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Failing Ninth-Grade Students in a Missouri School District, and the Comparison to Inadequate Learning Resources

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by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Dr. Sherry DeVore, Dissertation Chair — 11-18-2015 Date

Dr. Kent Medlin, Committee Member — 11-18-2015 Date

Dr. Brad Hanson, Committee Member — 11-18-2015 Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

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Abstract

This study involved a mixed design to generate the perceptions of students and teachers about failing ninth-grade students and the impact of learning resources. The participants in this study were a purposive selection of ninth-grade students and ninth-grade teachers in one Missouri school district. The conceptual framework of this study was based on the premise that ninth-grade students who failed multiple classes also lacked learning resources. The learning resources were categorized into cultural and physical resources. To determine if learning resources had an impact on the ninth-grade students' academic performance, the perceptions of the failing ninth-grade students were analyzed through a student survey and one-on-one interviews. In addition, ninth-grade teachers were surveyed, and their perceptions were included in the data analysis. The results of the data analysis indicated the students and teachers perceived the ninth-grade students had inadequate levels of family and friend support, lacked motivation and preparation for school, and made poor decisions that negatively impacted their academic performance. Furthermore, the perceptions of both students and teachers indicated the failing ninth-grade students did not lack physical resources. One significant aspect of this study was through the data collection process and the challenge of managing at-risk students. The students' at-risk factors included attendance, discipline infractions, and course failure. These factors, along with irresponsibility, created barriers for the student participants and contributed to a 17.2% completion rate.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The topics of failing students, dropout rates, and graduation rates have been at the forefront of most school district, state, and the federal government discussions since 2002 when the U.S. Department of Education (2015) enacted the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This federal government-driven decision led school districts across the country to search for strategies and answers to the chronic issue of failing students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The ability for U.S. schools to meet the challenges of low performing students and ensure no child is left behind has become more difficult and complicated over the past 40 years, according to Duncan and Murnane (2014). They contended rising economic and social inequality has disenfranchised many families, which in turn has made school reform less effective (Duncan & Murnane, 2014).

According to the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (2011), in 1981 the National Commission on Excellence in Education was directed to review and synthesize data and scholarly literature on the quality of learning and teaching in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities. The review also included both public and private schools, with special concern for the educational experiences of teen-age youth (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). This endeavor, though not nearly as publicized as the NCLB Act, began the conversations and research that led to the 2002 NCLB Act (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011).

The NCLB Act forced schools to address the failing student population and to devise plans and strategies to decrease this population by 2014 (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). School districts across the United States began to realize there were many factors that caused students to fail and most were not directly

related to a school district's lack of services (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). Research about the reasons students fail had begun earlier, according to Rumberger and Lim (2008).

Rumberger and Lim (2008) reviewed 25 years of research and 203 published studies associated with dropouts and determined there are two types of factors that predict whether students dropout or graduate from high school; the factors were either associated with individual characteristics of the student or with institutional characteristics of the family, community, or school. Rumberger and Lim (2008) reported in the California Dropout Research Project a variety of reasons for leaving school, but these reasons do not reveal the underlying causes. Multiple factors in elementary and middle school may influence students' attitudes, behaviors, and performance in high school prior to dropping out. (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

For the purpose of this study, the work of authors and researchers in the area of failing high school students, dropouts, and students who are identified as under-prepared or deficient in specific learning resources was investigated. An overarching goal of this study was to go beyond determining factors for academic failure and investigate the reasons why adolescents display certain behaviors and make certain decisions that are destructive to their academic performance. By exploring the perceptions of student who fail, a clearer understanding of available resources and unavailable resources emerge.

