding the importance of education in the United States have included different perspectives at different periods of time. These conversations have not always addressed issues of high school completion, school attendance, or dropouts. Conversations focused on school attendance and high school completion and such issues as technology, the labor market, and child labor laws influenced the conversations (Cervantes, 2016; Chappell et al., 2015).

A historical review of secondary education in the United States links the term *dropout* with changes in society's views regarding who should attend school. According to Cervantes (2016), as society began to view that attending high school was not just for a select population, the eligibility criteria for high school attendance were expanded and became the norm during the 1960s. Along with the expectation for more students to attend high school came the expectation for them to graduate in preparation for the job market (Cervantes, 2016; Chappell et al., 2015). Students who did not graduate were viewed as a threat to society, as unemployed, unconstructive citizens. Historically, students who did not graduate were stigmatized with the term dropout and for some researchers, the term was synonymous with a delinquent, economic liability, potential communist, gangster, hoodlum, and drug addict (Cervantes, 2016).

These early descriptors suggested the sole ownership of dropping out was that of the student. Interventions during the early 1960s did not consider factors beyond student characteristics. Therefore, interventions during the early 1960s featured counseling and preparing students for a job (Cervantes, 2016). However, emphasis on dropout prevention appeared to decrease during the late 1960s, but attention to the dropout issue reappeared nationally with

Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) that emphasized reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates. Emphasis on the school dropout continued with the publication of A Nation Accountable (USDE, 2008). Publications in the late 1990s and beyond appeared to relay that several factors contribute to students dropping out, including the school.

Current perspectives place some of the onus for students dropping out of school on the school, which is explicit in the term *dropout factories*. The expression, "low-graduation-rate high schools – those graduating 67 percent or less of students," is now used to describe dropout factories where ethnic minorities represent high percentages of dropouts (DePaoli et al., 2016, p. 10). Dropout factories, according to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2012), are products of poverty with a disproportionate enrollment of students of color versus White students. Their location reflects conditions of poor neighborhoods including high rates of unemployment and criminal activities (APA, 2012). These factories contribute to school dropout being considered a pervasive economic, social, and personal issue in secondary schools (McKee & Caldarella, 2016).

High rates of school dropouts are associated with low socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and gender (Meškauskienė & Guoba, 2016; Zaff et al., 2016). In view of the dropout issue and dropout factories, President Obama (2009) noted the need for innovative ideas and strategies as part of corrective measures and ways for "put[ting] those young men and women who have left school back on a pathway to graduation" (para. 36). Implicit in these ways are leadership practices for schools and intervention programs. Implicit also is that knowledge of the multiple factors contributing to school dropouts should guide efforts to create effective interventions.

Dropout Factors

Factors that contribute to high school students dropping out are explained in relation to the traits of these students. The need to understand the characteristics of students who are at-risk of dropping out of school and those who actually drop out has been explored in relation to best practices designed to reduce these chances. According to Zaff et al. (2016), limited studies fully explore the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which these students are defined. Despite the limited exploration of these categories of factors, researchers typically identify demographic and performance risk factors that contribute to school disengagement such as attendance, grades, motivation, personality, poverty, race, and other individual demographics (Burrus & Roberts, 2012; Thornton et al., 2013; Tomaszewska-Pękała et al., 2019). Also included in these factors are readiness, academic failure, anti-social behavior, social inequity, school dropout, and cultural discontinuity (Tomaszewska-Pękała et al., 2019).

The results of some empirical studies have implications for the content and evaluation of dropout prevention programs and strategies. Empirical studies on school dropout have a long-standing history of examining the effects of different variables on student performance and have identified statistically significant relationships between certain variables, such as test scores and students dropping out of school (Rickinson et al., 2018). Some reference sources reported in this section are predictive studies based on trend data involving large populations, and they identify influences leading to the likelihood of students remaining or dropping out of school. Therefore, they also identify factors that are addressed in some programs such as poverty, race, ethnicity, familial, socioeconomic, and other demographics; behavioral; and school factors.

Poverty. Poverty is consistently referred to as the leading economic and social issue contributing to school dropouts and as a predictor of school dropout (Franklin & Trouard, 2016;

Latif et al., 2015; Robison et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2017). The issue is not just limited to the United States but is among factors contributing to school dropout rates in rural Ghana along with child labor and teenage pregnancy (Adam et al., 2016). Although poverty is generally associated with income status that limits the affordability of essential resources, in 2017, the U.S. government defined poverty according to the criterion of a single resident, head of household under age 65 with an income below $12,752 (U.S. Census, 2018). People of color represented the highest percentages of ethnicities in this low-income status in 2017 which also is a continuing trend in 2019 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019; Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2017). Latif et al. (2015) identified financial problems and lack of basic facilities as economic issues and noted negative effects of student dropouts on the economy.

The demographics of poverty, familial, and socioeconomics as factors appear as interlinking predictors of students dropping out. Robison et al. (2017) and Wood et al. (2017) measured socioeconomic status according to students' eligibility for free lunch, parents' education and employment, and associated poverty with socioeconomic status. Some researchers agree that poverty follows academic failure and student behavior in predicting the likelihood of students dropping out (Robison et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2017). However, somewhat contrary to the above findings, Franklin and Trouard (2016) found that poverty was the second-highest predictor of high school completion among such factors as poverty, students' age, gender, attendance, and test score performance. Parental involvement in school was another familial factor predicting school dropout (Parr & Bonitz, 2015).

Poverty is also linked to students' behavioral problems and learning difficulties (Jensen, 2013; Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Students from impoverished homes are likely to display behaviors associated with chronic distress such as anger and assertive behavior (Jensen, 2013).

Additionally, poverty is linked to student achievement with income and the mother's level of education being contributing factors (Jensen, 2013). These linkages are basically attributed to the absence or limited availability of resources that have been found to promote student success. In addition to financial support for basic needs and educational materials, a student's success requires other forms of resources. Lacour and Tissington (2011) identified support systems such as relationships and role models, and resources in the form of emotional, mental, and spiritual among the types of support that students need. According to Jensen (2013), poverty and the lack of limited resources contribute to differences in students' health and nutrition, vocabulary size, motivation, attention, and attitudes about learning.

Although poverty rates are reducing, income inequality persists and is increasing (Glenn et al., 2016). Researchers refer to poverty as an achievement gap and recommend strategies that can assist in closing the gap through instructional practices; partnerships involving parents, the school, and community; and governmental assistance (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Intervention efforts reflecting knowledge that poverty as a divide leads to poor academic success and social instability may adhere to suggestions that intervention leaders build alliances and partnerships with stakeholders to address such challenges (Goldsmith, 2014; Jensen, 2013; Lacour & Tissington, 2011). In sum, the challenges require the collaborative efforts of families, communities, schools, and organizations. As people of color comprise high percentages of the impoverished, interventions at all levels of government may be warranted (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019; Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

Race and Ethnicity. The literature reveals variations in dropout rates among cultural groups. McFarland et al. (2019) reported that for 2017, the highest school dropout rates ranged from 10.1% to 8.2% for American Indian/Alaska Natives and Hispanics respectively, with 6.5%

for African Americans; the lowest rates were for White (4.3%) and Asian (2.1%) youth. The percentages for Black, Hispanic, and White youth represented decreased rates from 2006 by 5.0%, 12.8%, and 2.1%, respectively (McFarland et al., 2019). The decreasing trend of dropout rates among Black, Hispanic, and White youth from 2006 to 2017 also reveals a closure in the gap of dropout rates among these ethnic groups. The gap between Hispanic and White youth decreased by 10.7 points, between Black and White youth by 3.0 points, and between African American and Hispanic youth by 7.8 points; however, the dropout rates for Hispanics remain higher than those of Blacks, and both these ethnicities have higher dropout rates than Whites (McFarland et al., 2019).

Ethnicity and race factors that contribute to dropout rates for students of color include difficulties with the English language, employment required to assist with socioeconomically disadvantaged families, cultural differences, and low expectations of family and peers (Chappell et al., 2015). These factors coincide with some of the categories that APA (2012) identified, namely "individuals (e.g., truancy, poor school attitude), families (e.g., low-income, lack of parental involvement), schools (e.g., negative school climate, low expectations), and communities (e.g., high crime, lack of community support for schools)" (p. 2). In the context of these categories, the ethnic and race factors are associated with family background and employment status, parent training, immigration into a different dominant culture, teacher support, school disciplinary policies, and students' attitudes about schooling (APA, 2012).

Ethnicity, race, and *poverty* factors are interrelated with economic issues affecting school dropouts. Higher percentages of high school dropouts are among students of color, specifically Blacks and Hispanics who often reside in low-income or poverty neighborhoods (Latif et al., 2015). Research reveals that these neighborhoods include schools with low graduation and high

dropout rates, and compared to more affluent neighborhoods, have an imbalance in resources including high-quality teachers and experienced administrators (APA, 2012; Chappell et al., 2015). Additionally, the absence of a sense of school belongingness, feelings of nonsupport, and lack of academic motivation of Black and Hispanic students in some school settings suggest that devaluing education and a tendency to drop out are greater than their White peers (APA, 2012; Chappell et al., 2015). Associated with economic issues is that differences in educational preparation and attainment promote inequalities among diverse racial and ethnic groups in the workplace (Mor Barak, 2016). Creating alternative strategies to provide more educational opportunities for would-be-dropouts that will enable them to compete in a diverse workforce is among the challenges presented for this issue. As leaders create and pilot strategies to increase graduation rates, globalization challenges graduates to adapt to changes in the workforce, including language barriers among diverse cultures, a larger population of women workers, and increases in workers 65 years of age and older (Gratton, 2016; Mor Barak, 2016).

Gender. Early research on high school dropouts revealed that prior to 1980, females more frequently dropped out of school than males (Child Trends, 2015; Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015). In a review of the literature regarding factors contributing to females dropping out, Shahidul and Zehadul Karim (2015) categorized these factors as (a) economic, (b) household, (c) school, and (d) cultural. These factors were associated with circumstances females face such as teenage pregnancy, being employed at an earlier age than males, having to complete household chores, and caring for younger siblings when the mother worked outside the home (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015). Gender inequality in schools is also cited as a factor that leads to poor performance and eventually to females dropping out of school. Gender inequality refers to stereotyping and inadequate resources that dictate the female's role and force limitations

on participation in some content areas and extracurricular activities (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015). Gender stereotyping has recently focused on girls of color and the school as an agent in promoting conditions that likely lead to dropouts. Some researchers suggest that these females have been inappropriately labeled as displaying adult-like behaviors; therefore, nurturing and protecting them are not perceived as important or needed (Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019). The inattentiveness to these females, imposed disciplinary policies, and other school and familial conditions contribute to their poor academic performance, school expulsion, and early exit from school (Epstein et al., 2017).

Although dropout rates for females were once higher than those of males, the trend has shifted to where percentages of male dropouts exceed those of females. The McFarland et al. (2019) data revealed that the overall male dropout rate in 2017 was 2% higher than the female dropout rate and the male rate exceeded that of females in every race and ethnic group except Asian and Pacific Islander. The comparison for race and ethnicity revealed that the percentage for Black males was 8.0, while the percentage for females was nearly 5%; Hispanic females represented a percentage of 6.4, while the percentage for males was 10.0; the percentage was 11.6 for American Indian/Alaska Native males compared to 8.5 for females; and the lowest dropout percentage was for White males at 4.9 versus 3.6 for White females (McFarland et al., 2019).

A greater risk of leaving school early occurs for males from low-income families of color whose age is higher than the average for their grade placement than males without these characteristics (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). Poor grades, rates of studying, and low attendance have been identified as among the leading negative performance factors for males as opposed to females (Burrus & Roberts, 2012; Chappell et al., 2015). Performance factors influencing

dropout rates were also linked to school characteristics and suspension. In their meta-analysis focused on school suspension and student outcomes, Noltemeyer and Ward (2015) reported that males, and particularly Black economically disadvantaged males, received school suspension more frequently than other students. The meta-analysis also revealed that heavily populated schools with economically disadvantaged students also had high suspensions (Noltemeyer & Ward, 2015).

Orientation. Sexual orientation is associated with school dropouts, the school climate, and peer behaviors (APA, 2012). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students (LGBT) students are frequently the targets of bullying and harassment, which results in the students feeling unsafe (APA, 2012). Research reveals that these students are frequently absent from school, have lower performance grades than their peers, and are disengaged in the school setting (APA, 2012).

Absenteeism and Grades. The literature illustrates a linkage between school attendance, grades, graduation, and future success (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Nolan et al., 2013; Thornton et al., 2013). Irregular attendance and chronic absenteeism have been identified as factors contributing to behaviors that lead to students dropping out of school (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Tanner-Smith & Wilson, 2013). The reasons for school absence vary and some are directly linked to gender differences where females, for instance, are frequently absent because they may take on the role of caring for siblings or their own children as teenage parents (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015).

Researchers identified major categories of causes for absenteeism that lead to school dropouts in a case study (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015). These categories were family, teacher behaviors, the school setting, the student, and the environment. Family-related causes

included economic conditions that required students to work, parents' level of education, parents' failure to recognize its importance, family chaos including divorce, and the lack of parent participation in the school (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015). Specific causes in the other categories were linked to the lack of a positive student-teacher relationship, nonmotivating classroom environment, the inability of students to complete homework assignments, lack of peer socialization, transportation problems, illness, and disabilities (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015).

Absenteeism and poor grades are associated with school expulsion and suspension. Students who are excluded from instruction through disciplinary measures, such as forms of suspension and expulsion, suffer in their academic performance (Noltemeyer & Ward, 2015). Absenteeism is a prevailing issue among schools in the district included in this study. In 2008, SSD instituted a Dropout Recovery Project and an investigating firm identified dropouts in the Northern and Southern Regions; 38 dropouts from 10 schools in the Northern Region reportedly stopped attending for several reasons to include working, incarceration, and pregnancy (NCA Investigations, 2008). The district continues recruitment efforts before the end of October in its recovery effort, Grads Within Reach, a door-by-door campaign of neighborhoods where dropouts and parents receive information that enables students to reenroll (NCA Investigations, 2008). In addition to absenteeism and grades, the literature links self-esteem, family demographics, and school demographics to student performance or withdrawal, and call for additional research of these dropout indicators (Cambron et al., 2017).

Motivation and Personality. Motivation and personality are additional factors influencing students' decision to leave school. The research on student motivation is voluminous. Numerous publications and theories offer explanations of what motivates student learning. A

combination of cognitive and social theories suggests that motivation does not rely solely on external forces nor individual traits such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b). Rather, motivation can result from multiple sources and influences including the intrinsic need to feel self-determined (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Research reveals that the context of experiences can be a source of motivation which involves the beliefs and attitudes the student has about a specific subject (McCann & Lawrence, 2015). Associated with beliefs, researchers observed that students' self-set goals increased intrinsic motivation (Seo et al., 2017).

Researchers acknowledge that students are often unable to bring self-set goals to fruition and require external motivation and support (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017; Seo et al., 2017). Gbollie and Keamu (2017) found the combination of beliefs and learning strategies, along with the subject, determined whether Liberian high school students were motivated to learn. Motivation was enhanced through rewards or penalties and performance increased through such strategies as practice and use of organizational skills. However, for support, students were less likely to seek assistance from teachers or their peers.

Motivation and personality are referred to as psychosocial factors. Burrus and Roberts (2012) reported elements that students identified as associated with these psychosocial factors in two categories: about self and about others. The self-factors were lack of interest in class, not being engaged in-school activities, difficulties with tests, and poor attendance. Factors beyond the students' control or imposed upon them included lack of parental involvement, disinterested teachers, and low-performance expectations of adults. These self-identified factors, such as lack of interest for both student and teacher, are supported in conclusions cited in the literature that high school students become dissatisfied with education over time, which may begin during middle school (Deyé et al., 2010).

Support regarding factors about self and about others is also visible in the literature in recent studies. Categories of factors emerging from one study included the family (Gil et al., 2018). Categories resulted from views of high school classroom teachers and teachers serving in school management roles regarding factors affecting secondary students dropping out of school (Gil et al., 2018). From these categories, teachers cited commitment and support for students as the most influential factors for students dropping out (Gil et al., 2018).

As noted earlier, subject matter interest is a motivator for learning. Some subjects are viewed as more motivating as a factor of gender, such as mathematics, science, and language. This view is associated with the observation of male dominance in mathematics related careers (McCann & Lawrence, 2015). This view also presents questions for the nature of content and strategies included in interventions for students at risk of dropping out of school. McCann and Lawrence (2015) recognized the importance of mathematics knowledge for students to succeed in their courses and society and for teachers to be better prepared for teaching high school students through knowledge of students' motivation for learning mathematics. McCann and Lawrence suggested that many educational studies related to performance in mathematics have focused on grades and academic outcomes with little attention devoted to learner variables and their relationship with motivation and learning strategies.

Given the gap in the literature in examining learner variables and student motivation in mathematics, McCann and Lawrence (2015) investigated the relationship between age, sex, and ethnicity with student motivation and learning strategies among ninth-grade students. Findings revealed that age, sex, and ethnicity were related to motivation and learning strategies. Specifically, students who were age 14 and over earned higher mean scores on the motivation for learning scale and strategies for learning. In terms of gender, the overall mean scores for

motivation were the same for males and females; however, there were differences in individual items. Higher mean scores were documented for females on the motivation subscales for self-efficacy and test anxiety, as well as the learning strategies subscale. McCann and Lawrence (2015) concluded that females exhibited more confidence than males regarding math tasks and used learning strategies for completing math tasks more frequently than males.

According to APA (2012), Black students are more at risk than other ethnic groups for experiencing suspensions or other disciplinary measures because of racial stereotyping and limited teacher competencies in cultural diversity and classroom management. By ninth grade, these and other experiences contribute to students being labeled as disruptive and a misfit to the school, becoming disengaged in the academic setting, making poor academic progress, and dropping out of school (APA, 2012). Tomaszewska-Pękała et al. (2019) noted that a cycle of school disengagement results when students are not provided appropriate support. Measurable negative behaviors, which include disengagement, absenteeism, aggression, antisocial behavior, and actions involving the juvenile justice system are cited as the most consistent predictor of nonhigh school completion in several studies (Lovelace et al., 2018; Orpinas et al., 2018; Robison et al., 2017). According to Robison et al. (2017), the chance of an average performing student dropping out who has been expelled is 4% higher than an average student who has not been expelled; the chance of graduating on time for these comparative students is 28% versus 57%. Predictive studies show that these negative behaviors, particularly disengagement, begin before high school years but are not as severe before high school (Lovelace et al., 2018).

School Influences. The structure of the school can also pose a challenge for dropout prevention initiatives. Gang violence and other disruptive behaviors are associated with large middle and high schools (NEA, 2009). The reorganization of middle schools with smaller K-8

schools and high schools with small schools within the high school results in smaller classes and increased student engagement (NEA, 2009). These changes in school organization suggest opportunities for collaborative activities among students and the potential for teachers to gain deeper perspectives on the students they teach. Similarly, these changes suggest program leaders must adapt services based on the changing context of the school, and also enhance the knowledge base of staff to respond to the new choice's students may be presented in the changing curriculum (Gratton, 2016). Given the future workforce that Gratton (2016) described, prevention programs focused on preparing at-risk students for employment have to be positioned to respond to the focus of specialized subject areas, the associated skill sets required to advance student knowledge, and any regulatory policies governing these changes.

School resources and their uses influence classroom initiatives designed to address school dropout factors. Technological advances present challenges in creating preventive initiatives. Although technology provides struggling students an alternative method of learning and preparation for the workforce, schools experience difficulties keeping up with technological advances (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2019). Initiatives focused on preparing students at-risk for the 2025 workforce should also prepare the organization for increasing advances in technology, including cloud technology and artificial intelligence (Gratton, 2016). Among challenges is responding to the view that technology drives organizational change (Morgan, 2016). Opportunities for decreasing school dropout rates include school leaders building connections with staff to enhance awareness of how technology can change ways of sharing information, collaborating, and teaching, and how these changes support student learning (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2019).

Subject matter content is a factor associated with dropout in the category of school influences alluded to previously in the discussion of student motivation. High levels of performance in mathematics and English for students in grades 10 through 12 is a predictor that these 10th grade high performers are more likely to remain in school through 12th grade (Parr & Bonitz, 2015). Similarly, literacy in reading and mathematics and performance in study skills are predictors for high school completion (Bowers et al., 2013; Franklin & Trouard, 2016; Orpinas et al., 2018; Robison et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2017). Therefore, school practices that provide technological and other support through the curriculum for these content areas may help in reducing dropout rates.

Strategies and intervention programs have been implemented and other practices have been proposed for responding to school and other factors influencing student dropout. Some interventions at local and national levels have reported success**.** Although previous evaluations have identified factors that contribute to dropout rates, these studies provided limited scientific evidence of specific programs or strategies that are best for decreasing dropout rates (Chappell et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2011). The results of a meta-analysis of dropout prevention outcomes and strategies provided empirical evidence of the impact of eight strategies on dropout rates (Chappell et al., 2015). The following section is a synthesis of the literature on early and current intervention practices. The review contains examples of practices focused on some factors associated with students' decisions to leave school early.

Intervention Practices: National and Local

Practices in response to the high school dropout problem vary. Some features of early intervention programs created because of high rates of non-completers (e.g., skill and employability training) are also apparent in current interventions. However, some programs and

strategies that focused on school dropouts prior to the 1960s were not designed as interventions to deter students from dropping out but rather to prepare dropouts for employability and receipt of a high school diploma. Examples of these employability programs were skill training initiatives such as the Job Upgrading Programs in Detroit, Michigan, and school-based programs where instruction was provided in the evenings and at worksites that prepared workers to receive a high school diploma (Meyerhoff, 2019). Historical accounts of organized efforts in the United States explicitly identified for assisting students to complete high school show these efforts expanded with the coinage of the term dropout during the late 1950s and early 1960s (Cervantes, 2016).

These efforts as described in a historical review (Meyerhoff, 2019) mainly targeted Black students and included the Higher Horizons Program in New York City, which began in 1958 and serviced third through junior high school grades in a low socioeconomic neighborhood. The program offered students remedial instruction, counseling services, and cultural enrichment experiences; parents were also involved in workshops and other program features. Successes were seen in increases in students' IQ scores and performance grades and decreases in dropout rates which were appreciably lower than nonparticipants (Meyerhoff, 2019). Strategies were enhanced through the provision of guidance counselors in schools that were supported in part from a financial award from the Presidential Emergency Fund under the administration of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, who announced to the nation that school dropout was a serious problem (Meyerhoff, 2019). Guidance counselors assisted with recovering dropouts to complete school.

Other efforts directed to disadvantaged groups and designed to increase their interests in school were Project ABLE in New York with similar projects in other states including

California, and early childhood programs such as Project HELP in Baltimore, Maryland, whose objectives included providing early learners with experiences to promote language development, to reinforce self-concept, and to inspire curiosity (Meyerhoff, 2019). The National Education Association's Project on School Dropouts began in 1961 (Meyerhoff, 2019). According to Schreiber (1967), the project responded to the projection of large numbers of students who would not complete high school annually. Schreiber (1967) described this situation as unaffordable and dropouts as youths who would "become unwanted and unemployed" (p. 6).

Since the 1960s, dropout prevention programs have varied in their presence and foci. Also, creating programs to successfully address the dropout problem has been challenging. These challenges are consistent with issues that the America's Promise Organization (Civic Enterprises, 2017), the National Education Association (Garrison et al., 2009), and dropout prevention organizations identified as leading influences contributing to high school dropouts: economics, race/ethnicity, technology, and school organization.

National Programs and Strategies. Dropout prevention programs vary in their structure and approaches. Some programs are required through state legislation governing local education agencies. According to Jobs for the Future (2013), by 2002 dropout prevention efforts were supported through legislation in 36 states and the District of Columbia. However, all states have not consistently created policies aimed at increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates. States with policies often require that local education agencies develop action plans specifying strategies for student retention.

National programs are of different types. Wilson et al. (2011) categorized programs as general and teen parents. General programs typically contain multiple components. The class and school restructuring classification of general programs involves (a) reducing class sizes, (b)

changing the type of schedule (including use of block scheduling), and (c) creating curriculum changes (including personalized learning arrangements and grade or content area level academies). Other categories of general programs include (a) vocational training; (b) alternative schools; (c) employability, (d) career development training, or college preparation; (e) remedial instruction; (f) community service; (g) mentoring; and (h) tutoring with homework assistance (Wilson et al., 2011). These general programs target the needs of students placed at risk in various ways. For example, some programs focused on skills training typically address such needs as improving self-esteem and attitudes; whereas alternative schools offer interventions for behavioral problems for students who are pushed out of the regular school (Wilson et al., 2011). Vocational programs offer opportunities for students to develop skills for a career through specialized training and improve their financial status through work-related courses and paid employment (Wilson et al., 2011). The federal government and other agencies have sponsored dropout prevention and reentry efforts. The No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation provided school districts assistance in their efforts to increase graduation rates. The government's School Dropout Prevention Program or High School Graduation Initiative (HSGI) supports state and local educational agencies in implementing interventions through grants (What Works for Health, 2016). Amongst such grants are the Race to The Top (RTTT) and 21st Century grants. RTTT grants are focused on improving dropout factories or schools with high dropout rates (USDE, 2015), while 21st Century grants are awarded to state education agencies to develop community learning centers that support the academic experiences of students enrolled in high-poverty and low-performing schools (USDE, 2018). A federally sponsored program, the New High School Initiative Program, provides funding for developing strategies to address the needs of Hispanic youth at risk of dropping out (Wallace, 2015).

There are numerous long-standing prevention and intervention programs and models that have been employed in schools throughout the United States. Career academies represent an early form of dropout prevention and intervention. A career academy is defined as a school within a school (Career Technical Education Consortium, CTEC, 2013) whose purpose is to reduce dropout rates and improve students' skills and performance for college and careers (Lehr et al., 2004). Despite the structure, characteristics of the academies are (a) small classes formed as a community of learners, (b) collaboration among teachers, employer and community partnerships, and (c) integration of academics and technical skills for college and career preparedness (CTEC, 2013). The number of career academies has increased and some, in Florida for example, are legislated. Early studies showed that career academies have a history of proven success in increasing school attendance, increasing student performance, decreasing dropout rates, and increasing graduation rates (Visher et al., 2013).

Raise Inspired Kids (RIK, 2010) of Ventura, California created an integrated model for dropout prevention focused on the students, school, parents, and community with the goals of reducing dropout rates, increasing student engagement and learning. According to RIK (2010), the ALAS Dropout Prevention programs include tested and practical prevention and intervention strategies designed to reduce student dropout and increase student engagement and learning in at-risk youth. ALAS is a research and evidence-based middle and high school program targeting students at risk (RIK, 2010). Strategies for students include providing academic support and training in social problem-solving and skills for building positive attitudes. RIK partners with schools to integrate a model that includes building the capacity of: (a) staff in policy development and personalized strategies to address at-risk students; (b) parents in supporting their children's needs; and (c) school staff in collaborating with community agencies.

Agencies and foundations such as the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development have supported research related to the design of dropout interventions. Maynard et al. (2015) received such support for their study that used a public health approach for interventions targeted to nonacademic dropout factors including substance abuse, mental health issues, and criminal behaviors. According to Maynard et al. (2015), preventive interventions are commonly designed to address such issues as absenteeism, poor performance, and violent behavior and are organized in school and community-based settings. However, there is a gap in schools adopting the public health model as both preventive and recovery measures for students exhibiting substance abuse and socio-emotional behavioral problems (Maynard et al., 2015). The researchers advocated the addition of the public health model in schools as a cost-effective measure for increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates.

