

A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE EFFECT OF ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION ON THE
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, ATTENDANCE, AND DISCIPLINE OF
HISPANIC STUDENTS

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Educational Leadership,
Policy, and Technology Studies
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2010

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine whether selected independent variables are good predictors of athletic participation among Mexican students. The selected independent variables were gender, GPA, attendance, discipline referrals, and success on the Georgia High School Graduation Test. The dependent variable was participation in athletics. The participants of this study were Mexican students in the 11th and 12th grade at Southeast Whitfield High School in Dalton, Georgia. The data were collected from the Whitfield County student information system, which is called Infinite Campus. Permission was obtained from students as well as their parents before the data were collected and analyzed for the purpose of this study.

The original hypothesis was that each one of the five independent variables would have a relationship with athletic participation that would make it an effective predictor. However, after the data were analyzed in SPSS using a logistic regression, only four of them were found to be significant. Of the five independent variables, gender, attendance, discipline referrals were found to be significant and, as a result, supported the hypothesis of the study.

DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this dissertation to my wife and children. Throughout the pursuit of my degree they have made many sacrifices to enable me to do all the travel and work necessary to meet the requirements of this program.

I especially want to dedicate this to my children: Serena, Noah, and AnnaMaria. It is my hope that through this accomplishment they will be inspired to become lifelong learners and to always understand the importance of education. I also hope that they never lose the belief that they have the ability to accomplish anything that they choose in life. In addition I hope that they understand that sacrifice is almost always necessary in the pursuit of goals and accomplishments.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

GHSA	Georgia High School Association
GPA	Grade Point Average
NCHSAA	North Carolina High School Athletic Association
NFHSA	National Federation of High Schools Association
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
SIMS	Student Information Management System
SASI	Student Administrative School Information

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my dissertation chairperson Dr. Rose Mary Newton for giving me the tools necessary to survive this process. You have demonstrated tremendous leadership and patience as I have maneuvered my way through this educational journey all the while encouraging and prodding me to achieve this goal that has been a lifelong process. Your guidance and leadership not only inspired me to continue but also made this journey enjoyable. I would like to acknowledge the other members of my committee, Dr. Dantzler, Dr. Dyer, Dr. Newman, and Dr. Tarter. It was your questions, differing points of view, and guidance that enabled me to conduct this study in a manner consistent with the high expectations of The University of Alabama. I also want to say a special thanks to Dr. Dantzler for his much needed guidance through the statistical portion of this study. I am convinced I could not have done this without your help. I would be remiss if I did not mention the late Dr. Harold Bishop. I had the privilege of taking several of his classes early in the pursuit of this degree and that experience motivated me to endure. I truly feel I am a better educator for having known him.

I would like to say a special thank you to the Hispanic families who allowed me to use the data concerning their children in this study. Without their cooperation this would not have been possible. In addition, I would like to thank all of my friends and family for their support and encouragement along the way.

Finally, I would like to say a very special thank you to my mother. Throughout my life she has always supported me in any thing I have attempted. She instilled in me the everlasting importance of an education and made many personal sacrifices along the way to enable me to

pursue the highest levels of instruction. I will be forever indebted to her for the firm guidance, love, and support that she has given me throughout my life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital part of a person's life. In many ways it defines who an individual is and what he or she can become. During a student's time in school there are many areas of interest available for him or her to pursue, and many choose to participate in athletics. One major area of concern that accompanies this participation is the negative stereotypes often associated with high school athletes. The purpose of this study is to provide information to determine whether gender, attendance, GPA, discipline referrals, and success on the Georgia High School Graduation Test are good predictors of whether or not a Mexican student participates in athletics.

Statement of the Problem

The Southeastern United States has seen a tremendous influx of Hispanic immigration over the last 2 decades. The availability of jobs and opportunities for a better quality of life are reasons for the increase in immigration. Hundreds of thousands of people have left their home to come here in search of the American Dream. This growth, however, caught many areas unprepared to deal with such an increase in population, and thus has created problems that require our attention. Primary among these is educating the Hispanic youth. There is an ongoing battle by school systems across the Southeast to keep these students in school and provide them with a quality education. A disturbing trend has evolved in our society, which is producing far too many high school dropouts. This is particularly problematic in the Hispanic community. The education community must find an avenue through which these students can be reached. There

has been a great deal of research carried out concerning participation in high school athletics and the effects that it has on the students' academic and social performance in the school setting. However, the majority of the research is older than 10 years, and such a study has never been conducted in the state of Georgia. The peach state, more specifically North Georgia, has an alarmingly high dropout rate and high immigrant population. Many different negative influences have been considered when looking at the problems that students face in school; however, more attention should be given to the positive variables that exist within the schools. One such variable is participation in athletics.

Significance of the Problem

Ultimately the goal of the education system is for every student to graduate from high school. If the education community can discover what motivates the students, significant gains can be made toward accomplishing that goal. This study is being conducted to try to determine whether there is a relationship between participation in athletics and Hispanic students staying in school, and whether athletes are more productive while they are there. The study may provide the education community with a better understanding of how to identify and reach these students at an earlier point in their education and take progressive steps to get them involved in areas that will motivate them to stay in school.

Study Purpose and Importance

This study focused on the belief that gender, academic success, a better rate of attendance, a lower incidence of discipline referrals, and success on the high school graduation test are good predictors of participation in athletics by Hispanic students. A comparative study

was conducted to determine whether the variables listed above are consistent with the students spending an increased amount of time participating in athletics. This study had the potential to generate findings that could be of significant importance to educators in the state of Georgia in their battle to decrease dropout rates among Hispanic students. The results of this study could provide much needed insight into the areas of why the target student group behaves the way they do and make bad decisions. By taking an in-depth look at the relationship between athletic participation and success in the aforementioned categories, educators may be able to identify one avenue through which these students who are “problem” kids can be reached.

As mentioned above, the purpose of this study was to take an in-depth look at data involving Hispanic students who participate in athletics and the relationship that participation has with other areas of their school experiences. The data that were examined was gender, GPA, attendance, discipline referrals, and whether or not the student passed the Georgia High School Graduation Test, which is required within the state to graduate. This information was used to determine whether there was consistent evidence to suggest a relationship between athletic participation and students staying in school and being productive while they are there. Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to gain information that will aid the education community in ensuring that the majority of students perform well academically, stay out of trouble, graduate from high school, and become productive citizens within our society.

Research Question

The information that resulted from the data collected within the framework of this study supported an examination of the following relationships:

1. Are gender, GPA, discipline referrals, school attendance, and success on the graduation test good predictors of participation in athletics?

Definition of Terms

The following information gives the operational definitions that were used throughout the course of this study.

Athletes: According to the GHSA these are the students who participate in one or more interscholastic sports within the school year.

Attendance record: According to the Whitfield County Board of Education Policy Manual these are the daily records that are kept on each student concerning their presence at school, or lack thereof.

College attendance: This aspect considers the enrollment of high school students into an institution of higher learning at the conclusion of their high school career.

Discipline referrals: According to the Whitfield County Board of Education Policy manual, these are the number of times that a student is formally written up and sent to the office for disciplinary reasons, which are placed on the student's permanent discipline record.

GHSA (Georgia High School Association): This is the governing body of high school athletics in the state of Georgia. Members of the association set forth the requirements for students to maintain the athletic eligibility.

Graduation rates: According to the Whitfield County Board of Education Policy Manual this rate is the percentage of students who successfully meet the requirements set forth by the state department of education and the county board of education for graduation within the allotted timeframe of 4 years.

GPA (Grade Point Average): According to the Whitfield County Board of Education Policy Manual, this measures the cumulative academic performance in all classes that a student has taken throughout his or her high school career. The numerical range of GPA is 0.00 to 4.00.

Hispanic: For the purpose of this study the research conducted focused on Hispanics from Mexico.

NCHSAA (North Carolina High School Athletic Association): The governing body of high school athletics in the state of North Carolina. Association members have conducted studies along the same lines as this study and will be referred to throughout the course of the proposal.

NFHS (National Federation of High School Athletics): This organization is an alliance composed of all of the states' athletic associations.

No Child Left behind Act: The federal act that places requirements on schools concerning the performance of students and teachers in order to avoid federally imposed sanctions.

Non-Athletes: According to GHSA, these are the students who do not participate in any interscholastic sports during the school year.

SIMS (Student Information Management System): According to the Macon County School Board Policy Manual, this is the computerized system utilized by the schools in North Carolina to keep all data concerning their students.

Infinite Campus: According to the Whitfield County Board of Education Policy Manual, this computerized system utilized by Whitfield County Schools in Georgia to manage the records and data of their students.

SASI: According to the Whitfield County School Board Policy Manual, this computerized student data system is used in their county to manage and catalog their student information.

Limitations

The limitations of the study were as follows:

1. The research was limited to the state of Georgia and thus the findings may not be generalizable to other geographical areas.
2. There were other variables present within the lives of the study participants that influenced student productivity in the school setting and student graduation rates.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature associated with the tremendous increase in the Hispanic population in our education system, in order to better understand what steps need to be taken by the education community to ensure that these students are being provided the same opportunities to be as successful as their peers. A comprehensive review of the literature was conducted to gain a better understanding of the problems that society and, specifically, the education community is facing with the Hispanic population. Furthermore, literature was reviewed to determine whether there is a correlation between participation in athletic activities and academic success for other population groups. The chapter will be organized to first provide information concerning the challenges that are prevalent in the Hispanic community concerning the children attaining an education. That information will be followed by data that exist concerning the effects of extracurricular athletic activities on other aspects of students' experiences during their school careers.

History of Hispanic Immigration to the United States

Hispanic immigrants, along with their descendants, occupy a distinctive place in the narrative of immigration. They come from different places, they settle in different places, and take widely dissimilar paths in their journey to becoming part of the United States. In this country, which is widely known for the diversity that defines it, there are literally millions of

people that are of Hispanic origins (Library of Congress, 2003). The unique thing about this group is that they are at once among the oldest and newest immigrants to our nation. Many of them were living in the southern and western region of our country long before our country existed. Moreover, the number of Hispanics continued to increase during the 20th century, and many continue arrive daily.

Hispanic immigration in the 20th century can be traced to three distinct periods. Each of these timeframes saw a tremendous increase in overall Hispanic population. The first major influx of Hispanic immigration began in the 1900s. This was due in large part to the fact that a Revolution was being fought in Mexico and a strong U.S. economy provided vastly improved economic opportunities for the hundreds of thousands of Mexicans who made the trek to the United States. Census figures show that in a 20-year span from 1910 to 1930 the total population of Hispanic immigrants tripled to 600,000. However, as is often the case with census counts, the actual number was in all probability far greater (Library of Congress, 2003). El Paso, Texas, was the main point of entry into the United States for these immigrants. Moving to the United States provided opportunities for Mexican immigrants that they had not previously had access to. It also allowed them to provide stability for their families and options for their children's and grandchildren's futures.

The 1940s were also a crucial time in the history of Hispanic immigration. United States involvement in the war took many men from their jobs to serve in the military. As a result, the industries needed every available U.S. worker which, in turn, led to a fraught situation for U.S. farmers. Low cost labor was not available and farmers were desperate so they turned to the government for help. In a joint 1942 venture, the U.S. and Mexican governments created the bracero program, which was designed to bring Mexican workers to the U.S. as contract laborers

for farmers. This program resulted in approximately 5 million Mexicans entering the U.S. to work and many stayed (Library of Congress, 2003). After the war, however, the U.S. did an about face and started deportation efforts against Mexicans. These expulsions lasted into the 1950s and resulted in more than 4 million Mexicans having to leave the country. Information from the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) reveals that the third great rush in Mexican immigration is occurring in the present. The decade of the 1990s saw more immigrants come to the United States from Mexico than all of the European countries combined. One major difference in these immigrants and the ones from earlier generations is that they are making this their permanent home. Historically, Hispanics entered the U.S. with dreams of one day returning home, but a higher percentage of this generation has elected to stay. By in large, Hispanic immigrants who come to the United States believe hard work and dedication will enable them to make a better life for themselves and that of their family (Cuevas De Caissie, 2010). Since the beginning of the 20th century, Hispanics have made their way to this country in search of employment, quality education, and a life of contentment. Their hopes and expectations do not differ from those of us who are native to this country. They hope to own a home and be able to provide for those who depend on them.

Conflicts and fears are prevalent concerning Hispanic immigration. Many feel that these immigrants will take employment from the citizens who live in the targeted areas (Cuevas De Caissie, 2010). Still others express concern that this uneducated population will put stress on our services and will be a burden to an already encumbered society. Communities with high immigrant populations are rife with fears due in large part to a lack of understanding of the conflicting cultures.

Cuevas De Caissie (2010) feels that the greatest obstacle facing our country on the issue of immigration is a lack of understanding. History teaches that anytime there is change, fear is almost certainly to accompany it. We fear what we do not understand, we fear that we will lose our status within our communities, and we fear increased rates of crime and violence.

Admittedly, these fears are valid but not entirely due to increased immigration. Hispanics, like all of our ancestors, have come to this country amidst high risk and personal sacrifice and they remain in this country under the same circumstances. Often their coming means that they have had to leave family members behind in their native land. In many instances they never return home to see loved ones left behind for fear of not being able to make their way back to the United States.

Contemporary Mexican, and from a broader perspective Hispanic immigration, is without precedent in our nation's history. The lessons gained from past immigration have very little relevance to the present situation. The current influx of Mexican immigrants differs from past upswings in immigration due mainly to a combination of six factors: contiguity, scale, illegality, regional concentration, persistence, and historical presence (Huntington, 2004). Hispanic population growth since the 1970s can be attributed mainly to immigration. In fact this is by far the largest source of growth for this population segment. As a result of this, the first generation of Hispanics for the moment continues to outnumber subsequent generations born in the U.S. However, this demographic equation is in the process of rapidly shifting.

Consequently, the effects on the nation are undergoing significant changes. Simply stated, the most noted changes are occurring in the labor force due to the large number of Hispanic immigrants seeking and finding employment (Surro & Passel, 2003). It must be noted that this shift will also have a very formidable impact in the area of education. For the

foreseeable future, schools will experience a significant influx of native born Hispanics. In a span of 20 years starting in 2000 and ending in 2020, the number of these second generation Hispanics attending schools will double and, even more significantly, the number entering the labor force is expected to triple. This translates into a quite staggering statistic that by 2020 one-fourth of our nation's work force will be the children or grandchildren of Hispanic immigrants.

The most recent information from the U.S. Census Bureau largely confirms that immigration growth in the United States is right at 50% Hispanic. Moreover, the largest single group of Hispanics coming into this country is Mexicans. Recent figures illustrate that Mexicans make up 40% of all Hispanics entering the country. Furthermore, the youth and high birth rates are aiding in the overall increase in size of the Hispanic population. Another interesting fact from the 2000 Census data shows that throughout the 1990s Hispanics were migrating throughout the nation and moving into neighborhoods that were more integrated.