Background of the Study

A positive outcome of the NCLB Act has been the increase in research, or the investigation of "why" students fail. Research on the topic of failing students, dropouts, and achievement gaps has intensified over the past decade. Determining the factors

related to failing students varies slightly with each student, school, district, and state. Although common strands exist, it is extremely difficult to diagnose effective solutions for all students. Research has indicated a very small percentage of U.S. schools make up the majority of the nation's dropouts:

> The crisis is neither silent nor invisible: one in three high school students do not graduate, and more than half of those dropouts are produced by just 12 percentage of high schools—schools commonly known as dropout factories, where just 60 percentage or fewer of entering freshman progress to their senior year three years later. Although it's a concentrated problem, with a small number of schools producing a large share of dropouts, it is not a localized one. Dropout factories are located in every state; in urban, suburban, rural, and small-town America; in large high schools and small. (Tucci, 2009, p. 1)

Dropouts, though located in every state, are concentrated in specific areas of the U.S. (Tucci, 2009). According to Tucci (2009), dropouts occur from the freshmen year to the senior year.

By most measures, the nation's high schools did a remarkable job of educating the populace throughout the twentieth century (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). At least in part because of the secondary education they received in American public high schools, hundreds of millions of U.S. citizens have been able and ready to participate in a dynamic democracy and to contribute to and benefit from an ever-changing economy (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Many have used public high schools to help them transition from first-generation immigrants to American citizens (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

In addition to unacceptable dropout numbers, failing high school also costs. Research revealed approximately 1.2 million students did not graduate high school in 2011 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). The potential earnings of those students would have been approximately $154 billion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). Furthermore, if the nation's high school students were to graduate ready for college, the nation would have most likely saved $5.6 million in college remediation and lost earnings (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).

Research has consistently indicated there are some common predictors of student behaviors that lead to academic failure and potential dropout. Student characteristics associated with a higher probability of dropping out, often called student risk factors, are both numerous and are often-cited as dropout predictors. Not surprisingly, poor school performance is a strong predictor of dropping out of school (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

For example, low test scores, course failure, and grade retention have all been found to be strongly associated with leaving school (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). As noted, weak student engagement, often measured by absenteeism and discipline problems in survey data, is also strongly linked with a higher dropout probability (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Although the predictors can provide educators a head start to identifying students who most likely need additional help, it does not explain why those students are exhibiting those behaviors.

For this study, the reasons why students exhibit specific destructive behaviors that negatively impact their academic achievement were explored. The concept that poor performing students also lack important learning resources was examined through relevant literature. At the forefront of topics related to students at-risk, poverty, and

learning is Payne (2008) whose work has served as a practical guide for educators serving this population.

Conceptual Framework

Appropriate to this study was the work of Dr. Ruby Payne (2008). Her dedication and commitment to the study of poverty and the potential impact poverty has on children is well-documented; therefore, the concepts espoused by Payne (2008) served as the framework of this study. Payne (2008) related the importance of connecting the student, the resources, and the interventions:

> It isn't possible to educate well just by teaching the "group" and not knowing about the individual student in the classroom. Many students get identified as "at risk" when the issue is one of the resources. When you know the resources of an individual, then you can determine the intervention(s) that will work best. Interventions that are successful work the individual's strengths to enhance his/her under-developed resources. (p. 2)

Payne (2008) contended educators must know their students beyond the classroom and beyond their school image.

According to Payne (2008), students are labeled at-risk, but many times the specific resources they are lacking are not addressed. School interventions, in most cases, are applied to a group of students who are labeled at-risk (Payne, 2008). Although decidedly easier for the teacher, this method is not necessarily the best intervention for individual students.

Payne's (2008) concept of identifying students who lack educational resources is a beginning step in helping students succeed. The need to understand why students

possess certain behaviors that are destructive to their education is essential in lowering the failure rate and dropout rate, while increasing graduation rates. To evaluate the results of these behaviors or to establish indicators for students who are potential dropouts does not resolve or change student behavior.

Ashly Garris (2014), a columnist for the *Global Post*, stated poverty has a devastating impact on learning and educational readiness. Children's learning is determined by the resources to which they have access (Garris, 2014). Living in poverty limits those resources, which include pre-school, health care, nutrition, enrichment activities, educated parents, and educational trips (Garris, 2014).

