

WHAT DO ATTENDANCE TURNAROUND STUDENTS DO TO BECOME SUCCESSFUL?

What do Attendance Turnaround Students' at the Research Site do, And What Resources Are
Employed That Help Make Them Successful?

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Abstract

The objective of this action research project was to investigate what factors keep turnaround students in school long enough to graduate with a High School Diploma or a General Education Diploma. The research included students from lower socio-economic backgrounds aged 18-26 years of age who are living in a residential alternative school setting. Data was gathered through in-person and phone interviews of students who have graduated, along with surveys being given to the general population at the research site. The findings will help educators to focus on the most significant factors that keep dropout students in school long enough to graduate at the research site.

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Chapter One – Introduction

In the heart of a National Forest sits a small residential alternative high school for young adults. It is only 60 miles from a Pacific Northwest major metropolitan area, yet its closest town is 25 miles away. Surrounded by evergreen forests and a large major river, the setting is peaceful and void of outside distractions with many opportunities for outdoor activities.

The school has a very diverse population with many cultures and languages being represented including, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, Ethiopians, and Russian speaking students. Students come to this school to finish their education, and to learn a trade. The average student comes into education with a forth grade reading level and a fifth grade math level. Students who come to this school are considered to be high risk in any other school setting. They come from broken homes and from homes of abuse. They also come with up to 18 years of being told they were failures in the world of academics. Upwards of 40% of the students enter this school with some sort of learning disability. 50% of the students come in with some level of attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactive disorder. According to school statistics, the students come from an array of low socio-economic backgrounds, which is one of the conditions for getting into the program.

Most students come in thinking that this is their last and only chance of making something of themselves. Some come because they have no other place to go. A few are mandated by the state to finish the program or go to jail. With an extension, students can stay at the research site for up to two and half years. During this time they can complete their High

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School Diploma or their General Education Diploma. They can also learn one of eight different trades; Auto Tech, Business, Carpentry, Culinary, Electrical, Maintenance, Painting, Welding and soon to come Forestry. Students spend one week in their chosen trade and the next in Education until they are done with Education, at which time they go full time trade. Students live on the research site and have no expenses. Students are given a nominal stipend every other week. Students who are in good standing can go on “pass” every weekend.

In the education department all but one of the seven teachers has a Masters degree (the researcher) and is highly qualified for their jobs. Teachers have been teaching here from one to twelve years. The researcher is the Reading teacher who has been working here for two and a half years and works with students whose reading levels range from first grade to eighth grade. The researcher’s job is to take them from their current level and bring them up to a ninth grade reading level. The researcher is also active in extra-curricular activities with the students and is an advisor to three different clubs. The researcher has created a professional, yet close and secure relationship with the students, with whom she may spend up to two and a half years working with.

The school is structured and students have to abide by the rules, so not all students last the two years here (two and a half years with an extension) because they quit or get kicked out. But a lot of students do make it and fulfill their goals of finishing their education and learning a trade. These students go on to even further their education or to get good jobs. What is it that makes them stick it out in such a structured setting? What do they do here that makes them successful? What behaviors do they exhibit that keeps them coming back to class day after day?

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Finding out what these behaviors are can help the staff promote and encourage others to do the same. The researcher's goal is to find out what these behaviors are so these students can be kept in program long enough to graduate.

The research question is: "What do attendance' turnaround students' at the research site do, and what resources are employed, that help make them successful?"

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Chapter Two--The Issue

There are many factors that contribute to students skipping school and eventually dropping out; social, financial, emotional, and family issues, along with age and gender. All of these can create long term problems not only for themselves but for their families, schools, and communities. The task of getting students to finish their schooling has long been researched, but not much research has been done on those 'turnaround' students who have dropped out and have returned to school to finish their education.

Poor attendance and truancy are important issues for students, schools, and communities across the nation. Poor attendance has been correlated with a wide range of other issues. Roby (2004) found a distinct correlation between attendance and academic success. My own teaching experience supports this: the only students who have failed my class were students who missed class frequently. If students do not attend school, it is virtually impossible for them to keep up with their classmates and earn passing grades.

Another issue related to chronic absences is dropping out of school. Truancy is often a predictor of future dropout tendencies. High school dropouts have their own problems and may add to societal issues. Data from the 2000 census show that high school dropouts had only 52% employment rate, compared to 71% for high school graduates, and 83% for college graduates. Additionally, dropping out of school may be a precursor to delinquent and criminal activity.

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Not only is poor attendance a problem for the student and for communities, but it is also an important issue for schools and their funding. Schools report high dropout and absentee rates- some cities across the nation report absenteeism as high as 30 percent (Garry, 1996).

“Financially, depending on the size of a school, the difference of one or two percentage points in attendance over the course of a year can mean more money to hire another teacher, buy more computer equipment, or acquire whatever is needed to improve education” (Vandiver, 2003). In addition, recent legislation, No Child Left Behind Act, emphasizes the need for schools to improve attendance. No Child Left Behind made attendance an “additional indicator” for elementary and middle schools to meet Adequate Yearly Progress as designated by the Act. Four States in the Pacific Northwest- Alaska, Montana, Oregon, and Washington- are using attendance as an indicator (Railsback, 2004).

A few characteristics of low attendees are clear and consistent in the research. McNeil (2008) found high school boys were truant twice as often as girls, while girls were absent twice as often with parental consent. Age is another variable that is related to truancy. Roby (2004) explains that with an increase in age, there is concurrent increase in truancy. Lastly, the problem of poor attendance is more acute in urban school, where absentee rates may reach 30% or more (Baker, 2001).

Attendance is such a huge problem in our schools and so much focus is on trying to get students to stay in school; but what about those student who do come back to school after having dropped out? What behaviors or variables caused them to come back?

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What behaviors do these attendance turnaround students exhibit that made them come back to school every day and finish their education?

Literature Review

History

The history of truancy goes back over a hundred years when school attendance was first made compulsory. Then, as now, school administrators were charged with monitoring this, in addition to judging the overall quality of teaching. It was part of the administrators' duties to write up their impressions of their school. Administrators could, and did, comment on a wide range of aspects concerning education. They looked at school attendance, the curriculum, the quality of teaching and - a key focus here - whether pupils turned up regularly or not. The history of truancy and its remedies shows that the revival of penalties, such as fining and even imprisoning parents, by modern-day governments produces only temporary victories in the battle (Evans, 2010).

Two features of truancy have remained largely unchanged over the past hundred years, despite massive changes in family life, social welfare and economic circumstances. First, there has always been a clear link between social class and absence from school, with some (though not all) working-class communities placing a low value on schooling. Social distinctions between schools have depended on their catchment area. In the early years of compulsory schooling in the 19th century, attendance officers would prowl the poorer areas of town, aware they were not welcomed by parents who needed their children at home to care for younger siblings or at work earning money for the family. Studies of inner-city schools undertaken in

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1947 and 2004 found a close relationship between social class and absence from school. Yet there were (and still are) differences in truancy rates between areas with similar socio-economic characteristics (Sheldon, 2009).

Secondly, the legal framework for dealing with truancy and the enforcement system has barely changed for 130 years. Many local initiatives have been tried. After fines, court summonses, truancy sweeps, behavior and attendance consultants, what can be done which hasn't already been tried?