No review of this topic would be complete without a discussion of illegal immigration. The 1,950 mile border that separates the United States from Mexico is the longest boundary in the world of its kind, which is to say that things are vastly different on the respective sides (Guiseppi, 1993). On the southern side of the boarder is a country that is steeped in dire poverty and to the north is a nation of where wealth and opportunities abound. For various reasons Mexico has never been able to establish a functioning and thriving economy for its citizens. As a result, many Mexicans have been lured to the North both legally and illegally.

Illegal immigration has long been a sore spot for citizens of the United States. Those concerned worry about the negative effect it could have on our country. The reality is that the problem is not going away. Statistics reveal that Mexicans have powerful motivation for coming to this country. In the 1980s, data showed that approximately half of the working population in

Mexico was either unemployed or underemployed (Guisepi, 1993). With such a bleak outlook Mexicans ran for the border in search of options. It should be noted that while not all of the estimated 2 million illegal aliens in the United States are not Mexican, approximately 55% of them are. As noted earlier, many concerns exist about what effects illegal immigration are having on our nation. Arguments exist on both sides. Employers insist that these people are only taking jobs that are low paying and not wanted by Americans. By keeping wages down on these jobs, the companies are able to increase their profit which, in turn, benefits the consumers from a price standpoint.

The effects of immigration both from a legal and illegal standpoint have been felt all across our nation. However, the most profound effects have been in the Southwest part of the country. The characteristics of both countries have blended to the point that this region has been referred to as a third country. It has made the use of the Spanish language more prevalent and led to a revitalization of Mexican culture in the region. In his 1993 article, Guisepi addressed the negative effects that result from illegal aliens being in the country. First and foremost is the financial strain that is placed on the public services which are provided to taxpayers by the states. The United States Supreme Court ruled in 1982 that children of illegal immigrants must be educated, and the cost of that education must be absorbed by the states. In addition, many other social services are available to them which can lead to the resources of these agencies being stretched very thin. Law enforcement also faces additional strain with the increase of drug smuggling and gang activity. The problem stems from the fact that people who are in the country illegally are benefitting from the same programs that citizens benefit from, while not paying taxes to help shoulder the burden of financing these services.

Illegal immigration has long been on the radar of our government's legislative body. Collectively they recognize that if this situation is allowed to go unchecked it could have very negative consequences on the future of this nation. Therefore, in 1986 in an endeavor to stem the tide of illegal immigrants entering the country, Congress passed a law that targeted employers who knowingly hired illegal aliens (Guisepi, 1993). It required them to pay fines and face other penalties if they were caught engaging in such practices. They did show compassion by granting amnesty to some illegal aliens and by providing aid to farmers who had relied heavily on immigrant workers to work in their fields.

The debate over immigration in our country will rage on much like that of abortion or same sex marriage because people feel so strongly one way or the other. What is apparent though is that schools will serve as the main stage for this potential clash of cultures. The need for bilingual education and a multicultural curriculum is evidence that schools must adapt and reinvent themselves to meet the needs of an ever changing clientele (Glazer, 2004).

Hispanic Culture

The United States is by far the most ethnically and culturally diverse country in the world. So much so that there is nothing heterogeneous about being an American. We come from all walks of life. However, it is all too common to have a lack of understanding when two different and distinct cultures are thrown together in a common geographical area (Nauert, 2008). This can lead to conflict and misunderstanding. In order to conduct an effective and unbiased study it is necessary to gain a better cultural understanding of the people who being evaluated.

Hispanic immigration into the United States has increased at a fever pitch over the last two decades particularly with immigrants from Mexico. Areas that were not accustomed to diversity or ready to handle the change suddenly had to deal with both. This made cultural understanding imperative. In Mexican culture, men take great pride in the fact that they are the head of and protectors of their families (Nauert, 2008). As a result, conflict can very easily arise if they feel one of their family is being wronged. This is a traditional characteristic of Mexican men and these attitudes are greatly influenced by their strong adherence to the Catholic faith and their unwavering belief in the importance of the family. Consequently, by embracing these traditions in their new home they can create an abundance of problems for themselves and their families. Mexican males have increased risk of incidence of violence, substance abuse, and depression. They are also very reluctant to seek help if these things do occur, which is a very dangerous dynamic when one is in a new land.

Customarily, the Hispanic family is a close-knit group and the most vital social unit within their culture. A common *familia* usually goes beyond the typical nuclear family that we are accustomed to in the United States (Clutter & Nieto, 1999). The Hispanic family unit is not confined to just parents and children; it also includes the extended family such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The structure of the family in most cases consists of the father being the unquestionable head of the house, and the mother being the homemaker. It is also seen as the moral responsibility of the family members to provide aid to their relatives if they are experiencing hardship due to any circumstances, including health and financial problems.

Family membership creates an unassailable bond among the different generations of relatives. Such a bond is accompanied by an analogous set of rights and responsibilities (Merrill & Miró, 1996). Relatives are very affectionate with each other, and they provide for each other

from a material standpoint as well as serve as one another's moral compass. Within the traditional Hispanic family, these virtues are strictly adhered to. Elder members of the family help to ensure their enforcement among the younger family members through such things as social demands and manipulations.

Despite the fact that many striking changes have occurred in Mexican society since 1940, it still holds true that the family remains the most imperative social institution. Indeed, during the 1980s when the economic crisis was at its worst, the role of the family was further enhanced when many people had to turn to their families in times of need. Moreover, a national opinion poll conducted by the Center for Educational Studies in 1982 confirmed the unparalleled importance of the family within this culture (Merrill & Miró, 1996). The findings revealed that the majority of those questioned acknowledged that the family gave them the utmost feelings of security and confidence. Members of this culture viewed their family as the indispensable support group which provided them with help and protection. Among immigrants, economic survival is often the result of several family members obtaining employment and pooling their resources. In fact, it is often necessary for the children of the family to obtain jobs in order to enable the family to remain in the United States.

Family ties are also very evident when one travels for extended periods of time. During such excursions it is common for those traveling to stay with their relatives or in some instances friends of their relatives. This custom certainly differs from American family dynamics. Further evidence of the importance of families in the Hispanic cultures exists in the grandiose nature of their family gatherings. The extended family and friends consistently gather to celebrate holidays, communions, baptisms, weddings, and graduations (Clutter & Nieto, 1999). No event is too small to spur a major family gathering. Hispanic families inculcate in their children the

importance of principle, respect for those in position of authority, and. Especially. for the elderly. It is also of the utmost importance to preserve the Spanish language, and as such families continue to communicate with Spanish within the home long after they have been in this country.

Religion is also an extremely important aspect of the Hispanic culture. In fact over 90% of this culture is Roman Catholic (Clutter & Nieto, 1999). The church plays a significant role in the daily lives of Hispanic families and it also weighs great on the affairs of the community. Hispanics also look to the church to provide spiritual meaning to their culture. The importance of religion in the Hispanic culture is evident within each community as the celebrations to honor their patron saint far exceed the importance placed on personal birthdays. Hispanics also celebrate most of the major holidays such as Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving.

One of the most negative aspects that has been attributed to the Hispanic culture, in particular with Mexicans, is gang membership. However, this is due in large part to stereotypes that have been created through the media, and movies. In reality, gang membership is not part of Hispanic culture at all (Hallcom, 1997). Hispanic youths who affiliate themselves with gangs do so because they are unhappy at home, not because they refuse to assimilate into the American ways. Often they are victims of abuse, or they are the children of addicts, or they are addicts themselves. In many cases they are born to young unwed mothers who show little interest in their children and are more concerned with male companionship. In some cases gang members were married and then divorced themselves at a very young age. Interestingly, the majority of gang members are not immigrants but rather born here in the United States. Being involved in a gang does not create an awareness of their culture or pride in their nationality, and by no means does it provide any opportunities for education; however, it does give recompense for disaffection. Gang membership provides a strong sense of family, which appeals to these young

Hispanics even though they have chosen to reject the very culture that is steeped in strong family values.

Culture plays an important role among any race or ethnic group. It is apparent from the research that Hispanics and particularly Mexicans hold their way of life very dear. As a result, they are determined to maintain their identity despite living in a different country. This may delay or even prevent assimilation, which leads to feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement both of which are detrimental to the education process (Hallcom, 1997). Such circumstances will only serve to create a difficult learning environment. The challenge is for teachers to discover ways to make Hispanic students feel that they are part of our country and culture without disrespecting the culture of them and their families.

Hispanic Dropouts

Our society as a whole is facing a real problem concerning the alarming frequency that students are choosing to end their education before its completion. On the surface, Hispanic students face the same risks as impoverished, disadvantaged, or otherwise handicapped student from any race or background. However, Hispanic students face an obstacle to staying in school that other races are not often burdened with. As a group, migrant students are more intensely at risk than the general population (Migrant Attrition Project, 1987). One variable that exists with these students is over-age grade placement, which often results in a large portion of Hispanic migrant students not being on grade level. A summary of data from the 1989 Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS) indicates that, among students who classified as migrant in Grades 9-12, only 50% were on grade level; disturbingly, 32% were 1 year below grade level, and an even more alarming stat revealed 18% were 20 or more years below grade level. Thus,

this study revealed that about half of all migrant students might reasonably be considered to be at risk of dropping out of school (Migrant Education Secondary Assistance Project, 1989). Poverty is another major factor that motivates Hispanics to leave school early. Older studies show that the average family income for Hispanics who were classified as migrants was only \$5500 (De Mers, 1988). With that type of income it is easy to see why another member of the family working and bringing in extra money could be vital to meeting the needs of the family. Such an addition could provide much needed requirements in addition to helping attain economic stability. Compounding the problem is that many migrant Hispanic youth start families of their own in their teenage years, which, more often than not, require that they drop out of school to support their young family. The inability to afford child care and the lack of adequate child care services within schools can keep such students from participating in programs designed to allow them to finish school.

More recent research provides data that shows that this problem has reached critical levels among the Latino population. The U.S. Census Bureau revealed that in 2000, 21.1% of all Hispanics ages 16-19 were categorized as high school drop outs. That was around 530,000 people at that time, disturbingly of that number an estimated 175,000 were never enrolled in U.S. schools. It must also be noted that one-third of Latinos ages 16-19 were foreign born, which means that a large number of them are coming from countries where secondary education completion rates are not nearly as high as that of the United States (Fry, 2003).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2001) paints an even bleaker picture. Their data reveal that 44.2% of Hispanic immigrants ages 16-24 did not have a high school diploma in 2000. The data also revealed that among first-generation Hispanics in the 16-24 age group, the dropout rate was 14.6%, but the dropout rate among second generation Hispanics in the same age

group the dropout rate was 15.9%. This is an alarming statistic because it provides evidence that assimilation into their adopted country is proving difficult, perhaps providing some insight into why the dropout rate is so high among this ethnic group. This information reveals that a problem exists which is quite grave and could have negative long-term effects on the education system in the United States (Fry, 2003). This information is also vital to our country as a whole and not just our educators, because only with improved educational attainment can the Hispanic population also enjoy an increase in economic success and, given continued growth of the Hispanic population in the United States, this group of people will be an integral part of our economy.

The percentage of Hispanics that are labeled as dropouts is most certainly alarming. However, it is important that clear distinctions are made when assessing this problem. The dropout rate is skewed due to the high percentage of Hispanics that never attend U.S. high schools. Within this category, 90% are labeled as dropouts. The average estimated dropout rate for all U.S.-educated Latino 16-to-19 year olds is about 15%. And a further distinction between the native and the foreign born has to be made looking at this population. The estimated dropout rate for native-born Hispanic 16-to-19 year olds is about 14% percent, while the dropout rate is about 18% for U.S.-educated immigrant youth (i.e., those who arrive young enough to do most of their schooling here; Fry, 2003). This information provides us with a realistic view of the dropout rate among Hispanics, and it also gives the educators within the United States valuable insight into what is going on among the various subgroups of Hispanics. It is important here to note that while the numbers are better when the Hispanics who never attended a U.S. school are removed from the equation, the dropout rate among Latinos is still higher than any other group in the United States.

The ability to speak the English language is an important indicator for the likelihood of students dropping out of high school among Latinos (Fry, 2003). Language barriers can make obtaining an education extremely difficult, and when examining the data there is evidence to suggest that there is a strong correlation between dropping out of high school and an inability to speak or understand the English language. Fortunately, English language proficiency seems to be strongly correlated with education in U. S. schools. Most Hispanic youth educated in U.S. schools have a firm grasp on English. The U.S.-educated Hispanic youth who do not speak English fluently are primarily born outside the United States and more than likely to have not been in U.S. schools since kindergarten. For immigrant Hispanic dropouts who have received at least some U.S. schooling, more than 55% speak English at least well. On the other hand, almost 80% of Hispanic immigrant dropouts who never attended U.S. schools do not speak English. These percentages provide information that can be beneficial when trying to deal with this problem. This also provides evidence those feelings of isolation, which can definitely be created by language barriers, often leads students to withdraw from that which is exploiting their weaknesses.

Fry (2003) states that there is little doubt that, based on the available information, we need to make a concerted effort to focus on the educational achievement and attainment of our nation's Hispanic youth. While the number of Hispanics dropping out of school has declined, they are the least educated group within the United States. It is apparent that there is an achievement gap between Hispanics and other groups when they enter school due to the language barrier and other characteristics of the family. Research indicates that this initial barrier is there throughout school and is extremely difficult to overcome (Schnieder, Martinez, & Owens, 2006).

Teachers and administrators can also be a roadblock to academic success for Hispanic students. The problem arises from their fundamental lack of understanding of the cultural differences that exist for these students. Such a situation causes Hispanic students to feel uneasy around their teachers and thus their academic performance suffers (Schnieder et al., 2006). They are also more likely to feel that their teachers have unfavorable opinions about them than other ethnic groups thus compounding the problem. In stark contrast, White students often feel at ease with their teacher, which translates into them meeting their educational goals and feeling what they are doing is meaningful for their future. Hispanic students report that when weak relational ties exist between them and their teachers it can greatly diminish their motivation or desire to be successful in their academic work leading to poor performance. This type of relationship between them and their teachers can cause students to feel that their teachers do not care about them and have low expectations for them. Moreover, it can cause students to feel isolated and result in their complete withdrawal from classroom activities.

Overall their dropout rate is significantly higher than that of other groups. Evidence suggests that when any student makes the decision to forego their high school education it diminishes the opportunities for them to be economically successful. Statistics show that this in turn can lead to increased poverty rates, increased involvement in illegal activities, and a lower quality of life (Schnieder, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). Students' dropping out of school also reflect negatively on the school district, and has a direct affect on whether or not schools attain Adequate Yearly Progress known as AYP under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act.