Programs and Strategies in Texas. Texas, the state for the site of the study, has policies governing school districts' plans for addressing dropout rates. Deyé et al. (2010) reported legislative policies and actions from several states in response to the dropout problem. These actions included developing statewide plans for dropout prevention, creating mentoring and other prevention strategies, identifying struggling students, and initiating reengagement processes. The authors gave Illinois as an example where the Hope and Opportunity Pathways Through Education Program developed in 2009 permitted dropouts to complete high school through evening courses or other alternative time frames.

Dropout legislation passed in Texas beginning in 2007 requires school districts to submit an annual plan that describes research-based strategies that will be employed for dropout prevention (Texas Education Agency, 2017a). The plan includes courses focused on technology

and career education courses for preparing high school students for the workforce. The legislation also requires districts and charter schools to initiate activities including college readiness skills, transition counseling, advanced placement courses, and other social support services. This legislation applies to the two schools in SSD selected for participation in the study.

Dropout and prevention recovery programs and strategies evolved from the Texas 2007 legislation. Strategies included commissioning a study to identify best practices from high-performing dropout prevention programs and establishing a High School Completion and Success Initiative Council as part of strategic planning for reducing dropout rates. This practice is consistent with recommendations Chappell et al. (2015) made in their meta-analysis of dropout prevention outcomes and strategies for creating recovery programs and services designed for students to obtain a high school equivalent certificate. Other strategies were using end-of-course examinations as performance measures for high school instead of the TAKS state test and instituting a reentry maximum age of 26 years to permit dropouts to attend public schools to graduate (Deyé et al., 2010; Texas Education Agency, 2017a).

Other programs or forms of support for preventing or reengaging dropouts in Texas include the Optional Flexible School Day Program created in 2006 (Deyé et al., 2010). The program permits students flexibility in attendance in terms of days or hours. The Texas Education Agency supports the Amachi Mentoring program in which students ages 6–14 of currently imprisoned or just released parents receive one-to-one mentoring. The state's Big Brothers Big Sisters organization implements the program. The state awards federal funds through the 21st Century grants to YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other organizations to implement the Texas Afterschool Centers on Education program. The program emphasizes

supplemental learning and hands-on activities to improve student behavior, attendance, and academic performance (Texas Education Agency, 2017b).

Outcomes of Select Interventions

Consensus can be found in the literature that students at risk of dropping out require personal attention and personalized learning experiences (Deyé et al., 2010). The design of these learning experiences would cater to the needs and interests; thus, also address factors contributing to their at-risk status. A review of interventions revealed positive outcomes for some programs and strategies that focused on specific dropout factors. Academics, attendance, behavior, and the school were among the factors targeted in the interventions for reducing dropout rates. The review also revealed differences in outcomes in some programs based on ethnicity. There were inconclusive results for some others. This section of the document includes evaluation findings of some initiatives at the local and national levels that addressed improving chances for students to remain in high school.

Outcomes of Programs in Texas. Statewide evaluations of the Texas Afterschool Centers on Education program, designed as a supplemental and hands-on learning experience, compared participant versus nonparticipant performance. Outcomes of the centers' strategies included increases in students' reading and math scores, decreased absences, and overall behavior and performance to suggest the likelihood of these students being promoted (Texas Education Agency, 2017b). Although performance increased and the tendency to drop out decreased for participants in the mentoring and other dropout prevention programs, evaluation data also showed performance differed based on race and ethnicity. Texas Education Agency (2017c) reported that for the 2016 class, the lowest graduation rates were for Hispanic and African American students.

Texas was among the states to conduct a collaborative dropout reduction program based on research-based practices that involved various community agencies. Porowski et al. (2011) represented the agency that evaluated the pilot program's four intervention components: academic support, attendance, workforce skill development, and student and family support services. The evaluation included an examination of instructional strategies and the impact on achievement, dropout, and career readiness. The researchers used surveys, on-site visits, semi-structured interviews, and reports from the agency to collect evaluation data. In addition to content analysis of qualitative data, the researchers employed statistical analyses to test for significant relationships between the program and student achievement scores on the state's examination. After two years, the achievement scores of participating students were significantly higher. The dropout rates were lower and both graduation and completion rates were higher than the comparison group; however, these rates were not statistically significantly different (Porowski et al., 2011).

A recent study conducted in two large urban districts in Texas examined dropout and graduation rates based on schools with multiple intervention and prevention programs and those without multiple programs. Multiple programs referred to four or more programs within a school. In determining whether having multiple intervention and prevention programs in schools had a greater likelihood of increasing graduation rates and decreasing dropout rates than schools without multiple programs, Briones et al. (2015) identified other contributing factors that need to be considered in making such a determination. These factors were among those acknowledged in the literature as influencing students' decisions to remain in school—including the socioeconomic status of the family and whether the student is a teen parent.

Outcomes of National Programs. The U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (WWC, 2015) reports the impact of various programs and models for reducing dropouts. The ALAS Dropout Prevention model targets middle and high school students at risk (RIK, 2010). The What Works Clearinghouse acknowledged the success of the model in reducing dropout rates and its impact on the progress of students in school (as cited in RIK, 2010). Career academies, or schools within a school, were also found effective in retaining students. These academies provide career and academic instruction to students along with providing opportunities for job experience through partnering businesses. Recent evaluations of the WWC (2015) reported that potentially positive effects were found for academies' impact on students completing school; however, effects for remaining in school or progressing in school were not discernible.

Similarly, WWC reported that Check & Connect was successful in helping students to remain in school. This dropout prevention strategy included a monitoring component for assessing student progress and a mentoring and intervention component where students received individualized assistance through a collaborative effort involving the school, home, and community service providers. WWC also found potentially positive effects on students progressing in school, but there were no discernible effects for completing school among students with learning, behavioral, or emotional needs (WWC, 2015). Another evaluation of Check & Connect addressed its features associated with truancy and noted the need to shift emphasis from studying students' characteristics related to truancy in efforts to reduce absenteeism, to a focus on students' strengths and requirements for them to be successful (Ekstrand, 2015). However, Sullivan and Sadeh (2016) noted that Check & Connect effectively reduced truancy and mobility among emotionally disturbed students.

Some school districts employ the social and emotional learning (SEL) program to address student achievement and the social and emotional needs of students with attention to those who face academic and other challenges. SEL involves student learning focused on acquiring the "ability to communicate, resolve conflict, interact with others, and manage emotional responses" (Downey, 2019, para. 2). The results of a pilot study involving Atlanta Public Schools, Austin Independent School District, and six other districts revealed there were improvements in school climate, in students' academic performance and engagement, and graduation rates.

Several evaluations have been directed to dropout prevention programs in general and others have targeted programs focused on specific dropout factors such as truancy. Studies of the efficacy of truancy prevention programs include whole-school models and early warning systems. An evaluation of the intervention components of the Early Truancy Prevention Program showed that attendance improved for primary grade students (Cook et al., 2017). Eighth-grade students in the Diploma Now program, a secondary school reform model geared to students' engagement and persistence, successfully maintained 90% or above attendance in their ninth-grade year; however, the program did not show statistically significant impacts beyond ninth grade (Corrin et al., 2016).

Other researchers who have analyzed the evaluations of dropout prevention programs report positive impacts of the programs. Chappell et al. (2015) noted that despite the numerous evaluations of dropout prevention programs, there is insufficient evidence of rigorous studies that connects specific strategies with reducing dropout and graduation rates. Therefore, Chappell et al. conducted a meta-analysis of interventions and strategies designed to provide empirical evidence of strategies that effectively led to reduced dropout rates and increased graduation rates. The researchers found few studies that identified graduation rates as a dependent variable in

experimental, quasi-experimental, or ex post facto study designs as required for the analysis; therefore, the analysis did not include determining whether strategies improved graduation rates. Chappell et al. reported strategies that showed a mean effect size to predict successful dropout prevention outcomes including academic support, family engagement, literacy development, behavioral intervention, service learning, work-based learning, health and wellness, and school and classroom environment.

The Role of Leadership in Dropout Intervention

The influence of leadership on employee performance and student achievement is supported in the literature (Crabtree, 2014; Evans-Brown, 2015; Senge et al., 2015). Descriptions of leadership practices that promote engagement and address individual needs include implementing dropout prevention programs and strategies designed to address factors that put students at risk of dropping out. Although there is no consensus on the meaning of leadership, designing, organizing, managing, facilitating, and mobilizing people and processes for goal attainment are inherent in its descriptions (Northouse, 2016). Leadership is conceptualized from perspectives of theoretical approaches including behavior, trait, relationship, information-processing, and management; however, Northouse (2016) concluded that the nature of leadership is a process involving groups, influence, and goals. These components were adopted for this study and suggest that leadership is not simply based on traits of the leader, but also the leader's consideration of factors that influence the needs of students at risk, the abilities and interests of staff in addressing those needs, and the common goal of retaining students for high school completion.

Various leadership approaches have characteristics that appear appropriate for leading teachers and students in dropout intervention and prevention programs. Practitioners would agree

that no one leadership approach is best for leading an organization (Northouse, 2016). A combination of approaches may be most appropriate based on the circumstances. Factors found to influence student dropout have implications for leadership features that may be promising in intervention efforts. Dropout factors suggest that students placed at risk need guidance from individuals who (a) care about them; (b) model authenticity; (c) respect and value student differences; and (d) demonstrate empathy, openness, patience, and flexibility. These attributes are among those that leadership experts associate with servant, adaptive, and spiritual leadership styles (Northouse, 2016; Spears, 2010). The discussions of these styles have implications for intervention practices and were included in the study's framework focused on leadership and self-efficacy.

Leadership and Cultural Considerations in Dropout Intervention/Prevention

Leadership theory and approaches offer a wide range of choices for leaders to adopt for guiding both the would-be-dropout and the staff involved in intervention activities. Therefore, interactions with culturally different individuals suggest the leader would transmit the message in a style to ensure the potential dropout would understand words, body language, or symbols. Interactions would rely on how the leader contextualizes various types of diversities (Krauss et al., 2014; Mor Barak, 2016). Cross-cultural communications consider the ways one communicates and how people in different cultures interpret the meaning of the message (Mor Barak, 2016). Awareness and demonstrating appreciation of cultural differences may lead to students developing social identity and a sense of belongingness in the school (Mor Barak, 2016).

The issue of school dropout has implications for leadership and the recognition of the influences of diversity and school culture (Brown, 2012; Flynn et al., 2016). Diversity

encompasses multiple differences among individuals including gender and sexual orientation that help to define culture and influence leadership (Mor Barak, 2016). Mor Barak (2016) referred to culture as consisting of "patterns, explicit or implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbol, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their ideas and especially their attached values" (p. 293). Understanding and sensitivity to these cultural differences illustrated through verbal and nonverbal communication contribute to human relations and leadership behaviors (Mor Barak, 2016).

The overview of the dropout issue reveals that students of color represent the highest percentage of dropouts. The dropout literature also connects contributing factors to the dropout issue with the need for school reform. In response to reform from the perspective of addressing the needs of students placed at-risk of dropping out, school culture, and cultural diversity, school and dropout prevention leaders would need to be aware of the most appropriate and effective leadership strategies.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study features a combination of leadership and self-efficacy theories. Specifically, the leadership theory focuses on characteristics of servant, adaptive, and spiritual leadership approaches. The theory of self-efficacy focuses on both the students' beliefs in what can be accomplished and the leaders' beliefs that they have the tools and can model behaviors that promote students' self-efficacy and motivation to remain in school. The conceptual framework drove this investigation of program effectiveness for reducing high school dropout rates.

This study addressed the complexities associated with students dropping out of high school. Following recommendations in the literature regarding the function of the framework

(Collins & Stockton, 2018), this framework was built upon the interrelation of theory and concepts that address dropout intervention and prevention. Prior research indicates that high school dropout is a problem resulting from various influences (Chappell et al., 2015) and that students at risk of dropping out require intervention strategies that address the factors that put them at-risk(Cervantes, 2016). Thus, the choice of the conceptual framework was based on the (a) link between dropout factors, (b) theory of self-efficacy, (c) concepts of servant, adaptive, and spiritual leadership, and (d) impact of dropping out on the dropout and society.

Self-Efficacy

The theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977a) was appropriate for the focus of this study. Characteristics of students at risk of dropping out and factors thought to contribute to their decision to drop out cited in the literature support the rationale for the selection. The theory is based on one's self-system that includes attitudes, cognitive skills, and abilities that contribute to the belief that one is capable of succeeding. Contrary to having self-efficacy, students often drop out of high school because they feel incapable of achieving academically or being perceived as incapable (Branson et al., 2013; Doll et al., 2013). The nature of this research incorporated concepts of the theory merged with concepts of leadership in providing directions for the design of intervention programs that promote self-efficacy and discourage school withdrawal.

According to Bandura's (1977a, 2008) descriptions of ways to build self-efficacy, appropriate components can be incorporated in intervention programs to encourage student success. Bandura (1977a, 2008) identified "mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and states of physiology" (Bandura, 1977a, p. 191) as ways to promote self-efficacy. Based on these ways, program components for building self-efficacy would likely include

activities that allow students to observe the success of others with similar perceived capabilities and provide opportunities for students to master observed skills, behaviors, or concepts.

Similarly, leadership concepts associated with spiritual and adaptive leadership, but especially servant leadership behaviors, promote these sources of self-efficacy. Given Bandura's (2008) discussion of humans as agents of intentional influence on an individual's self-efficacy, social persuasion and psychological responses included in intervention efforts provide opportunities for mastery experiences guarded under the caring features of servant leadership. Although social persuasion would be evident in comments from leaders, teachers, and peers that encourage potential dropouts to believe in themselves and continue trying to perform their best, Bandura (2008) cautioned that these individuals as mentors must model the meanings of their comments.

The theory of self-efficacy is linked to learning from observations of modeled behavior (Bandura, 1977b). Behavior can be observed through a live model, a symbolic model such as a video, and a verbal instructional model (Bandura, 1977b). Learning from these observations relies on thought processes that are inherent in Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (2001), an individual can control thoughts through regulatory processes. Bandura (2001) identified a deliberate process that involves intentional thinking, forethought, and self-reactiveness which motivates and regulates action. Implied from the process is the key to regulating thought is engaging in conscious self-reflection or metacognitive analysis to determine what and why of a decision or action. When thinking is regulated through self-awareness techniques, the process may result in the discovery of what makes life living, what makes the individual happy, and how this happiness can be sustained (Bandura, 2001). However, intentional thinking may also produce unpleasant thoughts that influence feelings of self-

efficacy, according to Wood and Bandura (1989) who related the amount of stress and depression a person experiences in threatening situations to self-efficacy.

Educators and researchers have applied concepts of self-efficacy in various content areas and organizations. Applying the concept of self-efficacy to medical instruction, Artino (2012) noted that observations of modeled techniques for developing skill knowledge do not necessarily translate to the individual applying skill knowledge. The inability to transfer the knowledge may suggest the student has not developed the confidence to use the knowledge which also implies that the student has not yet experienced the results of self-efficacy firsthand (Bandura, 2008). Implications from the literature suggest that Artino (2012), Bandura (1977a), and other researchers would recommend incorporating the social persuasion source of self-efficacy in instruction to encourage confidence and motivation that would lead to the application of knowledge.

The literature reveals that dropout prevention programs aim to provide engaging activities that will ultimately motivate students to enhance or develop an interest and commitment to school and learning (Chappell et al., 2015; Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016; WWC, 2015). Demonstrating interest and commitment is symbolic of having self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977a); however, following Bandura's concepts, individuals who do not demonstrate self-efficacy require experiences or modeling as motivators. Modeling can stimulate thought, which is influenced by social systems (Bandura, 2001). Self-assurance, motivation, happiness, depression, self-efficacy, and other feelings can signal how a person thinks (Bandura, 2001). The following components contain descriptions of the leadership styles linked to tenets of Bandura's theory as a part of the conceptual framework.

Servant Leadership

Service is the core of servant leadership and is based on the leader's character (Northouse, 2016). The theory suggests the servant component of the theory is inherent and the leadership component is acquired, a major difference in the two terms (Greenleaf, 1977/2012). Servant leaders are committed in their care for followers and ensure followers perform to the extent of their capabilities (Greenleaf, 1977/2012). According to its founder, Greenleaf (1970), the first priority of servant leaders is ensuring that the needs of people are met. Researchers have since clarified the meaning of servant leadership through expanding the characteristics and behaviors of the leader and in creating various models of servant leadership (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Liden et al., 2014; Spears, 2015; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Key terms characteristic of servant leadership appearing across many studies and models are empowerment, stewardship, authenticity, and helping (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Liden et al., 2014; Spears, 2015; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). The theory suggests individuals migrate to the leader who is viewed as a proven and trusted leader and steward (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 1977/2012). This migration may assist in developing an organizational climate in which differences each member brings to the dropout intervention program are accepted.

Studies often link characteristics of servant leadership to leaders in the business workplace and employee satisfaction; however, servant leadership behaviors have also been linked to school principals, counselors, and student outcomes. For example, Crabtree (2014) noted findings from a study of schools in Virginia that revealed a positive association between student's reading achievement and principals' servant leadership behaviors. Other studies have focused on the linkage of leadership and the role of the principal and school counselor in dropout prevention (Boyer, 2012; Evans-Brown, 2015; Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017). Some recent

research illustrates a positive association between behaviors of servant leadership, academic performance, student satisfaction, and retention (Olatunji et al., 2012; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017). Also, researchers have identified specific servant leadership characteristics that were correlated to student satisfaction with advising and academic achievement, such as altruistic calling, the desire to place followers' needs above those of the leader, empowerment, and humility (Herndon, 2007; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). Such results support servant leadership as an applicable dropout intervention tool.

Inherent in servant leadership is commitment to the care for followers and ensuring that they perform to the extent of their capabilities (Greenleaf, 1977/2012); therefore, modeling persuasive messages would be expected. Social persuasion can also help with the individual's psychological responses that Bandura (2008) described as including emotional and physical reactions to failed attempts. Opportunities for practicing skills and activities in intervention programs prior to class evaluations may help potential dropouts to overcome fear of failure and adjust to stressful situations (Knesting-Lund et al., 2013; Meškauskienė & Guoba, 2016).

Tenets of servant leadership (Spears, 2010) are supportive of facilitating behaviors such as motivation, interests, and commitment. Spears (2010, 2015) used Greenleaf's (1970) research on servant leadership to identify behaviors of servant leaders. These behaviors include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. These characteristics describe the leader in attending to the needs, interests, and well-being of followers through establishing clear goals and developing trusting and nurturing relationships in a diverse setting. Workplace behaviors adhering to the golden rule and good citizenship are also implied in servant and spiritual leadership theories (Roberts, 2013). Terosky and Reitano (2016) indicated the servant leader is

"attuned to one's physical, social, and political environments, which results in one being able to step aside and view oneself and one's own perspectives in the greater context of the situation" (p. 211).

Servant leadership theory suggests the need for leaders to model and emphasize respect for individual differences and refraining from personal bias (Roy, 2012). The theory emphasizes humility, stewardship, faith, integrity, and other character traits (Contreras, 2016; Roberts, 2013). Spears (2010) suggested the theory can be applied in actions of business, organizational, and educational leaders through promoting the professional development of people when designing projects, curriculums, and support services. Servant leaders' use of intuitive thinking and wisdom from past experiences to respond to current issues suggests they may provide effective guidance in intervention programs and strategies. Knowledge and experiences related to factors influencing rates for graduation and dropout are important for providing appropriate interventions (Civic Enterprises, 2017).

Researchers employing the servant leadership theoretical model in educational organizations illustrate knowledge and application of the concept in current and future issues. The application of servant leadership knowledge is evident in studies whose findings reveal a positive correlation between servant leadership behaviors and employee commitment. One study of college employees showed a positive association between servant leadership behaviors and employees' commitment to the supervisor (Sokoll, 2014). Another study (Terosky & Reitano, 2016) revealed principals who exhibited actions consistent with characteristics of servant leadership were effective in building the capacities of their teachers. Servant leadership theory can be beneficial to researchers and organizations with a mission of increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates.

Adaptive Leadership

The focus of adaptive leadership is on what the leader does in order to encourage individuals to adapt to challenges associated with change. Credited to the 1994 work of Heifetz, this form of leadership is prescriptive in nature, follower centered, and its ultimate goal is to mobilize individuals to deal with changing environments (Northouse, 2016). Tenets of adaptive leadership appear to compartmentalize the tenets of self-efficacy, spiritual, and servant leadership appropriate for leading students placed at-risk of dropping out, dropout prevention leaders, and teachers. The similarity of the tenets is based on reports of a cross referencing of leadership scales revealing a commonality in such leading and following characteristics as trust, loyalty, support, obligation, respect, ethics, confidence, compassion, calling, and adapting (Nathan et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

According to the process of adaptive leadership that Northouse (2016) described, after the leader fully understands the situation, its complexities, and interpersonal dynamics, the leader assesses the situation to determine the nature of the challenge (technical or adaptive), and then applies appropriate strategies, according to the nature of the challenge. Nicolaides and McCallum (2013) compared technical and adaptive challenges and suggested that the level of complexities associated with adaptive challenges require discarding prior learning and attitudes and adopting new methods of learning. Among practices of adaptive leaders are engaging in deep listening and ensuring equal opportunities for the voices of those representing the minority opinion to emerge (Northouse, 2016; Senge et al., 2015).

Adaptive and system leaders have similarities in leadership practices through recognizing that problems or challenges people face are interlinked (Northouse, 2016). Senge et al. (2015) described system leaders from the perspective of having the ability to envision the realities of

people who are unlike themselves and to encourage openness. Although adaptive leadership has many benefits as "a complex interactional event that occurs between leaders and followers in different situations" (Northouse, 2016, p. 275), it is criticized for a lack of empirical research to support its assumptions. Despite this criticism, the apparent diverse situations that students at risk of dropping out present suggest that leaders have the ability to actively listen, visualize their realities, and adapt to new ways of leading to encourage students to remain in school.

Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership theory contributes to understanding and transforming organizational behavior. Leadership characteristics for facilitating spiritual survival are closely related to those of the servant leader and practices representing the leader-member exchange theory (Northouse, 2016). The core features of the theory, calling and membership, facilitate transformation of organizational culture through intrinsic motivation. According to Fry (2003), vision, hope, faith, and altruistic love are behaviors and values that inspire the development of a sense of calling and membership. Consistent with the tenets of the theory, Wibawa et al. (2014) found spiritual leadership influenced employee loyalty. Loyalty may be among leader-follower outcomes that influence the development of respect and recognition of cultural differences, a quality associated with guiding students of color.

The leader's ethical and responsible behaviors support the development of human relations, an appreciation for cultural values, and organizational culture (Frisdiantara & Sahertian, 2012). Spiritual leadership fosters "virtues oriented toward future rewards" (Mor Barak, 2016, p. 295). Its benefits are associated with the humane perspective of culture, "the degree to which a culture encourages and rewards people for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others" (Northouse, 2016, p. 434). Spiritual leadership characteristics of

being honest, ethical, visionary, and responsible promote the humane orientation dimension of culture.

Spiritual leadership behaviors have practical applications for the success of dropout prevention programs. Fry (2003) noted "spiritual leadership can be viewed as a field of inquiry within the broader context of workplace spirituality" (p. 708). This definition entails the presence of values, attitudes, and behaviors that motivate the desire for spiritual survival, an objective of leadership theory through calling and membership. Spiritual leadership offers support in regulating thought. The theory contributes to understanding and transforming behavior. According to the theory, leaders examine their human qualities and values and model them to promote spiritual survival in communication with followers. This examination suggests that the reflective practices of administrators would "include managing emotions" (Reave, 2005 as cited in Smith et al., 2016, p. 81).

Conceptual Framework Model and the Design of the Study

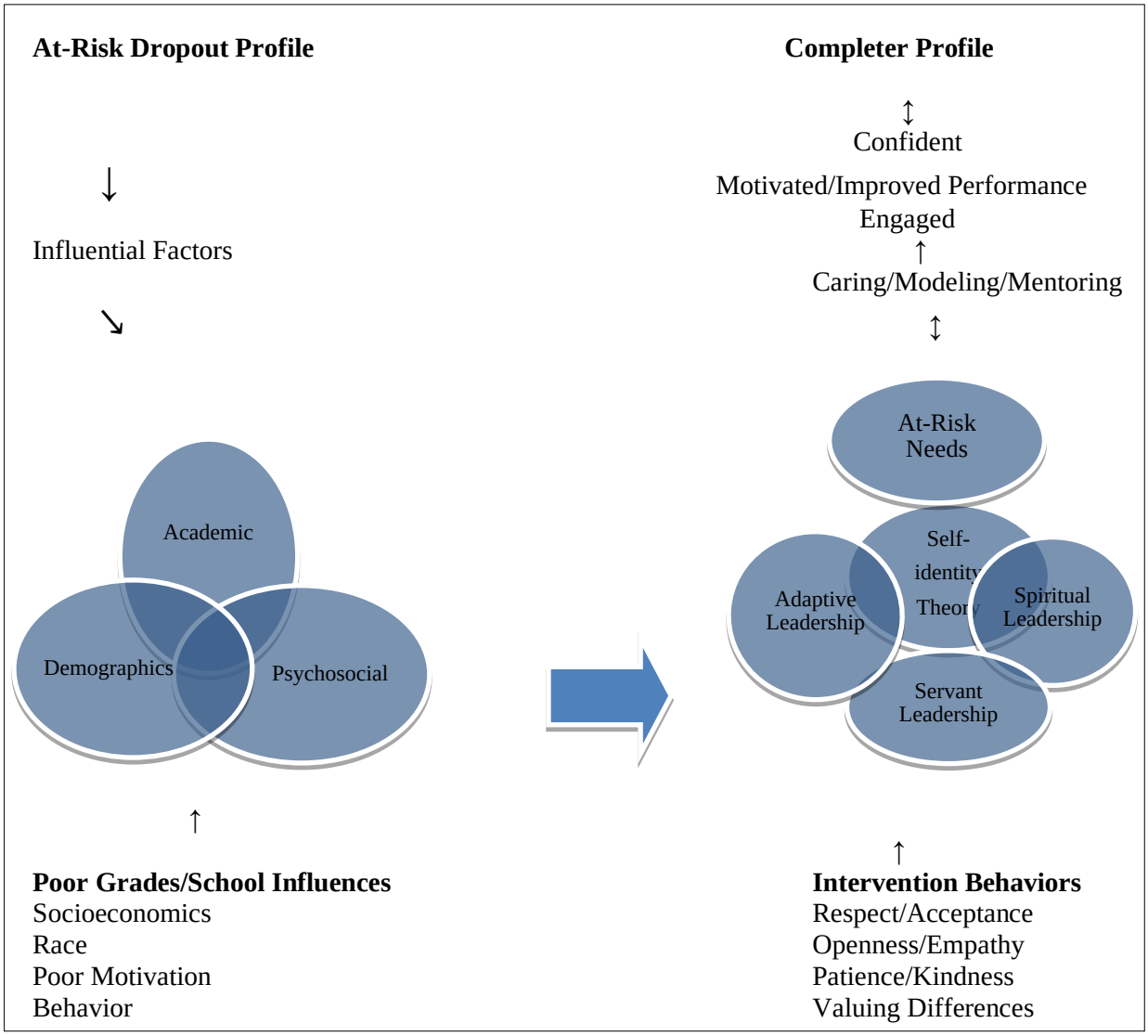
This conceptual framework focused on self-efficacy and supported with characteristics of servant, adaptive, and spiritual leadership brings attention to how students at risk of dropping out may behave because they do not believe in their capabilities to perform or meet the challenges they face. APA (2012) noted that students' beliefs in their capabilities decrease in early adolescence. This decrease may be influenced by such factors as absence from school, poor performance in core content areas and reading, and school disengagement which are predictors of the likelihood of them dropping out of high school (APA, 2012). Among implications for leadership to address this lack of self-efficacy is that leaders serve students in need through mentoring, modeling, and adaptive measures consistent with factors contributing to their situation.