Therefore, identifying students who failed a significant number of classes and surveying the students to determine if they indeed lacked adequate learning resources provides educators the type of information needed to develop appropriate interventions or additional resources to improve overall academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

In order to fulfill the role of public education in the United States and to educate all students, it is essential educators are able to fully understand learners and the reasons some succeed and some fail. There is a strong research base that indicates a nation-wide issue of failing ninth-graders (Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Researchers have identified the transition to high school as a vulnerable point in the educational pipeline where students are more likely to struggle academically and fall off-track, greatly reducing the likelihood they will graduate from high school (Fancsali, Fazekas, Jaffe-Walters, Rennie-Hill, & Warren, 2011).

As indicated in past and present research, failing classes and subsequent dropouts continue to be a significant issue for schools locally and nation-wide. Furthermore, the ninth-grade year is a critical point in starting on the right track or not (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The ability to administer timely interventions with fidelity could change the outcome of both increased graduation rates and decreased dropouts.

Research has indicated there are a variety of factors that play a role in students failing or dropping out of school. Those factors include, but are not limited to the following:

- student's lack of interest,
- poor attendance,
- history of poor academic performance,
- poor reading skills,
- high mobility,
- inappropriate behavior and reckless lifestyle,
- conflicting life pressures,
- lack of parental support,
- lack of academic preparedness,
- low self-esteem and low confidence, and
- learned helplessness (Rumberger & Lim, 2008)

Several behaviors both in and out of school–including absenteeism, delinquency, and substance abuse–are strong indicators of dropping out (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Assistant State Superintendent of Oklahoma, Richard Caram, stated changes in society over the years have impacted schools to the point where schools are more responsible for child-rearing (as cited in Archer, 2013). With the increase of interventions, parents have become dependent on assistance from the school system (Archer, 2013). Poverty, higher mobility rates, absenteeism, lack of parental involvement, and a greater population of non-English speaking students in urban schools, according to Caram, have directly impacted student achievement (as cited in Archer, 2013).

Research conducted by various institutions has shown ninth-grade students who fail multiple classes increase their likelihood of not graduating and/or dropping out of school (Poiner, 2014). Researchers target the ninth-grade year as a make-or-break year for completing high school (Poiner, 2014). During the ninth-grade year more students fail than any other grade in high school. Subsequently, ninth-grade students who are held back tend to drop out (Poiner, 2014). In addition, course performance and attendance during the first year of high school are powerful predictors of whether a student will go on to earn a diploma (Poiner, 2014).

As a result of the increased demands of high school, the statistics generated from the freshmen year are disconcerting. Ninth-graders have the lowest grade point averages, the most missed classes, the majority of failing grades, and more misbehavior referrals than any other high school grade level (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). This prompted the fundamental question of this study: Do the ninth-grade students in one Missouri school district who have failed three or more classes during the 2013-2014 school year also lack in learning resources?

Purpose of the Study

The ninth-grade year for students is a difficult and challenging time. Many ninth-grade students start their first year of high school with poor grades and then struggle to recover for the next three years (Willens, 2013). When students fall behind and have to repeat a grade, they can wind up in a vicious cycle of peer judgment and low self-esteem (Willens, 2013).

The struggle to recover is magnified by the social non-acceptance of non-promoted students (Willens, 2013). The biggest risk factor for failing ninth-grade, for example, is the number of absences during the first 30 days (Willens, 2013). Missing more than 10% is cause for concern (Willens, 2013). In addition, first-year high school students are classified as on-track if they earn at least five full-year course credits and have received no more than one F per semester (Willens, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to investigate why specific ninth-grade students exhibit particular behaviors that negatively impact their academic success. Studies have been conducted to identify the characteristics of failing students, but have not explained how or why those characteristics developed (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz & Chang, 2013; Lopez, Rosenberg, & Weiss, 2010). For example, students with poor attendance have a higher probability of failing and dropping out than students with good attendance (Phyllis, 2010). Like so many other factors, school absences affect children in poverty disproportionately; poor students are more likely to miss more days of school are more likely to fall behind academically because of these absences (Phyllis, 2010).