No Child Left Behind

School districts across the United States are subject to the No Child Left Behind Act, known as the NCLB. This law was passed in 2001 and was widely seen as a victory for American education. President Bush and members of congress sought to increase accountability for teachers and administrators and close achievement gaps between American students and those of other countries. According to Darling-Hammond (2007) in her article, *Evaluating 'No Child Left Behind,'* civil rights groups in particular were in favor of NCLB because of the importance that it placed on improving the quality of education for minority students, poverty stricken students, new English learners, and students who had learning disabilities. NCLB created these subgroups of students with the goal of closing the achievement gaps for these subgroups and setting benchmarks those schools must meet along the way in order to achieve adequate yearly progress. All of this was aimed at the ultimate goal of “100 percent proficiency” by the year 2014. These targets are tied to sanctions that can lead to the reconstitutions or closures of schools, as well as student transfer requirements (Darling-Hammond, 2007). NCLB has created a high stakes environment for schools and school systems by greatly increasing the accountability that educators are held to and sanctions for not meeting the benchmarks set forth in the law.

Hispanic students dropping out of high school at such a high rate is especially troubling for educators. On the one hand, high schools must reach benchmarks on the overall graduation rate in which all students are counted. In addition schools must also meet benchmarks in achievement and graduation for sub-groups. In many areas in the southeast and particularly north Georgia the Hispanic population is high enough to create a sub-group. In these situations schools can be in trouble for two indicators of AYP. On the flip side of that there are studies that exist

that provide evidence that low performing students are actually encouraged to dropout of school so that they will not have a negative impact on test scores. A study conducted by McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, Vasquez, and Heilig (2008) at Rice University and the University of Texas-Austin, respectively, found that the Texas's public school accountability system, the model for the No Child Left behind Act, directly contributes to lower graduation rates.

Unfortunately, a very high percentage of these low performing students are minorities, and they are being allowed and sometimes even encouraged to drop out of school. As I mentioned earlier, graduation rates both overall and within sub-groups are benchmarks by which AYP is measured, which would indicate that allowing or encouraging this to happen would have negative implications for schools. The Texas Education Agency (2000) carried out a study that revealed that the state's method of counting does not extend to include students who have dropped out for reasons such as teen pregnancy, incarceration, or those who have expressed their intent to take the GED sometime in the future. By doing this states create an official graduation rate that meets the NCLB benchmarks, but it also creates a huge discrepancy between the official graduation rate and the actual number of students that are being lost. There is also the very real possibility that other states will change the way that they measure graduation rates in order to meet the benchmarks.

The National Council of La Raza is a group dedicated to improving opportunities for Hispanics, and they believe that the NCLB will greatly enhance the quality of education, and the achievement levels of English Language learners or ELLs (Gonzalez, 2006). It is their opinion that before NCLB was passed, ELLs were given very little attention, and allowed to leave high school either as a dropout, or as a graduate who was ill-prepared to be successful. They equated this to an inequitable distribution of opportunities and resources, as well as insufficient training

of teachers to better prepare them to educate Hispanic students. The council also felt that the standardized tests that existed were not an accurate measure of ELLs. As a result of the attention that has been brought to this sub-group with the passage of NCLB, the council feels that if the act is properly supported, funded, and implemented, it sets high expectations for ELLs, and that there is an appropriate use of assessments to measure and improve their levels of achievement, increased accountability, and resources for school systems serving ELLs.

It is clear that both pros and cons exist for NCLB. Proponents praise the accountability that it provides for our educators. They also are very encouraged by the inclusion of sub-groups, which have previously been left out, as indicators for AYP. Opponents charge that it is grossly underfunded. In her article *Pros and Cons of the No Child Left behind Act*, Deborah White (2008) quotes Senator Ted Kennedy, who was a sponsor of NCLB and the Senate Education Committee Chair. Senator Kennedy summed up the problem by conveying that the tragedy is that these long overdue reforms are finally in place but the funds are not. According to White, there are also concerns about the test being culturally biased, and teachers being pressured to teach the test so that students would learn to do well on standardized tests, but at the time raising the question of whether any real learning had actually taken place that would prepare the student for the next level of education, or the work force. Good or bad, NCLB has a tremendous impact on the education landscape right now. Now more than ever it is vital for schools to prevent dropouts and increase achievement for minority students. While it could be argued that this should have been the case all along, it is now paramount for educators to understand what keeps these minority students, specifically Hispanics, in school and motivates them to achieve.

Assessment Concerns

There are many assumptions and opinions when it comes to the use of standardized tests as a form of assessment for students. Some feel those standardized tests are a good way to assess all students. Others feel the decisions and input by teachers are what determines whether a student is successful or not. Still others feel that these once-a-year decisions are the ones that carry the greatest weight concerning student achievement and assessment, and then there are those that put a great deal of faith in professional testing companies to create a sound and fair standardized assessment (Stiggins, 2004). According to the Georgia State Department of Education, there are currently 13 standardized tests given in high school each year. These are the state graduation test that are given in science, social studies, math, English, and writing. In addition to those, students are given state end-of-course tests in eight subjects: ninth-grade English, American Literature, Biology, Physical Science, Algebra I, Geometry, United States History, and Economics. With so much emphasis being placed on the results of these tests, one must expect the teacher to teach to the test. What effect does this have on Hispanic students?

The goal of all achievement tests is to raise the level of performance of students. They should be designed in such a way that they measure what is important for students to learn. The tests should also be written in such a way that is sensitive to the cultural diversity that exists in our country, and finally they should always be aligned with the curriculum standards that are in place for each state. This sadly is not often how standardized test are designed and therefore, many students perform poorly. This does not change the fact that results of standardized tests are the ruler by which student achievement will be measured and that in order for schools to make gains in student performance they must be held accountable by such measures as standardized tests (Davey, 1992).

The most common objection to high-stakes assessment lies in the argument that testing has a negative impact on minority students, at a much higher rate than that of their White counterparts. Many legislators and policymakers have voiced concern about the effects that high stakes testing will have on high school dropout rates. They fear that such testing might lead to an increase in retention and dropout rates. Therefore, officials have begun to call for research that focuses on documenting patterns of how high stakes testing combined with other policies are impacting high school graduation rates. Schools, districts, and states need to reallocate their resources and focus on paying attention to patterns of grade advancement and graduation rather than devoting their energy and efforts to analyzing test scores. Various states have undertaken studies that seek to track student successes by grade, race, and year in hopes of gaining an understanding of their clientele. Such studies might prove useful to other states as well (Clarke, Haney, & Madaus, 2000).

It could also prove beneficial to conduct research centered on the attrition patterns for various student groups in hopes of determining where they are going and why. Such knowledge could provide valuable insights into what resources would be effective in combating widespread attrition among ethnic groups (Clarke et al., 2000). It would also be beneficial to target specific times within the year when dropout rates seem to top out. Discovering what a student's motivation is in leaving would give teachers the opportunity to develop engaging activities to help offset the negative attitudes that lead to higher rates of attrition during specific segments of the year when the rate of students leaving is higher. Schools should also reevaluate what effect that these high stake assessments are having on their policies toward dropouts. Such evaluation could be helpful in identifying ways to encourage weaker students to remain in school and receive their diploma.

The problem is that most states where high stakes testing exist also have needs in their minority education programs, and these tests only serve to make the problem worse and widen the achievement gap between the minority student and their White peers. Overall, research has provided evidence that when minority students have to participate in high stakes standardized testing the probability of them dropping out of high school increase (Clarke et al., 2006; Reardon & Galindo, 2002). More states are implementing high school graduation tests as a condition to students receiving their diploma. This has, in turn, led to an increase of Hispanic students dropping out of school because they are unable to pass these high stakes test. This is particularly troubling because the fault often lies with the schools doing a poor job of preparing these at-risk students to pass the test. Surprisingly, at least half of the states that use graduation tests do not earmark resources to deal with students who are at risk for failing these tests. If this practice remains the norm it can be expected that widespread failures will occur and a large portion of students will not be able to receive their diplomas. Hispanic students fail graduation tests approximately twice as often as Anglo students (Fletcher, 2002).

Reardon and Galindo (2002) follow this study with evidence that confirms that minority students do suffer from the added hurdle of high stakes testing. Their study revealed that 27% of Hispanic students are required to pass a test to be promoted to the ninth grade compared to 14% of White students. Combine that with the fact that students who are required to take these tests have a greater likelihood of dropping out before the 10th grade and you have some substantial burdens for these students to overcome to earn their diploma.

Orfield and Wald (2001) conclude that high stakes tests that are attached to high school graduation requirements lead to an increase in the number of drop-outs, particularly for poor and minority students. Designs for Change and the Gaston Institute at the University of

Massachusetts have released evidence from a study that suggests that new high stakes testing policies are undoubtedly leading to significant increases in high school dropout in Chicago and Massachusetts. The chief concern of these findings is that minority students are extremely overrepresented among those who fail to graduate due to the inability to successfully navigate these high stakes tests.

The evidence of this perceived bias against minority groups has led to many public protests and outcries by leading minority political groups who argue that high stakes testing leads minority, in particular Hispanic, students to drop out at a more frequent rate (Guillen, 2001). The issue of discrimination seems to be most prevalent among the Hispanic population, due in large part to the language barriers that exist. When state-mandated tests require mastery of English language, Hispanic students may be of the opinion that there is no point in them even attempting the test due to their inability to master the language and therefore they may become discouraged before even taking the tests.

Standardized tests and accountability have become an integral part of our education system and, with so much emphasis placed on the tests, evidence suggest that Hispanic students often feel that they have no chance of success in the school system. McKenna (1999), in *Rethinking Schools*, acknowledged that there were problems with the sinister standardized tests; however, this acknowledgement was not intended to dismiss the fact that there are parent and community concerns about school accountability. These concerns are understood and agreed with. There is evidence to suggest that too many schools fail too many children, particularly those who are low-income students, students of color, and students who do not speak English as their first language. The broader community has the right and the responsibility to oversee how well schools perform, and how well these schools are meeting the needs of all their students.

Standardized assessments can be one valid method of insuring accountability, but as an education community we cannot afford to lose these Hispanic students who face many hurdles already in the name of accountability or good test scores.

According to Stiggins (2005), in recent years, society has come to understand that there are limitations in schools that merely sort and rank students. We have discovered that students who rank at the bottom and students who dropped out had a disconnect and failed to develop the basic foundations of reading, writing, and mathematical proficiencies that are needed in order to survive in, and contribute to an increasingly complex and ethnically diverse society. So today, society is demanding through accountability that educators bring the lower performing students up to standard and to keep kids in school. We call those expectations our “academic achievement standards.” Every state has them, and, as a matter of public policy, schools are to be held accountable for making sure that all students meet them.

However, Stiggins (2005) pointed out that despite this call for accountability, schools are still very much engaging in the practice of the sorting and ranking of students that has always gone on and the custom of ranking students at the end of their high school careers will continue for some time to come. This will change at some point due to the demand of society that the differences of students be celebrated, and that as educators we look at the amount learned and the well-roundedness of the child.

In our system students are volunteers, and while compulsory education laws keep them in school until they are 16, those laws do not require them to get a quality education during that time. Therefore, students are volunteers. Stiggins (2001) made it clear that the original intent of standardized tests was to hold teachers accountable and to place a certain amount of pressure on the teachers to perform at a high level. The problem is that this pressure has clearly been handed

down to the student who has served to make them feel a higher level of frustration. This has ultimately led to a higher dropout rate because students feel that the standards they are expected to meet are unattainable, and as a result give up.

Stiggins (2001) did not believe that there was a need to eliminate high stakes standardized tests, but that the test need to be structured in such a manner that enables students to feel that if they work hard and stay focused that they can achieve the standards that have been set by the state. This is especially true of minority students who are often encouraged to get a job to help with the expenses of their household. They are volunteering their attention and effort every day, and educators must strive to earn that effort and attention by making their education experience meaningful to them. If educators can create that engaging atmosphere whether through what is going on in the classroom or through the extracurricular activities that student participate in, the discipline referrals that are related to disengagement or a lack of interest in what is going on can be reduced significantly.

Standardized tests can turn into another means of disengagement for Hispanic students. Instead of trying to gain a better understanding of the issues and attempting to deal with them, many politicians have instead thrown their weight behind the most simplistic of reform measures: more standardized tests that are high stakes in their nature. This trend that is going on nationwide that is forcing more and more students to take these standardized tests, has led to students being detained, or even refused a high school diploma on the basis of a test score. When you consider different cultures and the language barriers that exist for Hispanic students, standardized testing can turn from a way to measure accountability, to a measure of discrimination (McKenna, 1999). Dating back to the IQ tests that were developed at the turn of the century, standardized tests have been used to label students, and all too often this labeling has

the most negative impact on minority children, causing them to feel even more isolated from the schools that they must try to assimilate into.

Achievement tests are designed to raise expectations. All students should be able to take advantage of the rewards and incentives provided by standardized tests, regardless of what the student's future plans are. Ideally, standardized test should be designed as an evaluation of the individualisms of people to include their religious beliefs and affiliations as well as their cultural ideals. Standardized tests should be written in such a way that they test what is most important for the student's future. This however, is not the case most of the time, due to the fact that in general state standards are not in line with testing programs. There are two staples within the education system: academic achievement is going to be measured by standardized tests, and if education is to improve then schools must be held to some measure of accountability (Davey, 1992).

Critics of high stakes testing argue that standardized tests expose prejudices, implying that they are tools of culture embedded in their educational or idealistic identities. Achievement tests are not used for students' predictive value, but rather they are often used for screening as a baseline for comparing data (Riordan & Jones, 1999). There is evidence to suggest that improvement in education must be tied to accountability, and that accountability is most effective when it is tied to standardized tests. It is also important that standards and expectations are high for Hispanic students as well. However, as the evidence suggest there needs to be a level of sensitivity to the hurdles and barriers that these students face.

Opponents of standardized tests believe cultural and linguistic differences are not taken into account when these tests are being developed (Bordeaux, 1995). Therefore, developing performance-based assessments that include real life situations, which demonstrate an

understanding for minority students' value systems and culture, could be extremely beneficial in improving the academic performance of students of ethnicity. Such an undertaking of improving and enhancing the cultural relevance of testing must include the input of all stakeholders so that people have a viable interest in seeing these children succeed. As minority students experience increased relevance in their education process, their performance is almost certain to improve. Such culturally relevant assessments can serve educators by supplying them with tools necessary to see language and culture as vital parts of the total curriculum. There is a need to keep them engaged so that they can have a successful and productive high school experience.

