The Influence of Reading Comprehension and Other Selected Factors on Student Dropouts in an Urban Southeastern School District in Virginia

Viola Garris Morgan
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THE INFLUENCE OF READING COMPREHENSION AND OTHER SELECTED FACTORS ON STUDENT DROPOUTS IN AN URBAN SOUTHEASTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT IN VIRGINIA

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY URBAN SERVICES OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The Influence of Reading Comprehension and Other Selected Factors on Student Dropouts in an Urban Southeastern School District in Virginia

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The purpose of this research was to examine the influence of reading achievement on the dropout status. The major research question was to determine to what extent does reading comprehension influence the dropout rate after controlling for demographic and performance characteristics?

The target population consisted of 677 urban twelfth-grade students attending schools in an urban southeastern school district in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Of the 677 students, 142 were dropouts, and 535 were nondropouts. Simple and partial correlations were used to determine the relationship between variables after partialing out performance and demographic variables. In addition, the discriminant analyses were used to determine the overall relationship between variables in predicting dropout status. Reading comprehension, gender, race, overage, grade retention, attendance, behavior, and socioeconomic status were variables used to determine whether discriminant analysis could be used to separate dropouts from nondropouts. The analyses were used to determine the influence of each variable on dropout status. The results of the analyses permitted the
researcher to conclude that all variables influenced dropout status. However, retention had the greatest influence followed by absences, overage, and reading comprehension.
Acknowledgments

Many fine individuals have contributed to my professional life and have, inspired or assisted me in one way or another, in the successful completion of this dissertation. Their patience, expertise, time, understanding, and devotion to my cause have been the support that I needed throughout this endeavor. This is to acknowledge and express my gratitude for the loving care and support of my advisor, Dr. Jane M. Hager, whose encouragement, insights, and guidance were invaluable to the successful completion of my dissertation. I also wish to acknowledge my other committee members, Dr. Jack E. Robinson and Dr. Patricia H. Fisher, for their careful consideration of my work and their scholarly talents.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Bernard E. Morgan III, whose encouragement and support gave me the inspiration to fulfill my dreams. I would like to thank my husband and friend for his support during this time. Bernard is the one person who motivated me to get to work on my first postgraduate degree, and his love has been the sustaining factor in the pursuit of my doctoral degree.

This work is also dedicated to my deceased parents, Mr. and Mrs. John B. Garris; they were my greatest source of inspiration during my childhood. Somewhere along the way, they instilled in me a desire to strive for excellence, and I will forever be indebted to them. I am appreciative to them for the gift of life and for stimulating me to excel.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The magnitude and economic consequences of high school dropouts are prime indicators of a major crisis that America is experiencing. Dropouts are of concern to families, educators, and policy makers for a variety of reasons. The students who are at-risk of dropping out of school may suffer economic and social disadvantages throughout their lives. For the nation as a whole, the costs of the dropout problem are reflected in higher welfare expenditures, lost tax revenues, and increased costs associated with crime and its prevention (Catterall, 1985, p. 158). To this end, America 2000 is a federal program designed to address this crisis in the nation. This program is a broad, comprehensive, and long range educational strategy to move every community in America toward the National Goals adopted by President Bush and the Governors in 1990. The strategy calls for major changes in public and private schools, changes in every home and community in America, and changes in the attitudes about learning. America 2000 presents a major challenge to all officials, community leaders, and educators at the national, state, and local levels. However, it presents the greatest challenge to parents because the home is where learning and literacy begin (Rayborn, 1993).

With the advent of one of the national educational goal which indicates that by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn, attention to readiness soared
in educational and cooperate settings throughout the country. Business and industry have begun to consider the readiness of young children, and The National Governors' Association has formed Readiness Action Teams. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has produced its landmark position statement on readiness, and numerous additional panels and committees have coalesced and produced notable reports (National Association for the State Board of Education, 1991; United States Department of Education, 1991; National Association for Education of Young Children, 1990).

Reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child's success in school and, indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success inevitably will be lost. It is self-evident, and referenced by numerous investigators, that the dropout act is seldom an instantaneous decision; rather, it is a protracted process based on many factors, both within and without the school system. There are certain warning signals indicating a problem with a particular student. Reading, mathematics, and science scores, while not in themselves a definition of the cause of the problem, do generally signal the presence of a problem. The data indicates that these signals are apparent and surprisingly consistent even at very early levels. While the extensive statistical data referred in this article go as low as the sixth grade reading scores, other researchers have reported indications
of dropout warnings as early as the third, and even the first
grade (e.g. Lloyd, 1978, p. 1193).

A number of descriptive studies dating back to the early
sixties have portrayed school dropout with respect to reading
ability. Peng (1960, p.1) investigated the reading skills among
593 former high school students from the Battle Creek School
District in Michigan and found that the rate of school dropouts
was three times higher among poor readers (50%) than among good
readers (15%). Accordingly, Voss (1966, p.363) reviewed the
literature on school dropouts and cited a study of male students
who had dropped out of high school in the Rochester, New York,
Public School District which found that dropouts had a median
reading score at the thirty-first percentile. Likewise, a study
of school dropouts in Ohio found that 75% had scored below the
median age level in reading and that 53% had scored in the lowest
quartile (Nachman, Getson, & Russell, 1963, p. 10). More recently,
Hammack’s (1986, p.324) investigation of school dropouts in the
Chicago Public Schools found that the rate was 50% among students
whose reading scores in the ninth grade were between the 4.7 and
6.7 grade levels and 68% among those below the 4.7 grade level.
Concurrently, a Chicago study on dropouts reveals that the most
important predictor for determining the dropout rate in high
schools is the number of overage students with low reading
ability. This study followed an earlier report, “Dropouts from
the Chicago Public Schools”, an aggregate analysis of dropouts
from the Chicago Public Schools for the classes of 1982, 1983, and 1984, which strongly associated with both below-normal reading scores and high numbers of students entering high school overage. Often these students became dropouts. The dropout rate was less strongly correlated with the racial composition of the student body or the level of poverty of the neighborhood in which the school was situated. Most important, statistical analysis revealed that the two below average reading scores were more strongly associated with the rate of dropping out from Chicago public high schools. The level of association between reading scores and overage students and the dropout rate is clearly an indicator of dropout (Hess, Wells, Prindle, Lineman, & Kaplan, 1987, p.330).

In a related area of investigation, some researchers have posed the question of why reading is so important. Reading is of extreme importance for the society as a whole as well as for the individual. Economic research has established that schooling is an investment that forms human capital that is, knowledge, skills, and problem-solving ability that have enduring value. While a country receives a good return on investment in education at all levels, from nursery school and kindergarten through college, research reveals that the returns are highest from the early years of schooling when children are first learning to read (Psacharopoulos, 1981). The Commission on Excellence warned of the risk for America because of shortcomings in secondary
education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Yet, the early years set the stage for later learning. Without the ability to read, excellence in high school and beyond is unattainable (Chall, 1983, p. 3).

A study by Bloom (1981) strengthens the argument for early prevention in the elementary school. Based on the findings of his study, Bloom concluded that the early years are the most crucial, and if the battle for essential skills is not won before the fifth grade, a student can automatically be identified as at-risk of school failure. Subsequently, early reading development is often described in terms of a series of broad, overlapping stages (Ehri 1992; Juel 1991; Gibson, 1965; Gough & Hillinger 1980; Mason, 1980; e.g., Chall, 1983) wherein the inception of each is marked by a qualitative change in the child's knowledge of how print works. While the fineness of the division between stages and even the foci of description within them differ from theorist to theorist, the child's discovery of the alphabetic principle is commonly held to be a major milestone in the challenge of learning to read.

Dropping out of school is a major problem facing American educators. In order to find appropriate solutions to the problem, it is important to analyze the history, the incidence, and the causes of the problem. The difficulty in analyzing the problem is that it is multifaceted and complex. Each facet of the problem requires a broad approach that acknowledges the
educational aspects, as well as the social, economic, and psychological ones (Afolayan, 1991). Conversely, effective programs must also address other needs of the dropout. Dropouts can learn, but the curriculum should be related to the skills that are needed in the workplace. Additionally, prevention programs should begin at an early age, since students at risk can be identified in their early years. Dropout prevention is one of the greatest challenges confronting educators and other community leaders today (Hammack, 1986; McDill, Natriello & Pallas, 1985; Pallas, 1986; Ranbom, 1986; Hahn, Danzberger & Lefkowitz, 1987). There is increasing evidence that a number of different types of students from diverse backgrounds and circumstances are leaving school (Lecompte, 1991). This realization has led some authors to suggest that causes and consequences of dropping out may require different models of prevention and intervention to adequately respond to the needs of different groups of dropouts (Franklin, 1989a; 1989c; Franklin, McNeil & Wright, 1990; Rumberger, 1987; Franklin & Streeter, 1991).

Researchers and experts suggest that a more effective approach to reducing the dropout rate must be to shift from the current emphasis on intervention and recovery programs at the secondary school level to an emphasis on early identification and prevention programs at the elementary school level. For this shift in emphasis to become meaningful, program development must be based on the development of a profile of significant factors...
that place elementary school students at-risk. The significant characteristics in the profile for elementary school students who are at-risk would then be the basis for the development of effective preventions designed and tailored to meet at-risk students' needs (Gage, 1990; Levin, 1987; Mann, 1986). Subsequently, a significant finding that has emerged from research indicates that the early identification of at-risk students coupled with effectively designed prevention and intervention programs that are important to the dropout must be provided (Gage, 1990).

Students drop out for many reasons. Every at-risk child is an individual with a different set of problems. Therefore, the structure and delivery of at-risk programs must be responsive to individual, personal, and environmental needs of those students identified as at-risk. The four primary areas of identification of at-risk students in early elementary school are attendance patterns, academic achievement, social behavior, and grade retentions (Smith & Shepard, 1987; Barber & McClellan, 1987). Children with poor attendance in elementary school are more likely to drop out of high school. Cage (1984) has supported this premise and has made a connection between high absenteeism and achievement. Barber & McClellan (1987) in a study of seventeen large school districts contend that attendance is the number one ranking predictor of dropping out and that negative attendance patterns begin as early as the primary grades. Attendance,
therefore, is one of the most critical elements in the early identification of potential dropouts. Accordingly, achievement or academic performance has also been identified as a predictor of future school failure. Forty-two percent of the dropouts in the "High School and Beyond Study" (Peng & Takai, 1983, pp.1-3) had a "D" average in school. Cage (1984) stated that poor achievement in reading and basic skills is identifiable as early as the first grade. At-risk students typically start school behind their peers and continue to fall further behind each school year.

The dropout problem in this country is a "quiet killer" of the American dream (McMillan & Behrmanm, 1986, p.17). Nationally, student dropouts are a threat to the well-being of this nation. The statistics show that in 1986, 4.3 million youth, ages 14 to 24, were dropouts. Of this number, 421,000 or 26 percent of the labor force for this age group was unemployed (Harrison, 1988, p. 38). Additionally, according to the Bureau of the Census's Survey, thirty-four percent of dropouts are outside the labor force (United States Bureau of the Census, 1989). The National Education Longitudinal Study of the eighth grade cohort of 1988, conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, showed a major longitudinal effort to provide trend data about critical transitions experienced by students as they leave elementary school, progress through high school, and move into postsecondary institutions or the work force.

In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics
(NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education has been the primary source of information and data on high school dropouts through their regular publications, longitudinal studies, and data bases. Research conducted in 1993 indicated that approximately 3.4 million persons between the ages of 16 and 24 years of age had dropped out of school before they earned a high-school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992, p. 17). Similarly studies of dropouts in the United States, including the U.S. Department of Education's graduation rates, usually assume that young people who become dropouts leave school between the ninth and the twelfth grades. The Intercultural Development Research Association (1986, p.18) study indicated that in 1980, three out of ten Texas dropouts-152,000 young people-had completed less than nine years of schooling. Similarly, Peng (1983, p.6) authored a paper for the Business Advisory Committee of the Education Commission of the States in which he estimated that the national dropout rate was at twenty-five percent. Within the nation's urban school districts, the rate was put at fifty percent. Essentially, identical statistics were reported in a study conducted by the Government Accounting Office (GAO, 1986). At about the same time, Hess and Lauber (1985) reported the dropout rate among inner-city Chicago schools to be over fifty percent. These three studies are representative of findings which received considerable coverage in secondary reviews published later (Lefkowitz 1987; Orr, 1987); and a monograph by
the Institute for Educational Leadership (Hahn, Danzberger, & Lefkowitz, 1987).

Additionally, a monograph by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the Urban Superintendents' Network (OERI, 1987); a major report on dropouts by the U.S. Department of Education (Pallas, 1987); and numerous newsletters from a variety of national organizations were produced. With the current national dropout rate at approximately twenty-seven to twenty-eight percent (W.K. Rice, personal communication, December 20, 1993), most of the school districts in the United States almost 151,000) monitor their enrollment, graduation, and dropout rates (Morrow, 1986, p.1). The U.S. Department of Education (1987) reported that during 1985-86, 682,000 students dropped out of school, averaging 3,789 students per day. Yet, according to the National Center for Education Statistics in 1995, the nation's dropout rate has decreased and has stabilized. In the 1995 edition of the Digest of Education Statistics, the NCES reported that 10.5 percent of the population segment between the ages of 16 and 24 are high school dropouts who are not currently enrolled in school. Since the report, A Nation at Risk (Lyke, 1986, p. 12), political and educational leaders have been involved in various attempts to reform and restructure American Education.

Some educators believe that standards should be raised if America is to be competitive with Japan and other countries. The
fact that reducing the dropout rate has been one of the education goals of President Clinton and former President Bush, indicates the seriousness of the problem. Many school districts are faced with a serious dropout rate and must continue to develop strategies to improve in this area. Subsequently, Virginia's governor, George Allen, has developed the Champion Schools Initiative to act as a framework for educators to build upon in order to meet the stated educational goals which include: establishing higher academic standards, instituting achievement testing for accountability, involving parents in their children's education, creating excellence through the encouragement of competition and cooperation, curbing school violence and drug abuse, increasing achievement through the use of innovative technology, providing greater choice in education to better serve schools' consumers (students and parents), reevaluating and implementing economic plans, and including community leaders in curriculum development (Governor's Commission on Champion Schools, 1994, p. 2).

High school drop out rates perpetuate a cycle of human tragedy that exacts a toll on the individual and society. Data indicates that dropping out takes a toll on the next generation as well as the present generation. The Children's Defense Fund concluded that "in families in which both parents were high school graduates, only 7% of the children were poor; if only one
parent was a high school graduate, 20\% of the children were poor; where neither of the parents was a high school graduate, 39\% of the children were poor." In many ways, school drop out is a barometer of social condition (Children's Defense Fund, 1991).

George Bush, the forty-first President of the United States, made the following statement (1992):

Education is the most enduring legacy, vital to everything we are and can become. Excellence in education is crucial to maintaining a strong democracy with a well-informed electorate, to building a competitive economy, and to solving the problems plaguing the poor in the nation's inner cities. Since education can help advance solutions to each of these issues and problems, I have made education reform a top priority of my presidency. If we want to change this country, we have got to change the schools (p.130).

President Clinton also made education a top priority in his platform for the presidency and made this statement (1992):

We know that too many students drop out of school, and too many who do finish simply don't have the basic skills they need to get and keep jobs. We know, too, that all children can learn but that it's tougher to teach them when so many bring society's problems with them through the schoolhouse door (p.132).

In short, poverty plays a major role in determining who
drops out. However, even if there were an eradication of poverty in the U.S., there would still be dropouts, but the dropout problem would be greatly reduced. In singling out the dropout problem, the President and the governors have come close to declaring at least a campaign, if not an all-out war against poverty. Nonetheless, educators must work with factors (including cultural ones) which they are able to alter themselves, and it is to such factors that educators now turn (Gage, 1990). The concern for dropouts is based on some hard realities.

Dropout rates are higher for students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds, from single-parent families, and non-English speaking family backgrounds. Frase contended in a nationwide study that there are higher dropout rates for students living in cities than for those living in suburbs or rural areas and in the South and West rather than in the Northeast (Frase, 1989). The knowledge about why students drop out of school can help schools, school districts, and states in developing effective policies and practices for encouraging them to stay in or to return to school.

Additionally, the National Longitudinal Surveys of the Youth Labor Market Experience conducted from 1979 to 1981 and national studies like High School and Beyond have provided much information on dropouts. These studies found that dropping out is related to students' background, achievement, behavior, and attitudes (Council of the Great City Schools, 1994). More than
one million young people who entered ninth grade in September 1981 did not graduate in June 1985. Most were dropouts. This dropout rate is evidence that in most states from 20 percent to 30 percent of the young people have sampled the product and have rejected education (Conrath, 1986, p. 46).