The framework represents elements of bodies of knowledge from leadership theory and approaches, learning theory, and dropout prevention research associated with developing dropout prevention programs, evaluating dropout intervention programs, and determining program effectiveness in addressing the lack of self-efficacy and other adverse influences on students not graduating high school. The framework for the study was based on the literature reported in this chapter supporting the need for leaders to exhibit behaviors and skills for guiding students in developing skills and behaviors in recognition of multiple factors that may place them at risk of dropping out of school. The researcher-designed pictorial framework in Figure 1 is relationship-specific in nature with the ultimate goal of improvement that leads to students completing high school.

Figure 1 is a representation of the interconnectedness of tenets of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977a) and servant leadership (Spears, 2010), and features of adaptive and spiritual leadership for addressing some factors contributing to students placed at risk of dropping out of high school. Emphasis of the self-efficacy theory is on modeled behavior that helps the observer to believe in self (Bandura, 1977a), and through regulated thought processes that build self-efficacy, awareness of one's self-identity and what makes the individual happy may also emerge (Bandura, 2001). Servant leadership places basic guiding principles on the behavior modeled (Torres, 2016). The two are supportive in fitting actions in a template that requires authenticity, fairness, flexibility, and the kind of leadership that encourages individuals to adopt new ways of thinking about themselves and their capabilities. The research reveals that convergence between spiritual and servant leadership occurs on their characteristic of facilitating intrinsic motivation where others begin to believe in themselves and demonstrate their capabilities (Freeman, 2011; Torres, 2016).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework: Self-Efficacy and Leadership Theories



Note. The researcher-created at-risk profile is a composite of needs generated from negative academic, demographic, and psychosocial influences. Movement to the completer profile requires intervention behaviors included in adaptive, servant, and spiritual leadership that are modeled in accordance with tenets of self-identity theory.

The sequential movements shown in Figure 1 illustrate the interconnectedness of self-identity and leadership. The interconnectedness is founded on the premise that individuals in

guiding roles must have requisite skills and behaviors including respect, acceptance, valuing differences, openness, patience, kindness, empathy (Northouse, 2016; Spears, 2010). The bases of servant, spiritual, and adaptive leadership are fused with self-identity theory in the mixture of qualities that model positive and caring dispositions for persons to see themselves as becoming successful. Noteworthy is that some characteristics of servant leadership are similar to those of other leadership approaches including adaptive and spiritual.

The conceptual framework informed the design of the study and the research questions included in the inquiry. The framework provided support for the aim of intervention and prevention efforts with attention to characteristics of leaders' and teachers' behaviors. Reviews of students who dropped out of school revealed that among reasons for dropping out was the lack of supportive and caring individuals in their lives who understood their problems (Campbell, 2015; Zaff et al., 2016). I used this information to identify best practice for addressing students' needs and the role of leaders and teachers. The framework's leadership behaviors associated with building self-confidence and encouraging academic success are implicit in the body of knowledge needed to lead activities directed toward the common goal of decreasing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates. The interconnectedness also suggests that the ability of students to remain in school is based on teachers' beliefs and lived experiences with intervention strategies, and students' belief that they can perform in challenging situations with the assistance of caring instructional and program leaders who implement measures based on inhibiting factors. Questions based on the conceptual framework identified teachers' beliefs and their lived experiences of their work with dropout interventions aimed at helping students to succeed.

Summary

The literature in this chapter illustrates a logical organization of topics that are intended to guide the reader in first understanding the concept of high school dropout. I approached this study based on the assumption that understanding the concept of dropout suggests having a knowledge of contributing factors. The selected sources connect these factors to intervention and prevention strategies that require the type of leadership appropriate for considering the needs and characteristics of students placed at risk of not completing school.

The synthesis of information sources reported in this chapter revealed multiple factors associated with high school students dropping out of school. The review of the literature also illustrates that although there are vast numbers of interventions and intervention programs and strategies aimed at reducing dropout rates, there are no strategies identified that can be said to reduce dropout rates better than others. However, evidence from empirical studies suggests that programs with certain components tend to produce fewer students who drop out than programs that do not contain those components. Elements of the theory of self-efficacy and the concept of servant leadership served as the foundation for this study. The review supports strategies characteristic of leaders who provide nurturing and mentoring, exhibit a caring attitude, and who assist efforts to motivate students to engage in the learning environment and to develop a belief in their own abilities and performance. These characteristics are related to emphasis given in the selection and implementation of interventions, as well as their focus on particular factors influencing student dropout.

The methods designed to determine whether leaders of intervention programs consider factors found to predict the likelihood that students will drop out are reported in Chapter 3. The intent of the study was also to compare leadership strategies and program outcomes and

determine which of two programs produces the best outcomes in terms of dropout rates. These methods include discussions of the research design, sample, and overall procedures for collecting and analyzing the data.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This study examined dropout prevention programs in a large urban school district. Observations in the literature show that dropout research on student subgroups does not frequently link characteristics of students with effective dropout interventions (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). The dropout rate was higher for students of color in an urban metropolitan school district in Southeast Texas; therefore, the need existed to identify practices designed to address characteristics of students placed at risk, and to compare the programs' intervention and leadership practices for effectiveness in reducing dropout rates. I explored answers to three qualitative and two quantitative research questions and hypotheses regarding program features, servant leadership strategies, factors targeted in the delivery of service, and differences in dropout rates for the two programs over a period of 12 years.

This chapter outlines the procedures for conducting this research study. Included are the research design, population and sample, quantitative and qualitative materials and instruments, and the procedures for quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Discussions of ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations follow procedures for data collection and analysis. The chapter ends with a summary of the methodology and its linkage to the study's purpose.

Research Design and Method

I used a mixed-methods design to study the dropout interventions at two high schools in the Southeast School District (SSD, pseudonym) and to determine their effectiveness in reducing dropout rates along with multiple approaches for the qualitative and quantitative components of the study. The philosophical worldviews associated with the mixed-methods research design are consistent with my views in advocating research that enhances understanding of a social problem

in society, factors influencing the problem, and alternatives for addressing the problem. Although mixed-methods research affords the opportunity to use different philosophies, pragmatism is most frequently associated with the design for the purpose of discovering practical strategies that work for solving problems (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). I also selected the design because of my focus on the needs of students placed at risk that include building their self-esteem through appropriate modeled behavior. Pragmatism in mixed-methods research allows for the flexibility of integrating different facets of epistemology to understand how "our degrees of confidence are rationally constrained by our evidence" (Steup & Neta, 2020, para. 1) and to understand how students learn successfully through constructivism (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Accounts that contribute to defining the epistemology of mixed-methods research include those that Creswell (2014) provided. Creswell merged his perspectives with those of other researchers in comparing aspects of pragmatism with characteristics of mixed methods. Among the comparisons are that neither pragmatism nor mixed methods rely on "one system of philosophy truth is what works at the time [and] quantitative and qualitative data work to provide the best understanding of a research problem" (Creswell, 2014, p. 11). Following this philosophy, I was free to select procedures that I deemed most appropriate for the purpose of the research.

The need to understand a research problem through all available approaches and without the confines of quantitative or qualitative research is the basic rationale for the emergence of the mixed-methods design illustrated in research during the 1980s (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Methodologists have continued to demonstrate the connection of the design to the quantitative

and qualitative designs and the flexibility facets of pragmatism in undergirding the design (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, 2014; Subedi, 2016; Tashakkert & Teddlie, 2010).

Proponents of mixed-methods approaches agree that its first characteristic is methodological eclecticism in which the researcher selects and integrates the most appropriate methods from all three designs to conduct a thorough investigation that provides answers to the research questions (Tashakkert & Teddlie, 2010). The methodological selection considers that while quantitative and qualitative designs may be best applied to studies of human sciences, observation of studies reveal that there are features that are not solely quantitative or qualitative (Tashakkert & Teddlie, 2010). Therefore, the selection involves excluding any aspect of either design that disallows the objective of methodological eclecticism (Tashakkert & Teddlie, 2010).

The implementation of mixed-methods research can occur through many approaches including convergent parallel, exploratory-sequential, and explanatory-sequential (Mertens, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019; Terrell, 2016). Explanatory-sequential constituted the basic approach for this study's mixed-methods design. In the two-phase approach, quantitative data are collected and analyzed first, and the results inform the nature of questions for the second phase that would expand upon or explain the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2014). Although priority is given to the quantitative strand where those data are collected first, characteristic of the explanatory-sequential approach is that both quantitative and qualitative components interact rather than being independent of each other and are mixed during data collection (Mills & Gay, 2019; Terrell, 2016).

Sampling differs in the two phases. Forms of quantitative sampling are used in the first phase and purposeful sampling is typically characteristic of the second phase (Patton, 2015). Among challenges that Creswell (2014) noted is the decision regarding the appropriateness of

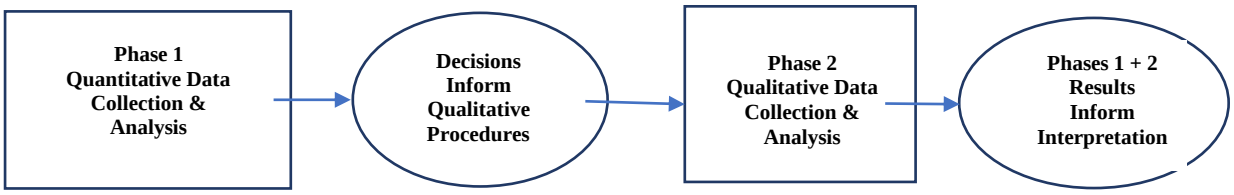
participants for the qualitative phase as participants' responses regarding the dependent variables may differ based on their demographics. The accuracy of quantitative data is another challenge for ensuring the validity of the study's results. Creswell cautioned that failure of the researcher to "consider and weigh all options for following up on the quantitative" findings may compromise the study's findings (p. 225).

In considering the various approaches and cautions, I selected the explanatory-sequential approach because of its feature of using qualitative data to explain the quantitative results (Subedi, 2016). The quantitative data in my study were dropout rates from archived databases and participants' responses to the servant leadership survey. I sought explanations of what contributes to differences in these rates for specific populations in conjunction with participants' views of factors targeted in their dropout intervention and leadership strategies for students placed at risk. The two forms of data converged to provide this understanding as the quantitative data provided the rates and leadership strategies, and individuals knowledgeable of the initiatives and their modeled leadership behaviors provided the explanations. Although some features of the often-practiced convergent parallel approach (Creswell, 2014) are similar to my chosen approach, it does not provide the explanation for differences in rates by ethnicity or differences in leadership practices among and between teachers at the two schools; rather the two forms of data are intended to "confirm or disconfirm each other" (Creswell, 2014, p. 219).

Following guidelines for the explanatory-sequential mixed-methods approach, I collected data for the quantitative research questions first from dropout rates and the servant leadership survey and followed with the collection of qualitative data as informed from the quantitative findings per research methodologists (Mertens, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019; Subedi, 2016). Figure 2 illustrates the process.

Figure 2

Sequence of the Explanatory-Sequential Approach



Note. Boxes contain the analysis of data collected for decision making in the circles. Quantitative data appear in Phase 1 Box which determine what qualitative data are needed in Phase 2 Box. Analyzed data from both boxes are presented in the last circle for interpreting, triangulating, and reporting results.

Figure 2 represents the process of the explanatory-sequential design beginning with the collection and analysis of dropout rates for a period of 12 years for both schools and the servant leadership survey administered to teachers at both schools. The analyses showed whether there were significant differences in the rates of the schools over the time period and whether leadership practices in four domains differed among and within the two sites. Questions generated from the analysis regarding what may have contributed to any differences in the rates both within and between schools, and what intervention and leadership strategies may have suggested changing trends in the data informed the procedures for the qualitative component. Guidance from the quantitative analysis included decisions about the selection of participants, the administration of data collection tools, the selection and review of programs' documents, and the nature of interview questions needed that would respond to findings and implications of the quantitative analysis. The completion of both phases merged in the form of results from each that allowed interpretations based on the results.

The quantitative and qualitative approaches in this mixed-methods study were beneficial to the study based on their specific descriptions. Causal-comparative and explanatory-sequential mixed-methods approaches were appropriate for evaluating the programs' effectiveness for reducing dropout rates and optimized procedures to offer a holistic evaluation of the programs' outcomes in a single evaluation that addressed several programmatic issues (Chen, 2015). The design also employs both quantitative and qualitative data and can be used to determine the generalizing capabilities of a program in the real world (Chen, 2015). The integration of the optimizing approach occurred in the nature of interview questions including those driven by responses on the servant leadership survey administered as part of the quantitative component, and in observing programs' documents that described program features and previous evaluation results. According to Chen, the objective of questions would include understanding the context of the intervention, determining factors that influence outcomes, and determining whether and which supplements are considered and used in program implementation.

The mixture of data enables readers to gain a greater understanding of the status of the dropout prevention program through identifying possible reasons for what the numerical analysis reveals (Creswell, 2013, 2014). The results of the study identified which program at the two sites had a greater impact on desired outcomes through testing the hypothesis. The results determined program effectiveness based on differences in the trend of dropout rates over a time period for the programs at the two schools. Guidance from the literature and the framework provided the basis for selecting the research designs and approaches that I deemed appropriate for evaluating outcomes of a dropout prevention program. I selected the approach for the convenience of using a one-time measure of program effectiveness.

The mixed-methods approach involved assessing the programs according to the objectives, instructional and leadership strategies, and outcomes. I reported whether program strategies were consistent with strategies found in the literature that are associated with successful high school dropout prevention programs. Following recommendations in the literature (Knesting-Lund et al., 2013), as part of the study, I examined the perceived roles of teachers and program leaders in influencing students' decisions to remain in school and their perceptions of the usefulness of the program.

Quantitative Component Design and Methods

The quantitative component was causal comparative in nature (Mertens, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019) to examine trends in dropout rates six years before and after instituting the national dropout prevention strategies. The component also included an examination of teachers' responses on the servant leadership survey to compare differences in responses between the two sites. Causal-comparative research is descriptive in nature as it attempts to identify causes or implications of causes for existing differences between groups (Mills & Gay, 2019), such as dropout rates. According to research methodologists, causal-comparative research involves comparing the performance of already formed groups that differ on at least one explanatory variable and identifying factors that resulted in the difference (Mertens, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019; Terrell, 2016). These characteristics mean that random assignment and manipulation of variables are not applicable (Mills & Gay, 2019; Terrell, 2016).

The purposes of using the causal-comparative design for the dropout datasets were to find differences between the independent variable (time) and dependent variable (dropout rates) after the action had already occurred and to determine whether there were any influences of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The procedures for determining influences of

the variables consisted of measures employed at intervals over a period of time before an intervention and measures taken for a period of time after the intervention (Mertens, 2019). Dropout rates for six years before the schools employed the intervention based on the national dropout strategies, and six years after the students were exposed to the program comprised the data for examination. Through statistical analyses, the intent was to discover if there was a change in dropout rates immediately following the implementation of the program. The analysis can predict the trend for future results (Mills & Gay, 2019). Also, according to Reeves (2017), if the change continues in subsequent time periods, the results suggest that the program produced the change.

Causal-comparative research is also applicable to seeking explanations regarding leadership strategies practiced in dropout prevention and interventions. Participants' responses on a 30-item, Likert scale servant leadership survey (Appendix B), taken at one point in time at post intervention, provided comparative data of leadership behaviors of individuals delivering services to students placed at-risk of dropping out of school. The intent of the statistical analysis was to identify practices that teachers perceived supervisors encouraged, whether these practices differed between the two sites, and implications of these practices in reducing dropout rates. The results informed the qualitative procedures to triangulate and expand upon the findings.

Qualitative Component Design and Methods

Phenomenology, a description of the essence of individuals' conscious lived experiences, was the qualitative approach selected for the study. Investigation of the phenomenon, dropout prevention programs, relied on capturing the shared lived experiences of personnel with responsibilities for the interventions. Philosophical assumptions associated with phenomenological research include that judgment of reality based on lived experiences should be

suspended until other basis of the certainty of reality can be identified. This involves the researcher setting aside personal biases while recognizing that reality is consciously related to an object, and that reality is based on one's perception of the meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2013). The procedures followed Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology drawing upon philosophy and psychology and incorporating heuristic inquiry as a framework. According to Moustakas (1990), heuristic inquiry involves discovering "the nature and meaning of experience while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences self-awareness and self-knowledge" (p. 9). The transcendental approach focuses on the description of individuals' experiences and requires the researcher to set aside personal experiences (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). The approach includes specific steps for the collection and analysis of interview data and focuses on participants' descriptions to identify the essence of the human experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The elements of the phenomenon are "perceived freshly as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Qualitative data included information from conducting video interviews following an interview protocol (Appendix C) and an examination of program documents.

The qualitative aspect of the study offered the advantages of conducting the study in its natural setting with individuals who were engaged in the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2013). The ability to engage participants in interviews allowed for discussions that yielded a holistic view of dropout prevention efforts and their limitations and effectiveness, a characteristic of qualitative inquiry approaches (Creswell, 2013). Further, qualitative research permits the researcher to use general and broad questions to conduct a subjective inquiry. Although researcher bias is also featured in the inquiry in order to build a complex and holistic picture of the phenomenon (the dropout program; experiences of intervention implementation and

leadership strategies), based on the words and expressions of participants, I had to be cognizant of refraining from imposing personal experiences on participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

Three qualitative research questions (RQs 1–3) and two quantitative research questions (RQs 4–5) and hypotheses guided the identification of instructional and servant leadership strategies and program procedures that participants viewed as effective interventions for influencing students' decision to graduate high school. The questions and hypotheses follow.

RQ1: What features of the dropout prevention programs do participants perceive as appropriate for addressing factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school and that will increase completion rates?

RQ2: What leadership practices do participants identify that target factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school?

RQ3: What do teachers and leaders perceive as their role in intervention efforts?

RQ4: Is there a difference in levels of empowerment, stewardship, authenticity, and standing back between teachers in School AM and School BW as measured by the servant leadership survey?

RQ5: Is there a difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies?

H_1: There is a difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies.

$H_{0:}$ There is no difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies.

The independent variable for research question five was time and the dependent variable was dropout rate. Program effectiveness was based on measures tested for the fifth research question. See Appendix A for a summary of the alignment of research questions, hypotheses, data sources, and participants in this mixed-methods research study. The following strategies were applied for conducting the study.

I collected data for the study through interviews, observations of documents, a survey, and dropout rate datasets. I obtained approval to conduct the study through ACU's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I also emailed a letter describing the study and requesting approval to conduct the study to the district superintendent.

The mixed-methods study comprised a combination of the quantitative causal-comparative and the qualitative explanatory-sequential methods. The quantitative component of the study acknowledged that dropout rates and leadership behaviors had already occurred. The analysis identified differences in dropout rates for six years before and after the intervention.

The interview was among data sources that triangulated survey findings and identified leadership practices that may appropriately address factors influencing dropout rates. Other sources for triangulation included observational notes from the review of programs' evaluations other documents, and participants' self-reports of factors and demographic information included in the demographic profile that accompanied the survey. Components of the study served as an evaluation of program effectiveness by integrating processes of the explanatory-sequential approach to facilitate a holistic evaluation of the programs' outcomes (Chen, 2015). This

approach was integrated in the data collection process through interviews and the dropout rates. I used numerical data for testing the hypotheses by examining documents containing dropout data for a 12-year period.

Population and Sample

In this mixed-methods study, the population for which the results were intended to be generalized comprised all high schools in the school district of the study that had formalized dropout prevention programs staffed with teachers and school leaders; and schools that had large populations of students of color placed at risk of dropping out. There were 37 high schools in the district serving 53,549 students in grades 9–12. Of the more than 200,000 students served in K-12 schools, 136,849 or 65.24% were classified as at risk, and 167,456 or 79.83% were classified as economically disadvantaged, defined as meeting eligibility for free and reduced lunch (Texas Education Agency, 2019c). African Americans (49,046, 23.38%) and Hispanic/Latinos (130,284, 62.11%) represented the largest populations of students of color in the district. A small percentage of students in these ethnic groups scored (8% and 7.9%, respectively) consistent with established criteria for demonstrating performance at or above levels for SAT and ACT tests, whereas Asian and Caucasian students' scores were 60.7% and 52.4% respectively, at or above the criterion (Texas Education Agency, 2019c).

Target Population

Of the 37 high schools in the population of the study, the targeted population consisted of 15 high schools where the average enrollment of African American and Hispanic students was above 90% with an average of 75% of these students described as being at-risk. On average, more than one-half of these students dropped out of school between the ages of 13–17 years (Texas Education Agency, 2019c). Therefore, within the targeted population of 15 schools were

program personnel and datasets representing male and female high school students described as needing interventions to deter them from exiting school early.

The target population of teaching and principals for these schools represented various ethnicities, but most were White and Black with Hispanics being among the minority in number. Referring to Patton's (2015) description of populations, this population represented individuals from which a sample could be drawn that would be appropriate for providing information needed for the purpose of the study.

Sampling Frame

The number of schools drawn was based on purposive sampling for selecting schools that represented the targeted population. In addition to the sample having a formal dropout prevention program for at least five years, criteria for selection included that (a) the total school enrollment would differ with one having more students than the other, (b) the percentage of students of color would be similar, (c) the student-teacher ratio would be the same, and (d) school ratings based on the district's criteria would be the same.

Quantitative Component Sample

Dropout data from two high schools with dropout prevention programs in the SSD and teachers responding to the servant leadership survey served as the quantitative samples for the study. The datasets of dropout rates included in the district's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for the years 2006–2012 and in the *Texas Academic Performance Reports* (TAPR) for the years 2013–2018 represented the percentage of students who dropped out of school for a 12-year period from 2006–2018 in each of the schools and were accessible from the district's and schools' websites.

The dropout data were based on the state's calculation of the annual dropout rate. According to the state's definition, the annual dropout rate is "the percentage of students who drop out of school during a school year" (Texas Education Agency, 2020a, p. 8). Among criteria for exclusion from the dropout rate calculation is that a student "is at least 18 years of age as of September 1 and has satisfied the credit requirements for high school graduation; has not completed his or her individualized education program (IEP); and is enrolled and receiving IEP services" (Texas Education Agency, 2020a, p. 8).

The sample contained schools that serviced students in grades 9–12 where the majority of the students were eligible for free and reduced meals (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The majority of the student population was comprised of African Americans and Hispanics. About 32% of the students scored on grade level in reading and on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) , and 65% scored at grade level in mathematics.

The graduation rate was 70% for four years and 73% for five years (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Both schools participated in the district's annual search for dropouts in their neighborhoods and focused on 15 dropout prevention strategies but differed in the basic structure and activities for their dropout prevention initiatives. Access to the sample of schools was requested through an invitation letter to the superintendent of the district and the principals of the two schools.

The total population at the two schools (AM and BW) who represented all teachers at each school and who directly participated in providing services during the programs' operation or in designing the program constituted the eligible human sample of participants for the quantitative component of the study. The population for survey participants totaling 189 individuals represented 118 teachers from School AM and 71 from School BW. The sample size

was based on recommendations of methodologists for using the total population as the sample when the population is small (Mills & Gay, 2019). However, some tables of sample size show that a sample of 135 corresponds to a confidence level of 95% with a 5% margin of error which is often used in educational research. Of the total eligible sample, 29 teachers, who were employed during the post intervention years, completed the servant leadership survey.

Qualitative Component Sample

A purposive subsample of 10 individuals, five from each school, was originally projected for interviews. The end sample consisted of five individuals from School AM and six from School BW. Each group of interviewees contained at least one school administrator (principal, assistant principal) with the other members representing a leadership role in intervention initiatives. The size of the purposive sampling was based on research methodologists' recommendations for selecting the size sufficient to represent the range of participant types, to gather information that would not be redundant, and to manage interview groups and resulting data (Mills & Gay, 2019; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2011).

Participants must have worked in the program for at least two years. Their experience ranged from 5 to 26 years suggesting that some teachers were employed during the pre and post intervention years. These individuals were identified through the schools' websites and recruited through an invitation letter for participation.

Table 1 provides a summary of the sample according to the research questions, data collection method, and type of participant. The samples represented targeted schools, datasets from the targeted schools, the total population of teachers at the schools, and a subsample of teachers and principals. Table 1 also illustrates the different types and sources of data for the

mixed-methods study. Consistent with the explanatory-sequential approach, a few interview participants may have completed the anonymous survey.

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Collection by Participant Type

Guiding Research Question/Hypothesis	Data Collection Approach	Number of participants by participant type
Research questions 1–3	Interviews	Teachers (*N* = 9) Principals (*N* = 2)
Research question 4	SL Survey	Teachers (*N* = 29)
Research question 5	Archival data from two schools	Dropout data sets (*N* = 12 years) Two high schools
Hypothesis 1	Archival data from two schools	Dropout data sets (*N* = 12 years) Two high schools
Null Hypothesis	Archival data from two schools	Dropout data sets (*N* = 12 years) Two high schools

Note. Four research questions represent the qualitative component with data collected through interviews. Two research questions (4, 5) represent the quantitative component with associated hypotheses and data collected through a survey and dropout datasets.

Data for the first three research questions provided explanations for the quantitative data collected for research questions four and five and the related hypotheses. The 12-year archival datasets constituted a time series of six years before and six years after specific interventions implemented at the two schools as described in the interviews. Instrumentation for the collection of data is reported in the section to follow.

Materials/Instruments

This section on materials and instruments is a report of measures for the quantitative and qualitative components. The instruments I created and published are described. The discussion

includes materials in the form of archived data and information retrievable from the district's website.

Quantitative Component

Archived dropout data were retrieved from district and schools' websites. The district collected these data through its department of research and accountability. The data collection tools and their psychometric properties were not available to me at the time of this writing. The dropout data included the percentage of dropouts by years within grades 9–12. The data were used in response to Research Question 5 to compare differences in the dropout rates for the two schools according to their overall totals by 4-year graduation years for the years 2006–2018.

The servant leadership survey (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) in Appendix B included a demographic component for collecting descriptive data for the quantitative component of the study. The survey contains 30 items organized in eight dimensions: empowerment (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 20, 27); accountability (Items 6, 14, 22); standing back (Items 5, 13, 21); humility (Items 10, 18, 25, 29, 30); authenticity (Items 9, 17, 24, 28); courage (Items 8, 16); stewardship (Items 11, 19, 26); and forgiveness (7, 15, 23). These items measure the concept from the perspective of the servant and the leader (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Items are arranged on a 6-point Likert scale with indicators of 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*somewhat disagree*), 3 (*disagree*), 4 (*somewhat agree*), 5 (*agree*), and 6 (strongly *agree*). The survey is a self-assessment focused on the follower and influences of the leader on follower outcomes (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). I received permission to use the survey, although the authors permit public use of the survey as long as its use is documented.

Three studies established the reliability and validity of the instrument. The reliability measures for internal consistency revealed that the Cronbach's alpha for all items ranged from

.69–.91, showing good reliability (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). The stability of the instrument's construct and content validity was established through numerous samples in several countries; the cross referencing of its dimensions with other leadership scales showed a linkage of the dimensions with ethical, charismatic, and LMX leadership characteristics (Nathan et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

This instrument was among sources of data for Research Question 4 to determine differences between program participants in the two schools on the servant leadership constructs of empowerment, stewardship, authenticity, and standing back. Following the recommendations of Nathan et al. (2019), the leadership behaviors of these four constructs were measured in terms of the outcome variables of service behavior and program performance in the dropout prevention program. These findings provided information related to leadership practices directed toward dropout factors targeted in the programs. Also, findings from interviews served to triangulate survey results from a subsample of participants from both sites. Findings also revealed implications for the effectiveness of the programs in reducing dropout rates.