Chronic absenteeism is not the same as truancy or average daily attendance, the attendance rate schools use for state report cards and federal accountability. Chronic

absenteeism is defined as missing 10% of a school year for any reason (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). A school can have average daily attendance of 90% and still have 40% of its students chronically absent, because on different days, different students make up that 90% (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Chronic absenteeism begins to rise in middle school and continues climbing through twelfth grade (Balfanz & Chang, 2013). A study completed in Baltimore by Balfanz and Chang (2013) indicated a strong relationship between sixth-grade attendance and on-time graduation rates. Chronic absence in middle school is one of the best indicators a student will drop out later (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Researchers in Utah found students who were chronically absent in any year between eighth and twelfth grades were 7.5 times more likely to drop out of high school (Balfanz & Chang, 2013).

The most powerful predictors of whether a student will complete high school include course performance and attendance during the first year of high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Therefore, systematic collection of student attendance and course performance data can be used to develop an effective early warning system that can also be tailored to local contexts. However, the reason or reasons for the development of poor attendance is critical to finding the solution for improving a students' academic success (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

In addition to the factors that negatively impact student performance, there is also the compounding issue of inadequate family engagement. Researchers have repeatedly correlated family engagement with student achievement, yet the strategy is rarely used as an integral part of school reform (Lopez, Rosenberg, & Weiss, 2010). Parental

engagement is accompanied by cultural challenges and low socio-economic status, according to Lopez, Rosenberg, and Weiss (2010).

This study involved investigation of the reasons behind the student behaviors that contribute to poor academic performance of ninth-grade students. In other words, why do some students exhibit specific behaviors that lead to poor academic and failing courses? In order to look beyond the behaviors, one must investigate the main reasons students do not attend school and why students are unmotivated and unengaged with their coursework.

Research questions. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the at-risk indicators for ninth-grade students who fail three or more classes?

2. What are ninth-grade teachers' perceptions of the cultural and physical learning resources available for ninth-grade students who have failed three or more classes?

3. What are the perceptions of ninth-grade students regarding the reasons they have failed three or more classes?

Definitions of Key Terms

At-risk students. An at-risk student can be defined as a student who struggles in an area or several areas (Meador, 2014). Those struggles often have an adverse effect on the student's performance at school (Meador, 2014). A student can be deemed an at-risk student due to several factors including low test scores, poor attendance, discipline issues, structure at home, socioeconomic status, and others (Meador, 2014).

Under-resourced learners. Under-resourced learners are students who lack adequate development or the presence of physical, cultural, or emotional development (Payne, 2008). This includes parental support and home resources such as technology, educated guardians, and supportive environment (Payne, 2008). Secondly, under-resourced learners are students, who do not have the resources to address a particular situation or negotiate a particular environment (Payne, 2008).

Limitations and Assumptions

The sample for this study was from one Missouri public school district, which limited the data and decreased overall validity. The participants were ninth-grade students and ninth-grade teachers, and the student data were collected for the 2013-2014 school year. The participants selected and the single school year did not eliminate the possibility of the sample being exclusive or the year tested being a unique year.

There were two instruments used in the collection of data. The surveys and interview questions administered in this study were created by the researcher. One instrument was a computer-based survey for the students and a survey for the teachers.

The student survey was of a personal nature and required the students to be forthcoming and honest about private matters. Certain statements revolved around the students' parental or guardian involvement and support, as well as the environments the parents or guardians provide in the home. These types of prompts may have yielded results that were inaccurate because students chose to not answer honestly. The dishonesty could decrease the reliability of the responses.

Sample demographics. Each of the five public high schools selected ranged from approximately 1,100 to 1,800 students. There were a total of 1,625 ninth-grade students within the school district for the 2013-2014 school year. The high schools' average free and reduced price meal population was 51% in 2014.

In order to increase the validity of this study, the students selected were extreme cases from one cohort ninth-grade class. These students were selected by use of the district's student information system, eSchoolPlus. The student data system provided a spreadsheet with student names of ninth-graders who failed three classes during the 2013-2014 school year.