At the state level, educational reform in California and other states has aimed at more rigorous academic standards (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas 1985). The California Assembly Office of Research and the California State Department of Education have speculated that higher standards may result in higher achievement for some students at the cost of a narrower curriculum and increased probability of dropping out for at-risk students. Subsequently, district studies were conducted on student dropouts. The need to aim for higher standards documented in a study by Mann (1986), carefully links needs of the dropout to effective teaching strategies in the Reidsville Middle School’s Dropout Prevention Project in Tucson, Arizona. This case study attempts to identify effective teaching strategies that will increase the academic success of at-risk sixth grade students and to expand the use of these strategies among the entire teaching staff whose members must, first and foremost, truly care about students (O’Sullivan, 1990). This study points out that teachers often experience frustration in working with at-risk students and are quick to place the blame on students, parents, and the community for the lack of achievement. Though
parents, community, and students have their share of responsibility in the educational process, teachers play the key role in influencing student's academic success.

Many studies have attempted to identify the factors that possibly influence dropouts. An extensive profile used in the 1970's by the Denver Public Schools, lists seventeen general characteristics of students who dropout. Obviously, the district notes, not all dropouts possess all of these characteristics and conversely, a number of pupils who exhibit some of these characteristics do not drop out of school. The data shown in this report indicated that dropout rates have generally decreased over the last two decades. In 1972, data from the Current Population Survey estimated that, of young adults under age twenty-five, six percent dropped out of school, of which over fourteen percent were dropouts. About 83 percent of young adults ages eighteen to twenty-four had completed high school with either a regular diploma or an equivalency certificate (National Center for Education Statistics, 1994, p. V). Furthermore, Barrington and Hendricks (1989) found that dropouts in a Wisconsin community showed clear indications of academic problems by the third grade. Their achievement test scores were significantly lower than those of their classmates and also below their ability as measured by intelligence tests; teacher comments alone identified dropouts with sixty-three percent accuracy. Poor attendance, failing grades, and low overall GPA marked these students' high-school
careers as a threat to their success.

Kaplan and Luck (1977) contend that absenteeism, academic failure, and early school departure are links in a long chain of interconnected problems. Other researchers concur that dropping out is a progression of factors that begins at the elementary school level and lead up to the student’s final decision to drop out (Evans, 1968; Fitzsimmons, Chefuer, Leonard, & Mancunovich, 1969; Peng & Takai, 1983; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989). On the other hand, the profile suggested by Neil (1979) included the general characteristics of dropouts as students who tend to be more mobile than other students, come from low income families, exhibit discipline problems in school, have a high rate of absenteeism or truancy, are of average or slightly below average intelligence, and tend to be underachievers. In addition, the students do not read at grade level, fail more grades than their peers, feel rejected by the school, and do not participate in extracurricular activities. These students, also have frequent health problems, tend to have more personal problems which are usually exhibited by behavioral problems or social withdrawal, are usually loners, experience poor communication between home and school, and have friends outside of the school who are usually dropouts.

In 1990, the Chancellor of the New York Public Schools revised the city's strict promotional policy, citing evidence that dropout rates among the students retained were higher than
among youths with comparable reading levels who were not retained, even though those who were retained under the policy received special services (New York Board of Education, 1988). The New York policy required retention of fourth and seventh graders who scored more than a year and a half below level on the Gates Reading Test. This policy contributed to the city's high rates of retention. In 1988, more than 40 percent of New York City's public school students were overage for their grade by the time they entered high school (PINS Advisory Committee, 1988, p. 6). While poor academic achievement is noted in the literature as a predictor for dropping out, it has not been heralded as a predictor for intelligence. In a report identifying national findings on why students dropout of school, Ekstorm, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock (1986) point out that intelligence is not the primary issue when looking at the academic achievement predictor. According to researchers mentioned, studies tend to concur that most dropouts possess the mental ability to be successful in school.

Pallas' study of school dropouts in the United States showed poor grades, constant disregard for authority, and truancy as the foremost characteristics of dropouts (Pallas, 1986). Another study by Williams (1987) compared black dropouts and black high school graduates in an urban public school setting. She investigated such variables as demographics and personal characteristics, academic origin variables, and feelings toward
teachers and peers in school. Similarly, William's findings complemented Pallas' findings. Mann (1986) stressed that the best way to prevent students from dropping out is to provide successful educational experiences at the elementary level.

The works of Paula (1987), & Mizell (1987) depict the opinions of educators with regards to the characteristics of dropouts. Paula suggests that students making low grades and Hispanics from poor families have a greater likelihood of dropping out of school Mizell (1987, p. 23), in the development of a risk assessment instrument, included the following variables: age in comparison to dropout: achievement test failures: tardiness: truancy: absences: suspensions: expulsions: pregnancy: parenthood: single parent family: welfare: and whether parents were dropouts and students who tend to dropout meet seventy-five percent of the criteria developed using these variables (Mizell, 1987). In recognition of the significance of the dropout to the nation, the United States General Accounting Office reported that the top three reasons for students' dropping out of school are unsatisfactory academic performance, insufficient interest in school, and lack of ability to get along with the teacher (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1987, p.14). O'Sullivan, in a prediction study in 1989, used a collection of variables. She used as predictors failing grades, teacher recommendations, attendance, age, grade point average, and discipline referral records, concluding that it was possible to predict dropout prone
students with fair accuracy. Additionally, absences and elementary grades provide the greatest prediction of dropouts in another prediction study (Hess, Lyons & Corsino, 1990).

Wells (1990, p.461) developed a checklist for identifying the dropout. The list included age, physical size, health, participation in out-of-school activities, participation in school, grade retention, father’s occupation, educational level achieved by father or mother, and number of children in the family. Also included were school-to-school transfers, attendance, learning rate, ability to read, and school marks. Additionally, reaction to school controls, acceptance by pupils, parental attitude towards graduation, pupil’s interest in school work, and general adjustment were factors used to identify dropouts. In a related area of investigation, follow-up data on eighth-grade, base-year students were collected in the spring of 1990 (when the students were in tenth grade) and in the spring of 1992 (when the students were in their final semester of high school). Each follow-up also surveyed the population of dropouts, allowing researchers to track students who dropped out of school after the eighth grade. These efforts complement a range of research studies designed to find out why students drop out of school (Council of the Great City Schools, 1994, p.5).

Although students placed at risk include all ethnicities, cultures, and socioeconomic groups, there is no question that they are over-represented by economically-disadvantaged members.
of minority ethnic groups in urban settings (Snyder & Hoffman, 1994; United General Accounting Office, 1986; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1995, pp. 1-26). Due to relatively high birth rates and increasing poverty rates for minority groups, projections are for the percentages of student dropouts to increase in the future (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). In the case of African American students, a focus of the present study, numerous factors appear to contribute to their relatively low group performance on academic achievement tests, among which are reduced opportunities to acquire academic skills, limited parental support and expectancies for educational attainment, and disengagement from or distrust of majority-cultural values for education (Renzulli, Reis, Hebert, & Diaz, 1995, p. 41-98).

Education is not an isolated phenomenon. Education is related to economic, political, and cultural conflicts within the nation. It is partially formed by a diverse section of people and contributes in some measure to their resolution. If the nation is to be strong in its democratic resolve, it must resolve that every child receive a real chance to develop his or her powers of mind, body, and spirit. Only then can the individual achieve skills and judgment needed to live responsibly and to contribute to the common good. A child at risk is a nation at risk (Lakebrink, 1989, p.xv). Clearly, dropping out hurts the nation grievously in terms of health, wealth, and the achievement of the democratic ideals. It stunts lives, leads to personal
unhappiness and tragedy, and lowers an individual's self-esteem. Given all of these adverse effects, there is good reason to applaud the national resolve to reduce the dropout rate. A national goal of ninety percent high school graduation means a national dropout rate of ten percent. Few educators argue against that goal (Gage, N., 1990, p. 283).

Basis for Study

The problem of school dropout is multifaceted, has many causes, grows incrementally worse each year, and over the past decade, has reached crisis proportions nationally and statewide. This problem is one of the most obvious examples of youth whose future is imperiled or has been compromised. Of paramount concern is the significant threat that high dropout rates present for the state and national economies, particularly given the shift to a global economy and the need to prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Experts project that the estimated costs of dropouts in the United States are seven billion dollars a year in lost tax revenue, welfare payments, unemployment compensation, and crime, and approximately four hundred twenty-five million dollars a year in training costs and lost productivity. High rates of unemployment and low wages among dropouts are cited; for example, only one in six jobs today suitable for the high school dropout and this figure is expected to worsen as increasing technology requires a more educated workforce.
National attention has been drawn to the increasing problem of dropouts and of students at risk of dropping out. One of the nation's most serious problems is the high rate of student dropouts from the public school system. The consequences to youth who dropout and to the nation's economic and social well-being are devastating, and the student dropout rate in the schools remains substantial. The significance of this nationwide problem of dropping out of high school continues to cause concern among those who educate children and among those who set policy governing them (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

In the spring of 1962, National Education Association employee, Daniel Schrieber, spoke about dropouts on a panel at the annual convention of the National Association of Secondary Principals. Portraying dropouts as running away from work half-done, from school half-completed, he declared, "How American education solves the problem of school dropouts...may well determine America's future" (Schreiber, 1962, p. 39). Foremost among researchers in the field of education is John Goodlad. During the late seventies, studies of dropouts and of those not being promoted prompted Goodlad to conclude that schools are becoming obsolete. He recommended that educators restructure schools. Consideration should be given to both human and natural resources as well as to the feasibility of new learning sites. (Goodlad, 1975, p. 274). In the 1980s, a body of literature on the topic of youth at-risk of dropping out of school was
generated (Kelly, 1996, p.18). This study indicated that family, school, community, and societal levels most predictive of early school withdrawal were clearly and consistently delineated.

During recent years, research on at-risk youth has been successful in identifying and documenting factors that place a child or youth at risk. This research focus has been so successful that it has achieved a chilling level of predictability. Using only a few identified factors, schools can predict with better than 80 percent accuracy students in the third grade who will later drop out of school. So powerful are these factors that researchers now maintain that if a poor child attends a school composed largely of other poor children, is reading a year behind by the third grade and has been retained a grade, the chances of this child ever graduating from high school are near zero (McPartland & Slavin, 1990, p. 9). This model suggests that factors that place children at-risk are related to the individual, family, community, and school. This model will serve as the theoretical framework for this research.

This study will explore these facts within one urban mid-sized city in Virginia. The study will also explore data obtained from this city of approximately 18,000 students in public education wherein the problem of high-school dropouts has been a major concern for the last decade. Data collected from 1985 provide a clear indication that the percentage of high-school dropouts in high schools was five percent. This percentage
escalated up to eight percent during the 1987-88 term. However, during the 1988-89 school year this percentage dropped to six percent and has continued to decrease as evidenced by rates of 2.4 percent, 2.3 percent and 1.1 percent in 1994-95 to 1995-96, respectively (Division Report, 1997, pp.21-23). While the number of dropouts has fluctuated for a decade, the data is showing a downward trend in the school division. Therefore, this researcher utilized data from the 1992-93 to generate information on students from the three high schools in the district. Similarly, test data from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for grades four and eight, were utilized.

After reviewing the data required for this study, the district’s data base was the best source for this information. Upon further examination, the following information was identified in the research and contained in the records in the district data base and educational records. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills reading comprehension scores for grades eight, Literacy Passport Test results for grade six, grades retained, age, socioeconomic status (as indicated by free and reduced priced lunch), attendance, behavior (as measured by suspension reports), gender, and race. Therefore, data was collected on nine variables for analyses.

This study has implication for elementary and secondary curriculum. The results of this study can serve as a focal
point for the development of effective educational programs aimed at potential dropouts.

Furthermore, the influence of reading comprehension on dropout status has implications for policy makers in terms of the impact of students dropping out of school and meeting the needs of the students. The district can use the data generated from this study in order to address the reading and dropout problems in the school system. Finally, the reading comprehension component of this study makes this a unique study.

Urban Perspective

School related factors which influences dropping out have been identified in numerous studies; the National Department of Education has attempted to provide comparable data on the dropout rates in urban school districts. In 1992-93, the median annual dropout rate was nine percent. The median four-year dropout rate in urban school districts was twenty-eight percent. Additionally, one out of four city districts had four-year dropout rates greater than thirty-five percent. Two years earlier, about one out of three had annual dropout rates that high (Coley, R.J., 1995.p.3). Moreover, in 1992, the national average of earnings for dropouts was only 71 percent of those completing high school; in 1994, 11.5 percent of the 16-24 year-
olds had dropped out of high school which was an increase of 0.5 percent over 1993; 3.7 million of 16-24 year-olds, in 1994 were high school dropouts. Concurrently, the family income had a significant influence on dropping out; 21.0 percent were from the low income level; 11.3 percent were at the middle income level; 4.4 percent were from the high income level; and 40.1 percent of dropouts ages 16-24 had less than a tenth grade education (National Dropout Prevention Center, p. 9).

The concern in urban communities for improvement in education and for a better life is the impetus for this study. This study takes place in an urban, aging community whose population density is approximately 100 thousand; poverty prevails, mobility is a way of life, and service delivery is a concern. If the urban community is to flourish, the schools are vital to this success. To this end, this study will provide information on the influence of reading on dropouts in an urban community.

**Importance of Study**

The desire to improve reading achievement is a critical factor for students across the nation. The information obtained from this study will prove useful in understanding the relationship of reading achievement and its impact on student dropouts. The concern for dropouts is based on hard realities. It has been estimated that the nation loses about $77 billion dollars annually because of school dropouts, $3 billion in crime
prevention, $3 billion in welfare and unemployment, and $71 billion in lost tax revenue (Levin, 1987, p.19). Upon completing the study, the results could serve as guidelines to assist in improving student achievement and in decreasing the student dropout rate.

The impact of reading achievement on dropouts described in this research is a critical issue to educators charged with the education of youth and to the community as well. The impact previously noted in this research will have a profound influence on the nation. Experts in the field agree that early identification is the vehicle to decrease the number of dropouts. Additionally, Lowery indicates that one advantage of this type of research is that the data examined are not confined to a particular discipline, but instead come from a variety of educational, economic, and sociological characteristics (Lowery, D., 1985, p. 41).

It is essential that America’s parents acting as the first teachers, and the entire educational structure unite to make America 2000 work. When parents meet the challenge of helping their children become literate and when they support administrators and teachers as they provide the skills needed for literate, productive citizens, then and only then, will the National Education Goals be reached. Success in school, and becoming productive citizens, are dependent on the ability to read, and learning to read begins in the home (Rayborn, 1993,
Barber & McCellan (1987, p.246), & Vaughan (1991, p.36) rank achievement, attendance, attitudes, and behavior problems as significant indicators for predicting school dropouts. Thus, the movement towards educational reform has returned education to the forefront of policy discussions at both the national and state levels. The most recent evidence of this interest is the national education goal number two, "By the year 2000, the high-school graduation rate will increase to 90 percent," and this goal is constantly in the forefront (U.S. Department of Education, 1992, p.32). However, as with widespread movements, this reform effort has its own direction and momentum; while it is directed to certain problems in school curricula, it fails to apply strategies to address the growing numbers of students who are at risk of dropping out of school (Fisher, 1994, 21). Therefore, the problem this study seeks to explore is the influence of reading achievement on the dropout status in the school system.

Statement of Problem

Numerous factors have been identified as predictors of dropouts through the literature review. Thus, information available from the district's data base will be utilized as predictor variables in the formulation of the prediction equation and will assist in determining the influence of reading achievement after controlling for demographic and behavior factors on dropouts. Six hundred and seventy-seven students who

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were members of the freshman class of 1993-94 and who remained a part of the senior class of 1996-97 were used for the study.

Overall Research Questions

To investigate the problem, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. To what extent does reading comprehension influence the dropout status?

2. To what extent does reading comprehension influence the dropout status after controlling for demographic characteristics?

3. To what extent does reading comprehension influence the dropout status after controlling for performance characteristics?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are relevant to this research.

1. **Attendance** - The summation of the number of days absent from school as indicated by the percentage of absences.

2. **At-risk students** - For this study, at-risk students will be identified in terms of school performance characteristics. Students in this group demonstrated one or more of the following characteristics: behind in grade-level assignments, two years older for present grade, retained in school at least two grades, scored below the 50th percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, qualified for free or reduced lunch, had poor reading achievement, and developed
patterns of persistent or excessive absences.