School Discipline Rates/Criminal Behavior among Hispanic Students

Evidence suggests that adolescent Hispanics face many obstacles as they attempt to attain a high school education. First, with Latinos there is a greater likelihood that they will be living in poverty. Secondly, Latino parents tend to have little or no education, and they often attend poor schools and are placed in lower level or vocational tracks. Unfortunately, as high school graduation rates rise, Latinos continue to receive fewer high school diplomas, as well as college degrees, than other Americans (Villarreal Sosa, 1997). Some in the Hispanic community have expressed concerns that our zero tolerance discipline policies in schools are actually aimed at pushing Hispanics out. This concern originates out of the policy toward gang involvement in many schools. Villarreal Sosa points out that in her experience with Hispanic youth she has found a high rate of poverty, more gang involvement, and significant racial tension, and she feels that many schools are ill-prepared and poorly equipped to deal with these issues as the Hispanic population continues to grow. Villarreal Sosa argues that while everyone wants safe schools the rate of discipline referrals are disproportionately higher for Hispanics due to gang involvement.

She is quick to point out that the majority of these gang incidents are minor infractions such as drawing on a notebook or wearing an article of clothing that administrators deem is the wrong color.

The Hispanic population was also found to be disproportionately higher, when it came to suspensions and expulsions being two times greater than that of their White counterparts (Rausch & Skiba, 2004). These findings mandate that school systems gain a better understanding of different cultures so that they can better serve the Hispanic population. Do these students not deserve the same quality of education as other groups? It is my hope that teachers would answer yes to this question, but there is evidence that suggests that our policies are failing these students. However, to get an accurate picture of discipline rates it is necessary to look at a bigger sampling of discipline referrals to determine the frequency and volume of discipline referrals among Hispanics that are not related to gang issues. Hispanics were suspended and expelled two times more often than their White counterparts. The majority of infractions that led to the suspensions and expulsions were listed as disruptive behavior and other.

These are both wide-ranging topics and it makes it very difficult to pinpoint specific behaviors and to rule gang activity in either category. Their study, however, was not able to produce any evidence that suggested the higher rate of discipline was due to the fact that Hispanic students were engaging in more highly disruptive behavior. One thing is certain, many negative academic and social risks are associated with being taken out of school for disciplinary reasons, including grade retention, dropping out, school disengagement, criminal activity, and incarceration (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1999). One particular word that stands out in that quote is disengagement. It would be beneficial for all parties involved to strive to understand what can be done to prevent disengagement from happening. The quality of education goes up

when students are engaged and, while this study is focusing on the high school level it is true at every level of education. If as the evidence has shown and the discipline referrals for Hispanics is disproportionate to that of other groups, in some cases it could be attributed to these students not feeling a connection to the education process. Research has shown that there are many negatives associated with students being suspended or expelled, chief among them poor academic performance. In as such it would behoove school systems to make every attempt to keep their Hispanic students engaged in the entire school experience, which could in turn lead to a decrease in discipline and an increase in academic performance. Research has shown that school related experiences such as truancy, low achievement, poor schools, and a lack of interest in what is going on at school can contribute to criminal behavior (Hawkins, Farrington, & Catalano, 1998).

Studies have provided evidence that there is a strong correlation between poor performance in the classroom and delinquency (Maguin & Loeber, 1996). Along those same lines a 1989 study by Farrington indicated that students who performed poorly in elementary school posed a greater risk for violent behavior later in life. Interestingly enough, that same study found that the relationship of early academic failure and criminal behavior is more prevalent among females than males.

The general belief that is supported by research is that when a student feels engaged or connected to his or her school it is an effective deterrent to criminal or delinquent behavior. This belief lends credence to the effectiveness of prevention programs designed specifically to address the risk factors that increase the odds of socially unacceptable behavior by minorities. Therefore, programs that promote desirable outcomes and model appropriate social standards greatly enhance the probability that the preferred results will be achieved (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996).

Moreover, such programs also serve to decrease the strength of those variables which tend to pull students in less than desirable directions and lead to delinquent behavior.

A 1994 study concluded that the need to feel part of what was going on in school was stronger among minority students due to the fact that it was viewed as a protective factor against violence (Williams, 1994). There is also research to suggest that the need to feel engaged in the education process becomes stronger as the student gets older and more prone to criminal or delinquent behavior. Students are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior when they are exposed to it at a younger age. When children are subjected to risk factors such as drug use or domestic abuse they exhibit substantially higher violent characteristics. However, prevention programs that target these students and attempt to increase their engagement have been successful in curbing the targeted behavior (Abbot, Catalano, Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Hill, & Maguin, 1995).

Other researchers have supported the notion that when students disengage from the school that they attend and appear to be isolated it can be a significant predictor for future negative behavior both within the school and in society (Elliott, 1994). This is particularly troublesome due to the consistent rise of homicide rates among our nation's adolescents. Students who disconnect from their peers at school often seek that bond from others who have a negative impact on their behavior. Violent crime is an epidemic in our nation and a significant percentage of these crimes are being carried out by our youth. Educators must be at the forefront to combat this disturbing trend and keep our minority students engaged and of the streets.

Further evidence to support the belief that school and extracurricular activities are important in the lives adolescents can be found in a study conducted by Farrington in 1989. The research that came out of this study suggested that youth who did not attend school on a regular

basis were more apt to commit acts of violence later in life; dropping out of school prior to the age of 15 also predicted later violence. While research does support the idea that frequent absences and quitting school may be indicators of a disconnect from school, it is also important to note that students may be missing or dropping out for other reasons as well (Boulerice, Janosz, Leblanc, & Tremblay, 1996).

In addition to truancy and dropping out, Maguin and colleagues (1995) found that students who had to change schools often in their adolescent years were more prone to criminal activity as an adult than those who had gone to one school. However, one cannot afford to be hasty in drawing conclusions from this because a transient student can also have other factors that predict violence. For example, Farrington's 1989 study concluded that 11-year-old students who attended schools where there was a high frequency of discipline referrals were often involved in more violent behavior than other students their age.

Unemployment for Dropouts

As mentioned earlier, our economy suffers when young men and women drop out of high school. For example, in Texas, between the 1985-1986 and 2001-2002 school years, the estimated cumulative costs as a result of public school dropouts were in excess of \$488 billion in lost income, lower revenues from taxes, the need for more job training, and the cost associated with welfare, unemployment, and payments to the criminal justice system (Johnson, 2001). This data illustrates how vital it is not just for school systems, but for our society as a whole to figure out how to keep these kids in school. On the surface, it appears that Hispanics have a much lower unemployment rate among their dropouts than that of other groups, and percentage wise that is the case. However, a closer examination reveals that year in and year out Hispanics represent

about 40% of all high school dropouts. The data also shows that Hispanics who drop out of high school have an unemployment rate of 7%. This equates to a much higher real number of those without jobs, and thus a larger strain on our economy.

As is this case when looking at statistics concerning Hispanics, it must be noted that there are variations between recently arrived Hispanic teens and second generation Hispanics. The Latino population is on the cusp of a major generational change. For the past several decades its growth was fueled mostly by immigration. Now, the extraordinary fertility rate of foreign-born Latinos living in the United States is fueling Hispanic population growth at a faster rate than the influx of new immigrants. The Hispanic population and labor force is increasingly native-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Of those who are recently arrived, only about 60% will ever receive a high school diploma or its equivalency, this is due to that fact that many of them join the labor force immediately upon arrival and work up to 38 hours per week. Available data provides us with the information that immigrant Hispanic high school dropouts earned \$10,000 per year (Fry, 2003). This is higher than the average White who drops out of high school will make, but still very much below the poverty line in the United States. Research does show that second generation and higher Hispanics are not working as much as those classified as recently arrived during their high school years. It appears that these young men and women are more likely to focus on the things that other school age groups are focusing on. However, the dropout rate and discipline rate among this group is still disproportionately high.

School Attendance/Truancy among Hispanic Students

Another problem that faces the Hispanic student is poor attendance rates. There are many different reasons for poor attendance, such as jobs, illness, and helping out with younger siblings,

but there is considerable evidence to show that poor attendance coincides with poor academic performance. On the other hand, high attendance creates a situation that is optimal for success. According to a study conducted by Richard Riley, the Secretary of Education, for the United States Department of Education in 1998, if a student is attending school every day and keeping pace with the rest of their classmates, he or she is less likely to become disengaged. However, if a student has a history of absences from school, evidence shows that he or she will lag behind academically, and this, in many cases, will lead to student dropping out of school. Therefore, there is cause for concern every time a student shows a pattern of poor attendance because he or she is exhibiting one of the characteristics for at risk students. The study conducted by Richard Riley (1998) was in response to the Hispanic dropout rate. The number of Hispanic and LEP students in the nation's schools continues to grow, and it is imperative that there is reliable data that will help educators and policy makers intervene strategically and appropriately on behalf of this population. A basic credential for future success in the workplace and in American society is the ability to expand one's knowledge base. Evidence from the study also suggest that as the workplace increases in technological sophistication, demanding workers with advanced problem-solving abilities, a 2- or 4-year degree and learning for a lifetime will become even more critical. Hispanic students who do graduate from high school appear to be in a good position to continue their education and acquire the skills they need to succeed in the labor market. Therefore, if students are allowed to continually be absent from school without any attempted intervention or appearance of caring from educators, they are being set up to fail in an increasingly competitive job market.

According to the study conducted by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency (2007), there are many reasons for truancy and many of them are unique. However, poor self-

esteem, feelings of academic failure, poor relationships with other students, and gang involvement have been given as reasons for truancy. Often students may be the victim of bullying, which may make them want to stay at home. There are also family factors that may lead to poor attendance by a student, such as domestic violence, homelessness, and a transient family lifestyle. Evidence from OJJDP supported the idea that elevated levels of family conflict and ineffective and inconsistent parental disciplinary practices may lead to inconsistent attendance patterns. Educators feel a high level of frustration when these situations exist due to the fact that it is very difficult and sometimes even impossible to help a child when these variables are in place. However, as the author points out, there are obstacles to good attendance that are created by the schools themselves. Among those obstacles are poor student-teacher relations, inappropriate academic placement, and ineffective or inconsistently applied attendance policies. Schools have to be sensitive to the needs of these students.

In the 1973 case *Lau v. Nichols*, the Supreme Court ruled that U.S. schools must provide Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students with an education that is equal to that of other students. However, Lucas, Henze, and Donato (1991) pointed out that high dropout rates, poor attendance rates, and a small percentage of Hispanics going on to college illustrate that the education system is doing a poor job of meeting the requirements the United States Supreme Court set forth in *Lau*. In looking at this information, there is evidence to support the idea that poor attendance is a key indicator that there is something amiss with that child and if there is not some kind of intervention on behalf of the school to get that student engaged in their education then a real possibility exists that the student will become a statistic.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem contains multiple components: physical, academic, social, and transpersonal. The physical component portion is the concrete such as our appearance and the environment that surrounds us. The academic portion is how well we are able to grasp concepts. The social portion is how well we are able to interact with the people around us, and the transpersonal portion is how well we relate to that which we do not know (Shore, 2005). A student's self-esteem has a truly unbelievable impact on practically every phase of his or her life. It affects how students engage in activities and how they will be able to deal with adversity in his or her life, and on his or her ability to interact effectively with their peers. In addition, self-esteem can have a marked effect on academic performance. If a student has low self-esteem it can cause him or her to lose his or her desire to learn, or to strive for success in and out of the classroom. Positive self-esteem, on the other hand, is one of the building blocks of school success; it provides a firm foundation for learning.

There is the belief that if students feel good about themselves and have a positive self-esteem that this translates into greater academic achievement. However, Weissbourd (1995) disagreed with that notion and felt that such a concentration on self-esteem would lead to less educated adults, who would not be prepared to be productive citizens. Weissbourd felt that students would lack the ability of old-fashioned hard work and determination. Self-esteem is important but because there is no scientific study that provides concrete evidence as to when self-esteem develops in life, it is safe to assume that the family unit plays an important role in the development of it. Therefore, educators cannot be expected to take sole responsibility for the development or lack thereof self-esteem.

Hispanic students are more likely than White adolescents to conform to their families' religious and political beliefs. They are also more inclined to assume the same occupation and lifestyle of their parents (Black & DeBlassie, 1991). Spirituality, the dignity of each individual, and respect for authority figures, is valued throughout Hispanic culture. Stereotyped sex roles are prevalent among many Hispanics: the male is perceived as dominant and strong, whereas the female is perceived as nurturing and self-sacrificing. Hispanic male adolescents tend to display more independence at an earlier age than the male adolescents of the general U.S. population. However, some researchers have found that Hispanic high school students often exhibit lower levels of self-esteem than their White counterparts.

Educators need to be aware that there may be some self-image and self-esteem problems for Hispanic American students that may be the result of rejection by their own ethnicity due to their attempts to conform and assimilate with the larger White American culture that is prevalent in high schools. To address these problems, educators need to plan interventions that acknowledge and celebrate cultural diversity when teaching and counseling Hispanic youth (Griggs & Dunn, 1996). Caring behavior is demonstrated to Hispanic students by having the same high expectations and nurturing spirit for them as is expressed for White Anglo students. This will help students reach their potential, and achieve success. In addition, the student needs to hear positive feedback about his/her potential through consistent reminders whenever the student is falling behind or performing poorly academically. Teachers have to relay to students that their goals are attainable with hard work, but most importantly, students must have the understanding that the teacher believes in their ability to succeed. Cultivating Hispanic students' self-esteem is viewed as caring behavior that all teachers are capable of providing.

As educators, the task before us is clear but it cannot be done alone. It has to begin with the stakeholders within the Hispanic community. It is apparent that if Hispanic youth have low self-esteem, then as teachers we need to be there to encourage, motivate, and mentor to these students. Also programs need to be implemented that are designed to deal with their personal as well as educational needs (Rodriguez, 2002). There need to be programs in place that will provide college preparation courses for these students. This will help raise self-esteem and provide a means through which Hispanic students can feel confident about their ability to pursue education beyond high school. Programs are needed that will get these students involved in school and raise the value of education in their parents' eyes. The more the parents are involved, the more determined the students will be to be successful.

The remarkable swell in the Hispanic population indicates that a need exists for social scientists to focus their efforts on this rapidly growing segment of our society in order to construct a foundation for understanding what the needs of this faction are and how we can better meet them (Dinh, Roosa, & Lopez, 2002). The problem behavior proneness for Hispanic youth must be examined to determine what characteristics are consistent with such behavior and how these can be addressed. Such understanding can lead to breakthroughs which can provide us with tools to combat such negative behavior and provide a better outlook for the future of these young people. Increasing self-esteem may be another important factor in the relationship between acculturation and problem behavior proneness.

The stress that comes with attempting to assimilate within a new culture combined with their status as an ethnic minority may lead many Hispanic students to question their personal value and ability to compete effectively within the larger society (Gil & Vega, 1996; Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994). Evidence from previous studies has shown that there is a negative relationship

between the stress that is felt as a result of their attempting to assimilate into the American culture and self-esteem among Hispanic youth. Juvenile and parental acculturation-related stressors and acculturation levels were strongly connected with lower levels of family solidity, increased problems between children and their parents concerning assimilation-based problems, low self-esteem among Hispanic teenagers, and the perception of negative opinions of them by their teachers.