The specific criteria yielded 101 total ninth-grade students within the district. Those ninth-grade students were also selected to complete a survey that included statements regarding the presence of specific resources or lack of specific resources within their lives.

Instrument. There were two instruments used in conducting the research and data collection of this study. The student information system, eSchoolPlus, was used to group all ninth-grade students who had earned three or more failing grades in the 2013-2014 school year. The surveys were uploaded to Google Docs, which is an online survey software that automatically calculates responses.

The ninth-grade students were accompanied by a proctor to ensure the survey was administered with fidelity and to assist students with their questions. In addition, there were three teachers selected at each high school who also completed a survey. The teacher survey included specific statements about observations of ninth-grade students who did not appear to have adequate learning resources.

Summary

All levels of education are working at a fast pace to keep up with the changing world, in order to offer students the education they need to be competitive and successful in the global economy. The resources schools provide are critical to the overall education and preparation of 21st century learners. It is a challenge for schools to fully prepare students, and the need for a partnership with the parents and community is critical. Currently, it is not feasible for schools to offer all resources every child needs to be successful.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possibility that a significant number of the ninth-grade students who failed three or more classes during the 2013-2014 school year were also under-resourced learners. It was the researcher's goal to expose new evidence of the reasons ninth-grade students fail.

In Chapter Two, a review of literature is provided to further explain the nation-wide issue of failing ninth-grade students and the contributing factors. The review includes viewpoints from books, articles, and research that are directly or indirectly linked to failing students. The literature review is organized in two categories that align to the student and teacher survey.

The first category, cultural resources, includes the factors that are predominately home-related. Therefore, parental support, home life, and economic status are the primary focuses in the cultural resources review. The second category, physical resources, includes nutrition, sleep, and personal hygiene.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

There is a substantial amount of literature and research on the topic of failing students, the reasons for failure, and the behaviors that contribute to failing grades. The discussion and research becomes much more difficult when one begins to look at why failing students' exhibit destructive behaviors. The individual reasons those students exhibit behaviors, such as poor attendance, lack of motivation, or destructive behaviors, becomes a personal matter.

In some cases the reasons surround an emotional circumstance. Research is clear that ninth-grade is a make-or-break year. More students fail ninth-grade than any other grade in high school, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth-grade subsequently drop out (Herlihy, 2007). The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that dropouts' average annual earnings are $20,241, which is $10,000 less than a graduate (Lynch, 2014).

The poverty rate of dropouts is twice as high as college graduates, and unemployment rates are four percentage points higher than the national average (Lynch, 2014). Furthermore, Lynch (2014) reports dropouts' life time earnings are $260,000 less than high school graduates. According to a study by Northwestern University, one dropout costs taxpayers approximately $292,000 over the course of the student's life.

The dropout crisis is more than a school issue, and although costly for the individual student dropout, it is an issue for the entire United States. Lynch (2014), indicated the financial ramifications are also a burden on the all Americans through the

additional need of public assistance for dropouts. Health care, welfare, and countless programs are designed and made available by taxpayers' money and local contributions for high school dropouts (Lynch, 2014).

On average, only 7 out of 10 ninth-graders receive high school diplomas in the United States. (Levin & Rouse, 2012). Many reformers focus on dropout prevention at the high school level with implementation of smaller learning communities, individualized instruction, and dedicated staff (Levin & Rouse, 2012). Effective teachers have a positive impact, however, decades of evidence indicate the most promising approaches need to start in pre-school (Levin & Rouse, 2012).