3. **Dropout** - Those students that may leave school during the school year without transferring to another educational institution.

4. **Grade Retention** - A student who does not meet the requirements to advance to the next grade level.

5. **Overage** - A student who is over the usual or specified age for a designated grade.

6. **Reading Achievement** - Reading achievement is defined as the reading score on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

7. **Socioeconomic Status** - This is determined by students who receive free or reduced lunch at school.

8. **Iowa Test (ITBS)** - Is a normed-referenced standardized test to assess reading and comprehension skills.

9. **Reading Readiness** - Is a fixed standard of physical, intellectual, and social development sufficient to enable children to fulfill specific school requirements and to assimilate the curriculum content.

10. **Emergent Literacy** - A philosophy which assumes that literacy begins in infancy and is ongoing (Morrow, 1989)

11. **Reading Intervention** - The strategies and techniques used to address the acquisition of competence in phonemic awareness, phonics, word study techniques, fluency and comprehension.

12. **Criterion Variable** - The factor that determines the student classification. For the purpose of this study, students will...
be classified as dropouts or nondropouts.

13. **Predictor Variables** - Those variables identified as characteristics that can be utilized to predict a student's likelihood of possibly dropping out.

14. **School Improvement Team** - The teachers, parents, students, administrators, and staff members at each school who develop the blueprint or plan for improvement of student achievement.

15. **Literacy (LPT)** - A state test required for promotion to the ninth grade. This test consists of reading, mathematics and writing skills.

16. **Discriminant Analysis** - a multivariate technique that allows one to weight and combine mathematically those variable which discriminate among two or more groups. In this study the two groups are school dropouts and nondropouts.

17. **Demographic Characteristics** - refers to student's gender, race or ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

18. **Performance Characteristics** - refers to student's attendance, grade retention and suspensions.

**Delimitations and Limitations of Study**

Several factors may diminish the validity of the research study including but not limited to, socioeconomic status, selection of subjects, and scores on the Iowa Test of Basic
Skills. A limitation in this study involved determining the influence common to all schools which was the number of free, reduced and pay status for lunches. This statistic was used to insure that all students were similar in socioeconomic makeup. A major limitation in using this statistic is that it does not address variations among those who are above the free or reduced price lunch income levels. This can result in students being considered similar, because the school has equal percentages of students in the free or reduced price category when they may be dissimilar due to the fact that a school could have a larger number of students coming from families of higher socioeconomic status.

Additionally, limitations on the Iowa Test scores will be evident in this study. Test results and attendance were not available for each year included in the study. Reading comprehension will be the only area recorded for reading achievement for grades six and eight. Transfer students who did not take the Literacy Passport Test or eighth Grade Iowa Test were not included in the study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides a conceptual framework for conducting the research presented and provides insight into various aspects of the study of student dropouts. In order to build a conceptual framework for this study, an understanding of the variables that may impact student dropouts is needed. The factors that identify student dropouts are critical to the knowledge base for this study. The review will include dropouts in relation to reading achievement, grade retention and overage, socioeconomic status, attendance, behavior, gender, and race or ethnicity.

Dropouts and Reading Achievement

In an attempt to address the needs of today’s children, much of the rhetoric—both the hope and the hype—has been cast around the term readiness. To some, readiness is a protective umbrella, safeguarding Head Start and other preschool programs that the nation values. To others, readiness is a bandwagon—the catchall issue around which to frame one’s current interest (Kagan, 1992, p.49). Readiness to learn, advanced by leading developmentalists, is regarded as the level of development at which an individual (of any age) is ready to undertake the learning of specific material, and is usually defined as the age at which the average group of individuals has the specified capacity (Good, 1973).

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Concurrently, reading readiness is a fixed standard of physical, intellectual, and social development sufficient to enable children to fulfill specific school requirements and to assimilate the current content. Research shows that there is a direct link between reading readiness in the early grades and success throughout one’s educational career (Kagan, 1992). It is also linked to the dropout issue which has tremendous implications for the growth as a country. Achieving the readiness agenda means to disperse responsibilities appropriately and to meaningfully engage multiple players while broadening the charge from measuring to implementing readiness. Additionally, readiness means supporting parents and supporting the teaching profession so that readiness future may well surpass readiness past and present in its effect on children, families, communities, and society (Kagan, 1992). Thus, the responsibility rests with the parents and teachers who must prepare the students at an early age.

Paratore (1993, p.35) explored the ways information about first-grade children’s uses of literacy at home might inform educators of the school-based assessment of children’s literacy knowledge. The subjects were ten Caucasian families in a small, suburban community of white collar professionals and administrators, and fourteen Caucasian, Latino, and African-American students, in a large urban community. Each family contributed three artifacts from the home literacy environment to
the children's classroom literacy portfolio. To provide data sources, the artifacts were read and sorted according to category, and how teachers used the artifacts to construct the child's literacy profile. Results indicated that the level of parent participation in the urban setting was higher than the level of participation in the suburban setting. The artifacts in the two settings presented clear differences in children's purposes and motivation for literacy uses in each community. The process of joining home artifacts with school artifacts provided teachers with a context for assessing the strength of the curriculum as well as knowledge of individual children; and the process of including parents as partners in constructing the portfolio influenced not only the evaluation of the child's literacy, but also the parents' understanding of the classroom and the teachers' understanding of the home.

Much of the current concern about students who leave school before graduating from high school has arisen primarily, not from the nation's schools, but from business leaders, policy makers at the state and national levels, and community organizations. Recognizing that the nation cannot absorb the growing numbers of unemployed and unemployable youth that exit the public schools without basic literary and numeracy skills, corporate America has become worried about the country's future competitiveness in an increasingly interdependent world economy (Fernandez, 1988). Furthermore, projects associated with family literacy seek to
break what has been called the illiteracy cycle, (Nickse, R., & M. Speicher, 1988, p.635) which indicates that illiterate parents tend to have children who do not read well (Somerfield, B., 1989, p.1). A disproportionately large number of persons who are poor in cities are low literates who, lacking the reading skills demanded by our society, are unable to get the kind of job which would allow them to improve their socioeconomic status (France, 1991, p.5). In addition, a study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of both the informal and standardized readiness measures in predicting the literacy development of both normal first grade subjects and high-risk subjects. Language delayed primary students consisting of sixty first grade students, and twenty-seven language delayed children were given four informal literacy measures. The informal literacy measures were the Writing Vocabulary Test, Concepts About Print Test, the Sentence Dictation Test, as well as the Metropolitan Readiness Test, and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. Data were analyzed, and the results showed that the informal literacy measures were the best predictors of both the reading achievement of the first graders on the Stanford Achievement Tests, and the at-risk; also the language delayed subjects’ scores on Clay’s Letter Identification Test (Harlin, R. & Lipa, S., 1988, p.23).

Historically, reading and the dropout issue have been a concern. Bledsoe (1959), in a three year study of one Georgia community, compared former ninth and tenth grade students who had
dropped out of school to age peers who remained in school relative to scores on the California Reading Achievement Test. He found that those who dropped out of school had a mean level of reading that was one grade below that of their peers. Combs and Cooley (1986 generated randomly selected samples of high school dropouts and graduates from the Project TALENT database to compare reading ability. They found lower mean scores for dropout samples on measures of reading comprehension (19 vs. 23.5) and table reading (1.9 vs. 5.5). Likewise, an analysis of the High School and Beyond database (Alexander, K., Natrielle, G., & Pallas, A., 1985, p. 409) established that both the 1980 and 1982 sophomore cohorts who were identified as dropouts had lower mean grade level scores (4.8 and 5.3) than their peers who remained in school in 1980 (7.2) and 1982 (8.5). Finally, (Hahn, A., 1987, p. 256) reported that based on a national sample of non-college-bound youth, those whose scores in reading and math fell in the bottom half were nearly nine times more likely to leave school as dropouts.

Correlational studies have also examined the relationship of reading ability and school dropout. Livingston (1958, pp. 195-203) utilized correlational techniques to evaluate the relationship of staying in school to 24 elementary school-level variables among a sample of 309 school persisters. He found a significant correlation between measured reading level and staying in school. Furthermore, in combination with variables representing
participation in formal school activities, participation in informal activities, number of grades retained, and persons with whom the student resided, reading level accounted for 67% of the variance between the dropout sample and school persister sample.

Walters and Kranzler (1970, pp. 97-104) developed prediction equations for a sample of 414 school dropouts. The best equation determined that reading achievement, in combination with student intelligence quotient score, age, socioeconomic status, and arithmetic achievement would accurately identify 91% of the dropouts. Lloyd (1976, pp.983-991), meanwhile performed a multiple regression to predict the grade in which former students had dropped out of school. The results showed that reading achievement test scores, along with age, number of absences, and math achievement test score, could significantly predict, 2 to 6 years in advance, the grade level of students who will leave school. Finally, Hess (1986, pp.29-52) reported that across the Chicago public schools' 63 comprehensive high schools from the years 1982, 1983, and 1984, the percentage of students with below normal reading scores was the strongest predictor of school dropout (at a simple correlation of .854).

The previously mentioned research on reading achievement provides ample evidence to support the importance of reading achievement in regards to student dropouts. Curtis' (1983, p.424) study of school dropouts and graduates from Austin, Texas, relative to reading scores on the California Achievement Test
found the dropouts to have a lower mean score (26 percentile) than the graduates (58 percentile). Moreover, a New York study indicates that among 5,800 students targeted in 26 high schools, 85% had failed a minimum of three courses the prior year, and that at least half were reading below grade level. (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1986, p.14). Subsequently, Chall contends that a twelfth grade reading level is required to live productively in a complex, post-industrial society. (Chall, J., 1990, p.55). Because of the central role that reading ability plays in children's lives, it is critical that the importance of reading is stressed from the birth of a child through adulthood. Furthermore, Ernest Boyer offers several suggestions for reducing the number of dropouts. He believes that students who are deficient in reading and writing should be given special remedial help in a summer program the first year of high school; and alternative schools should be organized to give intensive, continuous help to some high-risk students (Gage, 1990).

In keeping with the previous concerns, Success for All (SFA) was designed by Robert Slavin and his associates at John Hopkins University as a comprehensive program with two essential principles: prevention and immediate intensive intervention (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1992, p.5). Success for All (SFA) is one of the most extensively researched programs in education. The initial studies were longitudinal evaluations of implementations at six schools in Baltimore and Philadelphia, and
one in Charleston, South Carolina. With only a few exceptions, this research has shown SFA students to surpass their control counterparts on all posttest measures. As reviewed in Slavin (1996), results over a five-year period, starting in first grade in 1986 with 55 SFA cohorts and 55 control cohorts, show statistically significant and positive effects for SFA students at every grade level from one to five. In general, effect sizes averaged one-half a standard deviation at all levels. Most striking were the advantages for SFA students performing in the lowest 25 percent of their grades; these effect sizes ranged from +1.03 in the first grade to +1.68 in the fourth grade. Additional findings indicated progressive increases in SFA effect sizes with each additional year of program implementation, substantial reductions in special education placements at SFA schools, and higher performance relative to matched control students by first-grade special education students assigned to SFA reading classes (Ross, S.M, & Casey, J.P., 1995, pp.773-800).

Similarly, Reading Recovery offers many ideas about beginning reading and interventions that accelerate the learning of the lowest achieving first grade child so that they progress as successful readers with the class (Clay,1993, Pinnell, 1990, Jones, N.K.,1995, p.43). Working with Reading Recovery increases understanding of early reading and writing and helps to develop new perspectives on theoretical as well as practical issues.

Reading Recovery offers a rich source of information...
concerning the emergence of literacy and literacy processes in young children. This program was based upon and has generated significant longitudinal studies of beginning readers and writers (Clay, 1982, 1991, 1993; DeFord, Pinnell, Lyons, & Place, 1990). Reading Recovery teachers keep extensive documentation of their own teaching actions and decisions. Standardized report forms are completed for each child for easy generation of local, state, and national reports. Moreover, as teachers work to make their teaching more contingent upon each child’s performance and concepts, they have the opportunity to observe and reflect intently upon each child’s functioning and progress in daily, individual lessons. Since everyone involved in Reading Recovery continues to teach children at least some of the time, a vast reservoir of shared understanding of early literacy develops (Clay, 1993, DeFord, Lyons, & Pinnell, 1991; Lyons, Pinnell, & DeFord; Pinnell, 1990, p.43).

The principles underlying the theory and practice of Reading Recovery are particularly relevant toward understanding the roles of meaning and of print knowledge in reading. These principles may be useful in moving beyond the meaning-emphasis versus code-emphasis polarization that has plagued both reading theory and reading education. As each principle or insight is discussed, comparisons will be made to key tenets of meaning emphasis as well as code-emphasis researchers and educators (Jones, N.K., 1995, pp.43-45). This is just one program which
offers students an opportunity to acquire the skills of reading and thus to form a firm educational foundation.

In addition to the typical problems with student dropouts, the inmates who reported that they had left school before receiving a high school diploma or who reported receiving a General Education Diploma were asked the main reason they dropped out of school. The most prevalent reason given by prisoners for dropping out of school was academic difficulty. Moreover, reading was a problem with many prisoners (Haigler, K., Harlow, C.O'Connor, P., & Campbell, A., 1994, p.6). According to Beck and Muia (1980, p.65), the dropout problem originates from a lack of congruence between the cultural experiences a child brings to school and those experiences necessary to perform adequately within that environment. These exist upon entrance, and left unattended, the discrepancy becomes greater with each passing school year until, finally, the student withdraws from formal education. Working from this conceptual foundation, the authors proposed that the most efficient approach to reducing dropouts was early identification. Finally, the quickest way to improve reading capacities of the nation's young people is to help those currently at the lower levels. Large gains among current, poorly performing students will raise the functional literacy of the citizenry, which is more significant than small gains among the students already doing well. In the process, dropout rates might also be reduced, accomplishing two goals at once (Hess, A., 1986,
Dropouts and Grade Retention Overage

Students drop out of school for many reasons. One of the major reasons for dropping out is being overage (Johnson, G.L., 1994, p. 37). The impact of entering high school overage maybe a detriment socially, emotionally, and academically. Being overage, age 15 or older, when entering the ninth grade is sometimes an indication of having repeated at least one grade in elementary school. This is usually coupled with having academic difficulties. In the 1991 graduating class in Chicago, students entering high school at age 15 or older, accounted for over 69% of the dropouts, and only 53% of the population with no significant difference between the larger racial/ethnic groups. This report cites overage of entering ninth graders as one of the most important indicators of dropping out of school, a factor which is consistent with other research (Grissom & Shepard, 1986, p. 44; Smith & Shepard, 1989). Several analyses of data from Chicago and Austin have found that youths who are overage for grade level, drop out at higher rates when controlling for differences in achievement test scores (Grissom & Shepard, 1989, p. 43).

In the case of dropping out, age norms reflected institutional developments in response to major economic changes. High schools grew as a warehousing institution as teenagers withdrew from full-time labor. The age norm of graduation, and
the language of the dropout problem in the 1960s, showed evident anxiety about the assumed dependency of dropouts. When President John Kennedy wrote Congress about the needs of education in January 1963, he presumed that schools were the appropriate place to respond to the problems of dependency. One of the most consistent findings in the literature on early school leaving is that dropouts are much more likely to be overage for their grade by the time they drop out. The strength of the association between grade retention and school dropouts, widely cited in the literature, is impressive. Fully 77 percent of youths in the Fall River cohorts who repeated at least one grade dropped out of school, compared to only 25 percent who had never failed a grade (Roderick, M., 1993, p.103).

The results of the Fall River Study in Chicago suggest that much of the higher dropout rates among retained youths can be explained by the impact of being overage for their grade. Students in the Fall River Study who were older than their classmates, either because they entered the school system overage for their grade or because they were retained in a grade, faced an increased risk of dropping out (Roderick, 1993). The Chicago Study that dealt with the high dropout rate of high school students found that overage entrants when compared with normal aged entrants dropped out more frequently than normal aged students reading at the same level or at lower stanine levels (Hess, G. & Lauber, D., 1986, p.11).
Generally speaking, the higher the concentration of overage students, the worse schools do with these students. Twenty-six percent of all entering freshmen in the class of 1982 involved with the Chicago Study were overage. Of these, 61 percent dropped out (vs. 38 percent of normal age students); overage students represent more than a third (37 percent) of all dropouts (Hess, G. & Lauber, D., 1986, p.14). Studies have indicated (Rice, Toles, & Schultz, 1987, p.8) that overage which is the result of retention has been identified with dropout rates that are 20 to 30 percentage points higher than for students who enter high school at the normal age of 15.