According to Gonzalez and Padilla (1997), personal characteristics of a student, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and personal beliefs directly affect the motivation level of students. Students who have higher self-efficacy and better self-esteem are more confident in their ability to be successful in school and less likely to be vulnerable to outside stressors that can lead to poor academic performance or failure. It should also be noted that studies have been conducted that make obvious the importance of the student's environment equally at home and in school. The results show that both can have a direct impact on the overall academic performance of the student. The importance of parental involvement in education cannot be overstated, as well as the need for support. Such variables can have a significant influence on a student's motivation to further their education. Moreover, support from their peers and teachers are vital to a student's ability to sustain their grades and aim for loftier educational goals. However, the absence of such encouragement from a student's support system can have an adverse effect in the other areas of their educational experience. By and large, students who are more involved in their school community generally have higher grades and more social opportunities.

A 1997 study conducted by House revealed that one's own self-concept about their academic ability had a tremendous effect on their academic achievement. There were numerous important findings revealed in this study. First, House found that academic background and

one's belief in their own abilities were noteworthy predictors of early school withdrawal. Second, and not surprisingly, dropping out of school had negative consequences as it related to one's financial aspirations and social goals. Third, the study made clear that minorities saw school differently in relation to future success than did their Caucasian counterparts. The results of House's study lend support for the effectiveness of one's academic experiences and other variables as predictors of pubescent students' school withdrawal. House also notes that there is the possibility of other factors having an effect on academic achievement, such as, completion of homework, a positive and productive relationship interaction with the teachers, and participation in extracurricular activities.

Self-esteem and its importance was the subject of a study conducted by Wiggins (1978, 1987). The author believed that when it comes to achievement in school, the necessity of self-esteem cannot be overstated. Students with a positive self-image do a better job of handling responsibility, have a more positive outlook on life, and are proud of their efforts. On the flip side of that, students who view themselves negatively, or have a low self-esteem are more likely to be influenced by others, have trouble accepting responsibility for their own actions, and shy away from difficult task. Wiggins's research supported the notion that self-esteem was the only factor that could be directly associated with academic achievement.

Duckworth and Seligman (2005) noted that positive self-esteem might well be the golden path to success in academics. Their findings revealed that having a positive self-image was more than twice as likely to have a positive effect on a student's academic performance as their own intellectual ability. Duckworth and Seligman also noted that when there was a lack of desired results, the knee-jerk reaction of society was to lay the blame at the feet of the teacher, the curriculum or the class size. When, in reality, it would be more accurate if a student's lack of

achievement was blamed on one's lack of self-discipline. When describing one's image of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-concept, they are often used interchangeably and have the same meaning. Regardless of how one defines each of these terms, and whether or not one believes them to be interchangeable we can be certain that all three support self-awareness and self-image.

There have been several studies carried out concerning the effect that involvement in extracurricular activities had on self-image. One such study was conducted by Marsh (1992a). Many areas were studied that were believed to be associated with extracurricular activities; however, he found that among the lower socioeconomic groups that the social inequality was the most predominant. Marsh's study provided information that supported the belief that involvement in athletics or other extracurricular activities encouraged students to identify with and take more pride in the school that they attended. The same study also revealed that when an individual participated in a team sport, it had a more profound effect on their classroom success than participation in an individual sport did. Along those same lines, the results of Marsh's study strengthened the belief that participation in extracurricular activities that were school related had a greater impact on one's self-esteem than participation in activities that were not tied to the school.

From a strictly academic standpoint, Marsh and Yeung (1997) also found that there is research to suggest that a significant relationship exists between the number of hours per week that a student reads and their self-perception concerning writing ability. Other findings from that study suggested that students in general have a more positive self-perception when they take part in volunteer activities. The study revealed a positive, but weak, association with academic self-concept. However, no concrete evidence was revealed to suggest any consistency in the

relationship between students participating in specific activities and academic self-concept.

House (1997) felt that it would be necessary to carry out further studies in order to determine whether these were significant findings and generalizations.

Researchers have discovered that there are other consequences that are related to or associated with a general loss or lack of self-esteem in younger girls, but paramount among these are a noticeable decline in actual academic achievement. Research has provided evidence that adolescent girls are more likely to suffer from stress-related complications such as depression or attempted suicide than boys their age. Further investigation into this matter reveals that much of the stress and negative feelings that these young girls have is directly related to their own perception about their bodies and physical appearance (Debold, 1995). A negative image of one's own body as well disorders associated with it occur much more frequently in girls than it does in boys. This pattern holds true across ethnic lines as well (Orenstein, 1994). The fact that there are many different variables to consider make it difficult to pinpoint specific causes for these problems that are more prevalent among females, it is clear however that the various stereotypes that are present in our society make it very difficult for girls to have a healthy outlook about themselves (Smutny, 1995).

Educators must understand that when they are dealing with students who are preadolescent, girls are faced with the daunting task of attempting to reconcile the knowledge of equality and justice and the demands for compliance placed on them at home and in school. In an effort to help these young ladies of all races deal with this internal conflict, Backes (1994) suggested that teachers be at the forefront of the movement to ensure the girls are provided with the same quality of extracurricular activities as are boys.

Academic Performance

Many educators are of the opinion that athletics has a negative effect on the academic performance of its participants. However, according to Silliker and Quirk (1997), athletic participation by high school students does not endanger their academic performance, and may enhance it. Parents and school personnel tend to blame and restrict involvement in athletics if a student is having academic difficulty. Evidence suggests that peer tutoring and training in study-skills may be more effective responses to academic difficulties. Their 1997 study consisted of 123 soccer players from five rural western New York schools. While their findings did suggest a positive correlation between athletic participation and academic performance, they felt that the researcher needed to be conducted on a larger scale to validate their results and provide more conclusive findings.

The state of North Carolina conducted a 3-year study that ended in the academic year 1995-1996. The reports that were collected covered 285,805 students across the state. According to the report released by the NCHSAA, the surprise was not that the athletes did better than the non-athletes, due to the amount of literature that makes that assertion, the surprise was how much better the athletes did than their non-athlete counterparts. GPA was used in the 3-year study as an instrument for measuring and comparing academic performance. Over the course of the study, the mean GPA for student-athletes was 2.86 compared to 1.96 for non-athletes. The range of GPA for the athletes over the 3 years was 2.83 to 2.91. The range of GPA for non-athletes was 1.84 to 2.03 (NCHSAA, 1997).

In 1999, the University of Colorado conducted a study for the National Federation of State High School Associations of close to 22,000 students in the state of Colorado, which indicated that the athletes involved in the study had a significantly higher GPA than the students

who did not participate in high school athletics. That same study indicated that success in the classroom and on the fields and courts of competition was synonymous, citing that the athletic teams in the 16 schools that made up the district had won a combined 39 state championships (NFHS, 2003).

The NFHS partnered in various studies all across the United States to determine whether a pattern could be discovered. A study in New Mexico found that the students who participated in extracurricular activities had a mean GPA of 2.80 compared to a 2.00 for non-participants. Similar studies were carried out in Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Texas. In each study, those who took part in athletics outperformed those who did not take part in mean GPAs. Therefore, the study provided evidence to support the belief of the NFHS, that participation in athletics promotes better performance in academics (NFHS, 2003).

The various studies that have been conducted in the past 10 years show a pattern of athletes achieving higher marks in academic performance. The results certainly do suggest that the educational performance of athletes is better than that of non-athletes. This was also the case when studies were carried out along both racial and gender lines. According to Ryska and Vestal (2004), the results of their study indicates that there is evidence to support the assessment that sport motivation has a positive, meaningful impact on the academic attitudes of the student athletes. The same study also revealed that female athletes perceive themselves as being more capable of succeeding academically than do female non-athletes. The academic achievement is apparent along gender lines and ethnic sub-groups as well.

Effects of Attendance

Research has shown that a majority of students understand that attending class is an important factor in their academic success. However, this does not mean that the potential to unnecessarily miss class is not there because about two-thirds indicated that they would miss more classes if they could get the needed information from their peers or teachers (Sleigh & Ritzer, 2001). Students have reported missing class for many different reasons. More times than not they choose not to attend because they feel disengaged with the class or they feel the need to fulfill other obligations, and oftentimes because they are physically ill. Although many of these situations are beyond our control, as educators we must realize that we can control how we structure our classrooms and the encouragement that we give our students to become involved in the school. These factors that we can control are the ones that we must focus on and put our resources and energy into in order to make sure that we are fulfilling our responsibilities to the students that we are charged with educating. Sleigh and Ritzer also point out that in teaching, as in parenting, we should look in the mirror and examine our own behavior. We may be unintentionally displaying the very behavior that we are trying to break our students from by being tardy to class, failing to be prepared, and displaying a lack of interest for what else is going on in the school community.

Romer (1993) was of the opinion that there is a direct positive correlation between attendance and academic performance. Simply put, when students attend class on a consistent basis their academic performance is better. In Romer's study, which was carried out over the course of one semester, 159 students were interviewed. The results of the study found that when students only missed 5% of school days or less, they were more likely to earn an A or a B. Participation in an after-school program was found to have a positive effect on students. In a

2003 study, Jacobson found that students who were attending an after-school program in New York City had performed better academically and had a better attendance rate than those who did not attend the program.

Romer (1993) discovered that there was a positive correlation between a student's attendance and his or her performance on the reading assessment in the eighth grade (Table 1).

Table 1

Student Attendance and Reading Scores

Attendance	Passing
Below 80%	18%
80-85%	22%
85-90%	38%
90-95%	48%
95-100%	58%

The research undoubtedly gives credibility to the belief that consistent attendance and higher academic achievement appear to be directly correlated. Habitual and relentless class attendance requires one to have self-discipline. It also helps to create stronger relationships with faculty members, and demands that a student be proficient in time management and organization.

Research has shown that 92% of students surveyed revealed that attendance was important to academic success. However, in that same survey, the students stated they would be absent from class more if they felt it would not affect their academic achievement (Sleigh & Ritzer, 2001).

Biegel's (2000) study further supported the belief that there is a direct relationship between attendance and academic achievement. Students who attend class inevitably perform better in school and maximize their chances for success down the road. The same study also found that there was a shocking disparity regarding the extent to which students of different

races and ethnicities attended class, particularly at the high school level. It is likely that requirements that were the product of the various institutions were responsible for finding that athletes had lower rates of absenteeism and higher academic achievement during their playing seasons than out of season.

Biegel (2000) argued that many times students experience family situations that are beyond their control that contribute to their absenteeism. He also felt that the support provided by the family unit is imperative to the academic success of the student. In many cases, students are holding down jobs to help supplement the family's income, which can also prove to be an obstacle to consistent attendance. Work can curb a student's attendance because of feelings of fatigue or the need for additional finances. In addition to work and family issues, it is not an uncommon occurrence for students to have poor attendance in classes that they do not like or are not engaged in. He also found that a student's attendance was tied directly to the distance of the students' commute to and from school, and still other students miss class because they struggle academically with that subject area. Furthermore, it was argued that in most cases the students who have poor attendance are the ones who struggle academically and would benefit the greatest from regular attendance. Beigel feels that this is what leads to the teacher having to provide extra attention to the students who miss and as a result the rest of the class suffers. Beigel suggests that school districts and individual schools take an objective look at their attendance policies. The purpose of this review should be to determine whether the existing policy is consistently enforced, and if it involves reaching out to parents, regular communication when a student is absent, assignment of teacher mentors to problem students, and the use of law enforcement as an effective deterrent and solution to attendance problems.

Findings from the National Center for Education Statistics (1995) discovered that during the fall semester of their senior year, participants reported a higher attendance rate than their nonparticipating classmates. Half of them had no unexcused absences from school during the entire semester and half had never skipped a single class, compared with one-third and two-fifths of nonparticipants, respectively.

The analysis of attendance data that was available for review did reveal that there is a difference in the number of days missed annually by athletes when compared to non-athletes. The average number of days missed each year per student in all groups was significantly lower for the group consisting of athletes than that of the non-athlete group (Whitley, 1999). According to the data, athletes averaged missing 6.06 days less than the non-athlete group during the school year.

Understanding Student Discipline/Violence

Understanding school violence and discipline issues and the effect that those variables have on the education process and what groups are at risk for such behavior is vital to giving students the opportunity to be successful. There is valuable research available concerning the comparison of athletes and non-athletes from the standpoint of discipline referrals. There have been studies carried out to determine whether a difference exists between the two groups. According to a study conducted in North Carolina, there was a significantly lower percentage of athletes getting into trouble than non-athletes. The mean average referral rate for the athlete group was 30.51% as compared to the mean average referral rate of 40.29% for the non-athlete group. This means that, on average in the state of North Carolina, 9.8% more of the non-athlete populations in the reporting schools had incidents of discipline than the athlete population

(Whitley, 1999). Another study conducted by the NFHS (2001) found that the percentage of discipline referrals by the participating schools was lower for the students who were part of athletic teams than the non-athlete group; the rate of referrals for the athletes was at 33.3%, while the percentage of referrals for non-athletes was 41.8%. These two studies provided remarkably consistent results, which speak to the validity of the belief on the positive effects of athletic participation.

There is also evidence to suggest that participation in athletics leads to decreased incidences of drug use in the school. Naylor, Gardner, and Zaichkowsky (2001) reported in their study that athletes are less likely to use illicit drugs than the non-athletes who were part of the study. Findings from the study suggested that there was evidence that participation in athletics motivated the students to lead a healthier lifestyle, thus cutting down on incidents of discipline due to the use of illicit drugs. Along those same lines, a 1997 study concluded that non-athletes were significantly more likely to smoke cigarettes and use other drugs than the athletes who took part in the study. On the other hand, athletes were more likely to consume alcohol than the non-athletes, which suggest that coaches need to do a better job educating their players about the negative effects of alcohol (Winnail, Valois, Dowda, McKeown, Saunders, & Pate, 1997).

Another aspect of discipline in schools concerns violent behavior. In a 2004 study, delinquent behaviors involving athletes and non-athletes were measured. The behaviors were violent action, cocaine use, marijuana use, drinking while driving, trouble in school, and trouble with police (Rhea & Lantz, 2004). In each category, the non-athletes reported a higher rate of incidents than did the athletes. This served to provide evidence that athletic participation leads to less violent aggressive behavior outside of athletic competition, as had been reported in earlier studies. The authors of the study concluded that the self-esteem and self-confidence that is often

gained through athletic participation might play a role in less aggressive, delinquent, and violent behaviors in rural youth. The authors also warned of the dangers of perpetuating stereotypes when conducting such studies without taking other variables into account.

