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The Relationship of Dickenson County Adult Educational Attainment and the Impact on Adolescent Attainment of a High School Diploma

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**THE RELATIONSHIP OF
DICKENSON COUNTY ADULT EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
AND THE IMPACT ON ADOLESCENT ATTAINMENT
OF A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA**

A Research Paper

Presented to the Graduate Faculty

of the Department of Occupational and Technical Studies

at Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

the Master of Science Degree

By

Jana Trevaskis

August 2002

APPROVAL PAGE

Jana Trevaskis prepared this research paper under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in OTED 636, Problems in Education. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science.

APPROVAL BY: John M. Ritz

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DATE: 8-20-02

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
RESEARCH APPROVAL	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
LIST OF TABLES	5
LIST OF FIGURES	6
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	7
Statement of the Problem	7
Research Objectives	8
Background and Significance	9
Limitations	10
Assumptions	11
Procedures	11
Definition of Terms	11
Overview of Chapters	12
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	13
Research Variables	14
Summary	19
III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES	21
Population	21
Instrument	22
Methods of Data Collection	22
Statistical Analysis	23
Summary	23
IV. FINDINGS	25
Research Results	25
Research Variables	26
Summary	30
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	31
Summary	32
Conclusions	34
Recommendations	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY	39
APPENDIX	41

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1	27
Analysis of Dickenson County Educational Attainment Level for Persons 25 Years and Over	
Table 2	30
Median Income for Dickenson County and Virginia	

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Page 29
Poverty, Unemployment, and Dropout Rate	
Figure 2	30
Factors that Influenced GED Students to Dropout of High School	

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

People “live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common”, stated educator, John Dewey. (1926, p. 4) What does the community of Dickenson County communicate about the value of education? Does the community’s view of education have a positive or negative impact on the county’s adolescents’ educational goals? Dewey states that communication is necessary to transmit values to a community. This communication can be transmitted in two very important ways: by example and by support. Adults demonstrate the value of education by example when life-long learning is evident in their lives. Adult example can influence the behaviors, thoughts, feelings and goals of an adolescent toward education in a positive or negative way. (Gardner, 1995, pp. 8, 9) Adults show support of education by devoting time and money into educational programs. If a community maintains programs, which encourage life-long learning, adolescents give importance to learning in their lives. Higher educational goals result in benefits to individuals, family groups, and the community. The Partnership for Family Involvement In Education states, “Communities that have ... better educated residents are almost always safer, more stable communities where businesses and families thrive.” (U.S. Department of Education, <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/PFIE/community.html>, 2/2002)

How does Dickenson County’s adult community view education? Has this view helped or harmed the community?

The increased importance of a high school education for entry into the labor market and postsecondary education creates a need for student retention programs, to help adolescents attain a high school diploma. One factor to determine if a community values education is the dropout rate of its adolescents from high school. Another factor to determine if a community values education is the availability of life-long learning programs. This research study examined factors within Dickenson County, which contribute to county adolescents attainment of a high school diploma. The primary factors examined were the adult community's educational attainment, the value of education to the community, and community support for life long learning.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine the relationship of Dickenson County adults' educational attainment and its impact on adolescents' attainment of a high school diploma.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To solve this problem, the following research objectives were established:

1. Determine the educational attainment of two generations of Dickenson County adults.
2. Identify what factors contribute to the education goals of the county's adolescents.
3. Determine effective strategies which would promote life-long learning and student retention in the county.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

As society changes from the industrial age and continues progressing into the information age, the value of basic skills gains greater importance to all in the community. The attainment of a high school diploma is a measurable way to assess that a person values learning, and is therefore poised for further life-long learning. Over 52% of Dickenson County's adults do not have a high school diploma. (U.S. Census, <http://factfinder.census.gov>, 2/20/02). The community, educators, and businesses need to be made aware that a large proportion of the population could benefit from life-long learning programs. In view of the high percentage of adults who did not complete high school, it is not surprising that the adolescent dropout rate is high.

What has influenced adolescents of today to dropout? Donald Super, a career development researcher, states, "A person's parental socioeconomic level, mental abilities, education...determine the nature of a career path." (Super, 1990, p. 206) The educational level of a group of adults comprising a community can also determine, not only a career path, but also a life long learning pattern. Research, also, indicates a lack of education usually results in lower earning potential, which may be a significant factor in relationship to the low median income in Dickenson County. Other researchers have concluded that unemployment rates are very high among high school dropouts. Therefore, it is not unexpected that Dickenson County's unemployment rate, 16.3% in March 2002, is one of the highest in the state. (VEC, 4/02) The effect of adults' low completion rate of high school has created many social problems in the community.