Signs of Trouble

Truancy is the first sign of trouble; the first indicator that a young person is giving up and losing his or her way. When young people start skipping school, they are telling their parents, school officials and the community at large that they are in trouble and need help if they are to keep moving forward in life.

Research data shows that students who become truant and eventually drop out of school put themselves at a long term disadvantage in becoming productive citizens. High school dropouts, for example, are two-and-a-half times more likely to be on welfare than high school graduates. In 1995, high school dropouts were almost twice as likely to be unemployed as high school graduates (Garry, 1996). In addition, high school dropouts who are employed earn much lower salaries. Students who become truant and eventually drop out of high school too often set themselves up for a life of struggle.

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Truancy is also a gateway to crime. High rates of truancy are linked to high daytime burglary rates and high vandalism. According to the Los Angeles County Office of Education, truancy is the most powerful predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior. "I've never seen a gang member who wasn't a truant first," says California District Attorney Kim Menninger. (Menninger, 1996, p.17) Truancy prevention efforts should be a part of any community policing effort to prevent crime before it happens.

With a strong and long history of absenteeism and truancy in the school system, it is clear to see that this is a major problem that needs to be addressed. There are many schools of thought about how to remedy this problem, from incentive plans to intrinsically motivating students to corporal punishment. Researchers have found that there are many ways to combat absenteeism, but that a combination of the following are considered to be best practices.

Interventions

While there is an abundance of research on stepping-up attendance and reducing truancy, the suggestions are often contradicting and/or confusing. One source of contradictions is found in research where interventions and initiatives are suggested. Bell, et al. (1994) suggests a multimodal approach to strengthen the effects of intervention by focusing on the individual, the school and the family. A multimodal approach would include many venues to increase attendance including

- Individualized plans, a team approach, and “learning circles”;

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- Establishing ongoing truancy prevention programs for school, rather than a one time effort or an effort that only targets high risk students; and
- School staff that is trained, committed, and supported to provide high quality, responsive services and keep at-risk youth in the educational mainstream (Decker, Burhans, & Fair, 2003).

Because truancy is a societal problem, most truancy education programs are community-based (Hopkins, 1998). One of the key features of truancy intervention is a collaborative, or multimodal, approach that involves some combination of community stakeholders: parents, schools, community and youth organizations, social services agencies, businesses, juvenile courts, and law enforcement agencies. This approach takes into account the many risk factors that underlie truancy (Wells, 2003).

Early prevention programs that focus on elementary school children view parents as responsible for their children's failure to attend school (Decker, Burhans, & Fair, 2003). Early interventions at elementary schools have been studied. Promise has been found in intervention specialists, home school coordinators, individual success plans, one-on-one attention, mentors, skill-building, counseling, contracts, incentive plans, and a team approach to address student and family needs (Decker, Burhans, & Fair, 2003).

Princotta & Reyna (2009) found statistically significant relationships between school absence and many student, family, and school variables. Princotta & Reyna state that intervention programs such as targeting at-risk youth, re-engaging youth who have dropped out of school and promoting high school graduation for all will help establish a stronger foundation

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in the schools and thus lead to less attendance problems. They also state that including the community and getting families more involved in their students' education will create an environment that promotes a more positive relationship between the schools and the families.

In contrast, Wagstaff, et al. (2004) suggests that it is the curriculum and instruction that tend to destroy student motivation and cause the isolation of many individual students. He states that students need curriculum that is rigorous and relevant as an intervention, with teachers who are knowledgeable in the current strategies that are most effective. Wagstaff also states that teacher encouragement and enthusiasm is a key factor in student motivation.

Incentive/Extrinsic Motivation

Greater contradictions are found in research regarding the use of incentive plans to increase attendance. Henderlong Corpus, McClintic-Gilbert and Hayanga (2009) argue that incentive programs actually do more harm than good. With an incentive program, behaviors might change temporarily, but when the "goodies" [rewards] are no longer available, the unwanted behavior returns. They also state that rewards do not create deep, lasting changes and only induce compliance. Bolstering this argument against incentives for attendance is Conard (2004) who found incentives make little difference in attendance. In a study of college psychology students, Conard found that individual conscientiousness is a greater factor in regards to attendance than incentives.

At the same time Roby (2004) includes positive rewards for attendance as one essential component of a successful attendance policy. Vandiver (2003) and White and White (1997) both describe successful attendance programs that used incentives. White and White describe

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exempting students from semester exams based on a combination of grades and attendance. Since the inception of this incentive program, the number of students with perfect attendance has always been higher than before the program. Vandiver describes an attendance policy that stated students who miss more than six days a semester do not earn credit. Vandiver's policy also includes an enticement component; students with perfect attendance for a semester are exempted from final exams. Vandiver (2003) depicts this attendance program as "a formula that worked" (p. 81).

In another example, a student is considered truant at Mandan High School if they miss 49 hours, or the equivalent of seven days. If a student accumulates more than 12 absences, then they are withdrawn from a class, unless they participate in the credit buy back program. They can earn back up to two days of unexcused absences by spending time in detention. During this time, the student cannot accumulate any more unexcused absences or be late to class. Mandan high school also has a final test exemption policy. If students do not have more than two excused absences, two tardies and no unexcused absences, they do not need to take all of their semester finals (Kincaid, 2009). The results of these rewards are higher attendance and higher graduation rates.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation occurs when the learning activity and the learning environment elicit motivation in the student. Many teachers have encountered unmotivated students. These students do not have any drive whatsoever to do well in school for a number of different reasons. Some students only neglect a few subjects that do not seem applicable to their personal future while others blow off school entirely as irrelevant to life at all. Many researchers have investigated this

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lack of motivation and what can be done to motivate more students. Intrinsic motivation or built in motivation that comes from within a student has longer lasting effects than extrinsic motivation (Strong, Silver, & Robinson, 1995).

Bartholomew (2007) presents a few detailed reasons for students to become unmotivated or disengaged. These “vary, from boredom and frustration to anger and depression” (p.594). He also claims that teachers do not realize students must already be motivated to learn when they walk into the classroom. Because teachers do not know this, they cannot generate the necessary environment to motivate students. People in general express interest in learning things that are relevant to their lives; if a student does not see school as relevant, interest will not appear. Bartholomew (2007) calls on teachers to give students choices as a motivational tactic.

The need for intrinsic motivation stems from the fact that students’ interest and enjoyment in what they learn is highly correlated to the outcomes of learning (Yair, 2000). Lyke (2006) also suggests instructors need to develop intrinsic motivation in students so they engage in their own learning. Because intrinsic motivation results in increased student interest and positive learning outcomes, educators need to identify the strategies that support an increase in intrinsic motivation. Guthrie (2006) lists instructional practices that increase motivation as: supporting student autonomy, providing content goals and using reinforcement to foster positive student-teacher relationships.

In contrast, another article stated that motivations couldn’t be forced into these categories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Steven Reiss a professor of psychology at Ohio State University says: “Individuals differ enormously in what makes them happy – for some competition, winning and wealth are the greatest sources of happiness, but for others, feeling

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competent or socializing may be more satisfying. The point is that you can't say some motivations, like money, are inherently inferior" (p. 9) and "There is no reason that money can't be an effective motivator, or that grades can't motivate students in school. It's all a matter of individual differences. Different people are motivated in different ways" (Grabmeier, 2005, p.13).