As the fears of school violence increase, a student's education can be extensively altered. The opportunity for a successful education is put in serious jeopardy when students, faculty, and the community fear both going to school and remaining after school to put in extra time teaching or learning (Mulhern, Dibble, & Berkan, 1994). The prevailing perception of school violence and major issues of delinquency and discipline, by in large have the ability to physically and psychologically harm individuals; preventing them from maximizing their potential from a physical, academic and social aspect (Furlong, Morrison, & Clontz, 1993).

While it would seem that the causes of violence are beyond the influence of schools, a violent occurrence that takes place at school can initiate enlightening questions about what steps the school might have taken to prevent the incident from happening. When things like this happen questions that arise demand the schools to take a critical look at their policies. Does the school have a proactive or reactive policy on weapons and aggressive behavior? Were students made aware of the policy and its consequences, and is the policy enforced on a consistent basis? How are behaviors such as this dealt with through the climate of the school and the expectations that are mandated by the student population as well as the staff? What attempts have been made particularly by the counseling staff and teachers to demonstrate and model nonviolent conflict resolution? Is there appropriate student supervision at all times? Is there a plan in place that includes training for teachers on how to quickly spot and diffuse such situations before they can escalate out of control? Was gang influence involved in the incident (Curcio & First, 1993)?

Researchers have identified several chief causes for the increase in the incidence violent behavior within schools. These causes are often so entwined with each other that attempting to tackle one can often cause you to ignore the others and risk complete failure and lose the child. When students are faced with issues such as poverty, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, racism, readily available access to weapons, and the shortcoming of their parents, in addition to all of the normal challenges that face young people, it can become unbearable and lead to violence (National Association of the Educators of Young Children 1993). Therefore, the challenge to schools becomes one of finding outlets for students in which they can escape the burdens of their day to day lives and find successes. A growing body of research supports the need to find avenues of success for students. Finding suggest that youth who feel supported, and accepted within the school setting are more likely to report individual feelings of happiness and well-being, superior levels of dedication, and better performance in school (Miller, Brehm, & Whitehouse, 1998).

Studies show that the earlier boys are subjected to delinquent behavior the more likely they are to develop a pattern of criminal activity. Family involvement and bonding can lessen the severity of the behavior but early intervention is key to changing the behavior. Moreover, when young people have a positive self esteem they are less likely to engage in negative, disruptive behaviors at school and more likely to engage in accommodating, helpful, and socially acceptable actions (O'Donnell, Hawkins, & Abbott, 1995; Smith, Lizotte, Thornberry, & Krohen, 1996).

On the other hand, youth who are disconnected or disengaged from family, classmates, and societal institutions, including schools, are at an increased risk for an assortment of unconstructive social and behavioral outcomes, including participation in serious rebellious

activities (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998). Studies of risk factors suggest that students, who have a strong possibility of being involved in violent behaviors such as school shootings, possess a sense of alienation from family and peers and a lack of engagement in school. The available information points to these factors as key predictors of violence potential (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998).

In every community, today's schools serve a various array of students or, as some educators refer to them, customers. These students possess wide-ranging abilities and many different sources of motivation for learning. Some thrive academically and contribute enthusiastically to class and extracurricular activities. Others have a more difficult time achieving at a high level academically. They are disengaged with the school community, and therefore do not take part in any activities. In addition, large numbers of students who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities and emotional and behavior disorders have difficulty learning and adhering to rules and thus disrupt the educational experiences of their classmates (Benson, Scales, Leffert, & Roehlkepartain, 1999).

The first step in school violence prevention is performing a methodical evaluation to answer these and other germane questions. One way to approach such an appraisal thoroughly is to examine how the programs' policies and processes within the district, including the individual classes and school buildings, promote the peaceful interaction of individuals and groups (Somers-Hill & Hill, 1994).

Dropout/Graduation Rates

According to Alspaugh (1998), a study concerning the problem of students dropping out of high school revealed that there was evidence to suggest that participation in extracurricular

activities can be an effective deterrent to students dropping out of high school. Based on the information provided over the 3-year period, the percentage of students who dropped out of school was significantly lower for athletes than for non-athletes. The mean dropout percentage for the athletes was less than 1% (.7%), while the mean dropout percentage for the non-athletes was just under 9%. The information did reveal that the percentage of dropouts among athletes did increase by .39% during the 3-year study and over that same amount of time the dropout rate of non-athletes declined by .1%. However, the overall percentage remained significantly lower for the athlete group.

Based on the information concerning dropout rates, the graduation rate of athletes would be higher than that of non-athletes. Whitley (1999) found that the mean graduation rate of athletes was 4.9% higher than the mean graduation rate for the group of students who did not participate in athletics. His study also revealed that the graduation rate for both groups declined over the 3 years that he conducted his study. However, as was the case with dropout rates, the graduation rate of the athletes significantly exceeded the graduation rate of the non-athletes. The NFHS (2003) reported that the graduation rate of athletes was 99.4 % compared to 93.5% for non-athletes. A 2001 NFHS study also revealed the dropout statistics comparing the two groups. There was a dramatic difference in the dropout rate between athletes and non-athletes; the average dropout percentage for athletes was a mere 0.6%, while the subsequent percentage for non-athletes was much higher at 10.32%. These studies were conducted in the state of North Carolina, and the finding of each study was consistent with the other.

College Attendance

A 1998 report published by the Institute for Higher Education Policy reviewed the benefits that individuals received as college graduates. These benefits included but were not limited to higher levels of saving, augmented personal/professional mobility, a better quality of life for their children, superior responsibility in consumer decision making, and more time to pursue hobbies and other leisure activities (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). Further evidence exists to bolster the importance of college attendance in a report published by the Carnegie Foundation. The study suggested that non-economic benefits of individuals with a higher education include the propensity for postsecondary students to possess a more open-minded view of the world, to be more refined, have a more rational approach to solving problems, and to be more consistent and less authoritarian. These individuals are also more likely to pass these benefits on to subsequent generations (Rowley & Hurtado, 2002).

In addition, college attendance has been shown to make people less prejudice and more in touch with international affairs and elevating their social standing all the while increasing financial and employment security for those who earn bachelor's degrees. Various studies have revealed a positive relationship between higher education and enhanced cultural and family values. According to Cohn and Geske (1992), there is the penchant for more highly educated women to set aside more time to spend with their children; more importantly these women tend to make wise use of this time by doing things with their children to better prepare them for the future. The same report found that, for the most part, college graduates seem to be more optimistic about their past and have a brighter outlook concerning their future possibilities.

Attending college is more of a difficult proposition for Hispanics due to the barriers that many face as migrants. The U.S. Department of Education classifies people as migrant when

they, as workers, along with their children have to move for the purposes of obtaining cyclic or temporary work in agriculture or fishing (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). In addition to the frequent moves that migrant students face, they also must deal with the additional barriers of poverty, language, and differences within the culture, which only increase the burdens that are the result of their transient status. Moving from place to place is a tremendous obstacle to academic success. It makes it difficult to attend school on a regular basis, to master the objectives at one's grade level, to accumulate enough credits to stay on track to pass from one grade to the next, and to meet the various other graduation requirements. Moving from place to place also makes it difficult to participate in athletics or other activities that present opportunities to socialize with peers and gain a sense of belonging. Mobility also makes it more difficult for adults to provide the amount of support that young people often need in order to be adequately prepared for college life (Johnson, Levy, Morales, Morse, & Prokop, 1986) and meet the residency requirements to qualify for in-state tuition at most colleges.

Immigrant students represent an ever-changing and ever-increasing proportion of the school-age population, principally those enrolled at the secondary school level. For students at this level, the difficult transitions that face any adolescence combined with the added burden and challenge of learning to communicate their thoughts effectively develop their own personality, and gain an understanding of academic concepts in a language they are still in the learning phase of can be overpowering (Spenser & Dornbusch, 1990). The lack of ability to effectively communicate thoughts, ideas, and emotions confidently can result in misunderstanding, disappointment, irritation, and even hostility. In addition, immigrant students are faced with the task of successfully balancing the beliefs and values of their native culture that are prevalent at

home with the beliefs of their adopted culture, which is the one that they must deal with at school.

Koehler (1995) discussed the value of coaches in their ability to help student athletes understand the importance of academics and finding the right college. Many athletes expect to play collegiate and professional sports; therefore, coaches must keep them focused on the reality that very few of them will ever achieve this level of competition. The competitiveness of athletic scholarships makes it more probable that they will attend college on academic prowess. Athletes are more likely to have educational goals that extend beyond high school, and athletes more often feel that they can be successful at the college level as both a student and an athlete than do non-athletes (Ryska & Vestal, 2004). Extracurricular activities can also prove to be beneficial to students as they try to get accepted into college. The NFHS (2003) reported that one of the major factors colleges looked for in their applicants was participation in extracurricular activities. Looking beyond college, students who participated in extracurricular activities were found to be more likely to succeed in their careers after college.

Extracurricular Activities

Everson and Milsap (2005) provide strong and compelling evidence from SAT data, that participation in extracurricular activities provides students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities, and even those who otherwise have a less than illustrious academic achievements in high school, with a noticeable and meaningful gain in their standardized test scores. It is very often difficult to provide interventions that are effective in providing help to disadvantaged students. However, participation in extracurricular activities at the high school level appears to accomplish just that.

Marsh and Klietman (2002) discovered that athletic participation was more beneficial to students from low socioeconomic groups than traditional educational programs when it came to motivating them to be successful in the classroom and on standardized tests. Involvement in extracurricular activities had as much or more impact on these students as it did their more advantaged peers. Although, as Marsh and Klietman point out, this research cannot provide definite proof that the positive correlation between participation in extracurricular activities and SAT scores is nothing more than coincidence, the information gathered from the large subgroups of students and the integrity with which the study was carried out certainly indicates that participation has a meaningful impact in the area of academic achievement.

Finn (2002) found in his study that while it is the responsibility of teachers to teach the curriculum, it is imperative that they should promote and encourage the child to be well-rounded, which includes one's psychological, social, and physical development. Finn also expressed the belief that students feeling disengaged with or a lack of ownership in the school is one of the main reasons that students make the decision to drop out of high school. It is Finn's belief that participation in extracurricular school activities leads to a sense of belonging and pride in one's school. He also believed that a feeling of engagement or ownership has a direct effect on a student's ability to build a positive self-image, which can result in more success in the classroom.

Academic success can be greatly enhanced when a student feels a connection to the school that they attend. This feeling of belonging can enhance an at-risk child's chances of staying in school when they otherwise may have opted to drop out and join the workforce. Finn (2002) felt that one way to effectively achieve such a connection was participation in extracurricular activities, especially for students who are not as gifted in the area of intellect. In

addition, he also felt that his research provided evidence that participation in such activities had a greater impact on student achievement than did their study habits.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (1998), almost every high school throughout the nation offers various types of extracurricular activity. These include but are not limited to things such as music, drama, academic clubs, and athletics. These activities provide students with opportunities to learn the values of teamwork, commitment to a cause that is bigger than one's self, individual accountability and group responsibility, physical strength and stamina, the opportunity to compete, and an awareness of diversity and the importance of community. The lessons learned while participating in extracurricular activities provide an avenue to reinforce and draw similarities to the lessons learned in the classroom. This happens when students are offered the opportunity to apply academic skills that have been acquired in the classroom to real-world situations, and as such provide part of a well-rounded education that should be the ultimate goal of each and every school district throughout the United States. Indicators that participation in these activities leads to success are consistent attendance, improved academic achievement, and students expressing a desire to continue their education beyond the high school level. Participation in extracurricular activities was shown to be a positive effect on each of these success indicators among public high school seniors. Four out of five seniors who participated in this study reported taking part in at least one extracurricular activity, and all who participated supported the notion that it was a benefit to them academically. However, one concern did arise out of the study. Students with a low socioeconomic status were much less likely to participate than were their more advantaged peers. Research shows that these are often minority students and at-risk students who need the engagement that such participation offers.

The National Federation of High School Associations (1981) found that students who did not participate in extracurricular activities are 49% more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol and 37% more likely to become teen parents than those students who spend a mere 1 to 4 hours per week participating in extracurricular activities. This research helps illustrate how much of an impact that extracurricular activity can have on a young person's life, not only from an academic standpoint but a personal one as well. The NFHS study also provided statistics to support the belief that students who participate in extracurricular programs in most cases tend to have higher grade-point averages. Students who took part in activity programs also had better attendance records, lower incidences of dropping out of school, and fewer discipline referrals than the general student population. Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Minnesota State High School League, which consisted of 300 Minnesota high schools, revealed that the average GPA of a student who was involved in athletics was 2.84, compared to a GPA of 2.68 for students who did not participate in such activities. In addition, the same survey found that student-athletes missed an average of only 7.4 days of school per year, and non-student athletes missed 8.8 days on average each year.

In 2003, the *Journal of Adolescent Research* reported that participation in extracurricular activity is directly linked to lower rates of dropping out of school and improved involvement in community and civic organizations as well as higher levels of achievement in the classroom. In addition, it was discovered that when students consistently participate in activities from their eighth grade year throughout high school that such participation has been found to have positive effects on the students' lives for at least a moderate length of time.

Rombokas (1995) discovered that extracurricular activities are the only variable that motivates students to not only stay in school, but also to attend on a regular basis. She also found

that another benefit of extracurricular activities, especially for at-risk students was that it decreased the number of discipline problems. Rombokas discovered in her research that high school athletes were significantly less implicated in school-related violence; non-school related deviance; drug, alcohol, and tobacco abuse; and any other serious offenses with law enforcement. Participation in extracurricular activities motivated students to be associated with activities that were positive in nature, and to spend their time in a productive and useful manner.

Scoggen's (1984) study of over 9,000 students from varying sizes of high schools in New York concluded that the norm was that students who attended small schools participated in extracurricular activities at a more frequent rate than students who came from larger schools. This participation has been strongly linked to stronger cognitive, social, and personality development later during adulthood. This research strongly supports the belief that participation in such activities leads to sustained success in life, and would benefit students in schools of any size. Some examples of this success include a higher rate of survival in college and greater sense of responsibility to be a part of adult civic groups.

Barker and Gump (1964) conducted a study that examined what factors were present that led to a higher rate of participation in smaller schools. What they found was that two factors tend to promote student participation in extracurricular activities where the population was sparser. The first factor they called the attraction force, which they defined as an increase in a sense of responsibility on the intrinsic level to participate due to an increased opportunity for participation. The second factor they called foreign forces, which were more extrinsic in nature. Those were the pressures that were applied on students by others through things such as invitations, demands, and requirements to participate.

Goodlad (1984) also felt that were positive aspects that came with the participation in extracurricular participation. In examining Goodlad's work, one can tell that the effects of extracurricular participation were not the intended focus of his work. Instead, he sought to determine the effects of time utilization on student performance. Goodlad felt that time was the most precious resource available to students and teachers alike but only if that time was used in a productive manner. However, his research did illustrate that students who were involved in extracurricular activities had a better concept of themselves than did those who did not participate as well a better awareness of time management.