These efforts ideally include parents and frequent meetings and an ongoing commitment by all parties (Levin & Rouse, 2012). These types of efforts can be expensive as they do require more resources; however, the return rates are $1.45 to $3.55 for every dollar of investment, depending on the specific intervention strategy (Levin & Rouse, 2012). According to Levin and Rouse (2012):

> Proven educational strategies to increase high school completion, like high-quality preschool, provide returns to the taxpayer that are as much as three and a half times their cost. Investing our public dollars wisely to reduce the number of high school dropouts must be a central part of any strategy to raise long-run economic growth, reduce inequality, and return fiscal health to our federal, state, and local governments. (p. 1)

Levin and Rouse (2012) contended the investment of intervention strategies would yield returns to the taxpayers that would not only be cost effective, but could result in returns three to four times their initial cost.

The ninth-grade year is a difficult and challenging year that includes many factors that determine the success of a ninth-grade student. Students must negotiate new social relationships and adapt to the practices and routines of the new school (Neild, 2009). The uncertainty and anomies that result may manifest themselves in behavior problems, weaker attendance, and poor course grades (Neild, 2009). According to Korbey (2015), a disproportionately number of poor and minority ninth-grade students have difficulty transitioning to high school. Subsequently, this difficulty has implications on their academics and issues with graduating on time (Korbey, 2015).

The transition from middle school or a junior high school can disrupt a student's learning (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). First-year high school students in the Chicago Public Schools are classified as on-track if they earn (a) at least five full-year course credits, and (b) no more than one F in one semester in a core course during the first year of high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). On-track students are more than 3.5 times more likely than students who are off-track to graduate from high school in four years (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). These factors put freshmen more at risk than any other school-aged group.

The differences, both academically and socially, between middle school and high school make the transition difficult. McCallumore and Sparapani (2010), contended it is important to consider what can be done in middle school to better prepare students for new challenges, and it is also important not to withdraw support for students after ninth-grade but to continue support during their remaining high school years (Neild, 2009). Furthermore, Neild (2009) suggested that ninth-grade students, for the most part, are not prepared for high school.

One of the contributing factors to a ninth-grader's poor performance is inadequate skill development, below grade level knowledge, and simply a misconception of the workload and difficulty of content (Neild, 2009). Ninth-graders are also under-prepared in the area of high school culture (Neild, 2009). Middle school culture in most regions of the United States provide students a much more relaxed environment where overall expectations are relatively low, timeline flexibility, and teachers who are not demanding. High school cultures are nearly polar opposite with high expectations, strict timelines, and demanding teachers (Neild, 2009). This change can be shocking to a ninth-grader and create a less-than-desirable atmosphere. When paired with a lack of cultural resources, the student has many barriers to overcome.

Conceptual Framework

Maxwell (2013) described the reasons for employing a specific framework in a research study:

> . . . to assess and refine your goals, develop realistic and relevant research questions, select appropriate methods, and identify potential validity threats to your conclusions. (pp. 39-40)

Since this study involved students who have experienced failure in multiple academic areas during their ninth-grade year, the work of Payne (2008) provided an appropriate conceptual framework.

Payne's (2008) ideas associated with the causes and effects of poverty are evidenced by many students' lack of adequate learning resources. Furthermore, she has indicated students of poverty inherently perceive life and education in a very different

way when compared to other socio-economic groups (Payne, 2008). Their perception of money, property, relationships, and priorities is vastly different than that of students with financial means (Payne, 2008).

Previous and current research has indicated cultural resources profoundly impact the educational achievement of students, either positively or negatively. In the next section, cultural resources are explained and evaluated through available research. These resources include students' parental support, home life, and socio-economic status.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources can also include environmental resources. For the purpose of this study, cultural resources were defined as parental support, home life, and economic status. Resources that support learning can range from home to home and can be impacted significantly by the total household income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), the average household income for the city in which this study took place was $33,379 from 2008-2012. The percentage of persons living under the poverty level was 24% from 2008-2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). According to Do Something (2014):

> High school students, in particular ninth-grade students who are especially concerned about their identity, are likely to hide their deficiencies. This is seen through higher absenteeism and isolation. Children living in poverty have a higher number of absenteeism or leave school all together because they are more likely to have to work or care for family members. (p. 1)

Absenteeism and social isolation may be a result of family/home factors.