John Dewey (1929) wrote an article entitled, “The School and Society,” in which he notes, “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children.” (Archambault, 1964, p. 295) Dickenson County, as a community, must want a life-long learning environment for all community members, young and old. A community’s lack of value assigned to education has a negative impact on the entire community; therefore, when a community esteems life-long education, then it will prosper. Other researchers’ work substantiates the importance of this study, which shows the educational background of adults in a community can impact adolescents’ educational goals. However, there is no research relating Dickenson County’s statistics regarding adults’ educational background and the impact on county adolescents’ attainment of a high school diploma. The research variables examined in this study included the educational attainment levels of the adult community, factors that impacted adolescents’ educational goals, and programs that promote lifelong learning. Each variable was examined on a national, state, and local level prior to making a determination of which factor, or combination of factors, influenced the relationship of Dickenson County adults’ educational attainment and its impact on adolescents attainment of a high school diploma.

LIMITATIONS

This study was based on the following limitations:

1. The research was limited to two generations of Dickenson County, Virginia, adults’ educational backgrounds.
2. The research was limited to the present generation of Dickenson County adolescents and their attainment of a high school diploma.

ASSUMPTIONS

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The attainment of a high school diploma reflects the graduate's positive view of education.
2. An adult community impacts the goals its adolescents achieve.

PROCEDURES

The data were compiled from the United States Census Board and the Virginia Employment Commission. The study used data from these sources to support the study's objectives of obtaining the educational attainment of two generations of Dickenson County adults and the dropout rate of the county. The educational attainment levels and dropout rates were collected on national, state, and local levels. As a result of these findings, conclusions were drawn that would further enhance understanding the impact the community has on the educational goals of adolescents. A comparison of local statistics to state and national statistics helped to clarify the deficiencies and needs of the county's lifelong educational programs.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The terms used in this study are defined as follows:

1. Generation- the average period between any two such successive steps, about 30 years among humans. The data were compiled from the decades of the 1970s for the second generation (parents of current adolescents) and the 1940s for the first generation (grandparents of current adolescents).

2. Life-long learning- taking responsibility for learning and development by applying knowledge and/or information gained as appropriate.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter I information was presented that dealt with the impact of an adult community's educational background on adolescents' view of education. The study's limitations were stated and assumptions noted. Important terms were defined, which the researcher needed to clarify. The procedures for collecting and compiling the necessary data were explained. Chapter II will discuss relevant literature in relation to the variables of the problem such as: educational background of Dickenson County's adult community, Dickenson County's high school dropout rates, and lifelong learning and student retention programs. Chapter III will give details on the procedures used in collecting and compiling the pertinent data. The findings resulting from this study will be provided in Chapter IV. Chapter V will give a summary of the study, and also the researcher's conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Adults' values are transmitted to adolescents through communication and example (Gardner, 1995, pp. 8, 9). Research shows that family and community expectations can have either a positive or negative impact on adolescents' educational goals. In communities where education is valued, adolescents are encouraged and assisted to reach a high standard of educational goals. On the other hand, in communities where education is not valued, dropout rates are high.

The needs of the community in recent years have increased the need of a higher educational attainment level (NCES, 2002, p. 1). The demand for a highly skilled labor force requires that the minimum level of education expected would be a high school diploma. One measurable way to determine a community's value of education is to examine the dropout rate. When a community's dropout rate is high it implies that the value of education in the community is low, and usually other societal problems will occur because of this factor. A low educational attainment level is a known factor, which influences other societal problems such as poverty, high unemployment rates, and inadequate housing.

The need for understanding a community's educational values is clearly present. The value a community places on education impacts many other factors within the community. By raising the value of education within a community, the community will benefit in many ways including stronger families, higher median income, better housing, safer neighborhoods, and a stronger community.

RESEARCH VARIABLES

The research variables examined in this study included the educational attainment levels of the adult community, factors that impacted adolescents' educational goals, and programs that promote lifelong learning. Each variable was examined on a national, state, and local level prior to making a determination of which factor, or combination of factors, influenced the relationship of Dickenson County adults' educational attainment and its impact on adolescents attainment of a high school diploma.

Educational Attainment Levels of the Adult Community

The United States Census Bureau compiles statistics on the population every ten years. The statistics are analyzed on a national, state, and local level by reports from the U. S. Census Bureau, other governmental agencies, and private agencies. This study researched reports from various agencies using statistics compiled by the U. S. Census Bureau. The population studied includes all residents of the United States. However, it is important to note that there are gaps in the statistics, with data from recent years being the easiest to locate and later years having more gaps in information, which makes analysis difficult. Local statistics were the most difficult to obtain and had large gaps in the years gathered, which makes drawing conclusions difficult on a local level.

There are two primary ways of comparing educational levels. The first is to obtain educational attainment levels of people over the age of 25, and the second is to determine the dropout rate. The methods of computing educational attainment levels and dropout

rates have differed from year to year, which makes it difficult to compare statistics (NCES, 2002, pp. 59-71). However, most data supports the finding that since 1940 there has been a steady increase in the educational grade level of the population. The median educational grade level rose from 8.2 in 1940, to 12.2 in 1970, to 12.7 in 1991. After 1991 it is hard to determine the increase because the questions on the census survey changed (DOE, [http:// www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), 12/19/00). The higher-grade level attainment is also reflected in state and local statistics.