Renchler (1992) called out administrators to do their part to increase student motivation. He claimed that principals have the ability to set goals for the school as a whole that will motivate the unmotivated. He calls these principals to reward students when they achieve because not all students see good grades and learning for the sake of learning as a reward. According to Renchler (1992), expecting students to do well and rewarding them when they do achieve will increase motivation as well as performance. However, he never states how to reward the students and what constitutes performance worthy of a reward. The researcher feels it will be different for each student yet he makes it seem as though every student is the same.

Curriculum/Instruction

What happens in the classroom is the heart of keeping students in school according to Howard, (2002). Howard states that connecting to students through relevant curriculum helps to keep students coming back to school. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), "Schools that have found ways to educate all students well have done so by providing ongoing learning for teachers and staff" (p. 428). Those schools that have created a directive for a continued learning environment for their staff have also created a better learning environment for their students. Creating rigorous and relevant curriculum enhances

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teacher's efforts to connect to the students not only on an academic level but also in establishing culturally connected caring relationships with students. Using a culturally based curriculum has had good success in five Northwest Native American populations, including, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Alaska (Smiley, 2009). School staff that is trained, committed, and supported to provide high quality; responsive services will help keep at-risk youth in the educational mainstream (Decker, 2003).

Another component to the reasons why we should create curriculum that promotes teacher/students relationships is a student's lack of trust in adults. This lack of trust in adults makes young children suspicious of adults' motives and actions. This leads to life long mistrust in their teachers and concurrently bad teacher/student relationships (Sparks, 2002). By creating an atmosphere that encourages students to open up and express themselves with their teachers, students are able to communicate their problems or to seek safety in a crisis. Educating teachers to work with culturally diverse students, students with mental and physical challenges, and students who come from emotionally challenging backgrounds strengthens a teacher's ability to work with and develop curriculum that supports these challenges and creates lasting relationships (Smiley, 2009).

Social/Community Support

While no national data on the extent of truancy exists, it is known that in some cities unexcused absences can number in the thousands each day. In Pittsburgh, for example, each day approximately 3,500 students or 12 percent of the pupil population is absent and about 70 percent of these absences are unexcused. In Philadelphia, approximately 2,500 students a day are

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absent without an excuse. In Milwaukee, on any given school day, there are approximately 4,000 unexcused absences (Kincaid, 2009).

Louie Rodriguez (2003) says that combating truancy is one of the first ways that a community can reach out quickly to a disaffected young person and help families that may be struggling with a rebellious teenager. From a school perspective, more needs to be done to make students feel connected to school, Rodriguez said. It's easier in elementary school for students to feel connected, when one teacher provides all the academic content. In middle school and high school, however, it takes longer to form a connection with a teacher because students only see them for 45 to 50 minutes a day, he said. "We need to find ways we can connect every student with an adult," and "It doesn't cost any money to get to know students, it's about building relationships with the students" (Conchas, 2003, p.122) this sense of connection can make students feel successful.

Getting the community involved in all students' education can be the make or break point of a student's education. In small communities where student absenteeism is lower (Decker, 2003) the issue falls into the hands of everyone in the community. When a student fails to show up for class, people in some small towns keep an eye out for the student; should the student be spotted, the school is notified and action is taken. Such is the case at Job Corps Centers around the country; where if a student is absent from class, everyone on center is notified and someone goes looking for the student in question.

Truancy affects everyone in a family, school and community; not only is it a precursor to delinquent behavior, and costs millions of taxpayer's money; it is a solid cause for students to

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drop out of school. Once a student starts to skip school, the homework piles up and the student feels overwhelmed and altogether quits. History teaches to use a multitude of strategies and keep adjusting them to the circumstances in order to get and keep students interested in learning, and to keep them coming back to school each day. The research states that using a diverse set of strategies including, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, early and continued intervention programs, curriculum which is rigorous and relevant, and family, school and community support will decrease the number of truant and eventual dropout students. Only when all of these resources are used together, will this problem be controlled. The researcher will explore the effectiveness of these strategies from the 'dropout students' perspective in order to see if any of the strategies are truly effective.

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Action Research Proposal - Chapter Three

The Goal of the Action Research Project

The goal of this research project is to find out what behaviors attendance turnaround students exhibit that makes them successful. These are students who have dropped out of high school because of attendance issues, and have returned to school and were successful in obtaining their General Education Diploma (GED) or High School Diploma (HSD). From the research stated in this project it is known that attendance is a major factor in dropout prevention. While there are few studies on dropout students who have turned-around their attendance and gone back to graduate; it is the researchers goal to find out just what it is that makes this population of students succeed at regular attendance.

Keeping students in school long enough to graduate is a problem that is nationwide and one that everyone needs to be concerned about. There is a high school dropout epidemic in America. Each year, almost one-third of all public high school students- and nearly one-half of all blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans- fail to graduate from public high school with their class. Many of these students abandon school with less than two years to complete their high school education (Princiotta, & Reyna, 2009). But some do go back and finish. It is this population of students that the research is focused on. The researcher intends to find out what behaviors that these 'turnaround' students have that dropouts do not.

There are 122 Job Corp Centers around the nation and all are struggling with high dropout rates (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). The researcher will gather data from graduates getting insight from the students perspective on what keeps them coming back to school each

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day. Just as there is no one answer to dropout prevention the researcher believes that certain behaviors such as, family involvement, use of incentives and sanctions, student- staff collaboration, and relevant curriculum will be the major factors that keep these students in school long enough to graduate.

The researcher intends to use this gathered information to create a better learning environment at the research site. The researcher will find new ways to inspire, motivate and create an environment that is conducive to learning. It is the belief of the researcher that improvements can be made to make students want to continue their education. Improving student- staff relationships, increasing our motivational/incentive program, and creating a more relevant curriculum will be the focus of this research. The possibility exists that this information could be used at other Job Corps facilities. But as every Job Corps is unique, so are its situational offerings, and thus the results may not be transferable.

Data Gathering

In this study, the researcher will use the course of interviewing HSD/GED graduates and students who are within three months of graduating with their HSD/GED. The researcher will use a combination of face-to-face interviews, phone interviews and Internet based interviews. The researcher will give each subject a set of questions to answer verbally, and then release the interview to open discussion. Face-to-face interviews will be taped with the consent of the subject. All subjects will be given complete anonymity as data is gathered. Subjects in face-to-face interviews will be able to speak freely in the confines of the schools Principals office

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without interruption. All subjects will be at least 18-years-of-age, as parent consent is not available to the researcher for those under age.

Data will be assessed and analyzed for consistent themes or groupings pertaining to, and in some cases, not pertaining to, the asked questions. The data and results will be given to the school's principal to discuss making changes where needed.

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Chapter Four- Action Plan

The primary purpose of this research is to approach the dropout problem from a perspective that has not been much considered in past studies- that of the students themselves. This effort is designed to paint a more in-depth picture of what helped these former dropouts complete their education.

For this research project the researcher will ask graduates who have formerly dropped out of school and then returned; what factors kept them coming back to school each day long enough to graduate. Mary Reimer and Jay Smink compiled a working set of “15 Effective Strategies for Improving Attendance and Truancy Prevention” which included the following.