One finding that has not received the attention it deserves needs to be highlighted: students who are overage when they enter high school are far more likely to drop out than are their classmates of normal entering age. It is clear that being overage is associated with other indicators of problems with school, and thus is not, by itself, a variable whose policy manipulation will result in large effects. Nevertheless, the evidence presented casts doubt on the positive effects of holding students back (National Center for Educational Statistics Bulletin, 1983, p.7). One of the consistent findings in research on the school dropout is that high-school students who drop out are more likely than graduates to be overage for the assigned grade or to have repeated grades previously in high school. A widely quoted finding from the Youth in Transition Study is that one grade
retention increases the risk of dropping out by 40 percent to 50 percent, and being two grades behind increases the risk by 90 percent (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971, p.27). A similar association between grade retention and early school leaving is found in the more recent High School and Beyond Survey mentioned earlier in the research. In this survey, sophomores who reported that they repeated at least one previous grade dropped out at more than twice the rate of youths who reported that they had never repeated a grade (Barro & Kolstad, 1987, p.10).

In recognition of the significance that grade retention has on dropouts, McCall (1994, p.10), indicates that students who were at least a year older than their classmates in the seventh grade were more likely to drop out of school during the next four years. In a related area of investigation, Hahn (1987, p.60) found that students who have repeated grade levels are two to four times more likely to dropout as students who are working at grade level. One reason retention is one of the strongest predictors of dropping out may be that it stigmatizes children who are older than other children in their classes as failures. Another is that retention almost always means simply repeating the previous year's material (LeCompte & Dworkin, p.79). Roderick (1993, p.109) contends that failing a grade, second to dropping out, is perhaps the most dramatic indicator of serious difficulty in school. The fact that grade retention and school dropout rates are evidence of school failure raises an important problem when
trying to identify whether grade retention, as a policy, hurts youth's chances of graduating. The main problem is that students who have given up on school and are middle school dropouts have experienced retention. Indeed, fully 84 percent of middle school dropouts were not promoted in either the seventh or the eighth grade as compared to 13.7 percent of later dropouts and only 1.6 percent of graduates.

Elementary dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than are high school dropouts. Retention at the elementary level usually serves as an indicator or potential dropouts at an early age. Students who repeat two grades have a probability of dropping out of nearly 100 percent. After controlling for socioeconomic status, the single most powerful school predictor of dropping out of school is whether a student was held back in an earlier grade (Rumberger, 1995).

Accordingly, the most consistent findings in research on school dropout is that high school students who drop out are more likely than graduates to be overage for their grade or to have repeated grades previous to high school. A similar association between grade retention and early school leaving is found in the more recent High School and Beyond Survey. In this survey, sophomores who reported that they repeated at least one previous grade dropped out at more than twice the rate of youths who reported that they had never repeated a grade (Barro & Kolstad, 1987, p.12). Subsequently, high school dropout rates among
retained youths are often used as evidence that grade retention is harmful. The problem with such comparisons is that it is unclear to what extent higher dropout rates among retained youths reflect the fact that school systems retain pupils because they are doing poorly in school and, thus, are already likely to drop out (Roderick, 1993).

According to Curwin (1992, p.102), retained children perform more poorly when they go to the next grade than if they had been promoted without repeating a grade. Research findings on the effect of retention differ by whether retained or promoted youths are compared on the basis of their academic achievement at the same age or after completion of the same grade. Holmes (1989, p.19) concluded that studies which used same-age comparisons generally found large negative effects of retention. Studies that used same grade comparisons did not find negative effects when comparing retained and promoted youths after completion of the same grade. Still another factor associated with students who are at risk of dropping out is the retention of students in primary grades whose academic progress is considered inadequate for higher level course work. This is one policy that is likely to affect the alterable student attributes. Presumably, retention increases students' achievement upon their eventual entry in high school but increases their entry-age as well (Hess & Lauber, 1985).

In a finding significant for evaluation of the effects on
retention, the study found that overage students, even if reading at higher levels than their normal aged peers, are 7% to 10% more likely to drop out. But, when overage entrants were compared with normal aged entrants, it was discovered that overage students not only dropout more frequently than do normal aged students reading at the same level, they drop out more frequently than do normal aged students reading at a lower stanine level (Chicago Public Schools Study of Dropouts (Hess, G., & Lauber, D., 1985, p.146). At the same time, the dropout rate among 16-24 year-olds who had repeated more than one grade was 41 percent, compared with 17 percent of those who repeated only one grade and 9 percent of those who did not repeat any grades. Dropout rates were the highest among those who repeated grades 7, 8, or 9 (34%) rather than those who repeated any grades between kindergarten and 6 (17%) or grades 10, 11, or 12 (19%) (Synder, H. & Sickmund, M., 1995, p. 15).

Consistent across districts of very different socioeconomic levels, retained students experience a greater risk for dropping out that cannot be explained by their poor achievement. Wherever high school graduates and dropouts are compared, it is always the case that a substantially larger proportion of the dropouts have repeated a grade (Shepherd & Smith, 1989, p.214). In spite of all the emphasis on retention in the 1980s, an overwhelming majority of researchers are convinced that retention does not work. Not only does it not help students to catch up, but it usually proves
to be counterproductive in the long run. Dawson and Rafoth (1991, p.1) analyzed sixty-three studies that investigated the effects of retention on academic achievement and personal adjustment, and the conclusion: retained students do worse academically than comparable students who are promoted. Retention has been shown to result in a higher dropout rate than any other identified factor: in all likelihood because students retained were not given sufficient extra help so that they could catch-up with the class, or because students have extraordinary academic difficulties that are not corrected through extra academic assistance. In either case, these students are at extreme risk of dropping out (Smith and Shepard, 1989, p.9). Many teachers believe that early retention is beneficial to youths, while retention that occurs in later grades is more harmful (Smith & Shepard, 1987; Tompchin & Impara, 1992). Their perspective would predict that later grade retention would have a larger impact on the hazard of dropping out than would retention that occurs in earlier grades.

As evidence of academic standards there are public and political pressures to retain students who do not perform well in school. Some teachers believe that retention, particularly in the early grades, is an effective strategy to remedy poor school performance and that it may reduce the likelihood of later school failure. Schools, however, seldom keep follow-up data on retained students. Sometimes it is surprising to learn that little or no data is available to show that retention provides remedial
benefits; in fact, most research tells us that retention may, in the long run, place student at a higher risk of dropping out of school.

Research findings indicate from 5 to 7 percent of public school children, are retained in the United States annually. In the primary grades, retention rates are 0 percent in Japan and the United Kingdom and an average of 2 percent in other European countries (Center for Policy Research Education Policy Briefs, 1990 p. 1). In Virginia, during the 1995-96 school year 52,289 students were retained. The largest number of students retained were in Grade nine; over 11,000 students in Grade nine, or approximately 13 percent of membership were retained for the grade. (1995-96 Superintendent’s Annual Report).

A meta-analysis of 54 studies of retention shows that when retained children went on to the next grade, they actually performed more poorly on average than if they had gone on without repeating. In addition, the benefits of retention diminished over time so that differences in performance between retained and control children disappeared (Holmes, 1989). Moreover, the cumulative rate of nonpromotion year after year produces a cumulative rate of nonpromotion greater than 50 percent. Even when allowing for students who repeat more than one grade, studies show that by the ninth grade approximately 40 to 50 percent of all students in the United States who have failed at least one grade or more are no longer in school (CPRE Policy
A summary of the results from approximately twenty-five studies on the effects of retention on school achievement indicates that, on the average, promoted pupils make gains of eight to twelve months in a year while retained pupils make gains of only about six months. That is, it often takes two years for the retained child to learn what the promoted child learns in one year. Looking at individual progress, roughly eighty-five percent of promoted pupils as compared to thirty-five percent of retained pupils are found to be achieving at a normal rate (Rose, J., Medway, F., & Marus, S., 1983, p.201).

**Dropouts and Socioeconomic Status**

The impact of young people leaving high school without graduating presents an urgent issue for educators. In terms of functioning in society, Rumberger (1987, p.110), noted that young people who have dropped out or have been released from school generally have serious educational deficiencies that will impair their economic well-being throughout their adult lives. Students of lower socioeconomic status have been consistently shown to have higher dropout rates than students of high socioeconomic status (Alexander, 1976, p.324). Reports from other major studies consistently describe a bleak outlook for individuals with incomplete basic education (Edgar, 1987; Hess 1986; Kunisawa, 1988; Levin, 1972; Rumberger, 1987; Wehlage and Rutter, 1986). The research indicates that more than one in five school children
in the United States come from families in poverty (Hodgkinson, 1985, p.4). For educators, policy makers, researchers, and the public, improving these children’s schooling is an increasingly urgent concern. Despite extra resources and despite recent educational reforms, the children of poverty experience failure in their early school years; they often leave school ill-equipped for adult life (Knapp, Turnbull, & Shields, 1990, p.4). Results for the demographic background variables are consistent with statements in the literature that higher dropout rates are more likely in larger schools and poorer neighborhoods. The relationship between measures of socioeconomic status and school performance has been documented for achievement and the dropout rate (White, 1982, p.461). Moreover, Fernandez and Shu (1988) contend that family income tends to be a reliable predictor of students’ staying in school. Generally speaking, research has shown that the lower the family income, the higher the chances of a student dropping out. Conversely, the higher the income, the lower the likelihood of the student dropping out.

Rather than studying the problems that children of poverty face in whatever schools they attend, the researchers focused on classrooms in schools that serve high concentrations of poor children. Research shows that children in such schools face a double disadvantage, from their own poverty and that of the group: low achievement is most likely among poor children who attend school with predominantly poor classmates. In practice,
then, this was a study of high poverty classrooms and schools. Most, but not all, of the students attending these schools were from poor families (Knapp, Shields, & Turnbull, 1992, p.3). The question of whether the dropout rate is influenced by the status of the family on the socioeconomic scale has been the topic of several research efforts. Early studies of dropouts supported this viewpoint indicating that students of families low in socioeconomic status were likely to drop out of school. Benallack (1965, p.8) noted in a Wisconsin study that poverty and the accompanying cultural traits of poverty contributed to students dropping out of school. Schreiber (1967, p.39) concluded that dropout studies had been virtually unanimous in finding dropout rates to run significantly higher among lower-class youths. Accordingly, Shea & Wilkins (1971, p.19) indicated that 18% of the dropout students were from welfare families. Additionally, Brantner & Enderlein (1972, p.4) concluded that the claim that dropout proneness was more present in lower socioeconomic levels, spoke to the concern.

School related factors contributing to dropping out have been identified in numerous studies; Gage (1990, p.281), refers to poverty that stands out as the most conspicuous overall factor. Thus, the characteristics of our poorest people are also associated with the tendency to drop out of school. Being African-American or Hispanic, having lower scores on achievement tests, getting low or failing grades, being older than usual for
a given grade level, coming from a home in which the parents are not high school graduates, and becoming pregnant as a teenager, all are characteristics associated with poverty and dropping out. Poverty also increases alienation from the mainstream of American culture, and that alienation means lower self-esteem and a tendency to withdraw from identification with school and extracurricular activities. One of every five children in the United States lives in a family whose income is below the poverty level; that rate doubles among Blacks and Latinos (Children's Defense Fund, 1991, p.24). While poverty levels rise and fall, children remain the most impoverished age group, and obstacles to their well-being continue to mount. Thus, poverty also means inadequate housing, with concomitant noise, crowding, and lack of privacy. It means shared beds and bathrooms, or none at all. At best, somewhere to study may consist of a shared seat on a convertible couch in a crowded living room next to a noisy kitchen (Hodgkinson, 1991,p.9). Failing to complete assignments after school means that children are failing to accomplish tasks that teachers feel are necessary and appropriate for all students.

Researchers have long identified the relationship between the degree of poverty experienced by children and their tendency to drop out of school. Children now constitute the largest group of poor people in the United States. Since 1965, at least twenty percent of the nation's children have lived in homes with incomes
below the federally set poverty line. Half the nation's poor are children under the age of 18 (Barrington, 1989, p.309). Moreover, poverty is highly correlated with school failure. It has been observed that economically poor students are three times more likely to drop out (Children in Need, 1987, p.14). Principals and teachers need to extend their professional commitments into the homes of their identified at-risk students. Poverty is the overwhelming demographic predictor of who will dropout; students from the bottom third in family income stand a far greater chance of leaving school than teens from middle class or affluent families. And when socioeconomic factors are controlled, the differences across racial, ethnic, geographic, and other demographic lines blur (OERI, 1987, p.5).

Most empirical research on family background has focused on the structural characteristics of families, such as socioeconomic status and family structure. Research has consistently found that socioeconomic status, most commonly measured by parental education and income, is a powerful predictor of school achievement and dropout behavior (Bryk & Thum, 1989, p.353; Ekstrom et al., 1987, p.356; Rumberger, 1987, p.115). Most major studies include socioeconomic status as one of the most influential factors. In the 1987 GAO survey of dropout prevention programs, more than three-fourths of the youth were from families of low socioeconomic status, but about one-fifth came from middle class families, and four percent from families of high
socioeconomic status. Similarly, data from the High School and
Beyond data indicates that the dropout rate for youth from
households with low-income, low-skill wage earners, and limited
educational backgrounds was about three times the rate of those
from the highest end of the socioeconomic scale (U.S. General
Accounting Office, 1986, p.4). Concurrently, family influence as
a force for or against school continuation has been extensively
studied in a number of ways. The most common factors studied are
family socioeconomic status and intactness. Steinberg, Blinde, &
Chan (1984, p.120) summarized the findings of such studies on
family SES as follows: Virtually every study that has included
social class as an independent variable has indicated that
students in the lower SES strata are more likely to dropout of
school than their more economically privileged peers.
Furthermore, (Peng, 1983, p.11) found a higher rate of dropouts
(17%) among low SES former students than among former students
from middle SES (9%) and high socioeconomic status (5%) families
in regards to family influence as a force for remaining in
school.

Empirical research on high school dropouts has produced
descriptions of several different types of dropouts, as the
preceding review suggests. Calvin Streeter and Cynthia Franklin
(1991, p.218), contend that the most common portrayal in
literature is one of social and economic disadvantage and
minority group membership. More recently, there has been growing
awareness that significant numbers of middle class and minority youth are dropping out of school. Several researchers in the past have elaborated on the impact of socioeconomic status and achievement. Among them are Lynds' (1929, p.17) study of Middletown (a small midwestern city). The Lynds concluded that parents, regardless of social class level, recognize the importance of education for their children; however, working-class children do not come to school academically equipped to deal with the verbal skills and behavioral traits required for success in the classroom. Conversely, earlier studies on the relationship between income level and scholastic achievement suggest that socioeconomic status (in the absence of effective school intervention) is a major predictor of academic success (Jencks et al., 1972, p.4). More recent investigations show that students from low-income households are at a higher risk of dropping out. This may be due to economic pressures and because many low-income environments are not supportive of education. A recent study of under-educated youth in the United States found that young people living in poverty were twice as likely to be under-educated as those from more affluent families (Cardenas, Robledo, & Waggoner, 1988, p. 102).

Fundamental to their view on income level and scholastic achievement, Harris (1988, p.3) concludes that poverty and under-educated are cyclical and interdependent. The Educational Testing Service further concluded that the majority of the adults who
received Aid to Families with Dependent Children benefits in 1983 demonstrated reading and mathematics skills below the eighth grade level. However, socioeconomic status (SES) as measured by parental employment has been associated with school dropouts. For example, Cairns et al. (1989, p. 1437), used the Duncan Scale SES Index to classify the family's socioeconomic status. This sample had an average SES score slightly below the national average (31.5 and 34.5, respectively). Both boys and girls from families of lower socioeconomic status were more likely to drop out than those having a higher socioeconomic status (18% of low-SES females and 22% of low-SES males dropped out of school compared to 3% of high SES females and 11% of high SES males).

Beginning with the Coleman study of the 1960s, research has consistently demonstrated that family background has powerful influence on student achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972, p. 6). Several empirical studies of dropouts have found that at least half of the observed differences in dropout rates between racial groups can be attributed to differences in family background, particularly the socioeconomic status of students' families (Fernandez, Paulsen, & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989, p. 21; Rumberger, 1983, p. 199; Valez, 1989). Yet, dropout rates by socioeconomic status (defined by family income and parents' occupation and educational background) show the top half of the social stratum with a dropout rate of 18 percent compared to a rate of 35 percent for a low and low-middle socioeconomic
students (High School and Beyond figures as reported by U.S. General Accounting Office, 1986). A consideration of this bleak outlook underscores the importance of developing a means to identifying students before they leave school as dropouts.