Although the median grade level attainment has increased, the high school completion rate has increased only slightly. The increase is about 3% over a 29-year period, which represents slow progress (NCES, 2002, p. 17). However, the statistics show that people who stay in school obtain a higher-grade level, but that there have been limited gains in high school completion rates over the last thirty years (NCES, 2002, p. 23). Virginia's percentage of high school completion rates of 18 through 24 year-olds not currently enrolled in high school or below, October 1998-2000, was between 85-90 % (NCES, 2002, p. 22). However, in 1990, Dickenson County's population over 25 years old who had completed high school was only 47.1%, therefore, this statistic means that the greater percentage, 52.9%, do not have a high school diploma (U.S. Census, <http://factfinder.census.gov>, 2/20/02).

Information examined from Dickenson County School's annual report to the Virginia Department of Education indicates the dropout rate is slightly higher than the state. Dickenson County's dropout rate of the student population is 3.54% compared to the state's average rate of 2.99%. Dropout rates only refer to those who dropped out during the school year and not those who did not return after the summer.

Statistics show the low educational level of Dickenson County adults in the years from 1940-2000 (NCES, 2002). The majority of the adult population over the age of 25 years old does not have a high school diploma. The percent is 52.9 %.

Factors Impacting Adolescent's Educational Goals

In the report *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000* (2001) demographics were compiled on the race/ethnicity, age and sex, and region of young adults ages 18-24 years old, who dropped out of high school. The race/ethnicity status dropout rates for White young adults have persisted at levels that are lower than the rates observed for either Black or Hispanic young adults (p. 14). The numbers of young adults ages 18 through 24 who had not completed a high school education were comparatively higher, comprising 87.8 percent of all dropouts in 2000 (p. 16). The data indicate that males were more likely to be dropouts than females. Data of regional differences over the thirty-year period, from 1970-2000, indicate the South's status dropout rate is disproportionately larger compared to the country's other regions (p. 16).

Two other factors examined by the report were family income and family status. The dropout rate of adolescents from low-income households was higher than middle or higher-income households (p. 74). The family status also impacted adolescents' dropout rate. The data indicate adolescents not living with one parent have a higher dropout rate, and adolescents living with one parent have a higher dropout rate than adolescents living with two parents. The dropout rate is lowest among adolescents living in a two-parent household (p. 74).

The Educational Testing Services analyzed NCES information, data from state, city, other sources, and surveys of recent high school students. Researchers present a picture of the dropout situation in the U.S. in the report entitled *Dreams Deferred: High School Dropouts in the United States* (1995). The study indicates that urban areas have higher drop out rates than rural areas (p. 1). Also, almost one-fifth of the dropout population was held back a grade, and almost half failed a course. Many high school dropouts were enrolled in special education or alternative programs (p. 2). Some school factors that influenced dropouts were that adolescents did not like school, were failing in school, did not get along with teachers and/or students, and did not feel safe. Personal factors that influenced dropouts were employment, pregnancy, friends who dropped out, and drug or alcohol problems (p. 3).

In a report entitled “ The Dropout’s Perspective on Leaving School”, a summary of Curley, Sawyer, and Savitsky (1984), Kumar and Bergstrand (1982), Norris, Wheeler, and Finley (1980), and Peng and Takai (1983) research listed the factors that influenced adolescents’ decisions to dropout (Beekman, ERIC, 2/12/02). Many dropouts either viewed school as boring or not relevant to their needs. Some other factors given were dislike of school, low academic achievement, need for money, and pregnancy (p. 1).[†]

Dickenson County GED students cited similar factors reported in other research as influencing their decision to dropout of high school (J.Trevaskis, personal communication, 5/02). Other regional research studies indicate factors which impacted adolescents on a national level impacted adolescents on a local and state level (Bosley, 1999; ARCP, 2002; Rowley, 1999).

Programs That Promote Lifelong Learning

Research compiled by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (2002) indicates that communities that promote education are safer, have a stronger local economy, and better quality of life (p. 3). Programs that promote community support of lifelong learning communicate to adolescents the community's value of education. Some community programs, which enhance and support lifelong learning and student retention programs, are alcohol, drugs, and violence prevention, parenting classes, mentor programs, summer learning programs, and preschool programs (pp. 1-3). Research supports the fact that the greater the involvement of family and community in education the higher the educational attainment level of the community's adolescents (p. 4).

The Commonwealth of Virginia Appalachian Regional Commission Program (2002) developed strategies in a report that help communities in Southwest Virginia to create programs that promote lifelong learning (p. 16). One state objective is to "Develop a world class work force that is well educated and appropriately trained for the job market" (p. 10). Strategies to reach this goal include programs that support initiatives that will reduce the school dropout rates, support programs to improve enrollment in post-secondary schools, and support development of programs to establish local and regional community leadership (pp. 10-22).