- Systemic Renewal
- School-Community Collaboration
- Safe Learning Environments
- Family Engagement
- Early Childhood Education
- Early Literacy Development
- Mentoring/Tutoring
- Service-learning
- Alternative Schooling
- After School Opportunities
- Professional Development
- Active Learning
- Educational Technology
- Individualized instruction
- Career and Technical Education

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These 15 strategies have been supported throughout the concurrent research prepared by this researcher. Reimer and Smink's strategies cover a broad spectrum of policy that is valuable in the attack on truancy and dropout prevention. These strategies are found throughout the researched literature and will be key points as the researcher looks for possible answers to this nationwide problem.

Possible Solutions

While researching the literature on truancy and dropout prevention the researcher found that by the time students are in high school some of these strategies will not have any positive effects (Wayman, 2002). But there is still time to implement many of the following strategies such as a school and community perspective, early interventions, basic core strategies, and making the most of instruction. These will all increase the likelihood of positive outcomes and can be a major deterrent to truancy and eventual dropping out of school.

Mentoring

The implementation of mentoring and tutoring can be effective in many different situations. Having successful business owners and other prominent professionals involved in a mentoring program can have lasting effects. But other programs such as in the Baltimore School District in Baltimore Maryland can also work. In this program the Superintendent unveiled a plan to combat truancy that included a public awareness campaign, a mentoring program for elementary school students and the hiring of up to 100 parents to become "attendance assistants" at schools plagued by high truancy rates (Simmons, 2008). Just the addition of more adults in the schools tutoring and mentoring dropped the truancy rates by 50% in its first year (Simmons).

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According to Ken Reid, a mentoring program is most effective if the schools operate as a team, implement whole school policies, have clear guidelines and procedures for dealing with non-attendeers, and have good reintegration strategies and are vigilant and flexible in their approach. He also states that the key to successful mentoring lies in developing a positive relationship between the student and mentor (Reid, 2000).

The researcher feels that having a mentoring program at the research site will have positive outcomes. Students here come from broken homes, unstructured and dysfunctional family lives, and poor socio-economic backgrounds. Most have had no one that they can turn to and really rely on. Giving these students positive, role models/mentors in which they can turn to in times of crisis or just when they need an impartial or objective opinion, could have a great impact on how they perceive education and what it can do for them.

Service Learning

Service learning is not volunteerism; community service, or community-based learning. Service learning, according to the Institute for Global Education and Service Learning (2008), is “made up of activities that connect serving the community with the learning already being done in a school, program or organization. Service learning provides a hands-on application of knowledge and skills to real life community needs” (p.2). Service learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activities change both the recipient and the service provider. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content. Service learning is unique in that it

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benefits the students, and the community (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004; Burnett et al., 2005). Students involved in a service-learning curriculum have opportunities to develop collaborative and empowering relationships with the community. Students accumulate the benefits of their involvement in service learning in areas such as curriculum enrichment, professional skill development, and personal growth.

In Boston, Massachusetts there is an educational initiative that is seeking to transform the educational experience for at-risk students. This program develops innovative collaborations between communities and school districts through small teams of committed staff. Students, staff and community members collaborate in finding service learning type jobs in which the student can, upon graduation become fully employed. The program has been running successfully for the past 17 years and is considered to be a model for the U.S. Department of Labor (Abramsen, 1993-2009). Programs like this keep students motivated about graduating and getting out into the workforce.

There is great potential for the implementation of a service-learning program at the research site. Students at the research site are not only pursuing their education, but are learning a trade as well. In this setting a service learning program would not only help students to make connections to the working community, but they would be getting imperative hands-on experience. These students need to see how a “normal” work place situation operates, and a service-learning program could be the venue that allows them to see what it will be like upon graduation. Instead of just throwing students out into the working world, a service learning

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program could help ease them into the workplace and give them the connections and confidence to succeed

Curriculum/Instruction

What happens in the classroom is at the heart of keeping students in school. School must be more engaging and relevant to tackle our record levels of truancy. Schools which use strategies that address the learning styles of students, increase the knowledge and skills of teachers, and harness the power of technology can increase learning and attendance (Reimer & Smink, 2005).

One way to help students stay in school is to create a curriculum that is not only rigorous but relevant to the students it serves. When students at an Ohio high school were surveyed, four out of five wanted better teachers and three out of four wanted smaller classes (Roby, 2004). Students also stated that the textbooks were out of date and that curriculum was hard to relate to. Students want to learn about what is meaningful to them. One study of four successful alternative school programs found that the following characteristics were shared within each program.

Personalization & individualized attention

- True advisory and advocacy structure
- Active engagement in authentic, real-world tasks about issues that are of interest to them
- Hands-on, project-based learning
- Integrated curriculum
- Student reflection and self assessment throughout all work
- Work connected to the students' lives, communities, and local businesses or industries

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- Authentic assessment
- College & career preparation
- Technology use integrated throughout

Each of these schools have been successful because of the hard work of educators who believe that these hard to reach children can learn and are capable of high quality work.

“Canned” curriculum programs, such as computer learning systems, are largely ineffective with these students since the focus is largely on content delivery and not on relationships with the students and the other characteristics listed above (Muir, 2006). Muir also states that successful programs have teachers who are highly qualified and who create curriculum that suit the needs of the students (Muir).

One of the programs that have been successful is the Central Park East Secondary School in New York. The curriculum allows for a highly individualized design in order to promote innovation in education. It offers a common core curriculum for all students in grades seven through ten that is organized around two major fields: mathematics/science for half of the school day and humanities (art, history, social studies, and literature) for the other half. Interrelationships between different subjects of study are integrated and communications skills are taught in all subjects by all staff. At the end of tenth grade, students enter the Senior Institute. Each student has a Graduation Committee. The committee prepares a personal program of study designed to prepare the student for graduation and the world of work.

Another program that has been successful is the Educational Video Center, which is also an alternative high school in New York City, whose curriculum revolves around documentary making. Through the process of documentary video production, EVC students learn valuable

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research, writing and reporting skills, enhancing their capacities for critical analysis and creative self-expression. EVC's unique methodology of media education brings together the powerful traditions of student-centered progressive education and independent community documentary making. This approach uses media and technology to engage all students in creative and rigorous inquiry-based projects on current issues of importance to them. Documentaries produced range in topic from domestic violence, to race relations, drug abuse and teen pregnancy, bearing witness to the problems and possibilities of life for today's urban teenagers. Using this multidisciplinary approach, teachers can integrate English, social studies, art, and technology into video projects as students develop their literacy, research, critical thinking, and civic engagement skills.

A plan at the research site that integrated the foundations of the trade curriculum and the education curriculum would foster more interest in students attaining their GED or HSD. At the present time students are very interested in obtaining their trade certification, but less so in their educational activities. Combining at least some of the course attributes would increase student motivation and thus reduce attendance problems. Students who are interested in the content of their curriculum are more likely to stay interested in school.

Summary

After reviewing many alternative school programs, the researchers think that they all have their merits, but she also thinks that the research site is very unique in its setting in comparison to the reviewed programs. The researcher thinks that its students would be better

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served if she could us a collaboration of different programs and “tweaked” them to fit the research sites unique situation.