The survey contained a section for identifying such demographics as the respondent's position, years of experience, level of education, and others. The section also contained a list of factors from which respondents identified as targeted for addressing in the dropout intervention programs. The selection of factors was based on indications in the literature as associated with students placed at risk of dropping out of school. The list also included a line for other factors that the respondent may have chosen to indicate.

Qualitative Component

I created interview and observation protocols comprised the instruments for the qualitative aspect of the study. The Dropout Interview Protocol (DIP) and Dropout Program

Observation Tool (DPOT) in Appendix C contained questions and prompts to ensure that appropriate questions and information were not overlooked during data collection. The DIP included a demographic section to identify participants by pseudonyms, and a section to record notes or possible probes. The DIP also contained introductory statements for developing rapport and informing the participant of the procedures and major questions for the interview. Consistent with recommendations in the literature, a peer review of these questions ensured their appropriateness for collecting information that would answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Both the DIP and DPOT were based on directions in the literature including recommendations for conducting program effectiveness evaluations (Chen, 2015). These recommendations include posing questions that relate to the programs' goals, structure, and processes to ensure goals are met (Chen, 2015). The DIP addressed all research questions and contained 12 major open-ended questions. Space provided on the DIP permitted the recording of hand-written observations of body language and notes of any items requiring follow-up questions for clarifying responses. A sample interview question was "Please describe the organization of the program and services that are provided students." I revised questions on the DIP proposed for the audio recorded interview based on the input of the dissertation chair and individuals with expertise in dropout prevention and research methodology. Reviewers ensured that the questions were valid for collecting the intended information. Peer and expert reviewers are recommended for ensuring the appropriateness of interview questions (Creswell, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Researchers suggest formats and procedures that may be followed in making observations and taking field notes. Consistent with recommended procedures for qualitative data collection tools (Mertens, 2019; Patton, 2015), the DPOT contained categories for

identifying the purpose of the observation, problems or issues, relevant discussions, and actions taken. Yin (2011) suggested that observations require the researcher to make mental notes, limit assumptions, and look for emerging patterns. The DPOT included components for the date, place, a description of the setting, and observation notes. Observations of selective district and school reports, along with news media, were based on the potential for uncovering information about initiatives and evaluations of their effectiveness. An examination of data from both instruments involved the use of a numerical and alphabetical coding process for linking information to the appropriate research questions, categorizing similar and dissimilar responses, and identifying emerging themes as suggested for content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013; Mayer, 2015).

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The quantitative data for this mixed-methods study were based on archived dropout data for 12 years and a survey for teachers. Procedures outlined in this section include descriptions of the study's variables. The statistical tools for the analysis of data are also discussed.

Operational Definitions of Variables

The dependent variable for the causal-comparative design was *dropout rates,* and the independent variable was *time*. A preliminary review of dropout rates revealed that the data were reported in percentages by years and the district also collected data according to age groups. The highest dropout age group for both schools was for the school year 2014–2015. For the purposes of this study, the independent variable consisted of datasets for the years 2006–2018. The dataset represented six years (2006–2012) of dropout rates before the programs' implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and six years after employing this intervention (2012–2018). A description of the variables measured through the leadership survey follows.

Authenticity. The authentic leader openly illustrates his or her inner commitments and intentions (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Empowerment. The leadership behaviors for empowerment involve encouraging self-confidence (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Standing back. These leadership behaviors are associated with the other behaviors described and are focused on giving priority to followers' interests rather than self-interests and on supporting others (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Stewardship. This term refers to leadership behaviors such as serving as role models, caretakers, being responsible, and not controlling (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Data Collection and Analysis

Table A1 (Appendix A) provides information on the type of data collected for each research question including its source and targeted participants. The qualitative mixed-methods explanatory-sequential design requires that quantitative data are collected first. Therefore, upon approval to conduct the study (Appendix D), I collected dropout datasets and examined datasets for the 12-year analyses. I simultaneously emailed an invitation letter (Appendix E) to all teachers at the two schools to complete the survey through Survey Monkey. I explained the study and informed potential participants that their names and names of schools would not appear in any documents, included an email address for persons to indicate their interest in participating, and invited them to a closed-camera information meeting on Zoom (Appendix F). Per the district's requirements, I emailed a consent form (Appendix G) to individuals expressing interest in the study. Each participant received a link to the survey upon return of the signed consent form. After allowing an estimated return time of two weeks for participants to complete the approximate 15-minute survey and with a response rate less than 65%, I sent a reminder email to

all teachers. After follow-up reminders over a period of an additional four weeks and with issues associated with COVID-19, I discontinued further attempts to collect any additional surveys.

The descriptive statistical analyses of the data reported frequencies, means, and standard deviations for both dropout datasets and survey responses. The analyses included computations for a Mann Whitney U test with a *p*-value of 0.05 to determine whether there was a significant difference between the two programs for the 12 cases investigated on dropout rates. A comparison of means for both the datasets and survey responses through a nonparametric test, Mann Whitney U, determined whether any difference was significant. Specifically, the Mann Whitney U is an alternative of the *t*-test for computing significant differences between two means when the sample size is small and when data are not normally distributed (Mills & Gay, 2019). In the analysis, I uploaded data for computing these tests in a version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The analysis of survey data entailed examining responses based on the leadership levels participants identified. Levels of servant leadership refer to total leadership scores as measured through the servant leadership survey for the components of empowerment, stewardship, authenticity, and standing back. The leadership survey provided data for the fourth research question. Survey items 11, 19, and 26 measured the leadership characteristic of stewardship. Items 9, 17, 24, and 28 measured authenticity. Empowerment was measured by survey items 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 20, and 27. Standing back was measured by survey items 5, 13, and 21. These variables were measured on a six-point Likert scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*somewhat disagree*), 3 (*disagree*), 4 (*somewhat agree*), 5 (*agree*), and 6 (strongly *agree*). The analysis included determining the frequency of same Likert scale responses within and between the two programs.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Interviews and reviews of program documents constituted the forms of data for this component of the study. Program documents included those made available from the schools or their websites that contained evaluations of intervention efforts or reports of events and other initiatives linked to dropout prevention and intervention. Consistent with the explanatory-sequential approach, the collection of these data followed the quantitative data collection process.

Data Collection

Upon approval of the Abilene Christian University's IRB (Appendix D) and the district, I recruited prospective participants associated with the program for the interview through emailing an invitation letter (Appendix E) to their school's email addresses. The letter served to describe the study, apprise prospective participants of their rights, and as an invitation to participants to ask any questions through email or Zoom correspondence. The correspondence also included a consent form and directions for consenting individuals to return the form to an identified email address. I asked interviewees to suggest other potential participants who should be considered to ensure that appropriate program personnel were represented.

I scheduled interviews with consenting participants at their convenience through an electronic platform. Through my subscription to Zoom, I invited participants (Appendix F) to meet individually using a link that I created for the meeting. The participant was given the choice to engage in a closed-camera format, but I remained on-camera. All participants elected to participate on camera. The individual, face-to-face electronic interview with each participant took no more than 45 minutes. The interview was audio recorded with the security provisions of Zoom which ensured that no one else could enter the meeting. Although participants were aware

of possible follow-up interviews that would require no more than 30 minutes, additional information from participants was not required. The interview followed directions from the interview protocol as suggested for mixed-methods research (Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2017). The protocol contained 12 major questions related to the operations and structure of the program and leadership strategies. Interview data constituted the major form of data for answering the three qualitative research questions. Questions also served to explain and expand upon findings from the quantitative data.

Data Analysis

The interview provided answers for triangulation of all research questions. Answers to the first research question relied heavily on responses to interview questions 1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 12. Interview items 4, 7, 8, and 9 provided answers to the second research question. The third research question relied on responses to interview items 1, 2, 3, 9, and 10. Triangulating survey answers to the fourth research question primarily relied on responses to interview items 4, 5, and 9. Some responses to any of the interview items were also appropriate for answers to one or more research questions including providing explanations for the trend in dropout rates found for the fifth research question. Following Moustakas' (1994) recommendations, interview participants were asked to respond to the following questions: What have you experienced in terms of practices for reducing dropout rates? and What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of practices aimed at reducing dropout rates? Additionally, information from the review of documents helped to triangulate some other data sources.

I employed content and phenomenological analysis for the qualitative component with guidance from methodology literature (Creswell, 2014; Krippendorff, 2013; Mayer, 2015;

Moustakas, 1994; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Upon completion of all interviews, I used a reputable company to transcribe them. The analysis entailed coding the data with alphabets and or numbers that identified words and expressions in support of interview questions, research questions, the conceptual framework, and purpose of the study. Examples of codes included FRAM for framework; RQ1 for research question 1, and INT1 for interview item 1. The analysis also included identifying significant statements that denoted how participants experienced the phenomenon; categorizing coded data into meaningful units; and reducing and selecting units most applicable to the problem, research questions, and conceptual framework (Krippendorff, 2013; Mayer, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Following the initial coding, patterns of responses emerged. I then identified themes that emerged from the patterns and categories. These themes and significant statements permitted a report of the essence of participants' experiences based on what was experienced and how it was experienced. The themes served as the results of this component.

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

Research methodologists recommend that strategies for establishing trustworthiness address transferability, dependability, confirmability, and credibility (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015; Suter, 2012). However, credibility of the study is the main evidence of its trustworthiness (Suter, 2012). Selecting an appropriate research design and participants who are most knowledgeable of the programs are among strategies that ensure trustworthiness in the conduct of a study. I ensured the quality of data through procedures for data analysis that included using notes from interview and observation protocols in a constant comparative process. This process led to reducing data into meaningful categories to identify themes. I also engaged participants in member checking at the close of interviews to ensure my interpretations accurately reflected

their meanings, supported themes with participants' responses, and used different forms of data to triangulate findings. Finally, thick descriptions of the sites and participants (Creswell, 2014) added to the trustworthiness of findings.

Researcher's Role

As the researcher, I acknowledged that personal experiences with identifying dropouts influenced the selection of the research topic. My role included collecting data that would accurately report the status of the program and strategies that influenced the decision of students at risk of dropping out to remain in school. Therefore, interpretation of participants' meanings and observed events required that the analysis of data involved a constant comparative and reflective process (Palaganas et al., 2017). According to the literature, the researcher also has the responsibility of ensuring fidelity through validating measures to include selecting and or creating appropriate data collection tools for addressing the problem (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). Further, as the primary instrument of the qualitative part of the study, this inquiry element of the study suggests that the researcher reflects on personal experiences and discloses any biases related to the evaluation process, including employment or services conducted in the schools or district (Patton, 2015). In essence, my role as researcher included conducting the study in an ethical and responsible manner (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

Among ethics in research is gaining approval to conduct the study from authorizing bodies. The data collection process for this study began after Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school district granted approval. Ethical considerations in conducting the study also relate to apprising participants of their rights to withdraw from the study after consenting, assuring them of measures that will ensure confidentiality, and affording

them respect in the choice of words used and other behaviors. Procedures in the study adhered to practices outlined for research with human subjects to include maintaining data in a locked file at my home and the commitment to destroy documents through incineration after three years, the period IRB indicates for maintaining the data, and not using participants' names in reports of the study.

Ethical considerations also refer to ensuring instruments are appropriate for the information needed to address the research questions and their validity. In this regard, I used approved documents, the Dropout Interview Protocol (DIP), and Dropout Program Observation Tool (DPOT) to guide the interview process with participants and the review of data sets from performance reports of the district and the schools. As the major instrument for the collection and analysis of qualitative data, I used member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and thick descriptions among measures identified to establish construct validity, credibility, and trustworthiness of the study (Patton, 2015; Suter, 2012). I followed procedures to support conclusion, construct, and external validity for the quantitative component of the study. Conclusion validity refers to whether there is a connection between the program and the outcome and that the statistical analyses permit accurate interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2014). I uploaded data in a recognized and widely used software for quantitative data analysis.

Conclusion validity refers to the accuracy and validity of conclusions found based on the study. The threat to conclusion validity for the qualitative component and to statistical conclusion for the quantitative component is considered in selecting appropriate data collection instruments and analysis procedures (statistics for quantitative) to best ensure that conclusions from the data are reasonable (Mills & Gay, 2019; Patton, 2015). Although the selected design may not determine a cause, the statistics can show whether there is a difference in outcomes

(dropout rates) within and between the programs. The qualitative component can show possible reasons for the statistical results. The results of the quantitative component are transferrable to sites with similar characteristics of the study given that the researcher selects the test of significance most appropriate for analyzing the study's variables (Creswell, 2014). This study's population has 15 schools with similar characteristics to the two schools investigated.

Ethical considerations observed in the study included ensuring clarity in the descriptions of the programs, clarity in meanings of the study's variables, and connecting the study to the conceptual framework to establish construct validity. Ethical considerations also involved responding to threats to external validity through describing the programs and participants to determine whether their characteristics differed (Creswell, 2014). I did not have control of history, maturation, and testing threats for the period of the study that may have influenced the study's sample.

Assumptions

The procedures for this study incorporated the assumption that participants would respond truthfully and fully to interview questions and survey items. The invitation letter, consent form, and the review of the consent form prior to the interview provided opportunities for participants to question any reservation regarding the questions to be posed. I assured them that they may skip any question that made them uncomfortable. Also assumed was that the population and sample selected for the study were appropriate for the study's purpose. A thorough review of district and school demographics that suggested data collected would be useful to other school districts with large dropout rates among students of color addressed this assumption.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the parameters that the researcher sets for the study (Simon, 2011). The purpose of the study and the research questions contain boundaries established for the study. The study compared dropout prevention programs in two high schools in one large district to determine their effectiveness in reducing dropout rates based on their overall dropout rates according to time periods. The study was not designed to compare the performance of other dropout prevention programs within the district. Data for the study were based on 12 years of dropout rates and self-reports of a purposive sample of teachers and principals affiliated with the programs. Criteria for participation included: (a) personnel worked at least two years in the program, (b) the program had been in existence for at least five years, and (c) the school's student population included a large percentage of African Americans and Hispanics from low socioeconomic status homes. The study was not experimental; however, causal relationships between program features, practices, and dropout rates may be implied. The lack of manipulation of the variables in this study suggests that implications of any causal relationship between variables would rely on observations of any differences in behaviors based on statistical analyses, content analysis, and the literature. The conduct of the study was limited to an inquiry of program features and servant leadership practices that targeted factors placing students at risk of dropping out; the parameters of the study did not extend to the general population of students enrolled in the schools.

IRB Approval and Procedures

Established procedures for approval to conduct the study from the IRB of Abilene Christian University determined the starting period of the investigation. A letter requesting approval of the superintendent of the Southeast School District to conduct the study included the

purpose of the study and a request to meet with the superintendent or designee to explain the study's procedures and acquire email access to potential participating schools and dropout prevention teachers and school leaders. After approval, I emailed an invitational letter to teachers as potential survey participants. The letter (Appendix E) contained the purpose of the study, its procedures, a link for a Zoom information meeting, and my contact information. Interested persons responded and were provided a consent form. Consenting participants received a link to complete the survey through Survey Monkey. I invited potential participants for the interview to an electronic, closed-camera, or conference-call meeting where they could pose questions, acquire directions for submitting electronically transmitted consent forms, and directions for scheduling the interview. The consent form contained information regarding participants' rights, possible risks, assurances of confidentiality, and the storage and final destruction of raw data.

Summary

This study involved teachers and school leaders from two schools with high dropout rates for students of color. Data sources included interviews, dropout rate datasets, a survey, and observations of documents of the programs' effectiveness. This study represented mixed-methods research based on the explanatory-sequential approach with a causal-comparative and one-group interrupted time series design as the quantitative component, and phenomenology as the qualitative component. The study's components also served as an evaluation of the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs in two schools. Mixed methods are appropriate to optimize approaches used to evaluate the programs' effectiveness in reducing dropout rates and provide a holistic evaluation of the programs' outcomes in a single evaluation (Chen, 2015). Optimizing procedures also employ both quantitative and qualitative data and can be used to determine the generalizing capabilities of a program in the real world (Chen, 2015).

This study's approach intended to identify program procedures and leadership strategies that deter high rates of high school dropouts in a school district in Texas. This study of programs in two high schools was founded on leadership and the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b) in recognition that one's beliefs in the ability to succeed applies to program leaders' selection and use of leadership practices and program content. The theory also applies to students' beliefs in their ability to succeed with the support of interventions. The purpose of the study has significance for the effective planning and implementation of interventions, and for interventions that address dropout factors from the perspectives of students at risk of dropping out.

Chapter 4: Results

This research study examined dropout intervention, prevention, and leadership practices in two high schools in an urban metropolitan school district in Texas. The dropout rate was higher for students of color in the district. Observations in the literature show that dropout research on student subgroups does not frequently link characteristics of students with effective dropout interventions (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). Therefore, this study identified factors that schools targeted were associated with students placed at risk of dropping out of school. The research compared dropout rates within and between the two schools six years before and after dropout intervention strategies and teachers' responses on four constructs of servant leadership practices across the two schools based on the influence of their supervisors. The procedures determined whether a significant difference existed between the two schools' dropout rates to suggest which program practices were more effective in reducing dropout rates and whether practices associated with elements of servant leadership differed among the two schools.

This chapter contains the results for three qualitative questions, two quantitative research questions, and associated hypotheses regarding program features, servant leadership strategies, factors targeted in the delivery of service, and differences in dropout rates for the two programs over a period of 12 years. The chapter is organized according to the qualitative and quantitative components. The process for identifying themes and the resulting themes is presented first followed by the results for the quantitative component. The quantitative component is organized according to Research Questions 4 and 5 and the associated hypothesis. Tables augment the explanations of results where appropriate. Additionally, select participants' comments support themes that emerged in the qualitative component of the study.

Participant Demographics

Interview participants represented a subsample of the teaching and administrative personnel employed in Schools AM and BW. A few of the subsample may have also taken the anonymous survey. Recruitment objectives consisted of acquiring the participation of five teachers and one school administrator from each school. The total purposive sample resulted in five participants from School AM and six from School BW. All participants enthusiastically responded to questions. They willingly gave their time for the 45-minute interview, which sometimes involved rescheduling or the participant engaging in the interview while driving to check on students.

Participants' discussions often illustrated a storytelling approach. Their stories revealed their passion for helping students and their commitment to student and school success. Some participants became emotionally moved to tears while sharing their efforts to keep students from falling through the cracks. For some teachers, this meant literally saving students' lives from street violence and other negative influences. A common thread throughout stories included instances of participants working with parents to provide students a better chance of staying in school.

Interview and survey participants represented samples from the population of two schools. The schools serviced students in grades 9–12 where the majority of the students were eligible for free and reduced meals (Texas Education Agency, 2018). The majority of the student population consisted of African Americans and Hispanics. About 32% of the students scored on grade level in reading and on the STAAR assessments, and 65% scored at grade level in mathematics. The graduation rate was 70% for four years and 73% for five years (Texas Education Agency, 2018). Both schools participated in the district's annual search for dropouts

in their neighborhoods and focused on 15 dropout prevention strategies but differed in the basic structure and some activities for their dropout prevention program.

The total population at the two schools (AM and BW) represented all teachers at each school who directly participated in providing services during the programs' operation or in designing the program. The population constituted the human sample of participants for the quantitative component of the study. The sample for survey participants totaling 29 individuals represented 18 teachers from School AM and 11 from School BW. The interview sample of principals and dropout intervention leaders consisted of five participants from School AM and six from School BW. Table 2 is a summary of select demographics of the interviewees.

Table 2

Interviewee Demographics

Name	Age	Gender	Position/role	Years of experience
AM1	50–60	F	Instructional leader	19
AM2	36–40	F	Teacher/graduation coach	13
AM3	30–35	F	Counselor	6
AM4	40–45	F	Assistant instructional leader	5
AM5	45–50	F	Counselor	21
BW1	60–65	F	Graduation coach	26
BW2	40–45	M	Community liaison	25
BW3	60–65	F	Teacher/ attendance	18
BW4	45–50	M	Teacher	5
BW5	35–40	F	Counselor	5
BW6	40–46	F	Teacher	18

The demographics in Table 2 show the majority of participants were female. Participants represented an average of 15 years of teaching experience in various roles. Responses supporting

the first three research questions illustrate the connection of their roles to dropout prevention efforts.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative component contains three research questions. The core of the three questions focuses on features of the intervention and prevention strategy, leadership practices that target factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school, and the roles of teachers and leaders in intervention efforts. Responses to 12 interview questions served as the major data for answering the research questions. Elements of phenomenological and content analysis involving the frequency of similar words and expressions, identified through coding and categorizing responses, provided support for emerging themes and the essence of their meanings.

Procedures in the analysis process responded to recommendations for ensuring the trustworthiness of the data. Therefore, I began the analysis with procedures related to establishing the credibility of the study, the main aspect of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Suter, 2012). Following steps for analyzing interview data, I used preset coding schemes for categorizing data according to the research questions, interview questions, theoretical framework, and purpose of the study. Through a process involving reading the data multiple times using a comparative reflective approach, frequently used words and expressions were categorized as appropriate in the preset codes. Additional reading and reflection enabled the reduction and or merger of initial categories and the creation of new categories. Meaningful units of data constituted final categories that signaled a theme.

The credibility of these themes was established by triangulating sources of data that carried the same or similar message. In accordance with suggested practices in the works of Creswell (2014), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Patton (2015), these data included samples of

participants' comments from both sites that aligned with the theme, some survey results, and in some cases, references to the theoretical literature upon which the study was founded. Practices for establishing credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability included employing triangulation, member checking, thick descriptions, reflexivity, and disclosing researcher bias. These practices involved my providing detailed or thick descriptions of each school's practices that constituted a whole-school approach to dropout intervention and prevention, for example. Also, I provided opportunities for interview participants to clarify my interpretation of their responses and to make additional comments. These practices enabled the narrative to reflect a rich and authentic account of the data collected.

Themes

The analysis resulted in two or more themes for each of the three research questions. The following themes emerged from the data as themes for levels 1–3: (a) whole-school approach; (b) dropout factors; (c) communication, the foundation of preventive strategies; (d) setting the example; (e) specialized services; (f) facilitator of services for student success, and (g) image maker. I summarized the initial characteristics or functions of each theme. Theme 1.1, Whole-School Approach, identified the overall structure of the program. Theme 1.2, Dropout Factors, identified influences on students' decisions to drop out of school and how school personnel identify those factors. Theme 1.3, Communication, was the foundation of preventive strategies. It identified program features that were centered on the communication process that were aimed at decreasing dropout rates. Theme 2.1, Setting the Example, identified behaviors exhibited by teachers and school leaders that decreased student attendance or increased in motivation. Theme 2.2, Specialized Services, consisted of an account of services provided to students that would deter them from dropping out of school (i.e., credit recovery and similar programs). Theme 3.1,

Facilitator of Services for Student Success, identified the role of teachers in providing diverse services for students' individualized needs that lead to success. Theme 3.2, Image Maker, functioned to promote the behaviors personnel model to create the image that success is possible. Explanations of each theme follow.

Level 1 Themes: Intervention and Prevention Strategy

Theme 1.1: Whole-School Approach. Participants consistently referred to the program as whole-school, after-school, and in-school approaches with whole-school representing the majority opinion. PBW2 shared, "It's been a school-wide effort with pockets of intervention and prevention groups within the whole campus." According to Participant AM1, "A dropout prevention committee works to recover dropouts and support students that are potential dropouts." The committee functions as a leadership team and "they have to stay abreast of everything from the top to the bottom" (AM1). Participant AM1 further explained the function as follows:

> And what I mean by from the top to the bottom, what's going on in the community, what's going on in the cafeteria. What's going on with special ed. What's going on with the maintenance and what's going on with everything that is charged to ensure these students are successful.

As a whole-school approach, many individuals are involved in dropout prevention and intervention. Participants explained multiple roles in the process. These roles included the work of counselors, advocacy teachers, wraparound specialists, attendance coordinators, graduation coaches, and others. Individuals in these roles conduct such tasks as determining social problems that students experience; identifying their need for food, clothing, shelter, or childcare services;

determining difficulties with academic performance and school attendance, and other conditions that influence their school performance.

One aspect of the approach involves school administrators, counselors, and other personnel who work to ensure seniors remain on track for graduation. PBW4 explained that school administrators, counselors, and senior teachers review student data and identify those students who are not meeting expectations. Interventions for these students include Saturday school, after school, community engagement, and other arrangements for students to recover credits needed for graduation. PBW4 also shared how community volunteers help and said, "we would literally go out and go from door to door out to the community and try to physically contact those scholars who didn't respond to our request to get their credits and get their grades right."

All participants provided similar explanations of their dropout prevention and intervention initiative; however, some participants added other details. For example, PAM5 noted features of the school-wide initiative that included peer tutoring, support groups, and organizations such as The Breakfast Club. The Breakfast Club enabled students "with PTSD to come in before school and focus their energy or stay after [school] to ground themselves and get ready for what they have to face at home. They're not very textbook-related strategies, but it works for us."

In essence, the school-wide intervention and prevention strategies involved many components and activities. Participants BW1, AM4, and BW6 connected activities of the teachers in roles such as graduation coaches, wraparound specialists, and credit recovery personnel with school-wide efforts to prevent student dropouts. According to PBW1, the graduation coaches "keep students aligned with their graduating cohort." Their work entails

tracking students from ninth grade in concert with attendance and credit recovery personnel to ensure students have sufficient credits to graduate. PBW6 summarized the whole-school effort as beginning with student-focused instruction and following protocols that address attendance. The program also features counseling and support services with the assistance of an on-campus truancy officer.

Participant AM4 provided an overall summary of the program that captured meanings from both schools. PAM4 said:

> So, I would say whole-school, and the reason I'd say whole-school is because we have administrators who do home visits. We have teachers who call when students have two or more absences. We reach out to parents or anybody else to help us locate students that should be in school, but we haven't seen them.

PAM3 concluded, "We do as much as we can during the day with our program to get those kids who are behind caught up while they are in school."

Strategies implemented within the program also varied; however, participant BWI explained what is required for the success of whole-school efforts:

> We model. It starts from the top [with] our principal, our administrative staff [modeling] professionalism: how we speak to each other in front of the students telling them "hi." Always telling students "hi," greeting each other with smiles and words of affirmation (BW1).

Unlike the majority of participants, BW5 viewed the dropout-prevention effort as an after-school program. Participant BW5 discussed the strategy of identifying off-campus services to help students acquire credits needed to graduate; however, the student is referred to the department on campus "if there's anything social, emotional that goes on with that student.".

Participants agreed that keeping students in school was the ultimate goal of preventive strategies within the approach. Participants described strategies to include night-school, after-school, and Saturday-school arrangements. Participant AM1 provided a detailed account of various arrangements and strategies aimed at keeping students in school. According to this participant, for "those students who are working, we have what we call on-time grad credit recovery where they have to go through a class conducted over a week's time, during the holidays, during spring break."

Other participants at both schools provided similar and additional descriptions of program features designed to reduce excessive absences. Such features included community in the schools, wraparound specialists, attendance monitors, and formats for school attendance that enable students who work or care for children and family members to meet requirements to graduate.

Theme 1.2: Communication, the Foundation of Preventive Strategies.

Implementation of the whole-school intervention required multiple strategies. Participants identified strategies while providing an account of a typical day of their work to reduce dropout rates. For some participants a typical day included communicating with students to provide ways to differentiate instruction, to ensure students attended class, and to provide activities whereby students regained credit for missed work during absences. Participant BW1 indicated that intervention prevention efforts involved keeping students on track through communicating with the attendance committee. The participant explained, "We meet with the parent and student to find root causes to assist them along with their grade level counselor." Assistance included referring students to specialized services such as college and career readiness and the graduation laboratory.