Consistent with previous research, the estimates show that socioeconomic status is a powerful predictor of dropping out of school; eighth-grade students, one standard deviation above the mean in socioeconomic status (which was normalized to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one) were almost one third as likely to drop out as students with mean values of socioeconomic status. Conversely, eighth-grade students, one standard deviation below the mean in socioeconomic status were three times as likely to drop out of school as students with mean values of socioeconomic status (Dornbusch, et al, 1987, p. 1250; Epstein, 1990, p.99). Conversely, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have the highest dropout rate; among ethnics, Hispanics have the highest rate, followed by Blacks, then Whites. Low socioeconomic status coupled with minority group status are strong indicators of dropping out(Wehlage, G., Robert A.Rutter, & Turner, A., 1987, p.70). Among low-socioeconomic status eighth-grade girls are less likely than boys to test below levels in reading and math. At higher socioeconomic levels, however, girls lose this edge. Among high-socioeconomic status eighth-grade, girls are no more likely than boys to be in advanced reading, and they are less likely to be in advanced math (American Read...
Pallas (1984), described three somewhat different categories of factors, in addition to the standard socioeconomic background measures, associated with dropping out of high school. The three additional factors are academic performance, social disability, and accelerated transitions to adult roles. A large number of students who dropped out of school in 1992 lived in middle income families (Snyder, H. & Sickmund, M., 1995, p.14). However, the likelihood of dropping out during the year was highest among high school students from low income families. Research that addresses family literacy issues among the urban poor is critical. Kozol, and others, warn that there is a large discrepancy between the achievement levels of high and low socioeconomic groups in our society. This gap will continue to widen unless the children of disadvantaged groups are given the help they need to succeed in school,(Kozol, J., 1985, p.63). Former First Lady Barbara Bush’s Family Literacy Project suggests that elementary and secondary schools alone cannot solve the problems of educating the children of the twenty-first century(Bush, B., 1989, p.63). Ignorance and illiteracy, unskilled workers, and dropouts—these and other failures of our educational system breed failures in our social economic system: delinquency, unemployment, chronic dependence, waste of human resources, loss of productive power, and an increase in tax-supported benefits (Kennedy, 1964 ,p.105).
Dropouts and Attendance

A pattern of poor attendance is one of the most obvious signs of the dropout; therefore, educators must make early and continuous contact with students who miss school often and devise ways to keep them coming to school (Hamby, 1983, p.1). Among the most respected of those who have written dropout studies, the literature indicates that high rates of absenteeism are associated with a late or later risk of dropping out of school (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Rumberger et al., 1990; Sommer, 1985, p.113). For fifth graders tardiness and school absences have been used to classify children as at-risk for dropping out (Lirtz-Costes, McCall, Joyner, & Cook, 1992, p.6). Jones and her colleagues (1992, p.6) studied 124 fifth graders from an urban population. Thirty-three of these subjects met one of the four criteria established by the school district as risk factors (i.e., three or more consecutive, unexcused absences; two or more grade retentions; two or more visits to the principal; or personal concerns). Jones et al. reported that children at risk for being a dropout missed an average of 9.6 days of school compared to 5.1 days for children not at risk. Barber and McClellan rank thirty-three factors that are most often predictors of dropouts. This study concluded that school attendance ranks number one, and academic problems or poor grades rank number four (Barber & McClellan, 1987, p.266).

One of the most effective ways to keep students in school is
to keep them continuously acquiring knowledge and skills which are relevant to their lives. Students do not drop out of school because they do not want to learn and are failing to learn. Many question if the outcome of that learning serves a purpose and the process is more positive than negative. Competence based one’s knowledge base gives power, and power gives confidence. Using just the instructional technology and motivational strategies available at this time, schools can develop continuous progress using mastery approaches to instruction in basic skills to avoid grade retention of students. Educators must recognize individual improvements as well as absolute achievement by expanding honor rolls, sending letters to parents and involving them in their children’s learning, awarding ribbons, especially in the early grades, developing peer tutoring programs, and using volunteer tutors at all grade levels (Hamby, 1983, p.1).

Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, research on school effectiveness was primarily limited to the study of such variables as socioeconomic status and pupil intelligence (Bros, Ruijters, & Visscher, 1990). Jencks et al. (1972) and Coleman (1966) contend that only a student’s background characteristics account for the differences in pupil achievement while school characteristics are of no relevance for the output measures (Coleman, 1966, p.176). Yet, by the 1970s, attention was given to attendance in the classroom. Absenteeism (Rood, 1966, p.21) constantly interrupts learning. The more absences accumulated,
the less a student is expected to adequately participate in and to understand classroom activities. In a study of dropouts at Lewisville High School in Chester County, South Carolina, Stradford (1993, p.6) contends that the first cause of dropouts was poor attendance as evidenced in the study. Upon completion of this study and the implementation of a program to reduce dropouts, the school dropout rate decreased from 7.2 percent in 1990-91 to 1.6 percent in June 1993.

Baldwin (1990) DeRidder (1990) and DeBlois (1989) all cite lack of attendance as a major factor often resulting in dropping out and promote systems of rewards or curriculum designed to promote attendance. Reducing absenteeism was a primary objective in 331 of the 479 dropout programs surveyed by the GAO (1987, p.76). Thus, the focus of absenteeism is supported by a considerable body of research that indicates high rates of absenteeism are related to school failure and the increased risk of dropping out. Understandably, a student who never experiences success in school tries to avoid school. Chronic absenteeism compounds the problem; it leads to more failure, with the student perhaps quitting school permanently. Attendance and achievement are intertwined: improved attendance promotes increased achievement, and success in school results in improved attendance (Sattes, B., 1985, p.12).

Fundamental to Sattes' view, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement Urban Superintendent's Network (1987,
p.7) has indicated that the leading factor in the school-related category to dropping out is attendance. Attendance is critical, and students who fail to report to classes cannot develop the essential skills required for success. Vaughan (1991, p.24) echoes this same concern in his prediction analysis on dropouts. Hegner (1987, p.125) shares the same view on the relationship of dropouts wherein the success of the educational process depends on the presence of pupils in the classroom, continuity of instruction, class participation, and well planned instructional activities.

**Dropouts and Behavior**

School discipline problems, another predictor of dropouts, disrupt the educational setting and instructional time for the student, teacher, and classmates. Traditionally, discipline problems result in either detention or suspension, neither of which positively reinforce the value of education (McCall, 1994, p.7). In a related area of investigation, Sommer (1985, pp. 411-412) reported that truant students had more discipline referrals than nontruants in both the seventh and eighth grades. She matched twenty-five truants (16 males and 9 females) to nontruants on gender, school grade, ethnicity, and neighborhood. Truancy was defined as missing ten or more days from school and being placed on an irregular attendance list for unexcused absences by March of the school year. Truant boys had more
discipline referrals than nontruant boys during both school years. In the seventh grade truant boys received eighty-nine referrals compared to nineteen for nontruants. In the eighth grade these same groups received two hundred ninety-four and eighty referrals, respectively. Furthermore, the increase in referrals for both groups was significant from the seventh to the eighth grade.

Participating subjects in the 1982-83 national survey of high school dropouts in High School and Beyond (Ekstrom et al., 1986, p.29), gave self-reports of disciplinary problems, suspension or probation, and in serious trouble with the law. In all three cases sophomores who had dropped out showed higher incidence of these problems than non-dropouts: That is, forty-one percent of the dropouts had disciplinary problems; thirty-one percent had been suspended or put on probation and thirteen percent had serious problems. The corresponding percentages for sophomores who remained in school were sixteen percent, ten percent, and four percent respectively (McCall, 1994, p.9). However, other research has used teacher and principal estimates of aggression to identify children who are at risk for dropouts. For example, Cairns and his colleagues (1989, p.1440) classified seventh grade students as aggressive if two or more faculty members nominated them as such. Using a cluster analysis procedure, these researchers were able to associate high rates of early dropout among boys who received high aggression scores, low
grades, and who were older than same-grade peers. Further, aggression scores were consistent predictors of dropouts across all seven clusters.

School related factors to dropping out have been identified in numerous studies, a longitudinal research study by Kuperschmidt and Coie supports these factors. This research which followed children from the fifth grade until the end of high school, supports Cairns' findings. Subjects were given a battery of sociometric questionnaires at the beginning of fifth grade, and archival data were collected (e.g., grades and discipline records). Outcome measures (i.e., suspensions, truancy, grade retention, early dropout, police records) were gathered at the end of the study. These researchers used preadolescent aggressive behavior, peer rejections and school functioning to predict adolescent delinquency and school maladjustment. Aggressive behavior and peer rejection were measured by a sociometric test administered to peers. School adjustment was measured by absences and grades. Aggression was a significant predictor of juvenile delinquency (i.e., the predicted probability was 52.9% for the aggressive group having police contact while the predicted probability for the other group was 5.8%). Furthermore, early school withdrawal was best predicted by aggression scores and frequent absences. The predicted probability for students who were both aggressive and often absent was 73.7% compared to 45% and 27% for children who were only aggressive and often absent,
respectively (pp. 1350-1362). Moreover, a major study commissioned by the General Accounting Office (1986, p. 9) reported that the causes of youth dropping out are often difficult to isolate and to classify, because the factors associated with dropping out are usually interrelated. But the program officials indicated that problem youth were principally in two broad categories. Over half had problems of truancy or excessive absence. In addition, nearly forty percent displayed troublesome behavior. Other problems included pregnancy or early parenthood, and limited English facility.

Behavior problems have long been viewed as being related to dropping out. In fact, until recently, secondary schools often counseled disruptive students into pursuing options other than traditional schooling. The Urban Superintendents Network reports that misbehavior while in school can signal trouble. Students who have been suspended, who are chronically truant, or who have been in conflict with the law have a higher than average chance of dropping out (OERI, 1987, p. 15). Studies by Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1987, Griffin, Hahn, & Morrow, 1986, p. 7) show strong correlations between absenteeism, discipline problems, and dropping out.

Dropouts, Gender and Race or Ethnicity

Typically, gender and ethnic group differences are included in studies of dropouts (Cairns et al., 1989, p. 1450; Ekstrom et
In the 1983 national dropout study, males were more likely to drop out of school than females. These findings were found again in the 1990 national study of dropouts (NCES, 1990, p.15). Thus, national data confirm that social class is a reliable predictor of dropping out for females and males (Rumberger, 1987, p.121). Native American adolescents are more likely to drop out than Latino adolescents, followed by blacks and then whites; once we control for social class, Rumberger noted that among low-income adolescents, white students are relatively more likely to drop out of high school than Latinos, who are more likely to than blacks.

However, the first benchmark study on dropouts, published by the GAO in June 1986, reported research findings that show higher dropout rates for Hispanics and Blacks, as well as for youth from households of lower socioeconomic status among all ethnic groups. Concurrently, the second study, a survey of dropout prevention programs, found a slight majority of youth in surveyed programs were from minority groups. The data indicated that approximately thirty-four percent were Black, seventeen percent Hispanic, and four percent from other racial or ethnic groups. Forty-five percent of those surveyed were White (GAO Office, 1986, p.7).

The gendered definition of dropout studies followed a long
legacy in educators' writings. United States anxieties about adolescents have often been framed as the dangerous behavior of men. At the turn of the century, educators thought that male teenagers were much more dangerous out of school than were females, and they articulated that concern as the "boy problem" (Tyack & Hansot 1990, pp.174-175). The stereotype of the postwar juvenile delinquent was also male. And again, in the 1960s, writers framed the dropout issue primarily as a problem of male dropouts. Once gender is introduced into the analysis, the patterns grow even more complicated. Black males report the highest rate of dropping out nationally, with white females reporting the lowest. In urban areas, however, we find that white males and females drop out at equivalent rates (15.7 percent and 15.3 percent, respectively); black females drop out far less often than black males (16.6 percent and 24.4 percent respectively (Weis, Farrar, & Petrie, 1989, p.26). The Saginaw City Schools 1992-1993 Dropout Report indicated that of the 140 dropouts, approximately 66% were males and 34% female. This ratio was different for the senior highs with Saginaw High showing 69.5% males and 30.5% females and Arthur Hill showing 55.5% males and 44.5% females (Claus, R.N., 1994, p.41). Similarly, in St. Croix, the largest of the islands that make up the United States Virgin Islands, nearly 80 percent of the native-born Crucian boys dropped out of the public school system by age 16. On the other hand, only about 20 to 25 percent of their sisters had left
school at this point. The boys equated school authority with the persistence of slavery and the domination of poor blacks by native elites and white Americans. The girls, and interestingly, immigrant West Indian males, also black and lower-class, were less impeded in school by an oppositional identity and culture (Gibson, 1982, p.3-5).

Conversely, four percent of all high school students dropped out of school in 1992. Male and female students withdrew at about the same rate during 1992. While most dropouts reported school-related reasons for leaving school, most female dropouts reported family-related reasons. Twenty-one percent of females and eight percent of males dropped out because they became parents. Male dropouts were more likely than female dropouts to report finding a job as the motive for leaving school (Snyder, H., & Sickmund, M., 1995, p.14). However, most dropouts reported school-related reasons for leaving school; most female dropouts reported family reasons. More than a quarter of those dropping out of grades ten through twelve reported job-related reasons for withdrawing. Male dropouts were more likely than female dropouts to report finding a job as the motive for leaving school. Thirty-six percent of males and twenty-two percent females reported finding a job as a reason for leaving school before completing high school (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995).

Ekstrom et al.(1986, p.69) analyzed attitudinal data from High School and Beyond and generated conclusions which reinforced
these findings of the High School and Beyond respondents. Young women who ultimately dropped out were more likely to agree that most women are happiest when making a home, and it is usually better if the man is the achiever, and the woman takes care of the home. However, research on sex, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status suggests that girls of low socioeconomic status have better test scores than boys of like background in the lower grades, but that by high school, this advantage has disappeared. Furthermore, among students of high socioeconomic status, boys from all racial and ethnic groups have better test scores than girls. Nevertheless, girls generally receive better grades than boys, regardless of race or socioeconomic status (American Association of University Women Report, 1992, p.31). In a related area of investigation, gender differences in academic achievement are still to be seen in test scores. Cummings (1994, p.1996) hypothesizes that results on the statewide Maine Educational Assessment over the past five years have shown wide gaps in the performance of grade eleven males and females. Males outscore females in mathematics, and females outscore males in reading and writing. Accordingly, in reading at the state level, grade eleven girls performed better than the boys by a high of eighty points in 1991-92. In this same district, girls outperformed boys by as much as one hundred and four points in 1988-89. In 1992-93, the difference was eighty-seven points in favor of the girls. Thus, girls, it has also been found, tend to
out perform boys in schoolwork (Mussen, Conger, Kagan, & Huston, 1991, p.151). This gender difference in school performance suggests that girls relative to boys, might have a stronger task goal, which is characterized by an emphasis on the task at hand, effort, and improvement in one’s work, (Maehr & Nicholls, 1980, p.221) since a strong task orientation is essential for successful school performance. The data from an investigation by Simpson (1996, p.271) concludes that for these girls and boys, reading behavior differed in general terms insofar as the girls read more and read narrative fiction almost exclusively. They read very little of other genres including nonfiction; they empathized with characters and focused upon feelings and they shared their reading experiences. The boys as a group read less but read a wider number of genres over a broader range of topics. The conclusion often drawn from data such as this is that girls are, therefore, better readers, and consequently, have an advantage over boys.

Fine and Zane (1991) point out that simply being female puts girls at risk. The most obvious gender-related dropout factor is that girls who become pregnant and have children find it difficult to stay in school. Additionally, the consequence of poor performance is more devastating for girls than for boys. Girls who do not graduate are far more likely than boys to be unemployed. Girls who are retained are far more likely to express bad feelings about the experience and to drop out before age 18.
than are boys. They also are much less likely to obtain high school equivalency certificates (Fine and Zane, 1991, p.77).

Other studies point to similar disparity in the school performance and persistence of black males and females in Jamaica (Foner, 1973) and in the United States (Barro and Kolstad, 1987; Hess and Lauber, 1985; Hirschorn, 1988). Even within the NAEP reading test, the performance of boys relative to girls varied, depending on the type of reading exercise. Boys did as well as girls on expository passages and were most disadvantaged relative to girls in the literary passages. This is consistent with the finding that boys read more nonfiction than girls, and girls read more fiction than boys (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1982, p.23). Perhaps the clearest example of the male and female dropout comparison is a national study by the National Center for Juvenile Justice. Snyder & Sickmund, (1995, p.14), found that more than 383,000 students in grades ten through twelve withdrew from school in 1992 and did not complete high school. Four percent of all high school students dropped out of school in 1992. Male and female students withdrew at about the same rate during 1992. However, the proportion of students dropping out declined from seven percent in 1978 to four percent in 1992.