The researcher thinks that getting a mentoring program started would be a feasible solution that would not be much of a financial burden to the school. She also thinks that starting with the staff as mentors could lead to more involvement with the community. Starting with on center staff and progressing to more involved community members could be beneficial to everyone involved, especially the students. Although this possible solution has merit, the researcher rejects it because the job site cannot afford to hire additional staff to administer the program.

The researcher is a little more skeptical about starting a service-learning program. She thinks that because the staff is already overwrought with duties that other staff would have to be hired to take over the responsibilities. There are a lot of things to consider when setting up a service learning program for example, transportation, setting up and scheduling the work based learning in the community, and ongoing and recurring interaction in the surrounding communities. The researcher thinks that this would be a wonderful program that would be very beneficial to the student’s motivation, but thinks that it may have to be a long term goal, something that the center could start looking into. Due to financial reasons the researcher rejects this solution.

Changing the curriculum is a project that just might be the most practical solution to keeping the students interested and motivated to stay in school. The researcher knows from experience, that if the students are interested in the curriculum, the battle is half won. The

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researcher already knows that the students love to go to their chosen trade and learn. It only seems logical that the trade instructors and the education instructors get together and combine some of the materials. The culmination of trade and education will not only help the trade instructors promote their program, but the education instructors will have less of a hard time trying to get students interested in finishing their education. Even though this may be the most practical solution the researcher rejects this solution due to time constraints and the cost of new curriculum.

All three of these plans can work here at the research site, but it will take a lot of effort and hard work to get them implemented. Time seems to be one of the biggest factors that will keep any of them from being successful. The research site does have a lot of dedicated staff that if given the tools, support and motivation could turn this proposal into a reality that would greatly benefit the students. However, none of the above solutions are feasible due to financial and time constraints.

Action Plan

This action research plan seeks to find what it is that keeps students in school by conducting interviews with the students themselves. The following organizational steps are required before the onset of the actual action of the research.

March 2010

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Manager Notification- The researcher obtained permission from her educational manager at the formulation of the research project. Manager was also asked about conducting interviews during the first two weeks of May in his office and the request was approved.

April 2010

Student Identification- Students aged 18-24 who have graduated or are with-in 2 months of graduating will be interviewed. A list will be formulated from the schools database. First names and ages will be the only identifiable information used.

Scheduling Interviews- Researcher will set up a schedule for interviewing based on time availability. Researcher will conduct interviews during the first two weeks of May.

May 2010

Student Contact- Students on the research site will be contacted by letter. Students who are off center will be contacted by e-mail, or a phone call.

Conduct Interviews- Students will be interviewed in the private setting of the principal's office. Information will be kept confidential.

May-June 2010

Compile and Process information- Researcher will compile and process interview information and report on findings.

Conclusion- It is the researchers hope that the information from conducting these interviews will find its way to the center director in hopes of making some badly needed changes to our center.

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Attendance has always been a challenge here at the research site and continues to be a cause for much discussion, but very little action. Hearing from the students may just be what is needed to spearhead some changes in our curriculum, our lack of service learning and our lack of work based learning. Students, just like adults need motivation and a reason to stay in school in order to evolve and be comfortable in their setting. Finding out what factors influence students to stay in school here at the research site could be a groundbreaking start to a better learning environment that could help motivate students to stay in school long enough to graduate.-

Action Research Project

Chapter Five - Results and Next Steps

The purpose of this action research was to investigate what resources are employed to help returning dropout students to stay in school long enough to graduate. The research question is "What do attendance turnaround students' at the research site do, and what resources are employed, that help make them successful?"

The researcher used the data collection methods of interviews and survey to determine what factors keep students at the research site long enough to become successful. The researcher conducted interviews with graduated and soon-to-be graduate students, and used surveys with current students and the teaching staff. The researcher gathered background information, current information about the conditions of the research site, and future plans of the participants. The focus of the research is on the conditions of the research site.

The first method of data collection was to telephone interview 13 students who had graduated and had moved out into the world. The second means of data collection was to interview 11 students who had graduated, but had not yet completed their trade training. This was completed in-person. The third means of data collection was to interview in-person nine students who were to graduate soon. The second method of data collection was to give surveys out to current students at the research site's educational program. Students were given the survey in person by the researcher.

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The third method of data collection was to give the six teaching staff, not including the researcher, a survey to fill out on their own time.

Background Demographics

The researcher started by conducting personal phone interviews with students who have graduated from the research site and earned either their High School Diploma or their General Education Diploma, and had finished their trade courses. This research group was called the Off-Site Graduates (OffSG). These students are no longer living at the research site. Of the 13 students interviewed six have entered the work force, six have gone on to advanced training, four are continuing their education in college, and one is looking for work.

Entered the work force	Six are working	Four of these six students are also in college
Went on to Advanced Training	Six went to AT	One hopes to go to college after Advanced Training
Unemployed	One is unemployed	

Of these participants four were female and nine were male with their average age of 21 years and 9 months.

The second group to be interviewed by the researcher were those students who had graduated with their High School Diploma or General Education Diploma, but had not either finished trade, or were waiting to get into Advanced Training. Of these 11 participants there

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were four females and seven males with an average age of 18 years and 9 months. This group was called by the researcher as the On-Site Graduates (OnSG).

The third group to be interviewed was those students who were within two months of graduation. Of the nine participants, there eight males and one female with an average age of 20 years and 2 months. This group was called the Soon-To-Graduate (STG).

In sum, 24 males and nine females were interviewed. The following chart shows the breakdown by group.

	OnSG	OffSG	STG
# of interviews	11	13	9
# of Females	4	4	1
# of Males	7	9	8

The research included 16 questions which were broken down into three parts:

- background and home life conditions (including reasons for dropping out),
- conditions at the research site, and
- future plans, with the focus of the research being on conditions at the research site.

The researcher found that 51% of the students come from Oregon, 42% come from Washington and 6% come from the Pacific Islands. Twenty-seven of the students live with their parents and six are living on their own. Upon arrival at the research site the average student had

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11.34 credits toward their HSD or GED. Some students started with no credits at all while others came in with 23 credits.

Number of High school credits upon arrival at Job Corps

Credits needed to graduate: Modified 22, Standard 24
Range: 0-23 credits
Average number of credits upon arrival at the research site: 11.35 credits

Of these participants 60% attained a High School Diploma and 42% attained a General Education Diploma, with one student attaining both a GED and a HSD.

Attainment of GED or HSD

	Number	Percent
Attained HSD	20	60.0%
Attained GED	14	42.4%

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Survey Results

The first question dealt with reasons these students dropped out of school. There were seven areas listed in the survey as reasons for these students dropping out of school:

- bored,
- family problems,
- motivation,
- too hard,
- not caring,
- drugs and
- attendance.

The survey results showed that 87.9% of the 33 participants that attendance was the primary reason they dropped out of school. They just didn't want to go to school. The next leading reason was Not Caring with 42.4% of the participants saying that there was no real emphasis put on getting an education. This is followed closely by the factor of motivation with 39.4% of the participants saying they had no drive to go to school. The researcher was surprised to see that only a 36.4% of the students listed drugs as a factor in why they dropped out of school. Thirteen students out of the 33 stated that they got too "far behind" in school, and knew they couldn't ever catch up with their class, because it would be too much work.