The communication process emerged as the basic strategy for most participants. The terms talk and listen represented the most important part of the communication process. However, the quality of talking and listening was the deciding factor in the process. The importance of the communication process was based on the expectation that school personnel would engage in thoughtful and active listening to identify students' needs and then provide potential solutions. Participant AM3 recognized the communication process as a strategy for students to engage in decision-making. AM3 shared that they discuss with students explanations of options that could assist them with academic or other concerns. Students are then asked to identify the option they wish to pursue.

Participant BW1 passionately linked the active listening and talking strategy to the core of teaching and to recognizing the background of the learner. BW1 described the ultimate meaning of the strategy as: "being hands-on, educating with love, educating with purpose, educating with empathy, educating with the knowledge of where they come from and where they want to go." For other participants communication strategies incorporated making daily phone calls to parents, making home visits, identifying support programs, visiting community businesses, and forming partnerships with churches and libraries. Participant AM5 explained the importance of phone calls. "We made sure that students understood the importance of getting to school on time, going to every class period. They needed to understand how it was going to relate to the bottom line and achieve the goal of graduation."

To ensure that students understood, PBW5 gave the following as a personal account of the communication strategy: "I stay on them regularly to make sure that their needs are being met in whatever program that they're in, off-campus or on-campus, [and] follow up with the teacher to make sure that their progression is moving forward." Participant BW4 described their

success of communicating from the point of providing balance for students that parents sometimes do not provide. BW4 concluded that balance is achieved through active listening and talking with students.

Theme 1.3: Dropout Factors. Participants responded to questions about dropout factors based on the survey results that I shared during the interview. Leading factors identified in the addendum to the servant leadership surveys from both schools appear in Table 3.

Table 3

Leading Dropout Factors for Both Schools

Factor	School AM counts	School BW counts
Attendance	13	11
Poverty/socioeconomics	13	
Parental involvement	12	9
Motivation	14	9
Test score performance	11	10
Grades	10	9
Student's age and gender	10	
Academic failure	10	
Student responsibilities	10	9
Race/ethnicity	5	
Personality	5	
Study skills	5	
Behavior		10
Reading and math literacy		10
Teacher awareness of student's needs		10
Teacher/student rapport		9
Academic performance		10

The counts in Table 3 show that the lowest-ranked factors for School AM were race and ethnicity, personality, and performance in study skills. Attendance in both schools received the highest frequency of responses. Also, personality received the lowest number of responses for both schools. Although parent involvement received more survey responses at School AM than BW and neither listed this factor as a first priority, interview participants invariably placed the item in a leading position.

According to Participant AM5, the motivating factor for student attendance is "more about a buy-in from a parent than a motivation from the student. So, once I make it important to the parent and I show the kid how you can get out, then that works." Interviews at both schools corroborated survey findings of attendance as the leading dropout factor targeted at the schools. Both schools used such strategies as phone calls and home visits to find absent students and reasons for the absence. One school also employed a truancy officer to assist in this role.

Participants discussed results that I shared from the demographic addendum to the servant leadership survey regarding differences in dropout rates for the six years before and after infusing the effective strategies for dropout prevention from the National Dropout Prevention Center (2019; Smink & Schargel, 2004). Participants provided reasons for the increased rates of dropouts after implementing these objectives. Most participants attributed the increased rates to changes in what the district in general sets as a priority. The general sentiment expressed referred to state and national attention to the dropout problem that resulted in a great deal of attention to school improvement plans focused on reducing dropout rates during the first six-year period (2006–2012). According to participants, as the rates declined, the district's priorities turned to other issues. PBW1 expressed the difference in priorities as follows:

> I just know that as a district, we started a major push in 2004 that was priority number one. So, everybody—even the custodian was talking about dropout prevention. It was a major push, and not only that, but there was radio PSAs. I know 'cause I was on them; there was TV exposure through news. I know because I did all the Spanish stations in Houston for a couple of years as far as talking to parents of what was available, what kind of options students had. And then what happened was as it [dropout rates] dropped, something else took its place. So, it's always about priority, right? Whether it's discipline, whether it's test scores, it's whatever's at the top and whatever sells, right? I like to say whatever sells and whatever it gets you ratings. And so, it's not that leaders at the school level forget about it, because you don't, because that is always—I mean talked about on a yearly basis, weekly basis we do talk about it, but it becomes secondary; and then you become complacent with the growth.

School leadership as a contributing factor to the change in dropout rates was a perspective shared among participants in both schools. Some participants discussed the priorities of school leaders and that many things fall through the cracks due to changes in leadership. Participant AM1 said:

> The school has had five different principals within five years: there's a different leader every year, or every couple of months. Before that, there was stability in the leader. And now, there's stability again. If the leader does not have high expectations, then the people that are working under the leader or alongside the leader are not going to have high expectations**.** That trickles on down to the students, on down into the community, on down to the parents. So, if you have high expectations, then those expectations, they will

> rise to those expectations. You never water down the expectations. And I think the expectations have been watered down here in the past.

Participant BW3 from another school agreed that changes in principals and some economic hardship contributed to the differences in dropout rates.

Poor communication, lack of student engagement, and socioeconomic issues also contributed to increases in dropout rates. PAM4 acknowledged a gap in communication between school personnel, students, and parents. Participants BW1 and AM4 linked the communication problem in part with the influx of students representing diverse backgrounds and that parents often have a fear of visiting the schools. According to BW1, the district does not turn away any student. BW3 noted that a "lot of those kids work in construction with their parents. They're dropping out because they just want to work and make their money. That's the main thing they really want." AM4 recognized a combination of factors that potentially enhance the potential for higher dropout rates. In reference to the current use of communication technology, AM4 said, "We have to really do a better job of student engagement and keeping the students engaged." The participant explained, "We have to figure out creative and innovative ways to really keep the kids involved if it's just one-way and there's no two-way dialogue, then there's no way for you as the teacher to really understand if the kids have it and there's no way for the kids to let you know how they're perceiving your lesson." Supportive of this view, BW3 said, "Some of the kids I know say I'm just bored with school; what's the point?"

Participants responded to the question of efforts used to identify factors students indicate that influence their decision to drop out of school and how they respond to those factors. The strategy of talking, but more active listening, surfaced as in the earlier discussion of preventive strategies. For example, AM1 said, "You have to have a listening ear because these are the

students who are going to be running the country." The participant explained that students identify such reasons for dropping out as work, the desire to become independent of parents, fights between parents or a mother and her boyfriend, and because of a relationship with a girl or boy. AM1 shared a recent account of a student explaining her decision to drop out.

> Yesterday, a little girl says she had to drop out because her mother had another family, and she was with her boyfriend, and she needed to work to get some more hangers because she, and her boyfriend, and their other friend got an apartment together.

AM1 also noted that students drop out to avoid their parents having to face a judge and pay a fine for their excessive absences.

The listening and responding process for AM3 incorporates a big sister approach to identify the problem. Through a technique of ensuring the student that the issue is clear, AM3 relates to the issue through a personal experience where flexible alternatives to the problem are discussed and "if/then" questions are discussed. The following scenario illustrates the technique and the reasoning of the student as a result.

> So, let's be a little more flexible. I get it. I understand. You just want to work? Well, how far you going to work? How far you going to get if we're just working; we're not going to learn how to read. So, I try to put a little bit of humor in there, but really want you guys to get this done. You know most of the kids when you reach out to them, you don't have to be so hard. Because if they come back and say something, half the time they really just want to see that like you know; she wants me to be in school too. I kind of want to be in school but I don't know if I should. Oh well, she wants me to, so I guess I'll give it one last try. And so sometimes that one last try is what they needed.

Teachers in both schools explained similar techniques. The techniques involved engaging students in conversations about their aspirations and how they perceived that they could reach their goals. Participant AM4 explained the conversation as "listening to them, what is it that's stopping you or hindering you from moving forward and then looking at where you are and what we can do for you." In the case where students' work hours prevented them from attending school, AM4 provided them alternatives such as enrolling in "Grad Lab where you can work at your own pace."

The questioning process often involved asking the same question in a different way. Participant BW1 used the technique of holding a conference wherein the first conference did not focus on issues the student faced. BW1 explained that the student referral may indicate that the student always wears earphones, a signal that the student may like music. Therefore, the first session does not include the truancy issue. Rather, the discussion would follow this example:

> I might just talk music and the kid might not know like, "Oh, I thought I was in trouble," and we might talk 30, 40 minutes about music. Now, the second time I call you in might be two days later and now we're going to talk about some issues that are going on. But at the same time, I'm still talking about music and what's going on, and how it affects you emotionally. And so, I think listening to these kids, to me, is fundamentally the best thing we could do. But I think within any program, but especially when the kid feels like he no longer fits into that school, I think we need to listen.

Level 2 Themes: Leadership Practices Targeting Factors

Theme 2.1. Setting the Example. Some participants discussed how their principals stressed setting good examples for students through modeling and setting expectations for students. The examples also showed how the principal supported teachers in their efforts.

Participants AM 3 and 4 discussed similar experiences supportive of modeling behaviors that students could emulate. Participant AM4 discussed the impact of teachers' behaviors on students' behaviors in such "little things like being to work on time, being ready for your students, how you handle a discipline issue." AM4 further explained, "In my opinion, those things are always going on in modeling if you're watching to see how would [the] AP handle something or how the principal handles something. Our principal is very hands-on with parents." Participant AM3 provided the following account:

> So, she is very big on [modeling]. We had to do a PD. One teacher is very, very good at keeping her documentation. She calls the parents; she has this kind of documentation. She talks to students; she has this kind of documentation. She had to do a PD with everybody on how I do mine. And now they have to model it. She doesn't like force them to like [it]; this is what you should be doing because this is excellent. And so, our principal is really big on if you need to learn it, tell me. If you know where to go learn it, you know we'll let you go learn. If you feel like you don't have what you need, tell your AP. Your AP can let me know. But there is a way to get what you need for your classroom to the best of the ability you know.

Participant AM2 recognized the importance of modeling behaviors for students and setting high expectations for them. However, AM2 presented a minority view noting that "realistically, there's definitely room for growth. We definitely have a high ceiling, and there's a place where we need to support our teachers more. We need to build our teachers up, so our teachers can build our students up." The majority view of school leadership recognized the support provided to both teachers and students. For AM3 and AM4 support included observing the principal's behaviors and other teachers' modeling effective strategies during professional

development sessions. BM5 noted that the principal provides "every resource that a teacher needs to be successful… and has done a lot of cleaning up, and teachers feel good about that, but . . . It's a difficult environment to be in." Participant BW3 described the principal's support of students through such behaviors as talking to and greeting students, being visible in the hallways, and creating programs to encourage and motivate them. BW1 described the transparency in which the principal operates and makes resources available to teachers.

Participant AM3 further explained how leadership behaviors stressed the school as family-oriented and expected that teachers behave in a manner that made students feel like their showcased children. According to the participant:

> Our principal does tell them when you're in the classroom, if you have a superstar, let them know they're a superstar. If, when you're doing your failure calls, do a couple [positive] calls like, I love Armando; he is killing it in my class. You know so trying to do both because kids like it.

Participant BW3 also illustrated the concept of family in interactions with students. BW3 reported the following experiences:

> I just take on the mama role. I just talk to them on a serious note, man, you know? I say take care of this first. It's going to help you in the future. I say if you get this out of the way, and I tell them too—anything you need, anything you need financially, I'm just there for the kids. I talk to their parents if I can. Just encourage them. I just make them feel wanted. And that way they have somebody they can come and talk to.

BW3 shared other experiences with students while crying. Very emotionally with several pauses and repetitions, BW3 recounted:

> I have a senior. I have a senior. She graduated last year. She came back to me now, you know; I mean she had a baby; you know, she had a baby–last year–she was pregnant last school year. I mean, I'm just, I'm just here for the babies. I talk to them, encouraging them, you know, just to stay— hang in there, and even after they graduate, I mean, you know my baby needs this, I'm, I'm struggling with this. Can you Cashapp me some money? And I do it all the time. [Laughs].

In addressing strategies for enhancing students' self-efficacy, BW3 said, "every teacher, I think, the majority of the teachers try to motivate the kids and let them know that they are valued, that they're important, to help them with their future."

Celebrating students' achievements also expressed teachers' expectations of students and provided an avenue for building self-efficacy. Participant BW1 expressed that "just making it [celebrations] all-inclusive for the students to feel good about themselves, giving them a voice in what they want to do, and I think that that goes a long way in students feeling the buy-in into school culture." BW1 stressed the importance of these celebrations in the following description:

> I think we celebrated everything possible on the calendar that enabled scholars to socialize first of all with each other and staff and administrators. We do one thing that I've never been a part of in my 20-plus years in education when seniors are ranked. I've never been a part where they do it in front of the whole campus, and invite the parents, and celebrate scholars with tales of, "I remember when you were a freshman, but now you're senior you're ranked No. 15." I'm talking about with everything—balloons, confetti, parents dressed up, the kids dressed up—and this was done early, so we're not talking about, "Oh, we're doing it in the May or June when graduations." I'm talking about as soon as rankings come in, there's a full-fledged celebration where that freshman

> sitting in that freshman class gets to go and see his peers that are three or four years older have that smile and see that they're going to graduate within the three months.

Leadership behaviors in various contexts set examples for students to emulate or confirm that teachers and administrators care for them. For many participants, caring behaviors entailed actively listening to students and talking with them to ensure them that school personnel exist to help them. This leadership action for AM1 began with building rapport because students "have to know that you really care about them. So, I listened to them, I observed what was going on." Similarly, AM2 ensured there was a communication pipeline that made students comfortable in responding. As a result, AM2 said:

> We have kids that are speaking up for themselves. They're trying to figure it out however it looks. So even if they don't—they understand now that there is something there for them that's not traditional and so they are advocating for themselves.

AM2 further explained:

> I am their check-in. I'm kind of like the judge, jury, and executioner at the end of the day. But it works really well and I think that my program provides more of a building that rapport and relationship for the students. I definitely have a hands-on approach.

Participants explained how they motivated students to believe in themselves. Participant AM3 emphasized the importance of students thought process aimed at succeeding and gave the following example:

> They have to know that they can succeed. They have to know that there is a door at the end of this tunnel that they're going to walk through. It's going to close and you're going to be graduated and gone. You know in the nicest way possible but that's what you want, you want to graduate, so, 100% you know. Everything we do is like you can do this. And

every time one of my kids finishes, I go good job, good job! I'm going to add such and such. Hey, I heard you were on your final exam, good luck.

Interview responses regarding leadership behaviors supported findings from teachers' rankings on the leadership survey, although the analysis did not result in a statistically significant difference. Examples of empowerment items supportive of responses included (a) Q2: "My manager encourages me to use my talents" (mean rank = 15.39 for School AM; mean rank = 14.36 for School BW). Participants associated leaders encouraging and promoting teachers to share their talents in meetings where they demonstrated approaches to teaching that resulted in student success; (b) Q3: "My manager helps me to further develop myself" (mean rank = 13.97 for School AM; mean rank = 16.68 for School BW). The leadership behaviors inherent in both questions support that the leader demonstrates behaviors that are desirable to be copied. Participants shared how leaders trained them for implementing specific tasks and provided opportunities for professional development; and (c) the stewardship item Q 26: "My manager emphasizes the societal responsibility of our work" (mean rank = 15.03) for School AM and (mean rank = 14.95) for School BW (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) relates to participants' descriptions of the emphasis principals placed on teachers' responsibility to students.

Participants' stories revealed how their leaders set an example by demonstrating behaviors that encouraged faculty and students. In essence, the leader served as an example of how teachers could serve as an example to their students. It served to encourage them to realize and use their talents and to persist in growing their capacities. Similarities in the mean scores revealed that the survey responses of participants from both schools did not significantly differ.. Survey and interview participants from both schools perceived there were no differences in the behaviors their leaders demonstrated.

Theme 2.2. Specialized Services. This theme emerged from interview items 7–10 regarding services provided to students that would deter them from dropping out of school. Participants generally discussed similar programs; however, some programs only existed on specific campuses. The discussions most frequently included such terms or expressions as attendance, showcase, credit recovery, and programs. Specialized services constituted an integral part of the whole-school arrangement for the delivery of services.

Frequent absence from school determined the specialized services offered to some students. Absences could result in students not having enough credits to graduate or grades. However, the specialized service targeted causes of absences. Multiple causes emerged in participants' responses to include needs categorized as social, emotional, socioeconomic, behavioral, cultural, and others. For example, AM1 said, "If they have social [socioeconomic] needs, a wraparound specialist ensures that—if those students do not have the food they need at home, if their parents are having difficulty with the rent, if they need clothes—they find the resources for them." Participants at School BW also identified this specialized service.

The graduation coach and counselors also provided specialized services. According to BW3, these team members are effective in helping students to feel they are capable of performing. Students' academic performance involves services through a tutoring program. Participant AM3 explained how this is communicated to students. The participant said:

> So, day one, we tell you [that] you can. This program is made for you to succeed. The only way you will not succeed in our program is if you don't do the work. I'm here to help you; the grad lab coach is here to help you. Your teachers are [here] you know. If you're doing chemistry, you're not even in science class, it doesn't matter. You can go to the chemistry teacher who we put on there and say, hey I need your help with you know,

> whatever chemistry work this is. So, you have no choice but to succeed. There is no failing this.

Other participants approached the discussion of specialized services differently. For example, AM5 began the discussion by acknowledging to students that their interests may not include college. The participant also shared personal stories whereby students could relate to and use as a source of information for decision making. AM5 gave the following account:

> First of all, we explain that college is not for everybody. We understand that. I mean it just is what it is, but I also explain there has to be life after high school, right? You cannot sit on your mother's couch. So, if we're not going to college, then what are we going to do? Just tell me what you like to do. You want to do CDL? Got it. I know exactly where you can go, and we can pay for it. You want to go and get air conditioning licensing and plumbing? Whatever it is we need all those things. We need someone to fix people's cars because I don't even like to pump my own gas. We need people to go out and be in the military and see that's one thing I identify with a lot of our kids. So, in the state of Texas, we have to graduate kids under what's called CCMI, college career/military. So, if a kid is not going to a four-year school and only about 29% of my students do, if they're not going there, then I think I have about 40 that go to an HCC. They're trying to figure out what they're going to do thereafter, but I've raised the enrollment of military.

The purpose of the discussion included informing students of career options that they had no idea existed. For these schools, students received information and opportunities to engage in specialized services including choosing such options in trades such as welding or extracurricular activities such as boxing. Discussions also incorporated verbal contractual agreements.

Participant AM3 referred to the organization of a boxing club as a vehicle to motivate student attendance and gave an illustration of the conversation with a student.

> And so, we do things like that so that if you do have this interest at school even though it was after school, you know that I have to be here because my teacher is here. And they're not going to just let me show up at school and do boxing. No, no, no, no. You didn't show up to class today, you don't get to show up to do boxing. You got to go to class and then I'll see you after.

Participants reported specialized services offered through community volunteers. These volunteers focus on building self-esteem for males and females through mentoring. Participant BW1 discussed how mentoring can help students, the need for commitment to servicing students, and gave an emotional account of experiences working with students. BW1 said:

> I've lost six scholars in my 20 years, and every one of those scholars was on the right track, and we had changed their perception of what education was going to be, and... every single one was taken by the streets. I told my colleague I'm tired of speaking at funerals and telling the parents that their kid was on the right track, they just happened to be at the wrong place and wrong time on that particular night; but I've had to go identify bodies on the streets before. And so, for me, those things continue to burn within me to say there is no—there is no scholar that comes across my table or my desk that I say, "Oh, no, he can wait, he's okay. His problems are not big." Every kid has—their problem is big to them, and I realized that. And whether it's a boyfriend broke up with you or my girlfriend broke up, we were growing up to say, "It's okay, there's a thousand others." No, I take things very seriously. I'm grown and I have tools built in to be able to go through barriers, but these kids don't have that yet, and that's what we're trying to build.

> At the end of the day, that's what I'm trying to give these kids tools to battle demons every day.

Other participants shared experiences that supported the need for mentoring and modeling as specialized services for building students' confidence. BW4 explained the importance of understanding students' circumstances and building a teacher/student relationship. The participant explained:

> I am the kids I teach, believe it or not. I'm just in a whole different era and I understand the importance and I kind of give an example because the kids really respect me as a man, and they see the encouragement I give them, the love I give them, the discipline, the learning. They see how I value education, and I give them examples of that and show them, hey, we're all in the same boat, and our families are not going to leave us with generational wealth behind. We weren't put in that position. Because they've been around a lot of people that really don't care about…you know…anybody who do, and we got that role of teacher that is on another level with these kids that they respect so much, to where when they see me in the same…I mean, they might see me in the same Family Dollar throughout the week, and that means a lot.

Level 3 Themes: Roles of Teachers and Leaders

Theme 3.1: Facilitator of Services for Student Success. Participants' roles encompassed diverse responsibilities. Facilitating activities to ensure student success was central to all roles. Instructional leaders facilitated the organization of support programs, teacher modeling for students, and professional development for teachers. Participant AM1 identified monitoring reports from team members to ensure the accuracy of conducting their responsibilities. A major facilitating role involved preparing team members for full instructional

leadership positions. The position of some leaders was to provide training in some form for individuals responsible for some roles. These included serving as grade-level leaders. This training would also help to advance the skills of those teachers who aspired to become principals.

The position of graduation coach entailed ensuring students were on track for graduation. Facilitating this task involved determining the status of students beginning in ninth grade, providing them the best options to meet graduation requirements, and monitoring progress with the input of findings of other professionals. Other professionals included teachers, counselors, and other school personnel with knowledge about the student's status and needs. AM3 is among those professionals who also facilitate the eligibility of students to receive services including credit recovery and on-time grad. Teachers serve as facilitators of instruction where they are expected to target students' needs. Participants revealed the complexities associated with facilitating the many services to students that include differentiating instruction. Participant BW6 shared the type of conversations held with students in facilitating diverse services for their success. The participant said:

> I take the approach that, I am here to do everything and anything that I can to help you be successful. But again, at the same time, I'm going to hold you accountable because I have expectations for you and it's important for you to learn to meet expectations as you move beyond the world of high school. But I will, for the most part, help and work with you as much as possible to ensure that you get that opportunity.

Teachers also encounter many challenges in facilitating instruction. The instruction is not limited to students but includes facilitating knowledge about the importance of education to parents. Participant BW4 noted that the role often involves serving as a liaison between the community and the school. BW3 noted the complexity of trying to motivate diverse learners to

engage in instruction and also address their economic needs. In this respect, the participant explained:

> I've been trying to bring the program to the kids, you know, more gaming. The kids love gaming. [I've promoted] opportunities to get out and work, a student work program where the kids leave at a certain time to go to work. They know by the time they get to be a senior; you only have to come to school a half a day. You automatically get out of school—that motivates them to do what they need to do to get all the stuff [done] ninth grade to the eleventh grade. So, by the time you get to be a senior you have opportunity to go out and get a nice job. And then academic-wise, the teachers, you know, it's like you have to motivate the teachers too to want to motivate the kids.

Although participants noted the challenges associated with their responsibilities, the majority indicated they received the support of school leaders and experienced success in facilitating intervention efforts because they did not accept failure as an option available to students. Attempts to help students avoid failure included the facilitation of students' social and economic needs. Program services are facilitated through a wraparound specialist who works with community agencies to meet the students' economic and other needs and provides assistance for such basic needs as clothing and food. For example, Participant BW6 said, "jackets have recently been shared out; we partnered with the food bank to provide food consistently every month to families in the area." Participants' stories revealed that facilitating support services for students' needs was as important as facilitating instructional delivery based on their academic needs.

Theme 3.2: Image Maker. Participants explained program activities and elements directed to students' interests. Some of these activities consisted of clubs, organizations, and

after-school extracurricular events. Common events included soccer, football, basketball, band, and dance. Participants generally agreed that considering students' interests was among the important objectives in the educational process. Providing services and activities that interested students also enabled the school to ensure the positive engagement and behavior of students who remained on campus after school. AM4 noted that free activities available to students included classes in culture, cooking, and driver's education. AM4 advised students that "You don't want to come to school, but you don't wanna [*sic*] go home. So, you've got to do something." However, students' interests also considered the support of parents. Participant BW4 attributed changes in the attitudes of parents with their image of the school. BW4 explained the rationale as follows:

> I think more parents are seeing the benefit of an education in their child, the discipline, and that's what's doing it. The only thing they need us… is our effort. As long as they know we care, as long as they know we're putting the effort too, they're literally meeting us halfway. It used to be we went all the way to the finish line before we could hand it off. Now, they're actually meeting us halfway, the parents. And I see more of that. And I've seen that within the last four years.

The caring that BW4 mentioned equates to what participants explained as their image as a parent figure or family-oriented entity. The findings for prior research questions that involved modeling behavior that facilitated action on the part of teachers and students support the image maker theme for this research question. AM4 associated the image with changes made in school staff. AM5 explained:

> It was the extreme turnover in leadership. Now that that has settled and there is a pattern, right? And now there's a groove that they understand. There are processes. They know I

> am going to be here from June to July. I am going to be here the whole month of June meeting with those kids. They get that, and they understand the importance of it. The entire administrative staff is brand new.

According to Participant AM5, these new employees required training for their roles. In essence, "explaining to them the importance of having those kids in activities where they can gain credit in a timely manner is important because we're dealing with low-performing, all over-age kids."

Participants discussed situations that called for changes in students' behaviors to improve their images and that of the school. AM4 provided the following scenario of damaging images related to students leaving school early and efforts to correct them. The scenario began with a discussion to identify the undesirable behavior.

> So, we could figure that out. And then it's well why aren't you returning after lunch? Oh well, I don't like this particular class, or I don't want to be here, or you know the teachers would get their attendance and take off, would also take attendance and they would come back. So those were some factors and things we had to start ensuring that kids are returning to class after lunch. So, we would have people strategically placed in different places to make sure they didn't leave the building. Another way we kind of curbed some of that, we had a few incentives where we would do food trucks. So, we had food trucks last year a couple of times for the kids throughout the year. And they really enjoyed it. But you gotta [sic] go back to class. You gotta [sic] do this. So those were some incentives or things that we did to get kids to go to class.

The students' backgrounds, economic status, race, and factors contributing to their risk of dropping out of school prompted some school personnel to share personal experiences similar to those of students. These messages to students served to illustrate that their circumstances or

characteristics do not define their abilities or aspirations for the future. These messages came from males and females at both schools. Participants shared that the students related to them and became aware of career options that they did not know about previously including how the military could serve them. They also learned about extracurricular activities that motivated their interest.

Summary of Themes

Three Level 1 themes emerged from participants' responses that described features of the dropout prevention programs perceived as appropriate for addressing factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school and that would likely increase completion rates. The themes are interrelated in their efforts to reduce dropout rates. Strategies included in the prevention and intervention efforts considered factors that included students' social, economic, and academic needs. Implementing a whole-school approach focused on school attendance appeared as the most important feature of efforts to increase completion rates. However, the strategies embedded in the efforts must encompass active listening to students in order to understand inhibitors to school attendance, a characteristic illustrative of adaptive leadership.

Responses to the interview items for Level 2 themes resulted in two major action-oriented themes: setting the example and specialized services for attendance and credit recovery. These themes indicated behaviors that teachers and school leaders exhibited that resulted in decreased absences and increased student motivation. The answer to the research question reflected leadership practices that recognized influences on school attendance. These practices included modeling desired behaviors for students to emulate, creating opportunities for students to showcase their achievements, expanding curriculum choices, and providing opportunities for

students to experience success. These practices especially illustrate how participants work to build self-efficacy and participants' efforts to promote student success.

The two themes for Level 3, facilitator and image maker, revealed what teachers and leaders perceived as their role in intervention efforts. From the image of parents or family-oriented persons, teachers and leaders facilitated processes to identify students' interests and to link them to appropriate activities and services. Table 4 contains a summary of themes and supporting information, including the nature of the activities provided for the diverse needs and interests of students in and outside of classroom instruction. Support for some findings garnished from interview responses also appeared in teachers' survey responses for the dimensions of servant leadership. Table 4 contains a summary of themes and supporting information.