A list of factors was adapted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2009) from the publication by Wells (1990), *At Risk Youth: Identification, Programs, and Recommendations,* and the Massachusetts Department of Education 1989 report, *Changing Schools and Communities: A Systematic Approach to Dropout Prevention*:

- •Low socioeconomic status
- •Numerous family responsibilities
- •No parental involvement in school
- •Low parental expectations
- •Non-English speaking home
- •Child abuse or neglect
- •Domestic violence
- •High mobility
- •Homelessness
- •Little opportunity for learning outside of school
- •Low educational attainment of parent(s). (p. 1)

Any of these factors, when present in a student's home, can lead to decreased academic performance (Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

Parental support and home life. Parental support and home life are cultural resources considered in this study. Parents either create a home environment that is supportive and positive for their children's education, or they choose to be disinterested, disengaged, or negative. According to Kim (2008), home is where academic success begins. Children learn what type of student to be from their parents (Kim, 2008).

Families that intact, promote structure and role model positive decision-making are much more likely to succeed in school (Kim, 2008).

A child's home can have a particularly strong impact on school readiness, claimed Bovaird, Ferguson, and Mueller (2007). Children living in poverty do not receive stimulation or learn social skills required to properly prepare them for school (Bovaird, Ferguson, & Mueller, 2007). According to Bovaird, Ferguson, and Mueller (2007), it is not uncommon for inconsistent parenting, which can include a lack of routines, supervision, and role modeling.

The way a family interacts with their children can have a more profound impact on their success than reading, writing, or arithmetic (Cummings, 2010). The University of Notre Dame Professor of Psychology, Mark Cummings, along with his colleagues has studied the relationship of 300 families of six-year olds. Cummings (2010) contended cohesive families who tend to be warm and responsive to each other, and where problems are resolved, have children who cope well, which increases the likelihood of doing well in school.

On the other hand, Cumming (2010), stated over-involved families with moderate warmth increase the anxiety and stress levels of the child, which is counter-productive and decreases academic performance. The third type of family is the "detached" family. These family types avoids problem solving, shows little to no encouragement or affection, and in turn have children with the most problems and perform poorly in school (Cummings, 2010). In addition, Cummings (2010) contended dysfunctional families who live within high-crime areas or poverty are likely to experience additional school problems.

Ninth-grade is a time when children are figuring out what it means to be a teenager, and Moms and Dads are figuring out what it means to be the parents of a teenager (Ghezzi, 2010). It may be time to let children make their own choices and experience a little freedom, but ninth-grade is also a time for parents to stay close by and be available when needed (Ghezzi, 2010). Students need parents who will give them space, time to study, and can help them through their homework, according to Tapscott, (2010).

Unfortunately, many students do not have a stable home environment. Students may live in situations in which they do not even want to go home at night (Tapscott, 2010). It is no wonder they do not finish their homework or study for class (Tapscott, 2010).

Students from single parent families have a mother who dropped out of high school, or have parents who provide less oversight and support for learning, are at risk of dropping out of school, according to Lacour and Tissington (2011). Lacour and Tissington (2011) contended home life is critical in the development of the whole child and creates an environment in which children can thrive. Lacour and Tissington (2011) have done extensive work in the area family dynamics and the impact the family system has on the child's education and have suggested that students with older siblings who did not complete school are also more likely to drop out.

A four-year longitudinal study of 14, 16, and 18-year-old students was conducted by Bouchard, Dion, Vandermeerschen, Laberge, and Perron (2013) in Canada. They determined maternal and paternal emotional support reinforces self-esteem over time (Bouchard et al., 2013). Maternal coercive control undermines self-esteem in 16 and 18-

year-olds, but overall, the results indicated positive parental practices are related to youths' well-being (Bouchard et al., 2013).