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Reasons for dropping out

Reason	Number	Percentage
Bored	7	21.2%
Family Problems	19	57.6%
Motivation	13	39.4%
Too Hard	11	33.3%
Not Caring	14	42.4%
Drugs	12	36.4%
Attendance	29	87.9%

When asked what the reason for coming back to school was, most participants stated that they could not get a decent job, and that they wanted to make a better future for themselves. One student said “I wanted to finish my education, and not be a loser” while another stated that he “wanted to make something of myself.” A few of the participants came into the program because they had nowhere else to go. Only one was actually forced by a parent.

Conditions of the Research Site (reasons for staying in school)

The researcher asked the participants the question “What motivated you to keep with the program?” and got a variety of answers from “I needed to step up and help out family” to “I want the respect of my Mom.” One student said she “wanted to be a role model for her nieces” so that they would not make the same mistakes as she did. Another participant said that it was “self-motivation” that kept him in the program and that he had learned this concept in rehab.

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The resounding voice that the researcher continued to hear was that these participants wanted to be successful not only in the eyes of their parents, but in their own self-concept. All of the participants wanted to be able to go out and get a decent job, one where they would be able to take care of themselves and a future family. One participant stated that they “wanted to prove to myself that I wasn’t dumb,” which was a resonating theme that was heard throughout the interviews by of all the participants. These young people want what the same things that everyone wants: a home, a car, a family and the means to take care of it all.

The next question that the researcher asked in relation to what kept the participants in school long enough to graduate was “Did you have a connection/relationship with one of your teachers or staff members that you could go to and talk about difficult personal problems? Someone you could confide in or with someone who would just listen to you?” With this question came a 72.2% of participants saying yes, that they did indeed have a positive connection with a staff member, and that it did help them to get “through all of this.” Only 15.1% of the students said No to this question, and 12.1% answered with “Sorta.” Students said that “Staff members helped with problems I didn’t know how to deal with” and that the “Teachers care about me a lot.” The researcher found that many of the participants did form relationships with their teachers, and that these bonds gave the students the confidence and security needed when a parent figure was not there to help. The participants said that having a teacher to go to was very helpful, especially since it was at least 25 miles to get to the next town, and they could not go home whenever they wanted and talk with their parents.

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Connection with staff- does it help?

	Number	Percent
Yes	24	72.72%
No	5	15.15%
Sorta	4	12.12%

When asked the question “Did you have the support of family members or friends?” the overwhelming answer was Yes with 84.8% of the participants saying that they were being supported by family and friends. Fifty-seven percent of the students said that both of their parents were supportive while five percent of the participants said that only their Mom supported them. Others included girlfriends and grandparents as being supportive. The researcher found that it was very clear that the participants depended on their parents for support, and that they would not have come to the research site if it had not been for this support. The participants stated that more than anything else it was their parents support that kept them coming to school.

Does Family support matter?

	Number of students out of 33/percent
Yes	28/84.84%
No	5/15.15%

The fourth question that the researcher asked in relation to the conditions at the research site was “Did your teachers give relevant and interesting lessons that motivated you to stay in school?” and the answer somewhat baffled the researcher, as 54.5% said Yes, but 42.2% said Sometimes with 3% saying No, that good lessons were not a motivating factor in keeping them in school. The researcher thought that giving students innovative and exciting lessons would help

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keep students coming to school each day. When talking with the participants the researcher heard many different answers to this questions i.e., “They were Ok but not what kept me in school” and “They could have been more interesting- but it didn’t matter, I just wanted to get through it all.” One participant said that it (the lessons) “Has nothing to do with it” that it all comes from wanting to finish, and that this comes from inside you.

Were the lessons relevant and interesting?

Yes	18/54.54%
No	1/3.03%
Sometimes	14/42.42%

When asked the question, “What do you think helps keep students in school long enough to graduate?” students said parent support and self-motivation were the two key factors that motivated students to stay in school long enough to be successful. One student stated that “You have to want it yourself- but you also need people to care about you,” and another participant said “I call it back up- people who care about you, makes it so you want to do good.” One young man stated that it was “parent support, but it really comes from inside” which is what the researcher heard many times during the interviews. The key message was that students need inner strength and parental support to have the courage to finish their schooling.

The last question that the researcher asked concerning the conditions of the research site was “Did you participate in any outside activities that motivated you to stay in school? i.e., basketball, green team, Student Government Association, recreation activities...?” and the results were a bit of a surprise. Out of 33 participants 66.6% said that being in extracurricular

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activities helped them to stay in school. The researcher had thought that in this area more of the participants would have said Yes, when in fact 33.3% said no, that extracurricular activities did not motivate them to stay in school. The participants that said Yes, said that it was very competitive in their old schools to be in sports and clubs, and that few made the teams. But here at the research site it was easy to join a club or to go to the gym and play in intramural sports. One participant said that being in the SGA could have only been a dream at her old school, be here she was able to find the courage to “put herself out there” and make one of her dreams a reality. Many of the participants said that being part of something keeps you coming back because you don’t want to let your friends down. One also stated that it was the presence of the teachers who headed up the extracurricular activities that kept many coming back. He stated that seeing teachers participate in extracurricular activities made them more accessible, but more “human.”

Do extra-curricular activities help you stay in school?

	Number	Percent
Yes	22	66.66%
No	11	33.33%

In summary the research found that the participants rely heavily on their parents for support and that even the most thoroughly planned out and exciting lessons, might not be enough to motivate students to stay in school. The researcher also found that although extracurricular activities were important, and connections with staff were important, it was ultimately the support of their parents that was the most important factor in keeping student in school. Self-

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motivation plays a key role in helping students to stay in school long enough to graduate, and that parent play a huge role in developing this characteristic.

Interviewee Participant Future Plans

The researcher asked the participants a couple of questions regarding their future plans to get a feeling for what type of expectations these students have for themselves. They were all asked “Will your HSD/GED lead you to continue you education/schooling, i.e. college, advanced training?” and “Do you expect your HSD/GED to help you get a job when you leave?” Of those interviewed 51.5% are heading to Advanced Training, 21.2% are headed to college, and 27.7% are going to try to get jobs without going on to further their education. The participants stated that they had gained a lot of maturity during their time at the research site and that the lessons learned will help them start their lives in a positive way. The students were aware that getting their HSD or GED will not ensure them getting a job, but will definitely increase their chances. Participants also stated that it was understood that a HSD or a GED would only get them low paying jobs and that it was the job skills learned in their trade courses that would be the factor to boost their income level.

Are you heading to Advanced Training or college?

		Number	Percent
Advanced Training	Yes	17	51.51%
College	Yes	7	21.21%
Work Force	Yes	9	27.27%

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Will your GED or HSD help you get a job?

	Number	Percent
Yes	26	78.78%
No	4	12.12%
Sorta	3	9.09%

Student Surveys

A total of 101 surveys were distributed to student's 16- 24-years-old. Some background questions were asked and the results are show below. The population included 70 males and 31 females, with 28.7% of the students already having attained a HSD or GED before arriving at the research site and the rest (86%) who are working towards this goal. Some of these students have a GED but are also working toward a HSD. This population had an average dropout age of 16½.