The focus of the dropout issue is supported by a considerable body of research that indicates that males are more at risk of dropping out than females. Canadian studies have shown
that males are more at risk of dropping out than females, a finding that differs from comparable American data (Statistics Canada, 1991; Parkin et al., McCaul et al., 1992, p.10). In Virginia, over the four year period, 1988-1991-92, the percentage of males and females who dropped out of school remained stable with 59 percent male and 41 percent female. This is of particular interest because national dropout data for 1991 indicate virtually no difference between the percentage of dropouts who were male (49.4%) and female (50.6%) (NCES, 1992:16) (Virginia Department of Education, 1993, p.4).

Furthermore, the High School and Beyond data states that dropout rates for White youth from public schools were higher in the Southern and Western regions of the United States than in the Northeast or North Central regions. For Blacks, however, dropout rates were higher in the latter regions; among Hispanics, regional differences were small. For each race/ethnic group, dropout rates were higher than in the suburbs and rural areas (GAO, 1986, p.9). In a related area of investigation, Kunisawa (1988, p.61) noted that the ten states with the highest dropout rates all have ethnic minorities that exceed twenty-five percent, and the ten states with the lowest dropout rates all have less than twenty percent ethnic minorities, and six of the ten have under ten percent. In a study in Austin, Texas, males of African-American origin with average to below average achievement have a 45 percent chance of dropping out of school; but males of the
same origin and identical achievement scores who have repeated a year of school have a 75 percent chance of leaving school before graduation (Grissom and Shepard, 1989). Justiz and Kameen (1987, p.380) reported that Blacks and Hispanics have a dropout rate twice that of Whites, while Rumberger (1983, p.201) found that family background strongly influenced the propensity to drop out of school and accounted for virtually all of the racial differences in dropout rates. A major tenet of American society is that the achievement of the American dream is measured in terms of one’s economic success. For Americans who are also members of minority, ethnic groups, it is a widely held belief that the primary vehicle through which one obtains this success is education.

Summary

In the modern, worldwide educational arena, there can be no disputing the fact that America’s future is directly related to the education of its youth. Americans, traditionally, have looked to education to provide a productive citizenry. As never before in our nation’s history, the effective education of all children is the road into the nation’s social, political and economic arena.

The outcry over the United States’ educational system has grown more urgent in recent years as the dropout rate remained substantial. Despite the various efforts in dropout prevention,
students continue to drop out of school. To this end, it is essential that efforts to assess and intervene at the elementary level are crucial.

The review of the literature indicated that many factors have been documented as influencing a student's decision to drop out of school. Among the factors most often cited were socioeconomic status, overage, gender, grade retention, attendance, and poor reading skills. The factors are often closely related. The review of literature reveals that socioeconomic status doubles the disadvantages and contributes to the degree of dropouts correlated with school failure. Furthermore, the research shows the extent that poverty has on the dropout rate and pointed out that when these inherent needs are not addressed, students may be at risk of dropping out of school. Similarly, overage and grade retention are great predictors for dropouts. The Fall River and the Chicago Studies clearly showed the effect of overage on dropouts. Moreover, students who fail are two to four times more likely to drop out of school. A vast number of studies validate that gender, attendance, and poor reading skills are strong predictors of dropouts. The warning sign for dropouts can be noted as early as the third or fourth grade if the reading level is below the expected grade level. Additionally, researchers agree that early identification of dropouts is critical to the well-being of our nation.
Finally, few educators would argue with the pervasive costs of dropouts. The studies related the costs of dropping out of school in terms of loss of personal income, increased risk of the welfare burden due to higher unemployment rates, increased risk of incarceration, deceleration of human growth, and reduced sense of control over one's life. The plight of the dropout is not a new concern to educators and policy makers. However, the literature is explicit in relating the effects our youth and society will experience as a result of dropouts. Our national dedication to social justice will be challenged by our dropout rate. Specifically, the review of literature indicated that a large number of factors have been documented as influencing a student's decision to drop out of school. The absences, race, gender, socioeconomic status (free or reduced lunch), grades retained, achievement scores in reading, and information on behavior characteristics can be obtained from permanent records in the district.

This study was undertaken to obtain information on the influence of reading comprehension on dropout status while controlling demographic and performance characteristics. The demographic variables of socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and gender were investigated. The performance variables of Iowa Test, Literacy Passport Test, suspensions, retentions, absences, and overage were also investigated.
Hypotheses

To assess the influence of reading achievement on dropouts, the following hypotheses were selected for testing:

1. There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status.

2. There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status after controlling for demographic characteristics.

3. There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status after controlling for performance characteristics.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the methodological process of the study. An explanation of the purpose and setting, the selection of subjects, the design of study, the instrumentation, the data collection procedures, and the method of data analysis will be given, concluding with a summary statement.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which reading achievement influenced student dropouts while controlling for student demographic and performance characteristics. This researcher conducted an investigation of the relationship between reading comprehension and the dropout rate in an urban school district in Virginia. The demographic characteristics were gender, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity. Reading comprehension, grade retention, overage, attendance and behavior were the performance characteristics utilized in this study.

The data were collected on the 1992-93 eighth grade cohort who were the seniors for the 1996-97 school year. A dropout group and a non-dropout group were created; thus, simple, partial, and discriminant function analyses were performed to classify students. Also, the influence of each variable on dropout status was analyzed. The study revealed that all variables were...
significant in predicting dropout status, but retention had the highest predicing value and correlation of the nine variables analyzed.

The review of literature indicates that there is no single cause that can be identified as influencing a student to drop out of school. However, a variety of characteristics exists which, according to the literature reviewed, can be identified as influential in a student’s decision to drop out of school. The resulting information will be used to help guide the improvement of school practices, to provide focus for policy issues, and to assist with resource allocations.

Setting

The setting of this study is a midsized, urban community in the southeastern section of the United States with a population of approximately 101,000. The city’s major employing agency is the U.S. Navy. Approximately 18,000 students attend 19 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and two alternative schools. Overall enrollment by gender for 1996-97 was 50.7% male and 49.3% female. Similarly, the overall enrollment by race or ethnicity for 1996-97 is 67.7% Black, 30.7% White, and 1.6% other. The socioeconomic status (defined by free or reduced price lunch) for 1996-97 is 61.7% for free or reduced price status and 38.3% for pay status.
Description of Schools

The three high schools in the study are magnet schools, and each school has public housing students zoned to it. The first school, a Performing Arts School located in a middle class neighborhood, has an enrollment of 1,523 students and the socioeconomic status is 33.4% for free or reduced priced status and 66.6% pay status. This school has 46.6% males, 53.4% females; 54.4% Black, 42.5% White and 3.1% other.

The second school, a Math Science Technology School located in an urban neighborhood, has an enrollment of 1,275 students, and the socioeconomic status is 45.2% for free or reduced priced lunch and 54.8% pay status. This school has 48.1 percent males, 51.9% females; 93.4% Black, 6.5% White, and 0.1% other.

The third school, an International Studies School located in a middle class neighborhood, has an enrollment of 1,628 students, and the socioeconomic status is 46.8% for free or reduced priced lunch and 53.2% pay status. School 2 has 49.5% males, 50.5% females; 60.7% Black, 38.0% White and 1.3% other (Portsmouth Public School Office of Research, 1997, pp.148-152).

Selection of Subjects

The subjects in this study were selected by the computer from the total enrollment of the school system in grades eight through twelve. Though the initial sample consisted of 887 students, data for 210 were excluded from the analyses because relevant information was missing, or because the student was
classified as learning disabled and did not take the Literacy Passport or eighth grade Iowa Tests. The sample consisted of the 1992-93 cohort. However, 677 cases were selected for the study. This study consists of 535 non-dropouts and 142 dropouts.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The reading comprehension score, attendance, free, reduced, or pay status for lunch, suspensions, overage, retention, gender, LPT status, and race or ethnicity were taken from the data base and student records for grades eight through twelve on all students selected for the study. The data from the 1992-93 eighth-grade class was utilized to establish the baseline data for the study. Similarly, data will be recorded for each subsequent year. Finally, the data for the 1996-97 senior class was used to establish subjects for the study.

The information from the district data base was examined, and interviews or telephone calls were utilized to obtain the information missing from the data base. The subjects were dropped from the study if information was not available in all areas. Additionally, it has been determined through school data processing that the majority of the students live in inner city neighborhoods that are represented by six urban housing developments. Finally, the researcher determined through reports from the school food services division that 61.7% of the students qualify for the district's free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch programs. A majority of these students' parents receive
social service benefits.

The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in reading comprehension was utilized to establish the levels of reading comprehension. This test is given to fourth, eighth, and eleventh graders in the spring. Reading comprehension scores for grade eight were recorded for the study. Originally, the researcher intended to use fourth, eighth, and eleventh grade reading comprehension scores. However, the fourth grade scores were incomplete because different versions of the test were used for the 1988-89 school year. Some of the students in the sample for 1988-89 were not in the district for the test administration. Thus, missing and different test versions were present in the data bank. In addition, eleventh grade test scores were missing for students who dropped out of school for the 1995-96 test administration. Therefore, the grade six Literacy Passport Test and eighth grade Iowa Test results were used for this study. The percentage of students on free, reduced, or paid lunch, overage, retentions, race/ethnicity, gender, and suspensions, were examined as predictor variables. The dropout status was the criterion variable. To analyze the research questions, simple, partial, and discriminant functions were used. A listwise deletion technique of missing data was used. Table 1 provides an explanation of the data collection procedures.
Table 1

Definition of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>8th and 11th grade reading comprehension NCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male=1 and Female =0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td>Black =0, White =1, and other =2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overage</td>
<td>Overage =1 or No overage =0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Retention</td>
<td>Number of times retained, 0,1,2,3,4 Retained =1, Not retained =0, and Other =0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Number of days absent during the school year for non-dropouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Number of suspensions 0,1,2,3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>Free =0, Reduced =1 and Pay =2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Passport Test</td>
<td>Pass or fail, Fail =0 and Pass =1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership</td>
<td>Dropout=1.0 and Non-dropout=2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Design of Study

The focus of this study was to determine the extent to which reading comprehension influences student dropouts. A correlational study was used in this study, as well as a discriminant analysis procedure to examine ex post facto results without manipulation of variables. Thus, the study was limited in scope to those discriminating characteristics available in
student records that were readily accessible to school personnel. The district's records of students were utilized to obtain the reading comprehension, grade retention, overage, socioeconomic status, attendance, behavior, gender, race or ethnicity as cited in the literature for their influence on student dropouts. Additionally, the students' status during the period of study (dropout or non-dropout) was available and utilized as the criterion variable. In order to determine the students who have dropped out of school during their high school career, the eighth grade class of 1992-93 was tracked to the senior class of 1996-97.

**Instrumentation**

Studies have shown that dropouts are affected by demographic characteristics as well as by academic performance. Therefore, this study investigated the influence of reading comprehension on dropouts and utilized the other factors in the study. The formal instrument used in data collection will be the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, (Kramer, J., & Conoley, J., 1992, p. 421). This instrument is currently being used across the state of Virginia to measure the achievement levels of students. The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills was constructed to "provide for comprehensive measurement of growth in the fundamental skills: listening, word analysis, vocabulary, reading, the mechanics of writing, methods of study, and mathematics" (Kramer, J., & Conoley, J. C., 1992, p.223). For the purpose of this study, reading comprehension
scores will be examined.

The ITBS (Form G) is a standardized achievement test that measures the development of general cognitive skills. It was developed based on educational practices and reflects a better layout of test items, thus, potentially contributing to more test-taking comfort for the student. A content validity analysis of the test is included in the tests which are written clearly and are detailed enough to make it fairly straightforward for teachers and curriculum experts to assess the degree of congruence between item content coverage and the instructional content emphasized in a given school, district, or state level instructional program. Based on the content of the above mentioned documents, the reviewer concluded that the content validity is excellent (Kramer, J. & Conoley, J.C., 1989, p. 222).

Internal consistency estimates of reliability (Kuder Richardson Formula 20) are presented in the manual by level and subtest. Also in this manual are the means, standard deviations, and standard errors of measurement. These areas are presented separately for raw score, grade equivalent, and standard score metrics. The reported Kuder Richardson Formula 20 estimates of reliability are quite good, with most in the .80s and .90s (Kramer, J. and J. Conoley, 1989, p. 242). Equivalent form estimates of reliability also are provided in the manual. Form G was administered, using a counterbalanced design, to the same groups of students to gather the alternate form or parallel form.
estimates of reliability. The ITBS split half reliabilities for these scales yielded coefficients exceeding .90 and equivalent forms reliabilities exceeding .85. Stability estimates ranged from .80 to .91 for a one year interval; from .73 to .91 for a two year interval; and, from .73 to .89 for a three year interval. The correlations between comparable forms were adjusted for differences in variability between 1988 samples and the fall and spring 1985 national standardization samples. Appropriate sampling weights were used in generating percentile data to ensure that the standardization sample was adequately representative with respect to geographic region, public or nonpublic schools, and the socioeconomic status. Accordingly, appropriate weighting procedures were incorporated into the growth analysis to make sure that the final estimates of growth were adequately reflective of the achievement growth patterns in the target population. Additionally, the Form G content was examined carefully for its appropriateness to "members of demographic groups defined by sex, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status." An outside panel of judges, known for their expertise in fair test development, also reviewed the test items (Kramer, J. & Conoley, J., p. 242).

Additionally, content validity of the tests is based on careful construction to reflect the educational curricula represented by the tests. Evidence pertaining to the content validity of the ITBS includes information regarding the
relationship of the subtests and stability of the test to other measures of achievement and ability. Correlations between test scores range from the .60s to the .80s, depending upon grade level concerns. The stability of scores range from .90 to .94 from one to three years. The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills have been highly reliable. Kuder Richardson-20 reliability coefficients are in .90s for the test in grades three through eight for overall composites (Walsh & Betz, 1985, p. 204). The reliability estimates the stability of the test. In addition to the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the student’s educational record and information from the district’s data management system were utilized.

**Literacy Passport Test**

Virginia selected a form of the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) as the Literacy Passport reading assessment. This selection was a result of a compliance with the Virginia’s Standards of Learning Objectives. The Literacy Passport Test (LPT) developed by Touchtone Applied Science Associates (TASA), is a criterion-referenced test that gives information about the student’s ability in relation to the test (Koslin, Zeno, & Koslin, 1987).

The Literacy Passport is confined to the domain and purpose of measuring how well continuous prose is comprehended as it is read. This constraint on the purpose and domain provides the test with widespread acceptance and face validity in that it fulfills the purpose of providing evidence to support the interpretation of the scores (Koslin et al., 1987).
Reliability measures of alternate form, test-retest, and replicate LPT tests are reliable. Evidence is presented that LPT tests are homogeneous and that the standard errors of measurement are acceptably low. Homogeneity of the Literacy Passport tests based upon several administrations is evidenced by Kuder-Richardson 20 (KR-20) reliability coefficients ranging from 0.94 to 0.96 (Koslin et al., 1987, p. 43). Alternate form and test-retest reliability, indicating the degree to which a simple test yields identical results when administered twice over a short period of time during which reading ability is not expected to change, was relatively high (r = 0.90). Test administration of DRP forms 30 through 39 to grades four through ten yielded KR-20 coefficients from 0.93 to 0.97, with 59 our of 72 coefficients equal to or greater than 0.95. This indicates that LPT tests have a high degree of internal consistency and reliability (Koslin, 1987).

Method of Analyses of Data

The focus of this research will be to determine the influence of reading comprehension on the dropout rate after controlling for student demographic and performance characteristics. Borg and Gall (1983) define this study as a correlational study. This study employed a correlational methodology to identify variables which were useful in differentiating dropouts from non-dropouts. Specifically, a multivariate methodology technique (discriminant analysis) was
used to predict membership in one of two school retention groups: dropout and nondropout. Additional evidence indicates that the appropriateness of correlational methodology lies in the fact that the study involves multiple predictor variables on a single criterion variable which is based on the subject’s group membership. This situation calls for Discriminant Analysis, a statistical technique utilized in correlational studies. Klecka (1982, p. 5) recommends Discriminant Analysis as, a powerful technique for examining two or more groups with respect to several variables simultaneously which can be used for interpreting the group differences and employed to classify cases in identified groups. Kachigan (1986) lists the Discriminant Function as using a weighted combination of those predictor variables to classify an object into one of the criterion variable groups. Additionally, “dropouts vs. non-dropouts” is listed as an example of research calling for Discriminant Analysis. Finally, educational processes typically reflect complex interactions between variables; thus, correlational statistics are relied on a great deal in educational research (1983, Borg, W. & Gall, M., p. 603).