The School District of Greenville (2002) noted that when the community's expectations of educational achievement is raised that adolescent's rise to the new standard set. One factor cited to help adolescents is "reengaging families in the education of young adolescents."

Building a lifelong learning system is an important step in raising the value of education within a community. An interesting lifelong learning system has been developed in Bemidji, Minnesota. The home page of Bemidji Community Education (2002) provides an overview of the program. A sixteen-member cross sectional community representative group directs the program. The goals of the program are:

1. To provide life-long learning opportunities to all members of the community.
2. To promote and develop support for the K-12 program.
3. To build a strong community that allows citizens to achieve their greatest potential.

Examples of Bemidji programs are Adult Basic Education, Aquatics, Early Childhood Family Education, Family Resource Center, and activities for the Disabled, School Age Child Care, Enrichment classes, activities and trips, and Youth Programming.

SUMMARY

The factors, which impact adolescents' attainment of a high school diploma, are many and varied. The research, however, indicates that the value of education, which an adolescent's family and community hold, is the factor that is the primary motivating force in determining the completion of high school by an adolescent. Demographic statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and other research studies indicate that the majority of dropouts come from low-income, one parent households in communities that do not provide programs that help adolescents to reach their educational potentials. Pautler (1999) states, "Schooling, as we know, is an extension of the family, home, church, and community. As we hear so often, it takes a whole community to raise the child" (p. 295).

Chapter III will outline the methods and procedures used in this study to determine the educational attainment level of community adults, the factors that impacted adolescents' educational goals, and programs that promote lifelong learning. The instruments used for data collection will be discussed. Methods used to collect and analyze data will also be explained.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the compilation of data and also the interview procedures used to obtain data from Dickenson County dropouts. Information was provided on the population of the study, the methods used in the compilation of data needed for the study, the interview format of the study, and the treatment of the statistics compiled.

POPULATION

The study's population includes all residents, 2000 census population of 16,395, of Dickenson County, Virginia. A sample of 13 dropouts from Dickenson County will be included in the study to represent the reasons that local residents have not completed high school.

Dickenson County is a rural, mountain community located in Southwest Virginia. The area has beautiful scenic vistas, which are complemented by the warm kindness of the county's residents. Self-sufficient people, who were determined to make this rugged area into their home, settled the area and left a rich heritage and determined spirit to their descendents. Coal mining is the primary industry in the county; however, the mining industry is declining. This decline creates the need for diversification of the county's industries. Workforce qualifications, now and for future workers, create a need for higher educational attainment levels. The community's educational attainment levels have traditionally been low, which did not impact the county in the past. However, now the low educational attainment levels of the county's adults are creating many problems in the community.

INSTRUMENT

Data were obtained from the United States Census Bureau. Statistics were gathered to determine the educational attainment levels of the adult community.

Data were required for the sample, which were obtained by a closed form survey of thirteen GED students to provide insight into the reasons why county residents dropped out of high school. The areas addressed in the survey included the reasons why the student originally dropped out of high school, the educational attainment level of his/her parents, and the impact s/he feel adults have on adolescent's educational goals. Appendix A includes the survey.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The researcher contacted the U. S. Census Bureau, Virginia Employment Commission, and U.S. Department of Education to obtain needed statistics. The researcher also surveyed GED students in May 2002. Each participant of the survey was assured of confidentiality through the anonymous design of the survey (Appendix A) and a cover letter confirming confidentiality by of the researcher. Verbal confirmation of confidentiality by of the researcher was also given. The cover letter was given to each survey participant (Appendix B), and the letter granting permission to conduct the survey (Appendix C), which was given by the Director of Adult Education in Dickenson County, Ms. Sharon Purdie is included in the Appendix. All participants were over the age of eighteen. Surveys were completed after GED classes and left for the researcher.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data collected from the U. S. Census Bureau were the educational attainment levels of the generation of the 1940's (grandparents of current adolescents) and the generation of the 1970's (parents of current adolescents). The data were collected, and then the percentage was calculated of the adult population's educational attainment levels.

Data were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Virginia Employment Commission to determine the social and economic environment within Dickenson County. Poverty levels and unemployment rates of Dickenson County and Virginia were compiled, and percentage rates were determined. Current housing and household income levels were compiled and percentages compared to state statistics.

Upon completion of the survey process with GED students, the information obtained was analyzed to better understand the impact county adults have had on county adolescents. The data were tabulated, frequencies were determined, and percentages calculated to determine what factor had the greatest impact in the past on county adolescents. The educational background of each participant's parents was determined. Each survey question was analyzed to determine the impact of the social and economic environment of Dickenson County on the dropout.