General student survey stats

	Males #	Percent		Females #	Percent
Total Number	70	69.30%		31	30.69%
Have HSD	14	20%		7	22.58%
Have GED	4	5.71%		4	12.90%
Working on GED	35	50%		12	38.70%
Working on HSD	23	32.85%		17	54.83%
# who didn't drop out	15	21.42%		9	29.03%
# working on both HSD and GED	5	7.14%		7	22.58%
Average age of dropout	16.74			16.5	

The surveys included five questions that incorporate the researcher's goal of finding out what motivates returning dropout students to finish their education. The rest of the survey questions were for background use. The first question the researcher asked was about class lessons, and how much they motivate students to stay in school. The results were about the same as with the

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interviewee group with the lessons only being “a little” bit of a reason for students to come to school each day. This comes as interesting from the researcher’s point of view, as she puts in hours of work putting together lessons that she thinks will be informative and interesting.

How much influence do daily lessons in class motivate you to keep coming to class each day?

None #	Percent	Very Little #	Percent	A Little #	Percent	Quite a Bit #	Percent	A Whole Lot #	Percent
2	1.98%	16	15.80%	37	36.63%	34	33.66%	12	11.88%

The second question asked was about self-motivation and what role it plays in keeping students in school. The results stated that 52% of the 101 student surveyed said that it plays “quite a bit” of a role in keeping students in school, with another 29% of those surveyed saying that it played a “whole lot” in keeping students in school. These results agree with those of the interviewee group which stated that most agreed that self-motivation was a key factor in keeping students in school.

How much does self-motivation play in keeping you in school?

None #	Percent	Very Little #	Percent	A Little #	Percent	Quite a Bit #	Percent	A Whole Lot #	Percent
1	.99%	2	1.98%	15	14.85%	53	52.47%	30	29.70%

The third question was much like that of the interviewee group, but the results were much different. Most of the interviewee group (72%) said that staff involvement helped influence them to stay in school, while the biggest percent in the survey group was only “a little.” The overall total for this was 80% which is very close to the interviewee group. This translates to a discovery

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that teachers who are involved with their students create bonds in extracurricular activities have a profound effect on students staying in school.

How much does staff involvement in your life and activities influence you to stay in school?

None #	Percent	Very Little #	Percent	A Little #	Percent	Quite a Bit #	Percent	A Whole Lot #	Percent
3	2.97%	18	17.82%	38	27.62%	29	28.71%	13	12.87%

Do sports and extracurricular activities keep student in school? According to the survey group and the interviewee group the answer is Yes, but not as much as the researcher had previously thought. For those students who would have gotten involved in these types of activities, whether or not they were in a large school setting or not, has no bearing, but for those students who would not have gotten involved in a large school setting, it has made more of an impact. Students who had previously stayed uninvolved in a large school setting, have blossomed in a small school setting, making the impact of extra-curricular activities more meaningful.

How much do extracurricular activities play in keeping you in school? (i.e., sports, leadership, trips, arts & crafts...)

None #	Percent	Very Little #	Percent	A Little #	Percent	Quite a Bit #	Percent	A Whole Lot #	Percent
13	12.87%	11	10.89%	31	30.69%	27	26.73%	19	18.81%

How much of a role do parents play in their students graduating from high school? The researcher found this most interesting .; She found that 61% of the survey group and 84% of the interviewee group said that having parental support was the most important factor in their ability

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to finish school. Students who have their parents support said that this support made them not want to fail, because they didn't want to disappoint their parents. This information could be used to inform parents about the important role they play in helping their children succeed. One student said "I really don't think my parents know how much they mean to me, because I really don't talk to them much- but I do want to make them proud of me" Another participant said "I don't think I could make it through this program if I couldn't talk to my Mom every night" Even though this student population is going through the turbulent teens and early 20's they still need their parents support.

How much does the support from your parents/family member's help you in staying focused on finishing your education?

None #	Percent	Very Little #	Percent	A Little #	Percent	Quite a Bit #	Percent	A Whole Lot #	Percent
3	2.97%	7	6.93%	11	10.89%	18	17.82%	62	61.38

How much support do you have from your parent/family members?

None #	Percent	Very Little #	Percent	A Little #	Percent	Quite a Bit #	Percent	A Whole Lot #	Percent
1/.99%	.99%	8/7.92%	7.92%	14/13.86%	13.86%	22/21.78%	21.78%	56/55.44%	55.44%

Future Plans

Survey participants were asked the question "Will you continue your education after you graduate?" and almost 80% of them said Yes. When compared to the interviewee group which had roughly 72% these figures seem to connect with students who have actually graduated and are continuing their education. Inspiring students to learn and building self- awareness and self-

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esteem are key factors in getting students to believe in themselves. Once they have confidence they are able to make decisions that will improve their lives and better their living situations.

Will you continue your education after you graduate?

	Number	Percent
Yes	80	79.20%
No	16	15.84%
Maybe	5	4.95%

Students want to succeed, and they want their parents to be proud of them, but after many years of failing in the traditional school setting, most give up. Once at the research site, students get a second chance to prove themselves and find that staff connections, the building of their self-esteem and parental support all combine into a successful program that allows for them to be successful.

Teacher Surveys

There are only seven teachers on staff at the research site which services roughly 100 to 130 students on a rotating basis. The researcher gave a survey to each of the staff members. When asked “Do you make an attempt to make personal connections with your students? Why or why not?” all six staff member replied yes. One stated that she “eliminates a lot of discipline issues by having positive relationships” and another said “I think it’s impossible not to make personal connections with a student; it’s also conducive to the learning experience.” All staff

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members stated that it was important to make connections in order to understand each students learning needs and to form a bond that will help with the learning process.

The second question asked “Do your lessons help motivate students to stay in school/ Do your lessons make students want to come to class every day? Why or Why not?” was not what the researcher expected. The researcher thought that the staff would say Yes, that it was exciting and innovative lessons that brought students to class each day, but in fact the teachers said “probably not” and “I don’t think the lessons motivate the students, but I think that my individual attention to their learning problems and my hints, prods, encouragement and overall help motivates them” however one teacher did say “I hope so, the goal is to motivate and inspire students to have a love for learning”. This relays the message to the researcher that the teachers try hard to make the lessons motivating, but focus on individualization as the key factor for motivation.

The third question asked was “Can students come to you with a personal problem and get advice? Why or why not?” and there was a resounding answer of Yes from all teachers. The teachers at the research site have an open door policy that allows students to come in during breaks, before and after school and even during lunch time to talk with the staff. This has created an atmosphere of trust and openness between the staff and the students. In a school where no parents are within 25 miles, teachers have to step up and be parent figures and they do so willingly. This step-in (surrogate) parent arrangement supports the fact that students want to be cared about and to have their parent’s approval.

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The forth question was about encouraging student to get involved in extra-curricular activities. Most of the staff are involved in extra-curricular activities with the students, and encourage all students to get involved in something that interests them. One staff member stated that “it may be what keeps them in school” and she is correct in this thinking as the survey showed that 77% of the students felt that extra-curricular activities helped motivate them to stay in school.

When the staff was asked “What factors do you think motivates students to finish their education?” there were a variety of answers. One teacher said “Early on success in the re-start of the education, plus the desire to further their life” Meaning that they have not had much success in their lives, and thus when they come to the research site it is imperative that they experience some type of success early on. Another staff member stated that it was “family/cultural values of education, determination and internal drive” that motivates student to finish their education. This correlates with the researchers data from the interviewee group and the survey group, that the key factors that help motivate students to finish their schooling were parental support and self-motivation.