The information in Table 4 also cross-references the emerging themes from interview participants' comments to other pieces of evidence. These pieces of evidence included frequently cited, same, or similar messages in discussions of the research question. The cross-referencing also illustrates the intended meaning of the theme and other sources that support the themes (see Table 4). Additional information relative to the findings of the three qualitative research questions follows.

Table 4

Sublevel Themes and Cross Referencing

RQ: Theme	Frequent expression	Essence of meaning	Triangulation
1.1 Whole school	Whole; within; after; intervention	A multi-activity school-based initiative	Interview items: 1–3
1.2 Communication for preventive strategies	Tracking, home visits, attendance, listening, talking	Communicating for credit recovery and support services to keep students in school	Interview items: 6, 7, 10–12
1.3 Dropout factors	Attendance, needs, priorities, parents, communications, student engagement	I want to drop out because…	Interview items 4–6, 10 Survey item: 10
2.1 Setting the example	Model, celebrate, share, expectations, interests, self-efficacy	Teachers and leaders model high expectations whereby students feel good about themselves.	Interview items: 4, 5, 8 Survey items: 1–4, 11, 12, 19, 20, 25–27
2.2 Specialized services	Programs, grad lab, credit recovery, showcase, attendance	Opportunities for students to grow through varied programs	Interview items: 7–10
3.1 Facilitator for success	Differentiated services and instruction, modeling, roles	Failure is not an option.	Interview items: 1, 9; Survey items: 1–4, 11, 12, 19, 20, 26, 27
3.2 Image maker	Interests, success, doing something	Background and the environment don't have to limit career options.	Interview item: 10. Survey items: 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, 24, 28

Summary of Results for Qualitative Research Questions

Research Question 1

This research question inquired, "Which features of the dropout prevention programs do participants perceive as appropriate for addressing factors associated with students at risk of

dropping out of school and that will increase completion rates?" In sum, the answer to RQ1 involved a whole-school approach that included tutoring, counseling, focused instruction, and personalized services targeting school attendance, poverty/socioeconomics, parental involvement, behavior, test score performance, and academic performance. This answer entailed findings that emerged in three themes. The first theme identified the program through the expression whole-school approach. The second theme, communication as the foundation of preventive strategies, identified program features and strategies aimed at decreasing dropout rates based on communications with students, parents, and program personnel. The third theme, dropout factors, identified influences on students' decisions to drop out of school and how school personnel identify the factors.

Research Question 2

Answers to the question, "What leadership practices do participants identify that target factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school?" consisted of two themes: setting the example and specialized services. Consistent with the study's conceptual framework, findings suggested that teachers and administrative leaders model behaviors that support student learning, self-efficacy, and teacher learning. Incorporating these behaviors in mentoring, tutoring, and specialized services target the diverse needs of students with the objectives of teachers and leaders modeling high expectations whereby students feel good about themselves, providing opportunities for students to grow through varied programs, and students graduating, thus decreasing dropout rates.

Specialized services include responsibilities of the graduation coach, graduation lab, wraparound specialists, on-time laboratory, credit recovery, and college, career, military readiness. Frequently triggered by excessive absences, these services include counseling to

determine the reasons for the absences and programs designed for students to recovery credits in order to graduate with their cohort year. Leadership practices include organizing and monitoring the support services, providing appropriate resources (modeling, professional development, tangible resources) for implementing services. The nature of services such as the on-time laboratory requires students to attend class at the time scheduled to receive credit.

Research Question 3

The two themes for RQ3, facilitator and image maker, emerged in response to the research question, "What do teachers and leaders perceive as their role in intervention efforts?" The roles of facilitator and image maker emerged as answers to the question. From the image of parents or family-oriented persons, teachers and leaders facilitated processes to identify students' interests and to link them to appropriate activities and services. The nature of the activities provided for the diverse needs and interests of students in and outside of classroom instruction.

Support for some findings from interview responses appears in teachers' survey responses for dimensions of servant leadership. The essence of the meaning of these roles consisted of the teacher as a facilitator of differentiated instruction, the leader as a facilitator of differentiated services, and both teachers and leaders modeling behaviors to create the image that success is possible. Responses supported the use of leadership strategies and instructional modeling to fulfill students' needs based on the conceptual framework's profile of the school completer. Leadership behaviors including servant, adaptive, and spiritual were evident throughout participants' storytelling of their lived experiences in efforts to help students to achieve. These behaviors included demonstrating a caring nature, encouraging the development of values and the desire to learn, engaging in deep listening while communicating with students, and modeling these behaviors inside and outside of classrooms.

Summary of Results for the Quantitative Research Component

Research Question 4

Responses to the servant leadership survey provided answers to the question, "Is there a difference in levels of empowerment, stewardship, authenticity, and standing back between teachers in School AM and School BW as measured by the servant leadership survey?" The analysis revealed there was not a statistically significant difference in the levels of servant leadership assessed through the Mann-Whitney U test. Survey items 11, 19, and 26 measured the leadership characteristic of stewardship. Items 9, 17, 24, and 28 each measured authenticity. Empowerment was measured by items 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 20, and 27. Standing back survey items consisted of 5, 13, and 21. Assessment of these variables were represented by a six-point Likert scale with measures of 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*somewhat disagree*), 3 (*disagree*), 4 (*somewhat agree*), 5 (*agree*), and 6 (strongly *agree*). The analysis included determining the frequency of the same Likert scale responses within and between the two programs. The Mann-Whitney U test compared mean differences between the two schools on each of the four leadership characteristics.

Empowerment. The Mann-Whitney U test compared the mean differences between the two schools on each of seven items related to empowerment. Empowerment refers to leadership behaviors that encourage self-confidence. Empowerment scores for School AM (M = 14.17) and School BW (M = 16.36) were not statistically significantly different (U = 125.5, z = 1.339, p = .238) using an exact sampling distribution for U.

Stewardship. The Mann-Whitney U test compared the mean differences between the two schools on each of three items related to stewardship. Stewardship refers to leadership behaviors such as serving as role models, being responsible, and not controlling. Stewardship scores for

School AM (M = 14.58) and School BW (M = 15.68) were not statistically significantly different (U = 106.5, z = .367, p = .740) using an exact sampling distribution for U.

Authenticity. Four survey items characterized authentic leadership behaviors. These behaviors include that the leader openly illustrates his or her inner commitments and intentions (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Authenticity scores for School AM (M = 15.78) and School BW (M = 13.73) were not statistically significantly different (U = 85.0, z = -.770, p = .550) using an exact sampling distribution for U.

Standing Back. Three survey items measured this aspect of servant leadership focused on giving priority to followers' interests rather than self-interests and on supporting others (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Standing back scores for School AM (M = 12.89) and School BW (M = 18.45) were not statistically significantly different (U = 137.0, z = 1.825, p = .092) using an exact sampling distribution for U. The analyses for all components of the Servant Leadership Survey revealed there were not statistically significant differences in the responses of participants at Schools AM and BW. The analyses for RQ5 follow.

Research Question 5

The answer to the question, "Is there a difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies?" involved testing the null hypothesis.

H_0: There is no difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies.

Dropout rates for 12 school years (2006–2018) for each school constituted the data for this question.

The analyses involved operations to determine three associated questions of the data. The analysis determined whether differences existed in pre and post dropout rates within each school, between the two schools, and whether one school was more successful than the other in reducing dropout rates. The descriptive statistical analyses of the data reported frequencies, means, and standard deviations for both dropout datasets. The analyses used the Mann-Whitney U test, which is an appropriate test for a small sample size with nonnormal data (Wiedermann et al., 2017). An established *p*-value of 0.05 determined whether there was a significant difference between the two programs for the 12 cases investigated on dropout rates.

Analysis of Performance for Schools AM and BW. The analysis of dropout data for the two schools determined whether there were statistically significant differences in dropout rates between the schools. The analysis also determined the effectiveness of the schools based on differences in the dropout rates. Twelve years of data aided in understanding the performance benefits of postdropout prevention and intervention program efforts versus predropout intervention program implementation on the schools' dropout rates for each graduation year. The observations represented 6 years of predropout interventions and 6 years of postdropout prevention and intervention program data for each school.

An analysis of differences in dropout rates for both schools using a nonparametric test, the Mann-Whitney U test, resulted in $U = 17$, $z = 0.08006$, $p = .93624$. The critical value of U at $p > .05$ was 5. The result was not significant at $p > .05$ level. Therefore, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected since no significant differences existed in the predropout rates between the two schools. Both schools began the post intervention at similar rates.

The analysis of differences in postdropout scores between the two schools began in the year 2012. The rates for School BW were higher during this school year than School AM.

Therefore, the schools entered the postintervention period with differences in dropout rates. Also, dropout rates for School AM for 2012 and the years moving forward were not as consistent as those for School BW. The analysis of postdropout rates resulted in $U = 0$, a significant difference in rates between the two schools. After program implementation, the postdropout rates for School AM were lower than the rates for School BW.

Summary of Performance Analysis Between Schools. The hypotheses testing for RQ5 revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in the dropout rates between the two schools in the years before the intervention. The analysis revealed a significant difference in the dropout rates between the two schools in the years after the intervention. School AM's rates were lower postintervention than School BW's rates. The differences in the postintervention rates suggests School AM's program was more effective in its prevention and intervention efforts for lowering dropout rates; however, a small sample size, differences in dropout rates between the schools at the beginning of postanalysis (school year 2012–2013), and inconsistencies in dropout rates should be considered in fairness of the results.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The literature on school improvement, graduation rates, and high school dropout rates reveal that dropout rates became a concern during the 1960s when rates of high school enrollment and completion increased and diploma certification became an entry requirement for employment (Chappell et al., 2015; Doll et al., 2013). Early discussions about school dropouts included negative views that labeled them as a threat to society, antisocial, rebellious, and mentally inferior (Doll et al., 2013). Many of these views remain in today's society (Stark & Noel, 2015). The impact of dropouts on the economy is among concerns seen in the literature, along with intervention efforts to address students dropping out of high school.

Schools and other agencies have employed various interventions over the years in efforts to reduce dropout rates. Although the literature illustrates declines in dropout rates, rates for students of color remain higher than those of White students. The problem is that dropout research on student subgroups often fails to link characteristics of students with effective dropout interventions (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). Therefore, there is a need for an evaluation of dropout interventions and leadership practices for students placed at-risk of dropping out of high school and to determine the effectiveness of dropout programs for this population.

The gap in dropout rates between ethnic groups is apparent in the Southeast School District (SSD) where the longitudinal dropout rates for African American students were higher than other major ethnic groups (Texas Education Agency, 2019c, 2019d). This rate represents a 2.5% difference in the 12.3% for White students. The average state-wide dropout rate for students of color (specifically African Americans and Hispanics) for the 2017 cohort year was 8.0% compared to 3.2% for White students, according to the Texas Education Agency (Texas Education Agency, 2019c, 2019d). The dropout rate in SSD, a large urban school district in

Texas, has declined since 2007 where the dropout rate for the 2017 term was 14.8% for African Americans compared with 12.3% for their Caucasian counterparts (Texas Education Agency, 2017c).

Continuing differences in rates among ethnic groups imply the need to consider factors associated with dropping out and leaders' responses for creating knowledge-based prevention strategies (Campbell, 2015). Recommendations for addressing the problem focus on factors contributing to students leaving school. The problem in SSD is ameliorated in part through efforts of district personnel canvassing neighborhoods to identify students for reentry every year. Factors inherent in critical race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and social learning theories (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b), as well as a framework for dropout factors (Jordan et al., 1994; Watt & Roessingh, 1994), include poor academic performance, attendance, poverty, and low self-esteem, and indicate the likelihood of students leaving school early (Meškauskienė & Guoba, 2016; Ticuşan, 2016; Zaff et al., 2016). Identifying effective interventions is supported through recommendations to investigate students' social and emotional learning competencies (McKee & Caldarella, 2016; Zaff et al., 2016) for closing the gap regarding precise causes of dropping out, understanding the influences of dropping out on student outcomes, and designing interventions that consider students' characteristics (Campbell, 2015).

This problem is important and relevant due to the personal, social, and economic effects of dropping out on the learner as well as the community. Dropouts add to low rates of literacy, thereby affecting the productivity of communities (Latif et al., 2015). Additionally, high school dropout rates negatively impact local and national economies through the loss of income from individuals who are inadequately prepared for the job market (Latif et al., 2015; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics , 2017). Given the importance of the dropout problem, this study examined

intervention and leadership practices used in two high schools' dropout prevention programs designed to address factors associated with students placed at risk. Both schools were located within an urban metropolitan school district in Texas.

The research compared dropout rates within and between the two programs six years before and after dropout intervention strategies. The research also focused on comparing teachers' responses on four constructs of servant leadership practices across the two schools based on the influence of their supervisors. The objectives included determining the dropout factors targeted in both programs, whether a significant difference existed between the two programs' dropout rates to suggest the more effective program in reducing dropout rates, and whether practices associated with elements of servant leadership differed among the two schools.

I used a mixed-methods design to study the dropout interventions at two high schools in the HISD and to determine their effectiveness in reducing dropout rates along with multiple approaches for the qualitative and quantitative components of the study. Explanatory-sequential constituted the basic approach for this study's mixed-methods design where quantitative data were collected and analyzed first. The results informed the nature of questions for the second phase that expanded or explained the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2014; Subedi, 2016). I selected phenomenology, a description of the essence of individuals' conscious lived experiences, as the qualitative approach for the study. The approach involved my setting aside personal biases while recognizing that reality is consciously related to an object, and that reality is based on one's perception of the meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2013).

The quantitative component employed causal-comparative research and incorporated a one-group interrupted time series design (Mertens, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019). This approach permitted the examination of trends in dropout rates six years before instituting the national

dropout prevention strategies and six years after. The component also included an examination of teachers' responses on the servant leadership survey to compare differences in participants' responses between the two sites. Causal-comparative research is descriptive in nature as it attempts to identify causes or implications of causes for existing differences between groups (Mills & Gay, 2019), such as dropout rates. According to research methodologists, causal-comparative research involves comparing the performance of already formed groups that differ on at least one explanatory variable and identifying factors that resulted in the difference (Mertens, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019; Terrell, 2016).

Causal-comparative and explanatory-sequential mixed-methods appropriately incorporated optimizing approaches used in evaluating the programs' effectiveness for reducing dropout rates. Optimizing procedures represent a holistic evaluation of the programs' outcomes in a single evaluation that addresses several programmatic issues (Chen, 2015). The design also employs both quantitative and qualitative data and can be used to determine the generalizing capabilities of a program in the real world (Chen, 2015). The integration of the optimizing approach occurred in the nature of interview questions including those driven by responses on the servant leadership survey administered as part of the quantitative component.

I used interviews, a survey, and dropout rate data to seek answers to five research questions and to test a hypothesis. The first three questions represented the qualitative component of the mixed-methods design and Research Questions 4 and 5 represented the quantitative component. The research questions examined were the following:

RQ1: What features of the dropout prevention programs do participants perceive as appropriate for addressing factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school and that will increase completion rates?

RQ2: What leadership practices do participants identify that target factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school?

RQ3: What do teachers and leaders perceive as their role in intervention efforts?

RQ4: Is there a difference in levels of empowerment, stewardship, authenticity, and standing back between teachers in School AM and School BW as measured by the servant leadership survey?

RQ5: Is there a difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies?

$H_{1:}$ There is a difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies.

$H_{0:}$ There is no difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies.

This chapter includes a discussion and interpretation of the results of the examination. These results are reported according to the research questions, emerging themes, and their association with other findings in the literature. The chapter also contains implications of findings for practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

Research Question 1

The first research question that guided this study was "What features of the dropout prevention programs do participants perceive as appropriate for addressing factors associated

with students at risk of dropping out of school and that will increase completion rates?" Responses to all interview questions (with the exceptions of 7, 8, and 9) and responses to the open-ended survey item (question 10) provided answers for RQ1. The interview questions explored factors that survey participants identified within intervention efforts, results of the quantitative analysis of dropout rates, and descriptions of program efforts.

In response to features of the dropout prevention programs that address factors associated with students at risk of dropping out, participants of both schools revealed that intervention and prevention did not exist as a single, physical program that students attended, but as a whole-school coordinated effort of which students received services during and after-school hours. Leadership of the coordinated effort consisted of a team or committee comprised of teachers, interventionists, counselors, and other personnel with specific roles (e.g., wraparound specialists and graduation coaches).

Features of intervention and prevention efforts found in this study relate to findings in the literature. Accounts of early and current practices for reducing and preventing school dropouts feature a comprehensive approach that incorporates the school, home, and community. The practices identified in the current study feature a whole-school design that fuses multiple activities with students' needs. The whole-school design includes activities for which teachers, principals, counselors, and other personnel have specific responsibilities. The approach also incorporates within and outside activities that may be implemented before, during, after school, and on weekends. Programs such as the Higher Horizons in New York, ALAS Dropout Prevention, career academies, and general prevention and intervention models include counseling services, block scheduling, personalized learning, parental involvement, and other whole-school strategies (CTEC, 2013; Lehr et al., 2004; Meyerhoff, 2019; Wilson et al., 2011).

Features of recognized programs reported in the literature include a comprehensive approach to addressing the dropout program. Similar features to these programs and those reported in the outcomes of this study include mentoring and monitoring. For example, the Check & Connect dropout prevention strategy included a monitoring component for assessing student progress and a mentoring and intervention component where students received individualized assistance through a collaborative effort involving the school, home, and community service providers.

Truancy was another similar feature between the current and other programs. An evaluation of the truancy feature of Check & Connect revealed the need to shift emphasis from studying students' characteristics related to truancy in efforts to reduce absenteeism, to a focus on students' strengths and requirements for them to be successful (Ekstrand, 2015). However, Sullivan and Sadeh (2016) noted that Check & Connect effectively reduced truancy and mobility among emotionally disturbed students. Truancy efforts in the current study entailed focusing on students' characteristics, identifying their needs, and providing alternatives to alter negative conditions resulting from tardiness and absenteeism through various approaches to include credit recovery, student recovery, monitoring, home visits, and referrals to assisting social agencies.

Participants described whole-school features as incorporating activities that allow students to take courses at times that do not interfere with their work schedules, provide for some of their economic needs such as food and clothing, address their self-efficacy and motivation, and involve parents and community stakeholders. These practices constituted preventive strategies. For example, BW6 observed that "a lot of times, especially for an adolescent mind, academics is not always their number one motivation. So, it's the athletics and the extracurricular activities that provide that motivation to do." Therefore, BW6 described features of class

activities that focused on building and meeting high expectations, motivation for learning, and targeting students' academic needs.

> My motto is, "We work hard, but we play hard." So, what that means is I have high expectations in regards to our work, but because we get to go out in the field—we did a cross-curricular collaboration with the chemistry teacher where we're actually testing water for pollutants in our local bayou that's around the corner. So, literally for four Thursdays, we would go out to four different locations that were parks in the area. We would test water. In addition to building those partnerships, they got to do a boat tour of the bayou—fun things too. They love learning sometimes. They don't like the expectations often because they're high, but they meet the expectations because they know that, in the end, we also get to do some really great stuff. Kids even developed their own tour of our city where we actually took the tour they developed. So, those are the things that motivate and so that's what we see happening and are working to continue to build.

Motivation and self-efficacy are among the factors consistently addressed for improving student success. The theory supporting this study incorporates these factors. The scenario that Participant BW6 presented illustrates theoretical positions related to motivation and self-efficacy. Theorists and researchers suggest that motivation relies on multiple sources and influences to include external forces, attitudes and feelings about a specific subject, intrinsic needs to feel self-determined, and individual traits such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977a; McCann & Lawrence, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Prevention and intervention efforts shared in this study revealed teachers and leaders recognized the importance of recognizing students' interests and accommodating them through student assignments, school projects, extracurricular

programs, and student organizations. These features of the dropout intervention promote motivation and self-efficacy through leaders providing organizations and events in which students show interest, feel that their capabilities are showcased, and are encouraged to participate. For example, BW2 explained students are engaged in athletics, clubs, organized events where students received special recognition for their progress, and activities that focused on developing their confidence through improving their social skills. BW2 said:

> It started like taking them to restaurants, showing them how to dress, talking about proper attire when you're out, going to the store, or you're going to interview, or you're going to your job, or you're going out with your friends. So, just the basic kind of social skills that, sometimes, we take for granted as adults. I think they did an excellent job with just making it all-inclusive for the students to feel good about themselves, giving them a voice in what they want to do; and I think that that goes a long way in students feeling the buy-in into school culture.

Absenteeism emerged as the leading dropout factor. Teachers and leaders responded to this finding through instituting practices that addressed reasons for absences. These reasons were consistent with other findings and included poverty or socioeconomic conditions, and issues related to home conditions. The reason for absence largely consisted of the need for students to work, stay home with siblings while parents worked, or stay home with their own child. Practices designed to encourage students to remain in school included altering schedules to permit students to attend class around their work schedules and connecting parents and students to resources such as food, clothing, and shelter. Arrangements for completing school requirements consisted of evening school courses, weekend courses, short-term courses, and online courses. Evening school as a school-based alternative for high school completion has been a long-time practice in

connection with vocational and job training programs. Job Upgrading Programs in Detroit, Michigan is an example where students who worked in industries received instruction based on the school's criteria for awarding a diploma (Meyerhoff, 2019).

Some participants noted the need to address behavioral and other problems beyond school attendance. Participant BW1 discussed students who had developed positive behaviors about education but who died as a result of "the streets." BW1 explained, "I'm grown, and I have tools built in to be able to go through barriers, but these kids don't have that yet, and I'm trying to give these kids tools to battle demons every day." Participant AM5 acknowledged that "some of our students are definitely drug dependent or substance dependent. A lot of them are emotionally and mentally not well, and so they do a lot of self-medicating." AW5 noted the need for other types of interventions with these students. The whole-school approach for assisting students with behavioral problems appeared to be limited to the use of counselors, wraparound specialists, and a support group for students with posttraumatic stress disorder. Regarding interventions that provide for students' needs beyond academics, Maynard et al. (2105) concluded that there is a gap in schools adopting the public health model as both preventive and recovery measures for students exhibiting substance abuse and socio-emotional behavioral problems. Although participants did not indicate the existence of a health model, their observations supported the existence of whole-school strategies to address these concerns, particularly the role of the wraparound specialist.

In sum, the answer to RQ1 involved a whole-school approach that included tutoring, counseling, focused instruction, and personalized services targeting school attendance, poverty/socioeconomics, parental involvement, behavior, test score performance, and academic performance. The first subtheme identified the program through the expression whole-school

approach. The second subtheme, communication, the foundation of preventive strategies, recognized communication as a core component of program features aimed at decreasing dropout rates. The third subtheme, dropout factors, acknowledged influences on students' decisions to drop out of school and how school personnel identify these factors.

Research Question 2

The major forms of data collection for the research question, "What leadership practices do participants identify that target factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school" consisted of interview items 4, 5, and 8 [self-efficacy modeling for teachers' value acceptance], included findings from the leadership survey instrument with emphasis on the categories of stewardship and empowerment. Stewardship behaviors refer to those such as serving as role models, caretakers, being responsible, and not controlling (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Empowerment behaviors involve encouraging self-confidence (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Participants described leadership practices that supported them in their practice and in professional development opportunities. They also discussed leadership practices that addressed factors influencing students' self-efficacy and their ability to make decisions in support of their efforts to graduate. The highest percentages of agree or strongly agree responses came from participants of both schools, varying by leadership categories. Empowerment had the highest frequency of *strongly agree* responses, while stewardship and authenticity had the highest frequency of *agree* responses.

In this mixed-methods study, I assumed that behaviors of servant leaders enhance the behaviors of teachers, and thus enlighten students about the importance of completing school. Inherent in servant leadership is a commitment to the care of followers and ensuring that they perform to the extent of their capabilities (Greenleaf, 1977/2012). The measures of servant

leadership and their meanings included in this study are the following: (a) stewardship focused on role modeling responsible behaviors and not exhibiting controlling behaviors; (b) empowerment focused on encouraging self-confidence; (c) authenticity focused on disclosing inner commitments and intentions; and (d) standing back focused on supporting others and giving priority to followers' interests rather than self-interests (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

The results from both the survey and interviews illustrated that the teachers and leaders exhibited behaviors consistent with the message of the importance of staying in school, illustrating engagement in setting goals and expectations with students according to students' interests and needs, providing alternatives for student choice based on their ability and unique situations, and sharing their own experiences and choices of alternatives. Some initiatives reported in the literature that included elements of servant leadership resulted in positive outcomes on academic performance and student motivation. These findings include a positive correlation between principals' servant leadership behaviors in Virginia schools and the reading performance of students (Crabtree, 2014); a linkage between leadership and principals' and school counselors' roles in dropout prevention (Boyer, 2012; Evans-Brown, 2015; Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017); and positive relationship between servant leadership practices, academic performance, student satisfaction, and retention (Olatunji et al., 2012; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015; Tromski-Klingshirn & Miura, 2017).

Other findings reported in the literature review chapter appropriately refer to leadership and dropout prevention factors related to student performance and the needs outlined in this study. These findings included the existence of correlations between specific servant leadership characteristics such as altruistic calling, the desire to place followers' needs above those of the

leader, empowerment, humility, and student satisfaction with advising and academic achievement (Herndon, 2007; Paul & Fitzpatrick, 2015). Advising in this dissertation suggested the receptivity of students to advisement and being able to choose alternatives that promoted their success.

The discussion of dropout factors for this research question focused on leadership behaviors that addressed those factors students identified as well as those school personnel determined. For example, attendance, the leading factor that personnel from both schools identified, resulted from underlying causes that students shared. Participant AM1 linked attendance with what "the students feel, or the parents have told them, you need to go out and work to help support the family." On the other hand, Participant BW6 associated attendance with students being bored and not able to see the purpose of schooling. The lack of exposure to various careers or opportunities for students to learn about areas that interested them also influenced attendance.

Previous studies support additional similarities with the findings of this study. Irregular attendance and chronic absenteeism have been identified as factors contributing to behaviors that lead to students dropping out of school (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Tanner-Smith & Wilson, 2013). The reasons for school absence vary and some are directly linked to gender differences where females, for instance, are frequently absent because they may take on the role of caring for siblings or their own children as teenage parents (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015). Participants also noted students having to care for their own children or siblings while their parents work as a cause for school absence.

Researchers identified family, teacher behaviors, the school setting, the student, and the environment as major categories of causes for absenteeism that lead to school dropouts (Shahidul

& Zehadul Karim, 2015). Family-related causes included economic conditions that required students to work, parents' education and failure to recognize the importance of education, family chaos including divorce, and the lack of parent participation in the school (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015). Interview responses in this study supported the literature as illustrated in the following comments.

BW7 explained a student's reason for absence as "I was going to come back but now I don't have anybody to keep my baby." AM1 said, "so if they're working, they can't come to school and there are those that are not motivated," and AM 3 reported the following account regarding parental participation:

> So, once again, parental involvement is, it's hard. We call as much as we can. I have called this parent one, two, three times. I send a text message, I send emails. I have spoken with several parents who say I work night shift. And so all day you know, I send them to school so they can be there and at night I'm gone. So I don't really have a chance to interact with anybody.

Some specific causes in the other categories cited in prior studies were linked to the lack of a positive student-teacher relationship, a nonmotivating classroom environment, the inability of students to complete homework assignments, a lack of peer socialization, transportation problems, illness, and disabilities (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015). Participants in this study did not link student absence with the lack of a positive student-teacher relationship. Rather, participants linked the school environment with the school creating organizations and extracurricular activities based on students' interests, and teachers and leaders modeling behaviors for students to emulate such as showing respect, extending greetings, and demonstrating positive behaviors.