SUMMARY

Research data were collected via a review of U. S. Census Bureau records. The data obtained were calculated to show the percentage of adults who did not graduate from

high school in Dickenson County. The data collected were used to determine if the low educational attainment level of county adults impacted adolescents' attainment of a high school diploma. To determine the social and economic environment of Dickenson County data were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Education, Virginia Employment Commission, and research studies. The study's survey data helped to analyze local factors, which influenced county adolescents to dropout of high school. The survey data determined the percentage of dropouts who had parents that dropped out of high school, the primary factor that impacted the student to drop out of high school, and the influence the student felt adults had on his/her decision to drop out of high school. Chapter IV will contain the research findings, which resulted from the data collected.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The problem of this study was to determine the relationship of Dickenson County adults' educational attainment and its impact on adolescents' attainment of a high school diploma. The research variables examined in this study included the educational attainment levels of the adult community, factors that impacted adolescents' educational goals, and future programs that will promote lifelong learning. Each variable was examined prior to making a determination of which factor, or combination of factors, influenced the relationship of Dickenson County adults educational attainment and their impact on adolescents attainment of a high school diploma. Research results and a summary will be presented in this chapter.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Data were collected from the U. S. Census Bureau, and the percentage was calculated of the adult population's educational attainment levels. Data were then analyzed to determine the effect on the educational goals of adolescents. The percentage of high school dropouts who had high school dropouts as parents was calculated to determine if there were relationships between the adults' educational level and the dropout rate.

Upon completion of the survey process with thirteen Dickenson County GED students, the information obtained was analyzed to better understand the impact county

adults have had on county adolescents. Data were tabulated, and percentages calculated to determine what factor had the greatest impact in the past on county adolescents.

RESEARCH VARIABLES

Dickenson County Adult Community's Educational Attainment Level

Statistics show the low educational level of Dickenson County adults in the years from 1940-2000 (NCES, 2002). In 1990, Dickenson County's population over 25 years old that had completed high school was only 47%, therefore, this statistic indicates that the greater percentage, 52.9%, do not have a high school diploma (U.S. Census, <http://factfinder.census.gov>, 2/20/02). The data indicates, the generation of the 1940's (grandparents of current adolescents) and the generation of the 1970's (parents of current adolescents), that the majority did not graduate from high school. The data in Table 1 were collected from the U. S. Census Bureau. The educational levels of Dickenson County in the 1990 census indicate the high school dropout rate as 52.9%. The total population of persons 25 years and over is 11,189. The percentage of adults who have not obtained a high school diploma can be obtained by adding the data from the table rows of less than 9th grade and 9th to 12th grade; no diploma. The total is 5,924, which is 52.9% of the total adult population of 11,189. The percentage of adults, who have obtained a high school diploma or higher can be determined by adding high school graduate, some college, not degree, Associate degree, Bachelor's degree, and Graduate or professional degree. The total is 5,265, which is 47% of the adult population of Dickenson County. The data indicate the low educational attainment level of the greater percentage of the adult population of Dickenson County.

TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF DICKENSON COUNTY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
LEVEL FOR PERSONS 25 YEARS AND OVER

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT – 1990 U. S. CENSUS BUREAU	
PERSONS 25 YEARS AND OVER	11,189
Less than 9 th grade	3,771
9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	2,153
High school graduate	3,168
Some college, no degree	1,157
Associate degree	274
Bachelor's degree	456
Graduate or professional degree	210
Percent of high school dropouts	52.9
Percent high school graduate or higher all diplomas conferred	47.1

Factors Impacting Dickenson County Adolescent's Educational Goals

Data were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau to determine the social and economic environment of Dickenson County. Key factors examined were the poverty level, the poverty level of the children of Dickenson County, housing, and the household income.

Data compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates the economic conditions that impact Dickenson county adolescents. The data in Figure 1 compare Virginia and Dickenson County's poverty levels. Comparison of Virginia and Dickenson County

dropout rates and poverty levels may indicate that poverty could impact an adolescent's attainment of a high school diploma. Dickenson County's poverty level is twice as high as the state.

Closely related to the poverty level in the county is the high unemployment statistics for Dickenson County. Data collected from the Virginia Employment Commission indicate in March 2002 the unemployment rate was 16.3% compared to Virginia's, which was 4.0%. Figure 1 compares Dickenson County's poverty level and unemployment rate to Virginia. The data represented may indicate a cyclic nature of low educational attainment and societal problems.

Data were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau, which further indicates the economic and social environment of Dickenson County. Data indicate the level of poverty by the median income of Dickenson County households. The data show a significant difference in the state's median income and the county's. Research also shows that many households do not have adequate plumbing and water (People Inc, 3/18/2002). Table 2 compares median household income of Dickenson County and Virginia.