Summary

The resources employed by the interviewee group were first and foremost parental support, second self-motivation followed by teacher connections and extracurricular activities. The resources employed by the survey group were very much the same as the interviewee group with about a 20% less percentage rate in the area of parental support. This could be due to the fact that these students have not yet graduated and thus those without parental support may not

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finish their education. The staff surveys support the findings of the researcher and include insight about the reason and thoughts behind a teacher's action.

All of this boils down to "What do attendance' turnaround students' at the research site do, and what resources are employed, that help make them successful?" the researcher has revealed that parental support and self-motivation are the key factors that can determine whether or not a student is going to finish their education. What can educators do with this information? They can make connections to their student's parents, and convey the importance for support of their child and they can teach character education in their classes that will promote self-worth and confidence. They can go to their school boards and ask for teen-parent classes, so that the next generation of students is being raised by parents who have the knowledge to support their children. In the researcher's class, the researcher will employ and promote a character education curriculum that will foster the value of education, the importance of self-worth, and the crucial significance of keeping the channel of communication open between parents and their children.

Suggestions for Further Study

The researcher suggests for further study to compare small scale alternative schools to that of larger inner city alternative schools. Another study might include the study on self-esteem and graduation rates. An interesting project would be to find out what the high school dropout rates were, after educating parents/teen-parents on the importance of parental support. The researcher would also like to find out how early in a students academic life does attendance become a problematic factor in graduation rates.

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Appendix A

Interview questions

Name & # _____

Date of Interview _____

Back ground-

Gender _____ Age _____ Place of residence _____

Living with parents _____ Living on own _____ How long _____

~# of HS credits before starting here _____ Working on/finished HSD or GED

How long has it been since you were in HS last? _____

Did you come here to get your GED or HSD? _____

Did you think it would be hard? _____

How long did you think it was going to take you? _____

Dropout

1. What was the main reason that caused you to drop out of school?

2. Did any of the following have anything to do with you dropping out of school?

Bored _____ Family problems _____ Lack of motivation _____ It was to hard _____

Just not caring about your education _____ Drugs _____ Attendance problems _____

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Sticking it out/Hanging in there

3. What factor made you decide to return to school?

4. What motivated you to keep with the program?

5. Did you have a connection/relationship with one of your teachers or staff members that you could go to and talk about difficult personal problems? Someone you could confide in or with someone who would just listen to you?

6. Did you have the support of family members or friends?

Who?

Present

7. Did your teachers give relevant and interesting lessons that motivated you to stay in school?

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8. Did you participate in any outside activities that motivated you to stay in school? i.e. basketball, green team, SGA, Recreation activities...

Future

9. What do you think helps keep students in school long enough to graduate?

10. Will your HSD/GED lead you to continue you education/schooling, i.e. college, advanced training?

11. Do you expect your HSD/GED to help you get a job when you leave?

Comments

WHAT DO ATTENDANCE TURNAROUND STUDENTS DO TO BECOME SUCCESSFUL?

Interviewee Statistics

Groups studied (Interviews)

On Site Graduates (OnSG)

Off Site Graduates (OffSG)

Soon to Graduate (STG)

Gender

Total # of Male interviewees 24- 72.7%

Total # of Females interviewees 9- 27.3%

	OnSG	OffSG	STG
# of interviews	11	13	9
# of Females	4	4	1
# of Males	7	9	8

Age

Average age of interviewee 20.42

Range 18-26

Age in years	How many in age group	
18	6	
18	6	
20	10	
21	2	
22	2	
23	3	

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24	3	
25	0	
26	1	

Place of residence

	# living in state and %
Oregon	17/51.5%
Washington	14/42.4%
Pacific Islands	2/6.06%

Students who live with parents

Living with parents	27
Not living with parents	6

Number of High school credits upon arrival at Job Corps

Credits needed to graduate: Modified 22, Standard 27
Range: 0-23
Average number of credits: 11.35

Length of time since being in high school

Range: 0 to 84 months
Average: 33.8 months

Attainment of GED or HSD

Attained HSD	20/60.0%
Attained GED	14/42.4%

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Student expected and actual time to finish program

Range	2-28 months
Expected time	7.75 months
Actual Time	13.4 months

Reasons for dropping out

	Number of students out of 33/ percent
Bored	7/21.2%
Family Problems	19/57.6%
Motivation	13/39.4%
Too Hard	11/33.3%
Not Caring	14/42.4%
Drugs	12/36.4%
Attendance	29/87.9%

Connection with staff- does it help?

	Number of students out of 33/percent
Yes	24/72.72%
No	5/15.15%
Sorta	4/12.12%

Does Family support matter?

	Number of students out of 33/percent
Yes	28/84.84%

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No	5/15.15%
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Were the lessons good?

Yes	18/54.54%
No	1/3.03%
Sometimes	14/42.42%

Do extra-curricular activities help you stay in school?

Yes	22/66.66%
No	11/33.33%

Are you heading to Advanced Training or college?

Advanced Training

Yes	17/51.51%
-----	-----------

College

Yes	7/21.21%
-----	----------

Work Force

Yes	9/27.27%
-----	----------

Will your GED or HSD help you get a job?

Yes	26/78.78%
No	4/12.12%
Sorta	3/9.09%

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Appendix B

Student Survey Stats

Age _____ Gender _____

Do you have your HSD _____, or GED _____? Are you working on your HSD _____, or GED _____?

How old were you when you quit school? _____

General student survey stats

	Males	Females
Total Number	70/69.30%	31/30.69%
Have HSD	14/20%	7/22.58%
Have GED	4/5.71%	4/12.90%
Working on GED	35/50%	12/38.70%
Working on HSD	23/32.85%	17/54.83%
# who didn't drop out	15/21.42%	9/29.03%
# working on both HSD and GED	5/7.14%	7/22.58%
Average age of dropout	16.74	16.5

Circle the best answer.

1) How much influence do daily lessons in class motivate you to keep coming to class each day?

None	Very Little	A Little	Quite a Bit	A Whole Lot
2/1.98%	16/15.80%	37/36.63%	34/33.66%	12/11.88%

2) How important is getting your HSD or GED to your future?

None	Very Little	A Little	Quite a Bit	A Whole Lot
5/4.95%	2/1.98%	1/.99%	13/12.87%	80/79.20%

3) How much does self-motivation play in keeping you in school?

None	Very Little	A Little	Quite a Bit	A Whole Lot

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11) Did the pay scale of this job influence you to continue your education?	Yes	No
	34/33.66%	63/62.37%
Maybe 1/.99%	No Answer 3/2.97%	
12) Will you continue your education after you graduate?	Yes	No
	80/79.20%	16/15.84%
Maybe 5/4.95%		
13) Will you join the military after graduating?	Yes	No
	12/11.88%	83/82.17%
Maybe 4/3.96%	No Answer 2/1.98%	
14) Will you go to college after graduating?	Yes	No
	59/58.41%	37/36.63%
Maybe 4/4.96%	No Answer 1/.99%	
15) Will you enter the work force (go get a job) after graduating?	Yes	No
	83/82.17	17/16.83%
Maybe 1/.99%		
16) Will you go to Advanced Training after graduating?	Yes	No
	41/40.59%	53/52.47%
Maybe 7/6.93%		