Leadership behaviors in this study demonstrated key elements of the theory of self-efficacy as Bandura (1977a) purported. According to Bandura (1977a, 2008), ways to build self-efficacy include "mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, and states of physiology" (Bandura, 1977a, p. 191). These ways suggest that leaders and teachers would promote modeling positive behaviors through activities that allow students to observe the success of others with similar perceived capabilities and opportunities for students to master observed skills, behaviors, or concepts. Teachers in both settings provided examples of their supervisors modeling self-efficacy behaviors in support of teachers' efforts to promote students' self-efficacy. BW3 felt that the principal provided 100% support to teachers modeled behaviors to students through greeting "them every day at the door, makes them feel good . . . and has different programs to encourage the kids and motivate the kids [to] help out young ladies, help out young men. The teachers try to motivate the kids and let them know that they are valued, that they [are] important."

BW2 supported these views and expressed the importance of transparency that the leadership shows with teachers and students as part of the effort to change school culture that "starts from the top and it trickles down." The sentiments that this participant expressed involved the leader and teachers modeling a caring attitude in part through speaking in English and Spanish to convey to these different speakers "how they're doing and tell them to have a great day and tell them that they look nice today and tell them they're going to be winners today and we can't wait to see you tomorrow." BW2 continued stating, "I think we use words of affirmation; [they] are big here on this campus." Some of these leadership behaviors are reported in the findings of other studies. Terosky and Reitano (2016) found that principals who exhibited actions consistent with characteristics of servant leadership were effective in building the

capacities of their teachers. Servant leadership as characterized in this dissertation is evident in statements that illustrate such behaviors as listening, empathy, awareness, persuasion, stewardship, faith, integrity, commitment to the growth of people, and building community; as well as facilitating behaviors such as motivation, interests, and commitment. Comments demonstrating these meanings included "tell them to have a great day and tell them that they look nice today and tell them they're going to be winners today and we can't wait to see you tomorrow" (BW2). According to BW3, leaders' actions of greeting "them [students] every day at the door, makes them feel good." This action is associated with the caring nature of servant leaders and their commitment to build communities.

Other participants recognized the need for improvement in the leaders' behaviors that would better support their self-efficacy. For example, AM2 expressed the need for additional leadership support that would make a difference in teacher morale and reduce feeling overwhelmed. AM2 noted that "We're about halfway" in this area and the consequences include that "If I'm beat down all the time, then all I can give is what I have left, which is not enough to get these students where they need to be." Another participant, AM5 shared that the leader provided any resource that teachers needed and that the school climate was challenging with the many changes in administrative school staff, although teachers welcomed the changes. Participants AM3 and AM4 viewed the school leader as a model who (a) advocates for the school as the students' family, (b) needs to learn more about the students' past to build relationships with them, (c) encourages students to showcase their accomplishments, and (d) empowers teachers who demonstrated successful approaches to model those approaches for other teachers in professional development sessions.

All participants provided accounts of intervention activities designed to address factors associated with students dropping out or showing the potential of dropping out. Responses to RQ1 included approaches that incorporated within and outside school activities that may be implemented before, during, after school, and on weekends. Specifically, specialized services for students included programs and services such as On Time Grad, Credit Recovery, NGs, Community in Schools, Career Technology Education, Emerge, Miles Ahead, and Vocational Programs. Also, in addition to ROTC, students are afforded special interest groups and activities such as boxing, photography, dancing, and intercollegiate sports. Many of these groups and activities addressed needs to enhance self-efficacy or confidence in addition to exposing students to various career possibilities. According to Participant BW2, specialized classes are available where students acquire skills and firsthand experiences. BW2 said:

> Students acquire real world skills, like welding, beautician, nursing. They've got a nursing programs where kids get a CNA while they're still in high school. They've got college courses provided at the school, where kids can get college credits while they're actually in high school.

The literature reveals that the application of the concept of self-efficacy has been included in medical instruction (Artino, 2012) and other content areas. Teachers, wraparound specialists, counselors, truant officers, attendance clerks, graduation coaches, and community parent liaisons were among the personnel who facilitated services associated with these interventions in this study. Consistent with the literature, some of these activities and arrangements promote self-efficacy, encourage academic success, and lead to reduced dropout rates.

A meta-analysis that Chappell et al. (2015) reported included strategies that showed a mean effect size related to predictors of positive dropout prevention outcomes. Similar to strategies incorporated in programs at both schools, Chappell et al.'s strategies included academic support, family engagement, literacy development, behavioral intervention, service learning, work-based learning, health and wellness, and school and classroom environment. Family engagement in this study involved school personnel making home visits, engaging parents in neighborhood walks to find students who had dropped out, and inviting parents to participate in cultural events and recognition programs for students. The schools' career and readiness programs provided work-based learning under the instruction of professionals for such jobs as nursing, welding, cooking, auto mechanics, and cosmetology. Students successfully completing these programs received a certification permitting them the opportunity for a full-time job upon completion of high school.

Responses to the interview items for this research question resulted in two major action-oriented themes: setting the example and specialized services for attendance and credit recovery. These themes indicated behaviors that teachers and school leaders exhibited that resulted in decreases in absences and increases in student motivation. The answer to the research question reflected leadership practices that recognized influences on school attendance. These practices included modeling desired behaviors for students to emulate, creating opportunities for students to showcase their achievements, expanding curriculum choices, and providing opportunities for students to experience success. Leadership includes the teacher as a leader—exemplified in practice and supported in the literature. Knesting-Lund et al.'s (2013) survey of high school teachers found that teachers perceived that their behavior influenced students' decisions to remain in school. The resulting behaviors emerged in the following themes: (a) relationship-

building, (b) communicating caring, (c) motivation and encouragement, and (d) pointing to the future. Although the terminology of participants in the current study sometimes differed from that of Knesting-Lund et al.'s themes, an examination of the expressions reveals similar meanings. For example, the expression "They're going to be winners today and we can't wait to see you tomorrow" (BW2) has a similar meaning as Knesting-Lund et al.'s motivation and encouragement theme, and "greeting students at the door" (BW3) illustrates the themes of relationship building and communicating caring.

Research Question 3

Responses to interview items 1, 9, and 10 provided the basic information to answer this research question: "What do teachers and leaders perceive as their role in intervention efforts?" The interview questions inquired of (a) the nature of intervention and prevention efforts, (b) teacher/principal relationship in terms of supporting personnel through modeling behaviors whereby teachers feel valued and accepted for their expertise in guiding student behavior and performance, and support through resources and professional development, and (c) behaviors teachers demonstrate that encourage students to feel accepted, and activities or program elements that are directed to students' interests.

Interview item 1 elicited responses of participants' roles and responsibilities in efforts to decrease dropout rates. Participants recognized their role as facilitators of student learning through offering alternatives for completing high school requirements based on students' needs and interests. As facilitators, comments revealed that participants modeled behaviors expected of students that included social and academic expectations. Participants employed various techniques and activities in efforts to encourage student engagement and to show that they cared about the student.

Participant AM4's role included "making home visits and knocking on students' doors. Like where are you, why are you not here on campus." Participants BW1, BW4, AW1, and AW 5 expressed similar roles in their efforts to reduce absences and recover students for school reentry. Participants recognized that efforts to decrease dropout rates considered the students' needs, interests, and their levels of motivation and confidence in being successful in school. Therefore, participants described their commitment to encouraging students to want to succeed and in showing them that school personnel cared about their situations and about them.

Participants recognized that efforts to decrease dropout rates considered the students' needs, interests, levels of motivation, and confidence in being successful in school. Therefore, participants described their commitment to encouraging students to want to succeed and to show them that school personnel cares about their situations and about them.

Participants' descriptions of conversations with students most frequently contained the words "talk" and "listen." These terms meant that to address students' needs and interests, teachers and leaders had to engage in thoughtful listening to capture students' meanings. Participant AM1 shared the value of student-teacher communication by saying, "They [teachers] sit there and listen. And then when they tell them [students] they're doing good, then good job! When they tell them they need to change, they change. Children really need to know the genuineness of the teacher." Participants' roles included talk beyond conversations with students. Participant BW2's typical daily role included the following:

> It will definitely consist of phone calls to parents on a daily basis. It will consist of maybe 40 percent of my day being out on the streets doing home visits and meeting with community—and what I mean by that, I mean stores, or banks, or just community people. And then I would say the other portion will consist of me talking to either administrators,

staff members, whether it's a faculty or staff, whether it's clerks or teachers, about particular scholars; and then the other one will be on campus talking to scholars.

The behavior that school personnel exhibited served as a core component of their efforts to reduce dropout rates. Most teachers expressed that they were advocates for students and their role included demonstrating behaviors that showed they care about students. This did not mean that they failed to convey in their conversations the expectation that students complete their work and try to meet standards. Caring attitudes resulted in providing guidance and in offering recognition programs such as Hispanic Heritage, Black History month, Career Day, and celebrations for student achievement in various areas. School activities revealed teachers' commitment and support to students along with respect for students' abilities to make more informed decisions. Similar findings regarding important behaviors that teachers demonstrate in their efforts to prevent dropouts emerged in a study of dropout factors with secondary teachers. Gil et al. (2018) reported that teachers perceived commitment and support resulted as leading factors that affect school dropout. Gil et al. also concluded that preventing school dropout also involves the interest and motivation of teachers in the teaching and learning process.

In addition to demonstrating a commitment to students for enhancing their academic and overall performance, teachers described questioning-type discussions that encouraged students to reflect on their experiences in order to make informed decisions. School personnel supported students in encouraging them to participate in activities that interested them and in showcasing their achievements. In an examination of factors influencing secondary students to drop out of school, Gil et al. (2018) noted that teachers cited commitment and support as leading factors affecting student dropping out of school.

The roles of school leaders and teachers in the dropout prevention and intervention effort have shown success in decreasing dropout rates in various programs throughout the nation. The role of the truancy officer involved a cooperative effort of other school personnel to include the graduation coach and attendance clerks. Similar to other studies, the whole-school prevention program included an early warning system. An evaluation of a whole-school Early Truancy Prevention Program that also contained an early warning system showed attendance improved for primary grade students (Cook et al., 2017). Eighth-grade students in the Diploma Now program—a secondary school reform model geared toward students' engagement and persistence similar to this study's On-Time Grad and Credit Recovery programs—successfully maintained 90% or above attendance in their ninth-grade year; however, there was no statistically significant impact at the high school level (Corrin et al., 2016). According to participants, the different alternatives afforded students have enhanced their attendance rates. An alert warning occurs when a student is absent at least three times which prompts home visits to determine reasons for absences and to provide students and parents alternatives.

The roles of facilitator and image maker emerged as answers to the research question. The essence of the meaning of these roles consisted of the teacher as a facilitator of differentiated instruction, the leader as a facilitator of differentiated services, and both teachers and leaders modeling behaviors to create the image that success is possible. School leaders initiated the climate and expectation of modeling, according to participants. Principals set the tone in meetings and in hallways for teachers and students to engage in cordial greetings, shaking hands, inquiring about the feelings of individuals, and demonstrating a genuine caring attitude. Principals also stressed the need for the school to be visible in the community and providing resources that addressed the needs of students and their families to the extent possible.

The role of image maker included demonstrating socially acceptable behaviors while understanding cultural differences and negative situations students may have experienced and the expectation that teachers model successful strategies to other teachers for their consideration. Some participants shared that their image making included being present in local neighborhood stores where students and their families shopped, and in sharing their life stories to demonstrate that the teacher experienced some of the same circumstances as their students. This sharing, according to participants, emphasized that the teacher expected students to work hard to achieve. These practices are consistent with those recommended to ensure teachers convey their expectations of standards and for students to achieve despite race or other differences. Gershenson et al. (2016) reported findings from a study of disadvantaged students using longitudinal data that supported the need for teachers to examine their own biases in their communication of expectations to students. Gershenson et al. found that White teachers expected less from Black students than non-Black students. The negative expectations about students' abilities also included the perception that finishing high school was more likely for non-Black than Black students (Gershenson et al., 2018). The population for both schools in the current study represented high percentages of Black and Hispanic students while the teaching and leadership personnel mainly comprised White and Black employees with Hispanics being among the minority. Gershenson et al.'s (2016, 2018) research had implications for the influence of the teacher's race on the race of the student. Participants did not convey differences in student expectations based on the student's race.

Participants at both schools commented on the principal-teacher relationship regarding support in facilitating instruction and serving as a role model. Participant BW1 referred to the relationship as transparent and supportive. Accountability, training, communicating clearly, and

providing resources constituted part of the actions of the leader of teachers. According to AM4, in addition to communicating expectations at the beginning of the year, the leader's objectives included supporting and coaching teachers appropriately. These actions are similar to recommendations from studies that in-service training incorporates factors that influence school dropout including understanding students' cultures (Coronel & Gómez-Hurtado, 2015). All participants stressed measures to increase attendance rates in their prevention strategies and training and interventions that principals encouraged aimed at better understanding students and their circumstances.

Research Question 4

Responses to the servant leadership survey provided the primary answers to the question: "Is there a difference in levels of empowerment, stewardship, authenticity, and standing back between teachers in School AM and School BW as measured by the servant leadership survey?" The analysis revealed there was not a statistically significant difference in the levels of servant leadership assessed through the Mann-Whitney U test. Survey items 11, 19, and 26 measured the leadership characteristic stewardship; items 9, 17, 24, and 28 each measured authenticity. Empowerment items included 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 20, and 27; standing back survey items consisted of 5, 13, and 21. Assessment of these variables represented six-point Likert scale measures of 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*somewhat disagree*), 3 (*disagree*), 4 (*somewhat agree*), 5 (*agree*), and 6 (*strongly agree*). The analysis included determining the frequency of the same Likert scale responses within and between the two programs. The Mann-Whitney U test compared the mean differences between the two schools on each of the four leadership characteristics. The survey results revealed similarities in responses between the two schools for the four categories of servant leadership measured in this study. For the stewardship component, responses of *agree*

and *strongly agree* represented the highest percentages of responses. For School AM, the responses *agree* and *strongly agree* represented 49.4% of answers to all items for the category from a sample of 18 participants. For School BW, 11 participants responded that they *agree*d or *strongly agree*d to the category, accounting for 32% of the answer choices. Responses of both schools combined represented 33.3% of participants who *agree*d and 47.1% who *strongly agree*d, which constituted 80.4% of responses for both schools combined. Similar combined results occurred for both schools on the empowerment category with 77.9% of participants' responses in the *agree* or *strongly agree* categories. This represented the highest counts for items in this category for the combined schools. Authenticity yielded a combined percentage of 59.4% of participants who *agree*d or *strongly agree*d while standing back resulted in a combined percentage of 59.7% participants who *agree*d or *strongly agree*d in their responses to the questions.

The likenesses of responses in these categories suggested that participants perceived their leader practiced or exhibited such stewardship behaviors as leading with a vision, placing a high priority on their societal responsibility, and demonstrating the importance of focusing on the good of the whole. Interview participants' discussions of the direction their leaders outlined for enhancing student motivation and success and encouraging visibility of the school in the community supported their survey responses. Characteristics related to stewardship and empowerment represented elements of servant leadership that appeared most discussed in response to questions regarding the teacher-leader relationship in supporting their efforts. Of the seven items associated with empowerment, participants consistently identified their leader as providing them with resources, offering opportunities for them to learn new skills, encouraging teacher and staff development and creative alternatives for building student interests, and

demonstrating autonomy in teachers' decision making and in creating projects. Autonomy in teachers creating and implementing instructional alternatives included community-based projects, experimental projects where students tested theories through taking water samples from various locations in the city and proposing special interest clubs and activities based on students' interests.

Participants recognized their leaders as individuals who held the welfare and success of the students and the school as a responsive and family-oriented agency as their ultimate concern. Leaders demonstrated positive behaviors consistent standing back and authenticity in the conduct of their responsibilities. For example, participants credited leaders with being transparent, showcasing talents of both teachers and students, and making decisions for school operations despite the possibility of negative consequences. One participant acknowledged that although the leader may not agree with an employee's point of view, the leader always listened, provided a rationale for the decision, and willingly stayed after meetings for further discussions with anyone interested. Another participant commented that decisions in staff changes that possibly generated negative views among some employees were later recognized as needed and better for the organization. The creation of planning teams and program leaders supported that school leaders recognized the expertise of all school personnel in implementing objectives of the school.

A number of studies support the findings of the current study. Von Fischer and De Jong (2017) conducted a study with teachers and principals using the same instrument as the one selected for this study. Similar to the categories of stewardship and empowerment receiving the highest percentages of responses among survey and interview respondents in the current study, teachers rated these two categories as leading characteristics for promoting job satisfaction in von Fischer and De Jong's study. The empowerment item, "My manager encourages me to use

my talents," received the highest mean score in their study. According to von Fischer and De Jong, empowerment is demonstrated in ways that include teacher engagement in choosing instructional materials and decision-making at the building and district levels. Other investigations of servant leadership and teacher perceptions of their leaders revealed that teachers link the influence of servant leadership behaviors with promoting team skills and abilities (Al-Mahdy et al., 2016); increasing job satisfaction (Cansoy, 2019; Zhang et al., 2016); incorporating collaborative approaches for teaching and learning, developing trust in the leadership and indirectly to enhancing the performance of students (Sebastian et al., 2016). Although the aim of the current study did not include an assessment of teacher job satisfaction, descriptions of the teacher-leader relationships have implications for how teachers perceived their role and commitment to performing it for the benefit of students.

Research Question 5

Answering the question, "Is there a difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies" involved testing the following hypothesis:

> $H_{0:}$ There is no difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies.

Dropout rates for 12 years (2006–2018) for each school constituted the data for this question. The analyses involved operations to determine three associated questions of the data. The analysis determined whether differences existed in pre and post dropout rates within each school, between the two schools, and whether one school was more successful than the other in

reducing dropout rates. The descriptive statistical analyses of the data reported frequencies, means, and standard deviations for both dropout datasets.

The analyses included computations for the Mann Whitney U test with a *p*-value of 0.05 to determine whether there was a significant difference between the two programs for the 12 cases investigated on dropout rates. The analyses first applied the research question to the schools separately to determine whether significant differences existed in the pre- and post intervention years and then compared the performance between the two schools. The results revealed that preprogram rates for both schools did not differ significantly. However, the analysis of postprogram rates revealed a significant difference. The dropout rates were lower for School AM than School BW. The results should consider that the rates at year one (2012–2013) were higher for School AM than BW, rates were not as consistent as those for BW throughout the post years, and the study's sample was small.

Concluded from the analysis was an increase in both schools' dropout rates postintervention. A review of reports for the entire district supported the increased trend. For the term 2018–2019, district dropout and graduation rate analyses showed that dropout rates increased from the 2017–2018 school term. The dropout rates in the district for African American, Asian, and Hispanic students were 0.8, 3.1, and 1.1 percentage points higher than the rates for the class of 2018. The dropout rate for White students decreased by 1.2 percentage points. For the 2017–2018 term, School AM's four-year dropout rate was 18.0% (Texas Education Agency, 2019b) with an annual dropout rate of 6.7% and an annual rate of 6.2% for the year 2018–2019 (Texas Education Agency, 2020b). For School BW, the dropout rate was 22.4% for the 2017–2018 term (Texas Education Agency, 2019b). The annual dropout rate for the 2017–2018 school year was 7.3% and 8.1% for the year 2018–2019 (Texas Education

Agency, 2020b). The rates for school term 2019–2020 were not available at the time of this writing.

Interview data, survey data, and reviews of news releases from the district triangulated findings from statistical analyses. Further, interview data provided possible reasons for the dropout rates. Responses to survey questions regarding factors that most likely influence student dropout revealed attendance as the leading factor cited for both schools. Poverty/socioeconomics and parental involvement followed as the next leading factors for School AM. Behavior, test score performance, academic performance, literacy in reading and mathematics, and teacher awareness of students' needs received the same number of responses for the nest leading factors for School BW. Interview respondents also cited attendance as the leading dropout factor. Reviews of media releases contained reports of school and district personnel canvassing neighborhoods to increase attendance and recover students who had dropped out of school. Also, interview participants described their role in making home visits and the work of truancy personnel to intervene in potential dropouts through encouraging school attendance.

Interview participants did not disagree with increased rates and provided their perceptions of reasons for the attendance and school dropout problems. Most participants cited economic reasons as contributing to poor attendance for most students. These reasons included poverty where students lacked basic resources, work schedules that interfered with the school schedule, and baby or sibling sitting while parents worked. Differences in the geographical location of schools also contributed to differences in attendance rates. Participant BW1 said, "when I came over here and saw numbers, I almost passed out—attendance-wise; and like I said, because compared to where I'm coming [from]. We also made changes a long time ago in that

side of town. So, I know it can be done." Participant BW4 provided a detailed account that explained the influence of attendance and interrelated attendance with other factors.

> Our main problem [is school attendance]. We've been in the red for so long academically, and that's how they phrase it. My school academically is inept. …but if you break it down, it's not the test scores, it's not the quality of teachers…and that's what makes it confusing to the public, because they'll say, man, you've got some of the best teachers…and we really do. So, when you look at the dropout rate, the attendance, that's what's hurting us. It's called Index Four in our overall rating. And that Index Four is really more in control of the parents, like what happens when their kid leaves school. Do they do college, career, military readiness? Are they finishing? What are these kids doing? Our numbers fall because [of conditions] outside of our immediate control. Attendance is tied directly into that Index Four because they're missing…and the reason why these kids are missing is work. Some of them go to jobs and they see more of a benefit than coming to school. Then you have the kids who say, I don't want to work, I'm going to go hustle, because that's what I see every day. And they might do it on the weekend and go to jail and we won't see them no more, and they're missing days, and they're still enrolled in our school, and we might find out two or three months down the line. We've got young females who have kids at an early age, and then they stop coming. It's convoluted. It's a bunch of factors. They're all negative factors, of course. It's positive because they're working. They're kind of in a bind, and it goes back to attendance, ties back to socioeconomic, ties back to parental control.

Regarding the high dropout rates after the initial focus on interventions, most participants expressed that the leading reasons for increased rates included changes in district priorities and

instability in school leadership. Associated with changes in school leadership, one participant explained possible reasons for some changes. Participant AM5 said:

> They had an extreme turnover in leadership. When you're sending kids to summer school to take the wrong class that is important . . . [and] discouraged the student. They don't want to do it anymore. When you've allowed the student to take the same class, the same PE class over and over again, and they don't get any credit because it's the same class. See, in the state of Texas, you can't repeat a credit.

BW3 agreed that "economic hardship. . . changes in principals . . . with administration, teachers too" contributed to the increase in dropout rates.

Other participants explained the attention that the district gave to dropout prevention in previous years contributed most to increases in later years. BW1 said, "The major factor is priority. As a district, we started a major push in 2004; that was priority number one. So everybody—even the custodian was talking about dropout prevention." Another participant provided a minority view and related social media to increased dropout rates. However, explanations of the influence of social media supported the majority opinion of socioeconomic factors. Participant AM3 explained the following about social media and efforts to direct students:

> We're seeing TikTok; we're seeing Instagram; we're seeing video. Everybody wants to go viral. And so, we see that increase in shows like Real Housewives. It's giving a false sense of reality. These kids are like, oh so you mean all I have to do is have an only fans' page, and then I could be a millionaire. And I'm like you know, let's talk about it. Let's discuss this only friends' page you want to have. How about maybe instead we turn that

> wanting to have our own business. Maybe you're really into modeling and so we can go to school for fashion and business. …Maybe we're just showing off our clothes.

Interview participants at both schools traced their efforts to address dropout prevention to factors that they identified as contributing to reasons for poor attendance. Similar to Participant AM3, other interviewees based the choice of instructional alternatives on their expectations of students' abilities to complete assignments. This practice is supported in the literature. Peterson et al. (2016) completed research regarding the influence of teachers' implicit attitudes o on student achievement. The researchers concluded that teachers' beliefs about students' abilities contribute to their expectations of the students. According to participants, their focus on students' abilities has resulted in the success of their dropout intervention and prevention efforts. Additionally, Texas Education Agency (2020b) listed actions that would be implemented in light of the continuing increase in dropout rates and the gap between dropout and graduation rates among ethnic groups.

Limitations

Several factors limited the outcomes of this study. The availability of participants and the schedule for data collection were limited to the time I had available. This limitation was due to interruptions in the normal school schedule, basically created because of COVID-19. The investigation included two large schools in the district. Including all 15 schools that had similar characteristics to the sample selected may have added additional insight to the problem studied. The demographics of the other schools may have influenced dropout means, thus, potentially altering the study's results. Also, a reduction in the population constituting the sample resulted in an available sample size of 189 for which the response rate represented about 22% of the population.

Interview participants represented a purposive sample. As such, the sample may not have adequately represented the population which restricts transferability. In addition to procedures for quantitative analyses, the research design encompassed an inquiry approach to acquire participants' accounts of their experiences. Making their meaning operational relied on a narrative account of the richness and depth of their experiences. Therefore, a portion of the phenomenon investigated represented participants' experiences and points of view and may not reflect the views of other teachers and leaders employed in the same district or state.

Recommendations

The recommendations for practice and future research are based on the study's findings, limitations of the study, and the literature reviewed.

Recommendations/Implications for Practice

This study focused on efforts to intervene in students at risk of dropping out. The district's system of identifying students who are at risk and who drop out of school, as well as how the annual dropout rate is calculated, involves a complexity of characteristics that differ based on the timeframe of legislative decision-making in the state. Therefore, during the course of this study, the definitions of at-risk and dropout were amended to include some descriptors that became current in 2020. Currently, the district defines students at-risk as those who are under age 26 and meet at least one of the criteria established. These criteria refer to (a) the student's failure to maintain a set average in courses identified in the foundation curriculum, (b) the frequency of being retained, (c) unsatisfactory performance on specified assessments, (d) pregnancy, (e) parenthood, (f) placement in an alternative education program, (g) expulsion, (h) release from the criminal justice system, (i) prior dropout, (j) limited English proficiency, (k) custodial care from the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, (l) homelessness, and

(m) placement in a residential facility (Texas Education Agency, 2020b). The annual dropout rates for 2018–2019 revealed dropout rates increased among African American, Asian, and Hispanic ethnic groups (Texas Education Agency, 2020b). Economically disadvantaged students represented the majority of dropouts. Practical approaches at the school level for addressing students' economic needs included providing basic resources and developing alternative school schedules and programs for completing school requirements. However, given the criteria for at-risk status that the majority of dropouts have an eligibility status for receiving free or reduced meals, and that students in grade 9 have the highest dropout rate imply the need for interventions at the district level.

The grade level for the highest dropout rate is consistent with the age that students are eligible for employment. The economic needs of students may be addressed through the district instituting on-the-job training programs that would permit students to receive credit for graduation while also earning an income. The program may incorporate aspects of the vocational curriculum and the flexible scheduling available to students. The program should also have a support mechanism that includes mentoring and homework assistance. The practice addresses the self-efficacy and servant leadership components of the study's conceptual framework. Students will not only profit from fulfilling their economic needs but will likely gain confidence in their ability to succeed in school.