The researcher's survey of GED students, who were all over eighteen and were all high school dropouts, provided a sample of factors that impacted their decision to dropout of high school. Participants were asked about their parents' educational attainment level, what factors impacted their decision to dropout, and the impact they felt adults had on an adolescent's decision to dropout of high school. Parental educational attainment level was calculated and percentages determined. The data indicate that 88% of dropouts had parents, who dropped out of high school. However, it is important to note that of the 13

students, 38 % felt that their parents' decision to dropout did not influence their decision to drop out.

The survey asked participants to indicate what factor most influenced their decision to dropout of high school. The percentage of each factor was calculated. Figure 2 indicates the factor that impacted more dropouts was family responsibility. Family responsibility includes getting married, being pregnant or a girlfriend who was pregnant, and working to contribute to the family income. Family responsibility was the factor, at 84%, which impacted survey participants to dropout. Only 8% of the survey participants did not like school or find relevant, and the remaining 8 % indicate issues involving safety or other factors not included on the survey as reasons for dropping out.

FIGURE 1

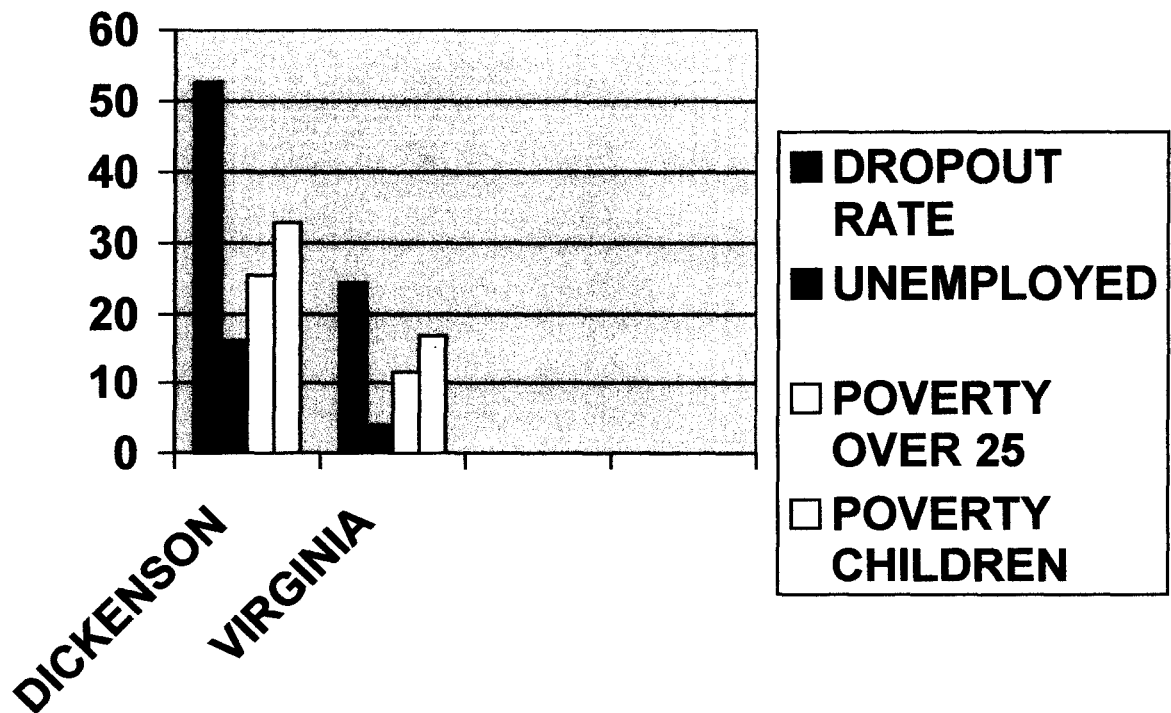


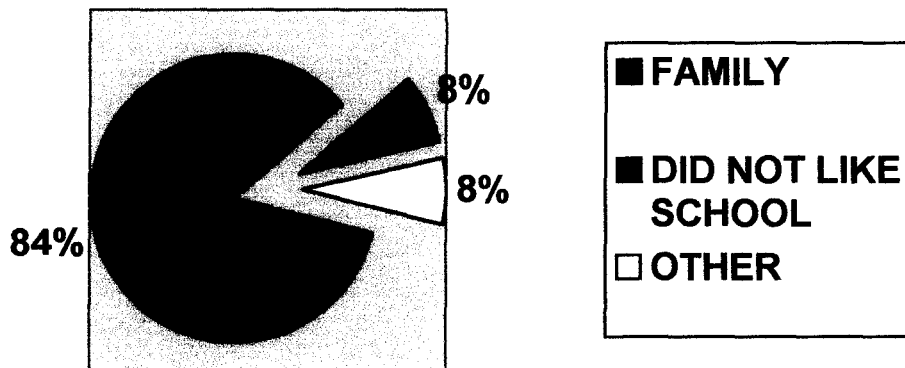
TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF DICKENSON COUNTY INCOME LEVEL TO VIRGINIA