The value of participation in athletics as it results to increasing a young person's ability to persevere beyond high school was revealed by Schonert-Reichl, Elliot, and Bills (1991). Their research was conducted on Iowa students and it was designed to extend 5 years beyond their graduation to provide insight concerning their life after high school. They found that one of the main benefits that came out of young men and women participating in activity type clubs was that they seemed to be more persistent and have a stronger will to see things through to their conclusion.

Over time, one of the main concerns that were voiced by detractors of extracurricular activities was how much did the time requirements detract from academic performance. Snyder and Spreitzer (1992) argued that time spent participating in extracurricular activities does not have a negative effect on academic performance, nor a drain on energy levels. In fact, more often than not, participation in such activities results in increased energy for the participant thus allowing time and energy to be dedicated to academic pursuits.

Beecham, Enders and Impara (1996) provided six opinions on the effectiveness and functions of extracurricular activities:

1. Activities provide a way for students who are not gifted academically to experience success.
2. Activities can provide an effective outlet for relieving stress in a constructive manner.
3. Participation can lead to the establishment of positive relationships between teachers and students and provide a means for parents to get involved in their child's education.
4. Participation can be an effective tool in creating a sense of attachment to the school for the students. A school's activities programs are usually more recognizable to the general public and as such can play a vital role in providing the school with an identity.
5. Participation in extracurricular activities provides opportunities for students to apply academic concepts that they have acquired in the classroom to real-life situations such as student government or writing for school publications.
6. Extracurricular activities play an important role in the lives of adolescents.

Coakley (1994) conducted a sociological study showed just what extracurricular activities contribute to student culture in a high school. Participation in certain activities can have a major impact on the social life of high school students, and thus greatly enhance the engagement that they feel with the high school setting. Students' behaviors and values can often be altered and positively influenced by their involvement in athletics or other extracurricular activities. This positive influence can then, in turn, become vital to the individual social and emotional growth of these students. The positive social growth of these students can be of critical importance in helping to define what type of adult this young person will ultimately become.

This strong, positive relationship that exists between participation in activities and academic success can most effectively be characterized by Marsh and Kleitman (2003) as mostly gain with little pain. The pattern of positive correlation seems to hold true for a wide array of

educational outcomes, covering the realm of good grades and better test scores as well as a higher rate of graduation and a higher frequency of aspirations, to attend college. In addition to the prospects of more favorable academic outcomes, there is also evidence to suggest that participation in these activities lead to a decrease of what society views as the negative components of our current educational system, such as lowering the dropout rate, and fewer occurrences of discipline issues (McNeal 1995; Mahoney & Caines, 1997).

Such knowledge and information can play a vital role in helping students succeed when they otherwise might not. First, the available evidence can dispel the widely publicized and prevailing assumption of the stereotypical dumb jock. Disturbingly, this belief is too often held by practicing educators. By having access to this research, the attention can be refocused on the educational benefits and the wide range of possibilities that are the result of participation in extracurricular activities. Perhaps to the surprise of some, the results of participating in high school athletics compares favorably to more intellectual activities such as debate, music, and the arts, which are often associated with learning and achievement (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001).

Evidence of other benefits that result from participation in athletics or other extracurricular activities is prevalent as well. Recent psychological and social psychological research provides affirmation that a positive relationship exists between sports participation and both mental wellness and self-esteem (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell, & Sabo 2005). In addition, recent economic studies have found that sports participation is linked to higher post-school wages and better opportunities and economic security (Ewing, 2007).

Even more recently, sociologists have begun to conduct studies that examine the role that sports participation plays in the involvement of civic responsibility and social capital. One study

found that it was of great benefit to society to foster athletic participation at an early age. The results indicated that when a person was exposed to athletics as a child they were more likely to be involved in their community as adults. Such information illustrates that communities should take a proactive approach with their youth and establish a pattern of involvement early so that it can pay dividends down the road (Perks, 2007).

Research has shown that when students participate in extracurricular activities it helps them to develop stronger character and increased self-confidence and it also empowers them to uncover various talents that otherwise might not have surfaced (Duncan, 2000). In his study, Duncan was able to pinpoint five specific benefits that result from participation in extracurricular activities: Participants have a greater likelihood of becoming leaders, participants are more likely to follow through on difficult tasks, participants have more adequate life skills, participants have an increased sense of self-awareness and self-esteem, and participants are more likely to achieve greater earning power and have annual incomes greater than \$50,000.

Employees contend that participation in extracurricular activities within communities is the most important career skill that one can have. The ability to be assertive, understand the value of teamwork, and be proficient in other social skills can have a very positive impact on one's success. Studies have shown that these valuable skills are greatly enhanced when students participate in extracurricular endeavors, and thus are more prepared to be successful in the careers of choice. Among these skills are academic achievement, a greater sense of self-worth, increased college survival rate, a higher level of maturation, and increased goal attainment (Toomer-Cook, 2002).

The United States Department of Health and Human Services conducted a study in 1995 and discovered that students who participated in extracurricular activities, are at least 43% more

likely to complete high school, 51% more likely to resist the temptation of using drugs, 63% more likely to not become pregnant as a teenager, 65% more likely to refrain from smoking, and 73% more likely to not be involved in illegal activities or be arrested than those who choose not to participate in extracurricular activities.

According to Cousins (2004), research established nine noteworthy differences interrelated to student involvement in extracurricular activities opposed to nonparticipation: Males who partake are 67% more likely to have a higher grade point average, females who are involved are 75% more likely to have a successful school experience, 92% of participants are not drug users, athletes express more self-confidence, participants take more accelerated classes, participants achieve higher grades and have better test-taking skills, participants are more well-informed about available financial assistance and are more apt to earn a college degree, participants' parents are more likely to be involved in their child's education, and participants' focus appears to transform from extrinsic rewards to accomplishments that are more intrinsic in nature.

Summary

The literature on this topic has consistently provided evidence to suggest that there is a need among the Hispanic community. They face issues such as transient lifestyles, language barriers, poverty, discipline and violence issues, gang affiliation, and feelings of disengagement. These recurring problems have created a culture of poor academic achievement and dropping out of high school. However, steps can be taken to help turn the tide for the betterment of these students. Research has shown that participation in athletics can be a valuable tool in combating these issues thus leading to positive outcomes for the rest of the educational experience. Whitley

(1999) reported in his study that based on his findings, the educational performance of athletes was better than that of non-athletes. In each of the areas covered in this literature review, athletes scored better, leading Whitley to suggest that for the most part it seemed that students who participated in athletics were getting more out of the educational experience than those students who did not take advantage of the extracurricular activities offered at their school. Various researchers provided different areas in which athletics proved to be valuable. Some felt that it provided motivation, some felt that participation in athletics improved students' self-esteem and confidence, and others felt that the requirements placed on athletes to maintain eligibility was an important factor in the success of athletes. However, all of the information reviewed for this dissertation concluded that the benefits of athletic participation were far too valuable to be ignored as a possible variable for increasing the academic performance of athletes, and even as a possible motivating factor for staying in school.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Methods

The study was carried out to determine whether gender, GPA, attendance, success on the Georgia Graduation Test, and discipline referrals of Hispanic students are good predictors of participation in athletics. There has been a good deal of research completed on this topic from various states throughout the nation. However, there is not a wealth of knowledge about the effect that athletic participation has on Hispanic students and no such study has been done in North Georgia where there has been a tremendous influx of Hispanics due to the availability of jobs. Therefore, this research was carried out exclusively in Whitfield County, which is in the Northwest part of Georgia.

Participants

The participants of this study were junior and senior high school students at Southeast Whitfield High School in Whitfield County, Georgia. Using a logistic regression, the data collected were used to determine whether gender, better school attendance, higher grade point average, passing the Georgia Graduation Test, and a lower incidence of discipline referrals are good predictors of athletic participation. All of the information gathered came from the participants' high school records, which are kept electronically on Infinite Campus, which is the student data system that is used by Whitfield County Schools. Informed consent was sought and obtained from every parent and student who participated. The sample group consisted only of

Hispanic students who were juniors and seniors. The goal was for the sample group to be an accurate representation of the community that the school serves.

Materials

The materials necessary to conduct this study were minimal, because all of the data existed, and it just had to be collected and analyzed. To carry out this research, permission from the principal and superintendent was needed in order to obtain access to the student records that are kept on Infinite Campus. The information from this student data system provided details on the student's gender, ethnicity, grade level, GPA, discipline referrals, attendance, success on the graduation test, and whether the student participated in extracurricular athletic activities. Rosters from each coach at Southeast high school were needed to aide in identifying who the athletes in the schools were. IRB approval was granted before any of the research began.

Data Collection

All of the data necessary to conduct this study was obtained from Infinite Campus which, as stated above, is the student data systems used in Whitfield County, Georgia, where the study was conducted. This information was gathered from Southeast Whitfield High School and could be collected at any time during the school year because they are computerized data systems capable of storing large quantities of information on each student. To collect this data, it was necessary to access each student's records on Infinite Campus so that the data could be analyzed for the purpose of the study. This information was gathered by determining who the members of the sample group were from each grade level, and then printing out the necessary information on each student.

The data gathered on Hispanic students was then grouped according to gender, grade level, and whether or not they participated in athletics.

Hypotheses

This research was carried out to determine whether there was evidence to support the following hypotheses:

There is a positive relationship between student athletic participation and gender, increased grade point average, school attendance, and success on the Georgia Graduation Test.

There is a negative relationship between athletic participation and the number of discipline referrals.

The data collected from this study were used to determine whether there was any evidence to support these hypotheses set forth by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data collected during this study were analyzed using a logistic regression analysis. Logistic regression is used when predicting the probability of the occurrence of an event by aligning data to a logistic curve. As is the case with many forms of regression analysis, the researcher can input several predictors or independent variables that can be numerical or categorical. Each of the regression coefficients was used to show the amount of the contribution of that risk factor. A positive regression coefficient indicates that the presence of that risk factor increases the probability of the outcome, while a negative regression coefficient means that the presence of that risk factor lessens the likelihood of that outcome; if a risk factor has a large regression coefficient that is an indication that it has a strong influence on the probability of that

outcome; however, when a risk factor has a regression coefficient that is near zero it indicates that there is little influence on the probability of that outcome. Logistic regression is an effective way of describing the relationship between one or more risk factors or independent variables and an outcome, expressed as a probability that has only two possible values. This method was used to determine whether the independent variables of gender, GPA, attendance, discipline referrals, and success on the high school graduation test are good predictors of participation in athletics.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

This chapter summarizes the research data that was collected and analyzed on the selected study group of Hispanic students at Southeast Whitfield High School. The purpose of the research study was to determine whether the independent variables of gender, GPA, attendance, discipline referrals, and performance of the GHSGT were good predictors of participation in athletics among Hispanic students in Northwest Georgia. The necessary data was collected from Infinite Campus for every Hispanic student that was in the 11th and 12th grade at Southeast Whitfield High School. In addition, each coach at Southeast provided a list of every Hispanic student that met the necessary criteria to be a part of this study and participated in his or her sport for the purpose of this research.

As stated in chapter III, logistic regression was used to determine whether the independent variables mentioned above were in fact successful predictors for athletic participation among Hispanic students. Once the data was collected from the sample group, logistic regression was used to test each one of the predictor variables to determine the impact on the dependent variable of athletic participation.

Site Description

Southeast Whitfield High School is located Dalton, Georgia, which is in the Northwest part of the state. Dalton is located in Whitfield County 75 miles north of Atlanta on I-75. This is a county of approximately 100,000 people with 42% of that total being Hispanic. The economy

of the area is heavily dependent on the flooring industry. Carpet industries such as Shaw, Mohawk, and Beaulieu all have numerous facilities within Whitfield County. The need for a large labor force and the attraction of reasonably high wages in the carpet industry has led many Hispanics to settle in this area. Southeast High School is currently 50.08% Hispanic. The school itself has 1,412 full- and part-time students in Grades 9-12. The part-time students are a result of the Whitfield County Career Academy, which offers non-traditional scheduling to accommodate students who wish to go there for two periods a day and then return to their home school for the other two periods. Southeast High School has made AYP under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act for the past 3 years, and currently the Georgia High School Graduation Test Scores are above the state average. In the past 5 years, the graduation rate has gone from 51% to 80%. This is all evidence that many good things are happening in this school, but there is much work to do, particularly with our large Hispanic population.

Findings

The research was carried out in four specific steps. These steps conducted were as follows. (1) identification of the sample group and descriptive statistics, (2) determination of predictor variables, (3) collection of data from infinite campus, and (4) analysis of data using a logistic regression.

Table 2

Descriptives

Category	N	%
Ethnicity		
Mexican	333	100*
Gender		
Female	165	49.6
Male	168	50.4*
Athletic participation		
Yes	109	32.7
No	224	67.3*
Passed GHS GT		
Yes	206	61.8*
No	127	38.2

* = Mode

Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics as they relate to the sample that was used for this study. The sample was not ethnically diverse due to the fact that all of the participants were Hispanic, as was the intent. The majority of the study was male (50.4%), did not participate in athletics (67.3 %), and passed the GHS GT (61.8%).

Logistic Regression Results

A logistic regression analysis was performed on sports participation as the outcome variable with five predictor variables: gender, GPA, office referrals, days missed from school, and whether or not the student passed the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT). Because there were no missing data, 333 cases were available for analysis.

A test of the full model with all five predictors against a constant-only model was statistically significant, $X^2(5, N = 333) = 102.26, p < .001$. The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness of fit test was not statistically significant, $X^2(8, N = 333) = 15.161, p = .056$, indicating that the

model has adequate fit (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). These results indicate that the set of predictors distinguished between those students of Hispanic decent who participated in sports and those who did not. The variance in sports participation accounted for is moderate with the Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2 = .368$.

Classification for the full model shows 87.1% of those students who did not participate in sports and 62.4% of those who did being correctly classified for an overall success rate of 79.0%. The model has better classification ability for those who did not participate in sports than those who did. Overall the correct classification rate is good.

Table 3 shows the regression coefficients, Wald statistics, odds ratios, and 95% confidence intervals for odds ratios for the predictors. Using the Wald criterion, GPA ($X^2 = 2.39$, $p = .122$) and passing the GHSGT ($X^2 = 3.67$, $p = .056$) were not good predictors of sports participation. The variables of office referrals ($X^2 = 8.24$, $p = .004$), days missed ($X^2 = 23.631$, $p < .001$), and gender ($X^2 = 4.63$, $p = .031$) were all good predictors of sports participation.