Prior studies of the role of teachers in dropout prevention include teachers' perception that their influence on whether a student remains in school is limited because of the nature of factors contributing to school dropouts (Knesting-Lund et al., 2013). These factors included drug use and economic needs. The participants in the current study also acknowledged these factors but provided alternative support mechanisms that could assist students. However, teachers also

felt overwhelmed at times from completing their classroom responsibilities while also being engaged in community activities and services targeted for reducing dropout rates. Given these circumstances, providing additional teacher support in the form of training, mentoring, and possibly team teaching may reduce instances of teacher burnout. Consistent with Day et al.'s (2016) observation, training should focus on the teacher's needs, the needs of the school, and consider the school's environment. In this regard, an action plan aimed at teacher support would involve district and school leaders creating a network of individuals to serve as home visitors and a schedule of timeframes for these visits to occur. This practice would relieve teachers of some responsibilities. Additionally, district and school leaders could serve as role models for teacher shadowing or for participating in debriefs of services that interest teachers. Affording teachers opportunities to observe leaders and to acquire knowledge supportive of their responsibilities are aligned with the conceptual framework for the study. The description of the high school completer in the framework's design also suggests characteristics of effective teachers and leaders and their need for developing skills and dispositions. Developing a confident teacher or leader involves encouraging and motivating behaviors from school and district leaders supportive of their interests and needs, similar to developing the confidence of the at-risk learner.

Servant leadership behaviors coupled with practices for promoting students' self-efficacy resulted in positive outcomes for leaders, teachers, and students. Therefore, these practices are recommended for district-wide inclusion in dropout prevention efforts and the general focus on student learning. As there has been a series of turnovers in school leaders, employment screening practices should include measures to assess potential hires for their position on the constructs of servant leadership and self-efficacy. This recommendation is also linked to findings from a study that von Fischer and De Jong (2017) conducted using the same servant leadership survey that I

used to collect data for this study. The researchers reported that teachers' job satisfaction and servant leadership were strongly related and suggested that demonstrated servant leadership should be a part of screenings for employing principals. In addition to screening for the dispositions of new hires, requiring district and school level orientations of new hires should include training to enhance awareness of servant leadership behaviors focused on those included in the study. Consistent with actions inherent in the conceptual framework, recommended is that the training involves problem-based learning episodes with role modeling and mentoring activities.

Participants engaged in active listening in order to identify students' needs and recommend the most appropriate learning experiences for students. In addition to sponsoring events to celebrate students' achievements, creating showcasing events whereby students can see that their suggestions are incorporate would likely increase student motivation and their confidence. From experiencing such events, students develop a sense of ownership in the school and also begin to realize that they have something to offer. Recommended is that the district assesses opportunities identified at both schools in the study and other schools in the district to determine those that may best benefit encouraging students to attend school. The results would then be used for the district to design a strategy required of all schools. In this way, all schools would have at least one comprehensive activity focused on encouraging student motivation to attend school.

Additional activities and services should be designed to encourage parental participation through a whole-school approach that the district adopts. The district-wide approach would include features recognized in both schools in the study. The approach focused on the involvement of all school personnel, parents, and community stakeholders in events, support

services, and a variety of strategies to encourage student learning and success. The district's design would include procedures to market and clarify its elements. In essence, the district would design the *how to* for implementing whole-school components. For example, radio broadcasts and other forms of social media could be used to extend invitations to parents, request their services on projects and in extracurricular activities, and relay information useful for acquiring resources for their economical and other needs. Increased parent participation would decrease the need to find missing students and increase attendance rates. The integration of academic and social services would be organized as committees with leadership of specific roles identified. For example, the wraparound specialists as the leaders of social services for students would be supported through a committee of counselors and social workers. This means that the district ensures that school staffs include counselors and social workers.

Implications/Recommendations for Research

The following are recommended for future research related to preventing school dropouts:

1. This study included two schools with similar student and teacher demographics. Research involving a larger population of schools from different geographical areas in the district is recommended in order to compare schools with and without high rates of dropout and attendance. The study may determine contributing factors unique to the location or other demographics.
2. A study that examines the perspectives of an equal number of males and females at the secondary level may yield different views of leadership practices, dropout factors, and ways to intervene than examinations of a predominantly male or female sample of teachers and school principals.

3. COVID-19 currently influences teaching and learning as evident in changes in instructional formats. An investigation that identifies specific influences, including attendance and school dropout, is recommended to provide more informed decision-making regarding instructional strategies and platforms that can be adapted in other crises that interrupt in-person instruction.
4. There remains a gap in dropout rates between students of color and their White counterparts at the site of the study. Additional studies are recommended that include acquiring students' voices and parents regarding reasons that students drop out of high school and their recommendations of the most appropriate measures for changing this trend.
5. Following observations that Quin (2017) suggested for analyzing what motivates students to engage in school, an investigation of students' motivation for remaining in school may yield information that could be incorporated in classroom and school-wide strategies to decrease high rates of school dropouts.

Conclusions

This investigation responded to the problem that often strategies that schools employ in efforts to reduce dropout rates often do not target factors that contribute to students dropping out. Findings revealed that practices in the two schools participating were designed to address factors students cited and those school personnel identified. Active listening to students and sharing appropriate alternatives were among the most effective practices found in this investigation. These practices support leadership skills and behaviors illustrated in the study's conceptual framework. Servant leadership behaviors demonstrated included efforts to identify students' needs and interests, to show genuine care for their welfare, and to build trusting relationships.

Active listening and talking along with modeling behaviors created opportunities for students to experience success, thus increase their level of confidence.

The study concludes that attendance is a prevailing problem that contributes to school dropout. The district's formula for determining a dropout involved dividing the number of grade 9–12 students who dropped out in a school year by the cumulative number of grade 9–12 students enrolled at any time during the school year. This study used the four-year annual percentage dropout rates in the calculations of the data for means. The formula for calculating annual dropout rates involves dividing "the number of dropouts in grades 9–12 during the 2018–19 school year" by the "number of students in grades 9–12 in attendance at any time during the 2018–19 school year" (Texas Education Agency, 2020a, p. 9). According to Texas Education Agency (2020b), by grade 10, over one-half of the dropouts were one or more grades behind their expected grade for their class. Also, for the 2018–19 school term, the highest dropout rate occurred for students in grade 9, which also represented the largest number of dropouts in the 7–12 grade categories, and about three-fourths of the dropouts for grades 7–12 were classified as economically disadvantaged. These statistics support the dropout trends described in the study including that poverty influences the decision to drop out, students frequently engage in the labor market rather than attend school, and high rates of absences exist. These statistics and the supporting trends for the schools in the study confirmed the results of the statistical analyses that revealed a continuing trend of increasing dropout rates and suggest the need for increased measures to address the issues at the district and school levels.

Similar strategies for improving attendance existed at both schools; however, the nature and number of strategies differed. Both schools had the services of wraparound specialists, participated in walks through neighborhoods to recovery students, and provided organizations to

target student interest. However, School BW appeared to provide a higher number and variety of student organizations and clubs than School AM. Clubs at School BW were created for separate and combined gender groups, some students received faculty sponsorship to participate in community and national organizations, and school-wide events highlighted student success through programs where parents and others were invited to attend.

Although this study did not compare rates among all ethnic groups, school and district data continue to report a gap in dropout rates between students of color and their White counterparts. Irregular attendance appears to also contribute to the gap in dropout rates among ethnic groups as students of color most often worked or stayed at home to care for siblings or their own children while their parents worked. Therefore, a need continues to determine what services the district and school can provide that can help to change this scenario. The stories participants shared illustrated parts of a model needed to close this gap with respect to attendance. Their stories suggested a whole-school effort integrated with parental training and involvement, services from agencies to include human resources, school activities geared to students' interests, and opportunities for students to work while also earning credits for graduation.

Modeled behaviors were inherent in a whole-school approach to support students at risk of dropping out of school. The approach focused on the involvement of all school personnel, parents, and community stakeholders in events, support services, and a variety of strategies to encourage student learning and success. The whole-school concept at School BW involved conducting classes or events on the weekends, after school, or during holiday breaks; facilitating ways for students to recover absences; addressing students' need for food and ways to attend class around their schedules involving working and caring for siblings; and motivating them to

attend school. At School BW, facilitating elements of the whole-school approach featured teachers taking on the role of a parent using hands-on techniques where through active listening and talking, students were encouraged to prioritize responsibilities. At School AM, the whole-school approach was considered a comprehensive approach that involved tracking students' progress through an advocate teacher, providing for students' needs through a Community in School arrangement, and servicing students through tutorials and counseling. School AM's approach adhered to the school as a *Show Me State.* The motto emphasized that the teachers modeled and shared information aimed at students meeting expectations. AM1 noted that "you have to show them, and if they see, and you talk, and they see what they can do, they'll do it, too."

Similar to findings of other studies (Gershenson et al., 2016; Schiefele, 2017), a conclusion of this study refers to teachers' attitudes and beliefs. The findings suggest that the attitudes and beliefs of teachers about what and how they teach, and their perceptions of students' abilities influence standards that teachers set for students. These attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors matter in decisions students make regarding remaining in school. Apparent from participants' stories and supportive of the study's framework, modeling positive behaviors contributed to student involvement in the learning process. According to Participant AM1, "you have those high expectations with them and do not allow them to give up when they try to give up."

I derived a number of understandings from engaging with participants as they shared their lived experiences in intervention and prevention programs. Seeing the consistency of findings across previous studies and my study served as a major benefit for comparing teacher perceptions and practices that involved similar and different student characteristics including

students' ethnicities. The message is clear regarding the need to address students' economic, social, and self-efficacy needs to better service students' academic needs. The need to target factors influencing students' decisions to remain in school served as part of the problem investigated in this study and an assumption that I ascribed to in conducting the study. Support of this assumption resulted in participants' experiences. Aspects of the conceptual framework for the study were threaded throughout participants' actions and these actions reflected some best practices cited in the literature review. Therefore, the essence of the message of this research experience to readers is that student learning and the motivation to remain in school require support from a whole-school approach focused on students' needs and individuals knowledgeable of barriers students face. These individuals are those who are (a) genuinely willing to adapt teaching and learning strategies to provide the needed support; (b) servers of students through facilitating resources; and (c) active listeners and promoters of developing attitudes and values that will prepare students to display positive behaviors.

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Appendix A: Cross Reference for Mixed-Methods Research

Table A1

Cross Reference for Mixed-Methods Research

Guiding research question/hypotheses	Quantitative, qualitative, or both and the associated statistical tests	Participant Type	Data sources types of information	Related protocol and instrument question number
1. What features of the dropout prevention programs do participants perceive as appropriate for addressing factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school and that will increase completion rates?	Qualitative	Teachers Subsample: teachers principals	1.2 DIP Intervention features 1.3 DIP Dropout factors	1.4 DIP #s: 1, 2, 6, 8,10, 11, 12 1.5 DIP: Demographics section, # 10
2. What leadership practices do participants identify that target factors associated with students at risk of dropping out of school?	Qualitative	Teachers Sub sample	2.1 DIP Leadership practices dropout factors	2.2 DIP: #1, 2, 3, 9, 10
3. What do teachers and leaders perceive as their role in intervention efforts?	Qualitative	Teachers Sub sample teachers principals	3.1DIP: Leadership practices	3.2 DIP: #1, 2, 3, 9, 10
4. Is there a difference in levels of empowerment, stewardship, authenticity, and standing back between teachers in School AM and School BW as measured by the servant leadership survey?	Quantitative: Frequency, mean, standard deviation, Mann-Whitney U test	Teachers	4.1 Leadership practices	4.2 SLS: 1–5, 9, 11, 12,13, 17 19, 20, 21, 24, 26, 28
5. Is there a difference between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies?	Quantitative Mann-Whitney U test	Dropout datasets	5.1 DDS: Rate data	5.2 DDS: All rates DPOT: Full reports on each school

Guiding research question/hypotheses	Quantitative, qualitative, or both and the associated statistical tests	Participant Type	Data sources types of information	Related protocol and instrument question number
$H_{1:}$ There is a relationship between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies	Quantitative Mann-Whitney U test	Dropout Datasets	$H_1$1 DDS: Rate data	H_1.2 DDS: All rates DPOT: Full reports on each school
$H_{0:}$ There is no relationship between dropout rates for schools before the implementation of that national dropout prevention strategies and after implementation of the national dropout prevention strategies.	Quantitative Mann-Whitney U test	Dropout datasets	H_0. DDS: Rate data	H_0 .2 DDS: All rates DPOT: Full reports on each school

Note. DIP = Dropout Interview Protocol; DPOT = Dropout Program Observation Tool; SLS = Servant Leadership Survey; DDS = Dropout Datasets.

Appendix B: The Servant Leadership Survey

Note: Manager refers to your principal or immediate supervisor. Indicate your level of agreement with each item according to the following scale:
Items: 1 (*strongly disagree*) 2 (*somewhat disagree*) 3 (*disagree*) 4 (*somewhat agree*) 5 (*agree*) 6 (*strongly agree*)

1. My manager gives me the information I need to do my work well.
2. My manager encourages me to use my talents.
3. My manager helps me to further develop myself.
4. My manager encourages his/her staff to come up with new ideas.
5. My manager keeps himself/herself in the background and gives credit to others.
6. My manager holds me responsible for the work I carry out.
7. My manager keeps criticizing people for the mistakes they have made in their work.
8. My manager takes risks even when he/she is not certain of the support from his/her own manager.
9. My manager is open about his/her limitations and weaknesses.
10. My manager learns from criticism.
11. My manager emphasizes the importance of focusing on the good of the whole.
12. My manager gives me the authority to make decisions that make work easier for me.
13. My manager is not chasing recognition or rewards for the things he/she does for others.
14. I am held accountable for my performance by my manager.
15. My manager maintains a hard attitude towards people who have offended him/her at work.
16. My manager takes risks and does what needs to be done in his/her view.
17. My manager is often touched by the things he/she sees happening around him/her.
18. My manager tries to learn from the criticism he/she gets from his/her superior.
19. My manager has a long-term vision.
20. My manager enables me to solve problems myself instead of just telling me what to do.
21. My manager appears to enjoy his/her colleagues' success more than his/her own.
22. My manager holds me and my colleagues responsible for the way we handle a job.
23. My manager finds it difficult to forget things that went wrong in the past.
24. My manager is prepared to express his/her feelings even if this might have undesirable consequences.
25. My manager admits his/her mistakes to his/her superior.
26. My manager emphasizes the societal responsibility of our work.
27. My manager offers me abundant opportunities to learn new skills.
28. My manager shows his/her true feelings to his/her staff.
29. My manager learns from the different views and opinions of others.
30. If people express criticism, my manager tries to learn from it.

*Adapted from "The servant leadership survey: Development and validation of a multidimensional measure" by D. van Dierendonck and L. Nuijten, 2011. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 26*(3), 249–267.

Demographic Section: Please respond to the following items:

1) What is your position?

- Teacher
- Principal
- Asst. Principal
- Program Director
- Counselor
- Other (Please specify) _____

2) Which one of the following best describes your dropout program?

- Within-School Prevention/Intervention
- After-School Prevention/Intervention
- Whole-School Prevention/Intervention
- Other (Please identify _____

3) How many students were enrolled in the program for 2018–2019?

- 20 to 39
- 40 to 59
- 60 to 89
- Other _____

4) What is your age?

- Less than 36
- 36–40
- 41–45
- 46–50

- 51–55
- 56–60
- 61–65
- 66+
- Decline to answer.

5) What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Decline to answer.

6) What is your racial/ethnic group?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White (not Hispanic or Latino)
- Decline to answer.
- Other (Please specify)

7) How many years of experience have you had in your position?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1–5
- ☐ 6–10

☐ 11–15

☐ 16–20

☐ 21–25

☐ 26+

8) The total years' experience in the dropout program: _____

9) What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

☐ Bachelor

☐ Masters

☐ Specialist

☐ Doctorate

10) **Please check all items that indicate factors that you perceive are targeted in the dropout intervention effort for decreasing the potential for students to drop out of school.**

Poverty/socioeconomics Students' age & gender School attendance

Test score performance Parental involvement Literacy in reading and mathematics

Performance in study skills

Behavior (anti-social; disruptive; aggression)

School (structure; climate; resources; subject matter content)

Race & ethnicity Grades Motivation

Personality School readiness Academic failure

Social inequity Disengagement Teacher/student rapport

Teacher awareness of students' needs

Student responsibilities (work; caring for children, siblings, parents)

Others (Please add others that are targeted)

Appendix C: Dropout Interview Protocol and Dropout Program Observation Tool

Date: _____ Participant:_____ Place:_____

Introduction

Among the purposes of the introduction is to establish rapport with participants. The researcher's introduction to participants includes greetings, expressing appreciation for participants participating, and sharing relevant information about self and interest in the topic while noting non-employment status with the district. Then I will briefly review the study and consent form to ensure participant is aware of rights, including not responding to any question that presents discomfort in responding.

Researcher's Instructions to Participant

There are several questions that are demographic in nature that I will ask you to answer such as the grade level that you teach and the number of years you have worked with the program. I will ask your opinion on 12 questions associated with the purpose of the study that was just explained. These questions are about the dropout prevention program that relate to its structure, content, strategies, and overall implementation. Some questions are about the kind of leadership approaches you and other personnel use to support the mission of the program and the factors being targeted that may influence a student's decision to drop out of school. Again, your answers are your own personal opinions based on your experience with the program; there are no expectations of a correct or incorrect answer. During the interview, Zoom records the conversation as you have permitted. I will also take notes and may ask you to give examples or explain your comment further to make sure that I understand your true meaning. Remember, if there is a question that you wish not to answer, please feel free to say that you want to skip that question. Are there questions you wish to ask before we start the interview?

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name of School (A or B): _____

1) What is your position?

- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Asst. Principal
- ☐ Program Director
- ☐ Counselor
- ☐ Other (Please specify) _____

2) Which one of the following best describes your dropout program?

- ☐ Within-School Prevention/Intervention
- ☐ After-School Prevention/Intervention
- ☐ Whole-School Prevention/Intervention
- ☐ Other (Please identify _____

3) How many students were enrolled in the program for 2017–2019?

- ☐ 20 to 39
- ☐ 40 to 59
- ☐ 60 to 89
- ☐ Other _____

4) What is your age?

- ☐ Less than 36
- ☐ 36–40

- 41–45
- 46–50
- 51–55
- 56–60
- 61–65
- 66+
- Decline to answer.

5) What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Decline to answer.

6) What is your racial/ethnic group?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White (not Hispanic or Latino)
- Decline to answer.
- Other (Please specify)

7) How many years of experience have you had in your position?

- 0
- 1–5

- 6–10
- 11–15
- 16–20
- 21–25
- 26+

8) The total years' experience in the dropout program: _____

9) What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

- Bachelor
- Masters
- Specialist
- Doctorate

Interview Questions

1. Please describe the program. Give me a snapshot of a typical day and what you do. (Use prompts if needed to acquire the mission; goals; number of staff and their roles; students targeted and rationale: grade level; failing X classes; attendance; etc.). Target: RQ1

2. Please explain how the program is organized and the services that are provided to students. (Use prompts if needed to acquire structure/schedule; curriculum; factors that address reasons, other than academic identified that possibly lead to students dropping out: child care; finance; behavior/social interaction, etc.). Target: RQ1

3. How would you describe your practices in leading and encouraging students to remain in school? Target RQ2, RQ4

4. The responses of participants from your school about factors that they perceived are targeted in the dropout intervention effort for decreasing the potential for students to drop out of school indicated that the following factors are the leading targeted items: Target: RQ1, RQ2

School AM

(1) School attendance (17); (2) Poverty/socioeconomics (16); (3) Parental involvement (16); (4) Motivation (14) and (5) Test score performance, Grades, Academic Failure, and Student responsibilities (work; caring for children, siblings, parents) tied for (13) responses. These were closely followed by student's age and gender, Behavior (anti-social; disruptive; aggression), and Teacher awareness of students' needs all at 12 responses. The lowest number of responses were: Performance in study skills (6 responses); and Personality and Race & ethnicity (7) responses

Q. What is your thinking regarding the factors stressed in your efforts to reduce dropout rates? What specifically is done to address these factors; What does the school do in targeting such factors as poverty/socioeconomics/school attendance/parental involvement/test score performance in working with students at risk of dropping out?

School BW

Attendance (11); Behavior (10); Test score performance (10); academic performance (10); Literacy in reading & mathematics (10); Teacher awareness of students' needs (10)
Parental involvement (9); Motivation (9); Grades (9); Student responsibilities (9); teacher/student rapport (9); Personality (5).

Q. What is your thinking regarding the factors stressed in your efforts to reduce dropout rates? What specifically is done to address these factors; What does the school do in targeting such factors as poverty/socioeconomics/school attendance/parental involvement/test score performance in working with students at risk of dropping out?

5. What efforts are practiced to discover reasons students identify that cause them to want to drop out? [Use prompts if needed to acquire specific factors, strategies, and assessments used within the program; how often are identification measures used]. Target RQ1

6. How would you describe the success of the program? [Prompts used to identify participant's meaning of success: dropout rates; changes in students' behaviors; changes in students' practices for studying, managing time; addressing students' dropout factors; etc.]. Target RQ1, RQ2, RQ5

7. Some researchers identify the need for students to believe that they can succeed as important to their remaining in high school, graduating, and entering college. In planning for program activities, how much emphasis, if any, do you think is placed on providing services to improve their self-efficacy? How would you describe what happens in the program is directed to building students' positive views of self? Target RQ2

8. How would you describe the teacher/principal relationship in terms of supporting personnel through modeling behaviors whereby teachers feel valued and accepted for their expertise in guiding student behavior and performance and support through resources/PD? Target RQ3, RQ4

9. What behaviors do teachers demonstrate that encourage students to feel accepted, that someone genuinely cares about their future and that people in the program are committed to helping them? [Prompts that reveal regular or special events where students showcase their improvements; activities that utilize or focus on cultural and other diversities; involve parents/significant others]. Target RQ3, RQ4

10. Please explain activities or program elements that are directed to students' interests [Prompts to identify how students' interests are identified; how they are prioritized in relation to program or personnel interests; school extracurricular offerings merged into aspects of the dropout program; etc.]. Target RQ1, RQ3

11. The results of the dropout trend for 2006–2018 showed that rates increased in the last 6 school years (2012–2013 through 2017–2018) when compared to the years 2006–2007 through 2011–2012. What explanations can you think of that suggests this finding? What happened to influence the increased rates from 2012–2018? What can happen to influence the lowering of the dropout rate in the future? What have you experienced in terms of practices for reducing dropout rates? RQ1, RQ5

12. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of practices aimed at reducing dropout rates? Target RQ1, RQ5

Dropout Program Observation Tool

Observation:_____ Date/Time _____ Type:_____

Purpose:

Identify Participants/Setting/Document Involved:

Identify any Problems/Issues Observed:

Describe Activities, if any, Related to Observation:

Describe Researcher's Reactions/Follow-up:

Relationship of Data to Research Question:

Additional Notes

1. **_____**

Decisions

1. **_____**

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

October 15, 2020

Nicole C. West
Department of Educational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Nicole,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "An Evaluation of Programs and Leadership Practices for Effective Dropout Prevention",

(IRB# 20-148)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix E: Invitation Letter to Survey Participants

I am a doctoral student at Abilene Christian University, and I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine intervention and leadership practices in dropout prevention programs in the Southeast School District. If you decide to participate, you will rate 30 closed-ended survey items based on your perception of the leadership practices of your manager (i.e., principal, supervisor, director) and identify factors that you think interventions at your school target for decreasing student dropout rates. The approximate time for completing the anonymous survey is 15 minutes.

Also, you may be selected to participate in a one-on-one Zoom interview with me and respond to 12 questions about dropout interventions at your school. If selected, you will receive an invitation to participate. If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx. You are also invited to ask questions in a closed camera Zoom meeting at the link provided in this correspondence on _____ at _____ p.m. where I will provide an overview of the study. After you have received responses to any questions you may have and agree to participate, please sign the consent form accompanying this letter and return it within 7 days to the address indicated below. I will then provide the link to the survey.

Thank you,

Nicole West

xxxxxx@acu.edu
Mobile |xxx-xxx-xxxx

Consent Form Return Address: xxxxxx@acu.edu

Appendix F: Invitation Letter to Interview Participants

I am a doctoral student at Abilene Christian University and would like to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine intervention and leadership practices in dropout prevention programs in the Southeast School District. If you decide to participate, you will respond to 12 questions about dropout interventions at your school in a one-on-one Zoom interview with me. The interview may take approximately 15–45 minutes.

If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx. You are also invited to ask questions in a closed camera Zoom meeting at the link provided in this correspondence on _____ at____ p.m. where I will provide an overview of the study. After the meeting, a consent form will be emailed to your school address, and you are asked to sign and return the form to the email address provided in this email within 7 days if you agree to participate. Upon receipt of the form, I will contact you to schedule the interview on Zoom at a time convenient for you.

Thank you,

Nicole West

xxxxxx@acu.edu
Mobile |xxx-xxx-xxxx

Zoom Information Meeting Link:

Consent Form Return Address: xxxx@acu.edu

Appendix G: Consent Form

An Evaluation of Programs and Leadership Practices for Effective Dropout Prevention

The issue of high school dropouts is prevalent in our society. Students drop out for different reasons. Schools use different strategies aimed at lowering the number of dropouts. This research is an effort to find out some ways that schools have been successful in preventing high numbers of dropouts. The research involves teachers and principals who can describe what they do to help students to finish school.

You may be able to take part in a research study. This form provides important information about that study, including the risks and benefits to you as a potential participant. Please read this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions that you may have about the study. You can ask about research activities and any risks or benefits you may experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other people, such as your family doctor or a family member.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop your participation at any time and for any reason without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION: This study is about dropout prevention and intervention at two high schools. Its purpose is to find out what intervention and leadership practices teachers and administrators use to prevent high rates of students dropping out of school. The information gained from this study may be used to assist school leaders in decisions related to strategies that may be helpful in decreasing and preventing high school students from dropping out of school.

If selected for participation, you will be asked to complete an anonymous electronic survey and you may be asked to attend one, individual interview with the study staff over the course of three weeks. The interview is expected to range from 15 to 45 minutes. During the course of the interview, you will be asked to participate in the following procedures: Engage in a one-on-one Zoom interview with The and respond to 12 questions about dropout intervention activities at your school. I will schedule the Zoom meeting at a time convenient for you and provide you the login information. I will conduct the interview in the privacy of my home and encourage you to identify a private location as well. During the interview, I will ask for any clarifications of your comments regarding the established questions in the interview protocol. If there are any areas of which I want to confirm your responses, I will ask during the interview and may follow up with an email after the interview. The record of interview responses will not have any reference that could identify you personally. Themes generated from responses will be reported as the overall results of the study.

RISKS & BENEFITS: There are risks to taking part in this research study. Below is a list of the foreseeable risks, including the seriousness of those risks and how likely they are to occur:

1. There is a minimal risk of anxiety from engaging in a Zoom meeting. This risk may be reduced by choosing to participate with the camera closed.

2. There is a minimal risk to your privacy when engaging in a Zoom meeting. This risk may be reduced by choosing a private location for the interview. You may not experience any personal benefits from participating in this study. However, participants' feedback may

contribute to policy surrounding preventing dropouts and will contribute to the research around drop-out prevention.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information you provide will be confidential to the extent allowable by law. Some identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals outside of the study team, such as members of the ACU Institutional Review Board. Otherwise, your confidentiality will be protected by maintaining data in a locked file at my home and destroying documents through incineration after the period IRB indicates for maintaining them has expired (3 years after completion of the study), and not using your names in reports of the study.

CONTACTS: If you have questions about the research study, the lead researcher is Nicole C. West, MPA, and may be contacted at xxxxxx@acu.edu or xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you are unable to reach the lead researcher or wish to speak to someone other than the lead researcher, you may contact Dr. Lisa Hobson, my Dissertation Chair at xxxxxxx@acu.edu). If you have concerns about this study, believe you may have been injured because of this study, or have general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at

(xxx) xxx-xxxx
xxxxxxxx@acu.edu
320 Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box 29103
Abilene, TX 79699

This study is expected to enroll 10 interview participants.

Please sign this form if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Sign only after you have read all of the information provided and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You should receive a copy of this signed consent form. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this form. Please return the signed form within seven days to xxxxx@acu.edu.

_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent	Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date