	DICKENSON COUNTY	VIRGINIA
Median household money income, 1997 model-based estimate	\$22,941	\$40,209

FIGURE 2

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED GED STUDENTS TO DROPOUT OF HIGH SCHOOL



SUMMARY

The research variables examined in this study included the educational attainment levels of the adult community, factors that impacted adolescents' educational goals, and future programs that will promote lifelong learning. Each variable was examined on a national, state, and local level prior to making a determination of which factor, or

combination of factors, influenced the relationship of Dickenson County adults' educational attainment and its impact on adolescents' attainment of a high school diploma. Upon completion of the survey process with GED students, the information obtained was analyzed to better understand the impact county adults have had on county adolescents.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes a summary, which contains an overview of the study. Data collected during the study answered the research study's objectives. The research objectives examined in this study included the educational attainment levels of the adult community, factors that impacted adolescents' educational goals, and future programs that will promote lifelong learning. This chapter also includes conclusions that were drawn based on the data, which answered the research objectives. The final section of this chapter includes the recommendations based upon the results of the study.

SUMMARY

The problem of this study was to determine the relationship of Dickenson County adults' educational attainment and its impact on adolescents' attainment of a high school diploma.

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. Determine the educational attainment of two generations of Dickenson County adults.
2. Identify what factors contribute to the education goals of the county's children.
3. Determine effective strategies which would promote life-long learning and student retention in the county.

Research shows that family and community expectations can have either a positive or negative impact on adolescents' educational goals. Adults' values are transmitted to adolescents through communication and example (Gardner, 1953, pp. 8, 9).

In communities where education is valued, adolescents are encouraged and assisted to reach a high standard of educational goals. On the other hand, in communities where education is not valued, dropout rates are high.

The research was limited to two generations of Dickenson County, Virginia, adults' educational backgrounds. The research was limited to the present generation of Dickenson County adolescents and their attainment of a high school diploma

Data were compiled to support the study's objectives of obtaining the educational attainment of two generations of Dickenson County adults. The study's population includes all residents, 2000 census population of 16,395. A sample of 13 dropouts from Dickenson County was included in the study to represent the factors, which impacted local residents in their decision to drop out of high school. The data collected from the survey were parental educational attainment level, factors that impacted their decision to drop out of high school, and if they felt adults' example influenced their decision to drop out. The researcher surveyed GED students in May 2002. Each participant of the survey was assured of confidentiality through the anonymous design of the survey. All participants were over the age of eighteen.

The data collected from the U. S. Census Bureau were the educational attainment levels of the generation of the 1940's (grandparents of current adolescents) and the generation of the 1970's (parents of current adolescents). The data were collected and then the percentage was calculated of the adult population's educational attainment levels.

Data were collected to determine the social and economic environment within Dickenson County. Data were collected from the Virginia Employment Commission on

the unemployment rates of Dickenson County and Virginia. Percentage rates were determined. Data were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau to determine the poverty level, housing, and median income. Research studies and a review of literature provided information on life-long learning programs, which have been successful in other communities and could be applicable to Dickenson County.

CONCLUSIONS

The problem of this study was to determine the relationship of Dickenson County adults' educational attainment and its impact on adolescents' attainment of a high school diploma.

Conclusions are based on the following research objectives:

- 1. Determine the educational attainment of two generations of Dickenson County's adults.**

Statistics show the low educational level of Dickenson County adults in the years from 1940-2000 (NCES, 2002). The data indicates from the generation of the 1940's (grandparents of current adolescents) and the generation of the 1970's (parents of current adolescents) that the majority did not graduate from high school. The majority of the adult population over the age of 25 years old does not have a high school diploma. In fact, the percent is 52.9 %. The impact of county adults' educational level can be seen in the higher dropout rates currently in the county. Information examined from Dickenson County School's annual report to the Virginia Department of Education indicates the dropout rate is slightly higher than the state.

2. Identify what factors contribute to the education goals of the county's children.

Data were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau to determine the social and economic environment of Dickenson County. Factors examined by the study were family income, poverty, and unemployment. These factors were collected because research verifies that adolescents living in distressed social and economic environments are at greater risk of dropping out of high school. Data collected indicates that Dickenson County is a distressed county; therefore, increasing the factors which impact adolescents to dropout.

Data indicates Dickenson County's median income is \$22,941 compared to Virginia's median income of \$40,209. Poverty level for persons over 25 years old in Dickenson County is 25.55 compared to Virginia's at 11.6%. The poverty level of children in the county is alarmingly high at 32.9% compared to 17.0% of the state. (U.S. Census, <http://factfinder.census.gov>, 2/20/02). Data collected from the Virginia Employment Commission indicates in March 2002 the unemployment rate was 16.3% compared to Virginia's, which was 4.0%.