The simple correlation of variables were used to determine the influence and interrelatedness of variables on dropout status. This technique helped to identify redundant variables to be eliminated and related ones to be combined. A correlation matrix was generated for each set of variables. This figure
indicates the strength and direction of the relationship between
variables.

The data for the predictor variables will be collected and
Discriminant Analysis utilized to determine a prediction equation
that could be utilized for the classification of students as
dropouts or non-dropouts using data available from school
records. In order to determine whether and to what extent the
predictor variables are useful in the prediction of dropouts, a
stepwise procedure was utilized. Reading was placed first. Klecka
and Kachigan (1982) contend that this procedure allows for the
selection of variables which have proven to provide the greatest
discrimination. To verify the accuracy of discrimination in the
study, Wilks’ Lambda was utilized (Kachigan, S. & Lowery, D.,

One-way frequencies were compiled for each variable to
determine the overall makeup of the data. This analysis provided
the total number of times each component of each variable
occurred and the percentage that total represents. The
frequencies will provide information such as the number and
percentage of dropouts from each school, and two-way frequencies
will be used to determine the status of the student (dropout or
non-dropout) for each variable for the entire data set, and then
again break down for each individual school. Additionally, simple
statistics (mean, variance, standard deviation, and range) will
be derived for each variable for the entire data set, and will be
broken down by status of the student (dropout vs. non-dropout). The SPSS Advanced Statistical 6.1.1 (1994, Norusis, M. J.) program package was used to perform data analysis.

**Summary of Methodology**

**Discriminant Analysis**

Discriminant Analysis is a statistical technique that allows one to identify variables that best discriminate members of two or more groups from one another. In addition, the Discriminant Analysis is a procedure for identifying such relationships between qualitative criterion variables and quantitative predictor variables. This procedure identifies variables that are related to the criterion variable and predicts values on the criterion variable when given values on the predictor variables (Kachigan, S.K. 1986, p. 357).

The purposes of the discriminant analysis were: (1) to classify cases into one of several mutually exclusive groups on the basis of various characteristics, (2) to establish which characteristics are important for distinguishing among the groups and, (3) to evaluate the accuracy of the classification function. To apply the results of the discriminant analysis in order to predict retention status, the scores of each student on each variable must be multiplied by the appropriate discriminant weights (Noursis, M.J., 1985, p.81).
Simple Correlation

Statistical techniques for determining relationships between pairs of scores are known as correlational procedures. Correlation analysis is the study of the relationships that exist among random variables, including the identification and summary of such relationships. This study will employ a partial correlation which is a technique used to determine what correlation remains between two variables when the effect of another variable is eliminated. Correlation between two variables may occur because both of them are correlated with a third variable and partial correlation controls for this third variable (Ary, D., Jacobs, L., & Razavieh, A., 1990, p. 159).

In order to determine the correlation of variables, a simple correlation coefficient and partial correlation were utilized to investigate the correlation and stability of the variables. Additionally, a correlation matrix was created to look at the intercorrelation of variables in each group. The significance level for eighth grade tests was set at .05.

Stepwise Selection of Variables

This process will add variables, one at a time, to the model and calculate the F statistic that reflects the variable's relative contribution to the model. Once a variable is entered into the model, it stays in the model. Grade retention, overage, socioeconomic status, attendance, behavior, gender, and race or ethnicity, and reading achievement will be placed in the model in
the order listed. With the Stepwise selection of variables, the program continues to add and remove variables from the model until the best combination is selected. The stepwise model will address the research questions.

Criterion Variable

The criterion variable is dropout status. Students who left the school system during the time of the study and who did not transfer to another accredited educational institution will be classified as dropouts and assigned the code of "1". Students still enrolled in school were classified as non-dropouts and assigned the code of "2". Data collection for both the predictor and criterion variables was performed by visiting the school attended by the student identified in the sample and examining the educational record of each student.

Predictor Variables

The educational records and district data base was utilized for the predictor variables listed below. The information was recorded and coded.

Reading Comprehension

Records of students enrolled in grade eight in 1992-93 and now members of the graduating class of 1997 were reviewed. Because the state has mandated that students who do not pass the Literacy Passport Test by grade nine cannot be classified as ninth graders, those students are classified as ungraded or as eighth graders until they have successful completed the test. The
LPT was recorded as P for pass and F for non-pass at grade six. The reading comprehension score at grades eight and eleven will be recorded. Thus, the eighth graders are included in the study. Test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills will be recorded from the educational record of each student for grades eight and eleven. The reading scores will be recorded for each student using the normal curve equivalency unit which is on the interval scale of measurement.

**Grade Retention**

The district data base was utilized to determine the retention patterns for 1992-93. If the student had not graduated at the time that the study was conducted, the number of retentions during the school career was recorded.

**Overage**

Overage will be determined by students who were two or more years older than their cohorts for the specified grade level. The variable overage will be dichotomously coded and will take the value of "1" for students who are considered older than their classmates (e.g., two or more years older than students are for the designated grade), and "0" for students who were not retained. For this study, a student was coded overage if born in 1977 or earlier. This information will be obtained from student records.
Socioeconomic Status

The socioeconomic status will be determined by the free, reduced, or pay status on lunch applications for students for the 1992-93 school year. The status was coded as "0" for free, "1" for reduced and "2" for pay. The data will be obtained from student records. This information is categorical, and the nominal scale of measurement was utilized.

Attendance

Each school inputs daily attendance into the district data base. The district’s data base for attendance was utilized to record the number of days absent from 1996-97 for each student in the sample. The interval scale of measurement was utilized.

Behavior

The suspension report for the 1994-95 school year was utilized to establish the behavior pattern. The district’s data base for suspension was utilized, and the number of suspensions was recorded. This information was obtained from the district’s data base and school records.

Gender

The gender of each student was recorded from student records. The code "1" for males was assigned to male students in the sample, and the code "0" for females was assigned to female students. This information is categorical, and the nominal scale of measurement was utilized.
Race/Ethnicity

The race/ethnicity of each student was recorded from the district’s data base. Race or ethnicity was defined as black or white. White students were assigned the code “1”, Black students were assigned the code “0” and other students were coded “2”. This information is categorical, and the nominal scale of measurement was utilized.

Summary

The intent of the study is to investigate the influence of reading achievement on dropouts after controlling for student demographics (gender, race or ethnicity, and socioeconomic status), and student behaviors (attendance, grade retention and suspensions). Data was gathered on 677 students for the 1996-97 school year. More specifically, a correlational study was conducted. The Discriminant Analysis was employed as a means to evaluate the relationship between the criterion of dropout status and non-dropout status and in combination with the nine variables in the study. The data were analyzed using the regression to weigh the importance of each predictor variable while ruling out the effects of the variables.
The purpose of this correlational study was to determine the influence of reading comprehension (Iowa Test and Literacy Passport Test) on the dropout status while controlling for demographic characteristics (gender, race or ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) and performance characteristics (attendance, grade retention, and suspensions). This chapter presents the results of statistical analyses procedures performed to determine if the variable reading comprehension influenced dropout status by testing the following hypotheses:

1. There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status.
2. There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status after controlling for demographic characteristics.
3. There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status after controlling for performance characteristics.

The results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical analysis procedure was used to determine the intercorrelations between criterion and predictor variables for dropout and nondropout groups, a summary of the descriptive and frequency statistics from the data of the sampling population,
and an analysis of the data are presented. Furthermore, all statistical analyses were completed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 6.1.1 (Norusis, 1994).

Descriptive Statistics of the Cohort

Race and Gender

As presented in Table 2, descriptive statistics for race and gender indicated that for the 677 students selected for the study 455 (67.2%) were black, 219 (32.1%) were white, and 5 (.7%) were classified as other. By gender, 290 (42.8%) were male, and 387 (57.2%) were female. The overall comparison revealed a greater percentage of blacks and females involved in the study.

Table 2

Descriptive Data on Race and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>455</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 677
Gender, Race, Overage, and Socioeconomic Status

The frequency data for gender, race, overage, and socioeconomic status, as presented in Table 3, indicated that 142 (21.0%) students in the 1992 cohort dropped out of school, and 535 (79.0%) students did not. Descriptive statistics indicated that, of the dropouts, 79 (55.6%) were male, and 65 (44.4%) were female. For nondropouts, 211 (39.4%) were male, and 324 (60.6%) were female. By race, data indicated that 31 (21.8%) of the dropouts were white, and 111 (78.2%) were black. For nondropouts, 188 (34.8%) were white, and 344 (64.3%) were black.

Furthermore, as noted in Table 3, an examination of selected variables found that 67 (47.2%) of the dropouts compared to 512 (95.7%) of the nondropouts were overage. Thus, 77 (52.8%) were overage for dropouts, and 23 (4.3%) of nondropouts were overage. Overall, 579 (85.5%) of the students were not overage, and 98 (14.5%) of the students were overage. A comparison of socioeconomic status revealed that 42 (29.6%) of the dropouts received free lunch and that 319 (59.6%) of the non-dropouts received free lunch. The overall comparison revealed that 361 (53.3%) students were on free lunch, that 266 (39.3%) were on reduced-price lunch, and that 50 (7.4%) were on full-price lunch.
Table 3

Frequency Data on Gender, Race, Overage, and Socioeconomic Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dropouts (n = 142)</th>
<th>Nondropouts (n = 535)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>64.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 677

Literacy Passport and Eighth Grade Iowa Test Results

Table 4 presents pass and failure frequency data for the sample on the Literacy Passport and Eighth Grade Iowa Tests. For the Literacy Passport Test, 42 (29.6%) of the dropouts compared
to 124 (23.2%) of the nondropouts failed the Literacy Passport Test. Overall, 224 (33.1%) of the students failed the Literacy Passport Test while 453 (66.9%) of the students passed the Literacy Passport Test. The eighth-grade Iowa Test results revealed that 74 (59.8%) of the dropouts' scores ranged from the 0 to 25 percentile, and 137 (33.7%) of the non-dropouts' scores ranged from the 0 to 39 percentile. The data indicate that the dropouts' scores were most often lower than nondropouts' scores.

Table 4

Frequency Data on Literacy Passport and Eighth-Grade Iowa Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dropouts Number Percent (n = 142)</th>
<th>Nondropouts Number Percent (n = 535)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LPT Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>100  70.4</td>
<td>411  76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>42   29.6</td>
<td>124  23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 0-39</td>
<td>106   74.6</td>
<td>137  33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40-59  31  21.9</td>
<td>247  42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60-78  4   2.8</td>
<td>116  18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79-99  1   .7</td>
<td>35   5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 677

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Retentions for Cohort Classification

As noted in Table 5, frequency data analysis on the number of retentions for cohort grade classification of dropouts revealed that only six students who dropped out of school were in their correct grade and that six students were special needs students. All others had been retained one or more times. By comparison for nondropouts, ten students were not in their correct grade. Analysis of the retention data also indicated that 36 (25.4%) of the dropouts were not retained and that 501 (93.6%) of the nondropouts were not retained. Overall, 537 (79.3%) of the students were not retained, 77 (11.4%) of the students were retained once, 42 (6.2%) of the students were retained twice, 15 (2.2%) of the students were retained three times, and 6 (.9%) of the students were retained four times. Students who dropped out of school had repeated a school grade more often than those students who did not drop out. Most of the students who dropped out had repeated one or more grades. In comparison of the number of years students were retained by the time they reached the twelfth grade, dropouts were more likely to have been retained than nondropouts.
Table 5

Frequency Data on Number of Retentions for Cohort Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dropouts Number Percent (n = 142)</th>
<th>Nondropouts Number Percent (n = 535)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ungraded</td>
<td>1 .7</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>6 4.3</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>37 25.9</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>54 37.9</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>38 26.9</td>
<td>10 1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>6 4.3</td>
<td>525 98.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 677

Absences, Suspensions, and Retentions

Table 6 shows the number and frequency statistics of absences, suspensions, and retentions for the cohorts. For the dropouts, 61 (47.9%) had absences in the range of 0 to 15 days, and 490 (91.6%) of the nondropouts had 0 to 15 absences. Statistics on dropouts revealed that 46 (30.3%) had absences in the range of 16 to 35 days, and that 44 (8.2%) of the nondropouts had 16 to 35 absences. The school records of dropouts and nondropouts revealed that their absences from school most often were in the category of 0 to 15 days.
In addition, 125 (88.1%) of the dropouts did not have suspensions, and 518 (96.8%) of the nondropouts did not have suspensions. The data also revealed that for 9 (6.3%) of the dropouts had one suspension and that 16 (3.0%) of nondropouts had one suspension. Of the dropouts, 6 (4.2%) had two suspensions, whereas nondropouts did not have any. In this study, the number of unduplicated out-of-school suspensions was calculated. Unduplicated suspensions mean that if a student was suspended more than once, it was counted only one time. This yielded the total number of students suspended one or more times. In-school suspensions were not included.

Table 6 also reveals that 36 (25.4%) of the dropouts were not retained, and that 501 (93.6%) of the nondropouts were not retained. On the other hand, 52 (36.6%) of the dropouts had one retention, and for 25 (4.7%) of the nondropouts had one retention. Also, the data for dropouts revealed 13 (9.2%) had three retentions, and for nondropouts, 2 (.4%) had three retentions. The data further revealed that 5 (3.5%) of the dropouts had four retentions and that 1 (.2%) of the nondropouts had four retentions. The data show that dropouts tended to have more retentions than nondropouts.
Table 6

Frequency Data on Absences, Suspensions, and Retentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dropouts</th>
<th></th>
<th>Nondropouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number (n = 142)</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number (n = 535)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16-35</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36-56</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57-85</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suspensions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retentions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 677

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Data Analysis for Hypothesis One

There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status.

Noncategorical Variables.

Table 7 provides the means and the standard deviations for noncategorical variables for dropouts and nondropouts. The means and standard deviations by group membership revealed data on dropouts and nondropouts across the variables. The mean for the sixth-grade Literacy Passport Test was 127.25 for dropouts and 240.08 for non-dropouts. In Virginia, students must pass the Literacy Passport Test before they can be classified as ninth graders. The mean for the eighth-grade Iowa Test was 24.49 for dropouts and 50.84 for nondropouts. For the total sample, the standard deviation was 103.10 for the Literacy Passport Test and 20.93 for the eighth grade Iowa Test. To further support Hypothesis One, of the sample which consisted of 677 students, 224 of the sample (33.1%) failed the Literacy Passport Test, and 453 of the sample (66.9%) passed the test.
Table 7

Mean and Standard Deviation for Noncategorical Variables for Dropouts and Nondropouts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dropouts Mean SD (n = 142)</th>
<th>Non-dropouts Mean SD (N = 535)</th>
<th>Total Mean SD (N = 677)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LPT Test</td>
<td>127.25 126.35</td>
<td>240.08 81.03</td>
<td>216.42 103.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa Test</td>
<td>24.49 20.38</td>
<td>50.84 17.29</td>
<td>45.31 20.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absences</td>
<td>24.27 18.78</td>
<td>7.30 5.70</td>
<td>10.86 12.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td>.20 .65</td>
<td>.04 .21</td>
<td>.07 .36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 677

Correlation and Discriminant Function.

Simple correlation of all variables listed in Table 8 provides an overview of the relative influence of all variables on dropout status. Simple and partial correlation of variables and discriminant function were used to determine if a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status existed. The simple correlation revealed group membership correlated with the eighth-grade Iowa Test at .51 the and sixth-grade Literacy Passport Test at .45. The group membership’s mean was 1.7903, and the standard deviation was .4074 as indicated in Table 8. In addition, frequency data revealed the failure rate of the
Literacy Passport Test as 42 (29.6%) for dropouts and 124 (23.2%) for nondropouts. The most significant relationships were established in the pairing of school performance variables, with retention showing the greatest influence, $r = -0.64$, $p < 0.05$. In addition, group membership correlated moderately with absences $r = -0.57$, overage $r = -0.56$, Iowa Test $r = 0.51$, and Literacy Passport $r = 0.45$. Race correlated with Iowa Test at $r = 0.27$ and Literacy Passport Test $r = 0.07$. All variables are interrelated. In contrast, demographic characteristics offered the least influence and are minimally related to dropping out of school. The race coefficient was reported as the lowest, $r = 0.12$. Hence, race appears to display a less significant relationship with dropout, which infers that based on this study, black and white students dropout of school in a similar proportion.