Table 3

Logistic Regression Analysis of Sports Participation as a Function of Gender, Office Referrals, Days Missed, GPA, and Passing the GHSGT

Variables	<i>B</i>	Wald Chi-Square	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Lower	95% Confidence Upper
Gender	.618	4.626*	1.856	1.056	3.260
Referrals	-.424	8.242**	0.655	0.490	0.874
Days Missed	-.209	23.631***	0.812	0.746	0.833
GPA	.048	2.394	1.050	0.987	1.116
Pass GHSGT	.737	3.665	2.089	0.983	4.442
(Constant)	-4.441	2.880			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The odds ratio of gender ($e^B = 1.856$) with a referent of 1 = female, indicates that being female increases the odds of sports participation. The odds ratios of referrals ($e^B = 0.655$) and days missed ($e^B = 0.812$) are less than one and indicate that as these predictor variables increase in value the odds of sports participation decrease.

Summary of Findings

This study was carried out in order to test the five independent variables discussed in the preceding paragraphs and determine whether they were effective predictors of participation in athletics among junior and senior Hispanic students at Southeast Whitfield High School in Dalton, Georgia. Each one of these variables for each individual student was analyzed independently and of the five variables that were included in this study, three of them were found to be effective predictors of athletic participation.

The only two variables that did not support the hypothesis in this study were student GPA and passing the GHSGT. Although initially surprised by the results that the logistic regression yielded on this variable, further reflection revealed scenarios that made this finding more logical. Athletes are only required to pass classes; there are no stipulations by the GHSA that dictates by how much they must pass. As a result of this, a student could quite possibly have a less than desirable GPA, and still satisfy the requirements placed on them to maintain their eligibility.

The remaining variables of gender, absentee rate, and discipline referral, supported the hypothesis of the study. It was anticipated that the research findings from each one of these variables would reveal a relationship with athletic participation that would support the idea that they were, in fact, strong predictors. The results of the logistic regression revealed that two of the

supporting variables had a negative relationship with athletic participation and one of the variables had a positive relationship.

Once that data was entered into SPSS it was determined that males were less likely to participate in athletic activity. In addition, the lower students absentee rate was the more likely they were to participate in athletics, as was the case with the frequency of discipline referrals. Overall, the data that was collected for this study yielded clean results that can be used as an effective vehicle for educational change.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the variables of gender, grade point average, discipline referrals, absentee rates, and performance on the Georgia High School Graduation Test were effective predictors of athletic participation among junior and senior Mexican students. As noted in chapter I, the findings assist the education community in ensuring that the majority of students perform well academically, stay out of trouble, graduate from high school, and become productive citizens within our society.

Discussion

This study focused on Mexican students at Southeast Whitfield High School located in Dalton, Georgia. Dalton is a town of approximately 100,000 located in the Northwest part of the state. This study has particular relevance in this area due to the high Mexican population, which is a direct result of the availability of jobs in the flooring industry. To carry out this study, I analyzed five independent variables to determine the effect each one of them had individually on the dependent variable, which was athletic participation. The hypothesis was that these independent variables would be good predictors of the dependent variable. Using a logistic regression the analysis of the collected data revealed that four of the variables supported the original hypothesis.

Gender and Athletic Participation

Predictor variable 1 was gender. This variable was found to be an effective predictor of athletic participation with females being more likely to participate in athletic activities than their male counterparts. Past research has shown that female students who participate in athletics are more successful in other areas than female students who do not participate in athletics. In his 1994 study, Backes suggested that teachers need to be on the frontlines of the movement ensuring that girls are provided with the same quality of and equal opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities as their male counterparts. Female students often struggle with self-esteem issues because society has created and reinforced various stereotypes, which make it very difficult for girls to have a healthy outlook about themselves (Smutny, 1995). Therefore, it would be beneficial for educators to determine whether there is something that can be done to get girls of all races more involved in athletics and as a result increase their self esteem.

GPA and Athletic Participation

It was a hypothesis of this study that the higher a student's GPA the more likely they were to be athletic participants. However, the relationship was shown to be insignificant. This finding was surprising because previous research had shown that there was a significant relationship (Ryska & Vestal, 2004). A possible explanation for the finding is that there are no policies in place that require athletes to have a certain GPA, only that that pass a certain number of classes. To receive credit for a class one must only get a 70, which does not translate into a stellar GPA but does satisfy the eligibility requirements placed on student athletes by the GHSA. This would help explain how the possibility existed of a higher GPA not being an effective predictor of participation in athletics.

Attendance and Athletic Participation

Attendance was an effective predictor of athletic participation. This finding is consistent with the previous research conducted in this area. In his 1999 study comparing athletes to non-athletes, Whitley found that on the whole athletes were more likely to attend class than non-athletes. To participate in high school competitions student athletes must be present in school on the day of the contest, if not they are prohibited from competing by the GHSA, which is the state of Georgia's athletic governing body. When one considers this, combined with the attendance requirements that individual coaches place on their athletes, it comes as no surprise that the relationship between attendance and athletic participation is statistically significant. Prior research shows the direct relationship between better attendance and higher academic achievement (Romer, 1993). This gives credibility to the idea that athletic participation strengthens a student's performance in other vital areas such as the variables that were part of this study. The results from the attendance data do, in fact, support the earlier research on this subject and could prove to be helpful as educators look to find ways to engage these students and provide them with adequate opportunities to be successful and better themselves academically.

Discipline Referrals and Athletic Participation

The third predictor variable that proved to have a significant relationship with athletic participation was incidence of discipline referrals. As anticipated, the lower number of discipline referrals a student had, the more likely he or she was to participate in athletics. Earlier research had indicated that this was the case as well. The NFHS (2001) found that the number of discipline referrals was 8.5 percentage points lower for athletes than for those who did not participate in athletics. Also, drug use and incidence of violence were less prevalent among those

who were members of athletic teams. As is the case with attendance, the GHSA has policies in place that prohibit students from participating in athletics during any suspension from school, placement in alternative schools, or adjudication to the Youth Detention Center. In addition Whitfield County Schools prohibits an athlete from participating if they have been assigned in-school suspension during the length of that suspension.

This finding could also be attributed to individual coaches having discipline policies in place that discourage any kind of negative behavior and have consequences in place if such behavior does occur. Based on past research, students are more likely to act out if they feel isolated and disassociated from their families, peers, and schools (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998). In many cases one of the more appealing aspects of athletic participation is the feeling of belonging to something and such a sentiment can alleviate those feelings of isolation and the need to act out in a rebellious manner.

High School Graduation Test and Athletic Participation

The final predictor variable was success on the Georgia High School Graduation Test. Students at Southeast Whitfield take these tests as juniors and, as is the case with all students in the state of Georgia, they must pass this test to graduate. Success on the graduation test was a statistically insignificant predictor of participation in athletics. Due to the lack of previous research on this topic, this finding is important and warrants further investigation. Further study in this area could provide teachers with valuable tools in their constant battle against high school dropouts.

Implications

Educators must confront the problems that Mexican students are facing, and must realize that they are not someone else's problems but ours to deal with. We are faced with the task of educating students who often do not understand our language or culture and we, in return, often do not understand theirs. Yet for all of the barriers that we perceive, as educators we are charged with the burden or opportunity, depending on your point of view, to prepare these young men and women to be productive members of our society. Immigration has greatly increased the number of Hispanics living in our country and their high birth rate has only served to enhance their growth within our population. It would be naïve on our part to deemphasize their impact on our public services and our economy. Hispanics will become an increasingly important segment of our society and educators must do their part to ensure that they are viable contributors to the overall well being of our nation.

Of the five variables that were measured in this study, three of them were found to be effective predictors of athletic participation. Success on the graduation test was so close that further study would possibly yield results that would classify it as effective predictor. Previous literature has provided valuable information concerning the plight of Hispanics and the problems that such difficulties cause for our society. On the other end of the spectrum, a great deal of research has been conducted which gave credibility to the idea that athletic participation demonstrated positive effects on those who chose to partake in such activities. Therefore, when taking those two situations into account, educators may find that participation in sports is a valuable tool for assisting at-risk students. In many cases, Mexican students are dealing with being in a new country, and trying to learn a new language. This often makes them feel isolated because they do not understand the customs and ways of their adopted home. This study,

although small, has provided information to assist in reversing this trend and creating opportunities for these students to be successful.

Our federal government demands that as educators we are held accountable for the education of all of America's youth and as such have implemented a program to measure the success of our students. For those of us who teach in areas that have high minority populations this can be particularly cumbersome. Successes in schools in these areas are not only measured overall but by their subgroups as well. Simply put, if the population of Hispanics within a school is high enough to classify them as a subgroup then that group must meet the requirements set forth by the government as well as the entire school population. There are many examples of schools that did not make AYP only because their Hispanic subgroup did not achieve at a level consistent with government expectations.

Therefore, the current educational landscape makes it imperative that teachers and administrators find ways to overcome the barriers that exist and provide this segment of our student body with a quality education that will enable them to be successful. If as educators we fail to accomplish this monumental task we do so at our own peril. The findings of this study show that there are connections between athletic participation and the desired results. This study and others like it can provide educators with valuable information as we go forward in our attempt to educate all of America's youth and not just the ones who are easy and do not need us anyway. Traditional means of education will not work and as such we must find alternative ways to reach out to these at-risk students. In doing so we are bettering society because we are instilling in them the ability to be productive citizens who enhance our communities rather than detract from them.

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on the information from this study I feel that the following recommendations would be beneficial to educators. Such studies could provide information that would be helpful in reaching students who without intervention would likely dropout of school.

1. It would be beneficial to conduct a study to determine why Hispanic females are more likely than Hispanic males to be involved in sports. Such a study could focus on what variables within the Hispanic culture discourage their males from participating in athletic activities. In addition, it would be advantageous to verify that it is not something that the schools are doing that discourages these young men from taking part in athletics. A cultural preference exists toward soccer within the Hispanic community so it may very well be that a lack of exposure to and understanding of other sports are the chief culprits in the low percentage of male participants. If the reasons could be determined through research, it would enable steps to be taken to reverse the trend and afford Hispanic males the benefits of athletic participation.

2. A similar or identical study to this one could be carried out throughout the state of Georgia to determine whether the same findings would hold true in other areas of the state as well. One of the limitations of this study was that it was geographically confined to northwest Georgia. This only provides the academic community with limited data, and while the results of this study are very relevant to the area in which it was conducted it only provides a basis for assumption throughout the state. Whitfield County faces problems that are mirrored throughout the state of Georgia. It would however, be irresponsible to assume that the reasons for those problems are the same or that identical solutions would be practical. However, conducting a similar study that is more broad in its scope could provide answers that could aide educators in their efforts to provide quality education for all of Georgia's students.

3. A study to look more closely at the effects that athletics has on GPA would be warranted due to the conflicting findings of this study when compared to earlier studies. I was surprised by this finding and firmly believe that further investigation would reveal that GPA is in fact impacted by athletic participation. Similar studies carried out that did not focus on one particular ethnic group found that athletes had higher GPAs than did non-athletes. It is quite possible that the same would hold true for Hispanics if the sample size were increased and GPA was the only variable that was included in the study. Although possible reasons were provided that might help explain the findings of this study, it is the belief here that a higher GPA is in fact an effective indicator of athletic participation and a more focused study could disclose such information.

4. It would be advantageous to conduct a study comparing male and female performance when measured against the same variables to determine whether athletic participation has a more positive effect on one group than the other. Educators could benefit from gaining an understanding of what effects athletics had on students as it relates to gender. A study that focused on this variable could provide valuable information concerning self-esteem, behavior, and academic performance. By understanding the extent to which athletic participation affects the performances of Hispanics and the variances that exist in that performance between genders educators can determine the value of athletic participation among the sexes. Such information could be beneficial in mapping out strategies to enrich the education experience of Hispanic students.

5. It would be helpful to measure the effects of athletic participation on these variables when comparing natural born Mexicans to naturalized Mexican Americans. Research in this area could help educators understand the struggles that recent immigrants face when they come into a

new country. Language barriers and cultural misunderstandings often make it very difficult for these students to be successful, and any opportunities to improve their chances should be seized. By analyzing the effects that athletics has in relation to the variables in this study on recent immigrants when compared to natural born Hispanic Americans it can be determined whether athletics is a possible means of reaching out to these groups. It can also help teachers and coaches conclude if treating both groups the same is beneficial to the individual students.

6. Success on the Georgia High School Graduation Test did not show to be an effective predictor of athletics, thus indicating that participation in athletics had no relationship to passing the test. However, the findings from the logistic regression indicated that success on the GHSGT was extremely close to being statistically significant. Therefore, increasing the size of the sample and expanding the study would almost certainly produce findings that would indicate that a positive relationship exist between passing the test and athletic participation. If conducting a larger study did reveal that passing the GHSGT was statistically significant to athletic participation that information could be used by teachers to help bolster the success rate of Hispanic students on the test.

The federal government has established the GHSGT as the benchmark by which AYP is measured. All students take this test in their junior year and they must pass it to receive their high school diploma. Where schools often fail to meet AYP is within their subgroup populations. These subgroups are based on ethnicity and socioeconomic status provided that a school's population of either or both is high enough to warrant such a group. Obviously, economically disadvantaged and Hispanics traditionally score lower on these tests than their peers, so conducting a study that generates useful information for improving their scores could be

paramount to schools achieving AYP. It could also prove useful in empowering these students to graduate high school and earn their diploma.

Conclusion

This study found that athletics can have an impact on academic success and be an effective tool in the fight to keep Hispanic students in school. This study yielded valuable information concerning attendance and discipline referrals and how they are effective predictors of athletic participation. Both of these variables limit the amount of time that a student has in class and, according to Goodland (1984), time is our most valuable resource and as such must not be wasted. Therefore, the results indicate that if one participates in athletics they are less likely to lose time out of class as a result of these variables. This will indirectly have an impact on their academic performance because they will be in class more and as such receive more valuable instruction from the teacher. In addition, although success on the Georgia High School Graduation Test did not yield results that would indicate that it is effective in predicting athletic participation, it is important to note that it was very close and further research could provide valuable information concerning a possible relationship between athletic participation and passing the test. Hispanic students traditionally perform at a considerably lower rate than the other subgroups that take the test and as a result often cause schools to not achieve AYP status. Further exploration of the relationship between athletic participation and success on the high school graduation tests could prove valuable.

Academia is by many accounts failing this group of people for whatever reasons, and as such anything that provides the slightest bit of hope of reaching them warrants further investigation. This study provides sound statistical data that could be useful in exploring possible

avenues through which barriers could be broken down and desired results might be accomplished. Further examination is not only practical in this area it is the responsibility of those with which the education of America's youth is entrusted to explore.

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APPENDIX
SUPERINTENDENT APPROVAL

Scott,

I approve your request to conduct dissertation research in Whitfield County Schools. I look forward to learning the results of this study on the relationship between athletic participation and academic performance among Hispanic students.

Katie

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