Data compiled from the survey cited factors, which influenced participants' decision to dropout of high school (J.Trevaskis, personal communication, 5/02). The primary reason for not completing high school by county dropouts was family responsibilities, which included marrying, becoming pregnant, and need of money, contributing to the family income, and caring for a family member.

Data collected from the survey further indicated the impact that adults have on an adolescent's attainment of a high school diploma. The high percentage, 88%, of high school dropouts, who had parents that dropped out of high school, indicated the impact adults educational level has on the attainment of an adolescent's high school diploma.

3. Determine effective strategies, which would promote life-long learning and student retention in the county.

The community, educators, and businesses need to be made aware that a large proportion of the population could benefit from life-long learning programs. In view of the high percentage of adults who did not complete high school, it is not surprising that the adolescent dropout rate is high. People “live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common”, stated the educator, John Dewey. (1926, p. 4) Dewey states that communication is necessary to transmit values to a community. This communication can be transmitted in two very important ways: by example and by support. Adults demonstrate the value of education by example when life-long learning is evident in their lives. Adults show support of education by devoting time and money into educational programs. If a community maintains programs, which encourage life-long learning, adolescents give importance to learning in their lives. Research compiled by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (2002) indicates that communities that promote education are safer, have a stronger local economy, and better quality of life

(p. 3). Programs that promote community support of lifelong learning communicate to adolescents the community's value of education. Some community programs, which enhance and support lifelong learning and student retention programs, are: alcohol, drugs, and violence prevention, parenting classes, mentor programs, summer learning programs, and preschool programs (pp. 1-3). Research supports the fact that the greater the involvement of family and community in education the higher the educational attainment level of the community's adolescents (p. 4).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau, Virginia Employment Commission, Dickenson County School Board, study survey, review of relevant literature and research studies conclusions were drawn in the final chapter of this research study. The researcher has made the following recommendations.

1. Due to the low educational attainment level of the greater percent of the county's adults, adolescents in Dickenson County have a vital need for educational counselors. Although the county has guidance counselors there is a critical need for an enlarged staff of qualified educational counselors. The primary recommendation of the researcher is to staff a unified counseling department for all county students.
2. Data collected indicates the primary factor impacting an adolescent's decision to drop out of high school is family responsibility. The researcher recommends that all students be assigned a counselor/child advocate in

elementary school to provide support and early intervention. Research confirms that children must have guidance, which is a continuous and consistent support system. Therefore, if children have a counsel/child advocate, who can direct them to community resources to help with family responsibilities, retention in high school should be increased.

3. An Adult Learning Resource Center should be established to coordinate life-long learning programs to help raise the adults' educational level within the county. An Adult Learning Resource Center should include GED programs, job skills training, and provide post-secondary and vocational educational counseling. Some communities have created a multi-member-cross sectional community representative group to direct a life-long learning program. The goals of such a program should include:

1. Provide life-long learning opportunities to all members of the community.
2. Promote and develop support for the K-12 program.
3. Build a strong community that allows citizens to achieve their greatest potential.

4. Future research to implement a county mentoring program. Implementation of program and funding to enable college students and adults, who value education, to mentor adolescents towards the attainment of a high school diploma and post-secondary education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

APPENDIX B COVER LETTER

APPENDIX C LETTER OF PERMISSION

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

Survey of GED students

Please answer a few questions.

1. Did you graduate from high school? Yes
 No

If no, what was the main reason you quit?

- Family Responsibilities
 Did not like school/teachers
 Other _____

2. Did your parents graduate from high school?

- | | Mother | Father |
|-----|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. Do you feel that adults in your life influenced your decision regarding education?

- Yes
 No

Thank you

Jana Trevaskis
P.O. Box 561
Haysi, Va. 24256

Dickenson County GED

May 16, 2002

Dear GED student:

Thank you for participating in the GED survey. The survey will provide information about how the relationship adults' educational attainment level impacts adolescents' educational goals.

You are under no obligation to response to the survey; however, if you do participate the information you provide will help to determine what type of programs would help adolescents complete high school.

The information you provide will remain anonymous, and will be used only in connection with this research study. The research study is being conducted as part of my graduate research project at Old Dominion University.

Thanks again for taking the time to provide this information.

Sincerely,

Jana Trevaskis
GED Instructor

Dickenson County Public Schools

P.O. Box 1127, Volunteer Street

CLINTWOOD, VIRGINIA 24228

Fax (276) 926-6374 (276) 926-4643

"Pursuing Academic Excellence "



Dr. Danny C. Greer
Superintendent



The Torch of Knowledge Disperses
The Darkness of Ignorance

April 19, 2002

To: Human Subjects Review Committee
Old Dominion University

Jana Trevaskis is an employee of our local school division as an adult education teacher. She has been given permission to obtain relevant research information from area GED students to assist with her project.

Sharon M. Furdie
Director of Sp Programs

Letter of Permission for the survey of GED students by the researcher.