The canonical discriminant function coefficients are standardized to adjust for the unequal means and standard deviations of the predictors. The coefficients for the eighth-grade Iowa Test and Literacy Passport Test are substantial at 0.74 and 0.58, respectively; therefore, the data provided further support for Hypothesis One.
Table 8

**Simple Correlation of Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grp</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-Iowa</td>
<td>.51*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-LPT</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-RET</td>
<td>-.64*</td>
<td>-.38*</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Ov.</td>
<td>-.56*</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
<td>-.45*</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Abs.</td>
<td>-.57*</td>
<td>-.34*</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
<td>.41*</td>
<td>.44*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Susp</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-SES</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-Gen.</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>.08**</td>
<td>.08**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-Race</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.09**</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-.08**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.34*</td>
<td>.08**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** N = 677  ** = p < .01  * = p < .05

**Data Analysis for Hypothesis Two**

There is a significant relationship between reading comprehension and the dropout status after controlling for the demographics characteristics (gender, race or ethnicity, and socioeconomic status).
Correlations Controlling for Demographic Variables.

Table 9 provides a summary of the partial correlations observed for group membership and the performance variables while controlling for demographic variables (gender, race, and socioeconomic status). The correlation between group membership with the Iowa Test was $r = .48$, Literacy Passport $r = .44$, retentions $r = -.62$, overage $r = -.54$, absences $r = -.55$ and suspensions $r = -.18$. These correlations are similar to simple correlations reported in Table 8. The negative correlations for retentions, overage, and absences with group membership reflect that the higher scores on these variables are negatively related to the decision to drop out of school.
Table 9

Partial Correlations Controlling for Demographic Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Iowa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-LPT</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Retentions</td>
<td>-.35**</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Overage</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>-.44**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Absences</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-Suspensions</td>
<td>-.10**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>-.62**</td>
<td>-.54**</td>
<td>-.55**</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 672, **p < .01

Discriminant Analysis.

Table 10 shows a summary of the discriminant analysis correlations computed for the variables while controlling for demographic characteristics (gender, race or ethnicity, and socioeconomic status). The within-group correlations between discriminant variables and canonical discriminant functions are ordered by the size of correlation with the function, which indicates the amount of influence to the discriminant function.

The discriminant analysis indicated that when all variables were entered, retention (.60), absences (.50), overage (.49),
Iowa Test (.43), and Literacy Passport (-.30) contributed the most influence on the dropout status, irrespective of the (.13), demographic variables. Suspensions (.14), socioeconomic status gender (.10), and race (-.09) contributed the least influence on the dropout status. This analysis supports Hypothesis Two.

Table 10
Stepwise Discriminant Analysis Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All Entered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retentions</td>
<td>.60197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absences</td>
<td>.50459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overage</td>
<td>.49319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>-.43450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPT</td>
<td>-.36216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td>.14227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>.13307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.09774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-.09058</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 677

Stepwise Correlations.

The most notable discrepancy between the analysis of the
stepwise correlations and other analyses presented was the influence of demographic characteristics. Demographic characteristics were determined to have been slightly related to dropout status. Similar results from simple and partial correlations were revealed, and the effect of demographic variables was minimal in the discriminant function. Consequently, the model was reduced from nine variables to six variables: eighth-grade Iowa Test, Literacy Passport Test, retention, overage, absences, and suspensions. The discriminant analysis observed supports Hypothesis Two.

Wilks' Lambda.

Table 11 shows the Wilks' Lambda for the variables. The highest influence was Wilks' Lambda of .59 for retention with an F-Ratio of 462.80, .68 for absence with an F Ratio of 325.17, and .69 for overage with an F-Ratio of 310.64. The lowest influence was Wilks' Lambda of .98 for race with an F-Ratio of 12.20 and followed by gender with a Wilks' Lambda of .98 and an F-Ratio of 10.48.
Table 11

Wilks' Lambda with Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Wilks' Lambda</th>
<th>F-Ratio</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>0.73681</td>
<td>241.1112</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPT</td>
<td>0.80118</td>
<td>167.5112</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>0.59325</td>
<td>462.7912</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overage</td>
<td>0.68483</td>
<td>310.6413</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence</td>
<td>0.67489</td>
<td>325.1677</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension</td>
<td>0.96312</td>
<td>25.8503</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>0.96758</td>
<td>22.6157</td>
<td>.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.98225</td>
<td>12.1998</td>
<td>.0005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>0.98471</td>
<td>10.4789</td>
<td>.0013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=677

Data Analysis for Hypothesis Three

There is a significant influence of reading comprehension and dropout status after controlling for performance characteristics (attendance, grade retentions, and suspensions).

Correlations Controlling for Performance Variables.

Table 12 presents a summary of the partial correlation statistics computed while controlling for behavior-related
variables (i.e., absences, retentions, and overage). Analysis of the data revealed low partial correlations for group membership with the eighth-grade Iowa Test scores, $r = .26$ and with Literacy Passport Test scores $r = .23$ after controlling for performance variables. Despite the fact that reading and performance variables were moderately correlated with each other, the Literacy Passport and Iowa tests were still significantly correlated with whether students drop out of school. In addition, the statistics computed showed a negative correlation between gender and eighth-grade Iowa Test scores, $r = -.07$; and group membership correlated with gender was $r = -.08$ scores were significantly correlated with whether students drop out. The data show that males are more likely to drop out than females are and that males are more likely to do poorly on the Literacy Passport Test and the eighth-grade Iowa Test than females are. Hypothesis Three is supported by the Iowa and Literacy Passport tests results.
Table 12

Partial Correlation Controlling for Behavior Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Iowa</th>
<th>LPT</th>
<th>GRP MEM</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LPT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.08**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.08**</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRP MEM</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 671, **p < .01 * p < .05

Discriminant Classification of Dropout Status.

Table 13 summarizes the accuracy of the discriminant analyses results, using the variables to predict dropout and nondropout status. The discriminant model was used to classify cases into one of two groups. For this study, the two groups were dropout and nondropout. Assigning a case to the group for which it had the highest score was equivalent to assigning a case to the group for which it has the greatest probability of membership. To determine if a student would be classified as a dropout or nondropout, the student’s variable score was multiplied by each weighted classification score in the dropout
The constant for that group was subtracted. The student's variable score was multiplied by each weighted classification score in the control group (nondropouts). The constant for that group was subtracted. The score that is the highest after the constant is subtracted indicates the student's group membership (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). Table 13 shows that of 142 dropouts, 120 (84.5%) students were appropriately classified as dropouts and that 22 (15.5%) were not properly classified. For nondropouts, 508 (95.0%) students were appropriately classified as nondropouts, and 27 (5.0%) were not properly classified. Overall, the percent of the "grouped" correctly classified was 92.76%.

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual Group</th>
<th>No. of Cases</th>
<th>Projected Group 1</th>
<th>Projected Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td></td>
<td>84.5%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nondropout</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>95.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent classified correctly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>92.76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 677
Summary

The analyses presented in this chapter provided an interpretation of the data relative to the three hypotheses. All of the hypotheses were tested for statistical significance at the \( p < .05 \) and \( p < .01 \) levels of confidence.

The review of the literature indicated that a number of variables influence dropout status. An analysis of the data provided descriptive data on the 142 dropouts and 535 nondropouts in this study. The analyses determined, the relative contribution of all variables to group membership. The frequencies for all variables were determined and statistical analyses were performed utilizing simple, partial, and discriminant analyses of the statistical computer program package SPSS.

The relative influence that each variable contributed to dropout or nondropout group membership was obtained. The findings indicated that retention, overage, absences, Literacy Passport Test results, and eighth-grade Iowa Test results contributed the most to predicting dropout status. With all variables in the equation, the accuracy of classification was well over 92.76 percent.

This chapter presented the results of the discriminant analysis statistical procedure performed to determine if the variable reading comprehension influenced dropout status. Based upon the findings of this study, the three hypotheses tested were
not rejected:

1. There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status.
2. There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status after controlling for demographic characteristics.
3. There is a significant influence of reading comprehension on dropout status after controlling for performance characteristics.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the study, implications drawn from the study, implications from an urban perspective, and recommendations for further study.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of reading comprehension on dropout status in an urban southeastern school district in Virginia. A sample of 677 twelfth grade students was selected by the computer from secondary schools in the district for the class of 1996-97. The sample consisted of 142 dropouts and 535 nondropouts. Three hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level.

This study examined the influence of reading comprehension on dropout status. With this in mind, the researcher sought to address the following hypotheses: (a) there is a significant relationship between reading comprehension and the dropout status, (b) there is a significant relationship between reading comprehension and the dropout status after controlling for the demographic characteristics, and (c) there is a significant relationship between reading comprehension and the dropout status after controlling for performance characteristics.

The review of the literature found a number of variables that were identified as relating to a student’s decision to drop out of school as well as the influence of reading comprehension
on the dropout status. An examination of student records and the
data base in the district indicated that scores were available
for the eighth grade Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the sixth
grade Literacy Passport Test. Data were also available on gender,
race/ethnicity, overage, grade retention, attendance (absences),
behavior (suspensions), and socioeconomic status. In addition,
the criterion variable, student’s status (dropout or nondropout)
during the period of study were available. The results of the
analyses indicated that the variables in this study were
statistically associated with the dropout status.

Discriminant procedures, simple and partial correlation
indicated that a relationship could be identified and measured
between the nine variables and the criterion variable. Retention,
absences, overage, and reading comprehension were found to be the
most influential in each analysis, generally followed by gender,
suspensions, race, and socioeconomic status. A discriminant
analysis was performed on the data by the statistical program,
which correctly classified students as dropouts and nondropouts
in over 92.76 percent of the sample.

The data collected for this study support the contentions of
previous researchers who assert that reading comprehension has an
influence on a student’s decision to drop out of school.
Hypothesis One examined the influence of reading comprehension on
the dropout status. Simple correlations revealed that correlation
of eighth-grade Iowa Test results and sixth grade Literacy
Passport Test results correlated with group membership at .51 and .45, respectively.

Hypothesis Two examined the influence of reading comprehension on the dropout status, while controlling for the demographic characteristics. The findings revealed retentions were $r = -0.62$, absences $r = -0.55$, and overage $r = -0.54$. Partial correlation between group membership with Iowa Test of Basic Skills at $r = 0.48$ and Literacy Passport Test at $r = 0.44$. Show that the influence of reading is evident.

Hypothesis Three explored the influence of reading comprehension on the dropout status after controlling for performance characteristics. The results rendered evidence that the influence of performance characteristics was highly correlated at $r = -0.64$ for retentions, $r = -0.57$ for overage, $r = -0.56$ and for absences. In addition, partial correlation for group membership with eighth Iowa Test of Basic Skills was $r = 0.26$ and for Literacy Passport Test was $r = 0.23$ indicated the influence of reading on dropout status. As noted, retention has the highest influence on dropout status in this study.

**Implications Drawn from the Study**

This study sought to provide recommendations for policy changes that could possibly reduce the dropout rate and increase the reading comprehension of students. This study is similar to those of both Fetler (1989) and Hahn (1987) who reported that...
improved reading comprehension could reduce the dropout rate. Moreover, students who failed achievement tests were also associated with dropping out of school. While the findings of this study have definite policy implications for the urban school district facing the urbanization process, care must be exhibited in the interpretation of the results.

**Implications for Instructional Programs**

Encouraging students to improve reading comprehension can be challenging for students and teachers. Findings from research studies indicate that a twelfth-grade reading level is required to live productively in a complex, post-industrial society (Chall, 1990). Therefore, implications for program design include reading, counseling techniques, intervention, remediation, and parental involvement. The implications are that school districts should ensure that their reading and intervention programs enhance the academic and emotional development of students. The reading programs should be a part of the regular curriculum at each school site.

Students need a strong reading environment that will assist them in their quest to become better readers. Good reading ability is promoted through early reading experiences (Paratore, 1993). For example, some students are in an environment where parents do not value education, and the students often have similar attitudes to their parents. A home without reading
stimulation predisposes children to failure. When children are involved in a supportive reading environment, they are able to attribute the lack of success to deficits that can be overcome. The involvement of parents is crucial.

Continuous alignment of the curriculum is essential. This will allow students to relate to a curriculum that mirrors the various experiences of life. The curriculum must be embedded with comprehension skills that will prepare lifelong learners. Staff development and preparation programs for administrators, staff, personnel, counselors, teachers, and parents in the early identification and intervention process should be planned and implemented. These efforts would provide the practical academic needs of each student through a more sensitized staff, relevant curriculum, counseling services, and remediation. Finally, the curriculum should include the reading process which encompasses evaluating, planning, monitoring, and modifying of reading strategies when needed.

**Implications from an Urban Perspective**

The influence of reading comprehension on dropout status is a major concern for our nation, state, and district. Reading is a basic life skill. Thus, it is a cornerstone for a child's success in school as well as throughout life (Lloyd, 1978). Former President George Bush and President Clinton made education their top priority (Bush & Clinton, 1992). The United States Department of Education provided data on the dropout rates in urban school
districts which indicated Virginia's dropout rate for ninth graders was 28.2 percent (Virginia Department of Education, 1993). This study also revealed that the highest influence on the dropout status was retention. Hence, the development of a national policy requiring states to establish a management information system that provides basic and common data on students should be established. This information should be disseminated annually to all citizens.

Thus, the impetus for policy is evident. It follows then that the school system needs to examine its policies on retention, discipline, attendance, and overall performance indicators. There is a need to review, as necessary, organizational variables, policies, and procedures affecting the school's ability to meet the needs of all students. Findings in this study have significant implications for the development of policies pertaining to reading, intervention, and dropouts. There is a need to allow local schools to develop dropout prevention programs that effectively address their specific situations and the needs of the students. In addition, reading interventions for students should be mandated in the early elementary grades (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1992). This provides a safeguard for students prior to entry in middle school. More nationally mandated emphasis on early intervention should be placed on programs for at-risk students perhaps as early as the third grade.
Educators and policy makers also have to look beyond their schools to find answers. Some of the predictors of dropout behavior are not school related at all, and dropout prevention programs that focus on the school only are not likely to be effective. Chronic unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and a scarcity of social services may, for example, make it difficult for some parents to concentrate on helping their children in school when these and other matters seem to demand more attention. Issues of this nature must be addressed by the larger society, but it does not mean that educators can comfortably sit back and wait for families and society to be restructured.

The school system has an intervention program recognized by the state as a model for others to follow; however, the district still fails to utilize this resource to its fullest capacity. Second, the school improvement teams should focus on the needs of the students as a first priority and should place lesser emphasis on standardized test results. Finally, if the needs of the students are met, achievement will be more evident.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The research gathered from this study is by no means conclusive. Further research is needed in order to see if these results can be replicated involving a larger population sample in some of the neighboring school districts to determine if the same results can be derived in other districts. Emphasis should be placed on locating all missing data before analyses take place.
This study could serve as the benchmark for longitudinal research for urban school systems. Since research on the specifics of this study is limited, these results should be replicated several times before they are considered significant. Furthermore, consideration should be given to conducting this analysis as a longitudinal study, beginning with kindergarten students and following their progress through all of the grade levels in similar academic settings. Concurrently, similar research should be conducted to determine if the effects of early identification and subsequent interventions provided affect the percentage of dropouts. It is also critical that reading comprehension be evaluated thoroughly to gauge the effect it has on dropouts.

Programs designed to help students stay in school until they receive a high-school diploma should include early intervention. The potential dropout must be identified at an early age when effective intervention programs can be designed and implemented. This could call for a re-examination of district attendance policies and the consideration of flexible school hours for students who have economic needs, problems and who as a result of their socioeconomic status have employment that impedes attendance during the day. In addition, further study should be considered for a more comprehensive model that shows more interrelatedness between all factors identified and their long term cumulative effects. The interrelation of one variable to another variable and its impact on dropout status should be
explored. In this respect, such relationships as retentions should be explored with a view at factors other than the fact that students left school. This study should be conducted in other school systems to determine if the same accuracy of prediction can be achieved in other settings.

Further examination of the General Accounting Office Report of 1986 that dealt with the middle class dropout rate and the effect of socioeconomic status on dropouts. This study indicated that these factors should also be examined. Hence, a replication of the study with a larger population and different demographics is needed. These should include research on the effects of retention, ways to reduce retention of students, ways to assist special-needs students, and strategies to improve reading comprehension. Ongoing research in these areas will enable providers of educational services to meet the challenges of their task with even greater competency.

Finally, student achievement as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Literacy Passport Test are limited sources for testing. In short, further investigation of additional student academic performance measures to supplement the Literacy Passport Test and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills should be investigated. Continued research on this topic will produce information much needed by educators throughout this country if this nation is to become more successful in producing a literate
citizenry for the twenty-first century.
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