Bogenschneider and Johnson (2004), at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, cited Laurence Steinberg's research, which indicated student achievement primarily focused on course curriculum, instructional methods, and teacher training in the late 1980s through the 1990s. Yet those reforms have accomplished very little, because academic achievement is shaped more by children's lives outside the school walls, particularly their parents, peers, and how they spend out-of-school time (Bogenschneider & Johnson, 2004). They stated:

> If this country is going to turn around poor school performance, one of the most significant problems that must be addressed is the high prevalence of disengaged parents. A lack of interest on the part of parents is associated with academic difficulties and low school achievement. Steinberg estimated that nearly one in three parents in this country is disengaged from their adolescent's life and particularly their adolescent's school. (Bogenschneider & Johnson, 2004, p. 1)

Bogenschneider and Johnson (2004) contended parent engagement as the most significant problem in student academic performance in the United States. With the importance of an education engagement level of parents or guardians, parent support was identified as a learning resource for this current study.

The presence of physical resources can be solely impacted by household income, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013) determined the amount of income it takes to adequately provide the members of families with the basic essentials necessary to

support their livelihood. In the next section, the impact economic status has on students and their learning resources is discussed.

Economic status. Economic status in the United States is defined by most economists based upon income (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013), poverty forms a specific culture and way of life and is a growing issue. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (2013) data have indicated Americans on poverty has increased each year since 2000. According to CNN Money, the poverty rate in the year 2000 was 11.3%, 12.5% in 2007, and 15.0% in 2012 (Hargreaves, 2013). The poverty guidelines are based on a formula that factors in cost of living, the value of the American dollar, inflation, and minimum food diet (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

Families USA reported the federal poverty guidelines for February 2013 were as follows: $11,490 for a one-person household, $15,510 for a two-person household, $19,530 for a three-person household, $23,550 for a four-person household, $27,570 for a five-person household, $31,590 for a six-person household, $35,610 for a seven-person household, and $39,630 for an eight-person household (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013, p. 1). These figures indicated a level of income that does not support minimal living conditions, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013).

One-fifth of American children struggle with hunger (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012). Today, more than 46 million Americans—15% of the population—live below the poverty line of $23,050 for a family of four (U.S. Department of

Agriculture, 2012). Of those, 20.4 million are in deep poverty, which is defined as income less than $11,500 annually for a family of four (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2012). Children are especially hard hit. More than 16 million U.S. children—21.9% of the population—live in households struggling to put food on the table (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012).

There appears to be a high discrepancy between students from middle to high-income homes to those from low-income. A study by the National Center for Education Statistics indicated students from low-income families had a five times greater chance of not graduating high school (Sikhan, 2013). According to Sikhan (2013), children in low-income households obtain a long lasting negative effect that continues to impact their decision making (Sikhan, 2013). The emotional trauma and attitude that develops from living in poverty supersedes many of the social services available to children (Sikhan, 2013).

The cycle or revolving circumstances a low-income family encounters also has a negative impact on all family members. Low-wage jobs become the only option for parents who were formal dropouts or have minimal education (Sikhan, 2013). The low-wage jobs continue to put financial pressure on the family, which in some cases leads teenagers to feel responsible to participate in the family income (Sikhan, 2013). Coincidentally, a study by the Center of Social Policy at the University of Massachusetts indicated fewer than 50% of low-income young people ages 18 to 24 remained connected to school or the labor market, compared to 75% of middle to high-income people Sikhan, 2013).

Poor students and middle class students who receive exactly the same cognitive, social, emotional, and educational experiences do not yield the exact same results (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Poor students consistently score lower even though there are many similarities in family dynamics, values, and importance placed on education (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). A recent study indicated 81,000 students across the United States who were not in Title I programs consistently reported higher levels of engagement than students who were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).

According to the same study, there are seven differences between middle class and low-income students (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Those seven differences are health and nutrition, vocabulary, effort, hope and the growth mind-set, cognition, relationships, and distress (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Students of low-income situations are not broken, but rather deprived of essential resources and development (Jensen, 2013). Jensen (2013) suggested understanding these differences can be powerful for teachers. The ability to address these differences with purposeful teaching can have a significant impact (Jensen, 2013).

Lacour and Tissington (2011) contended the state of poverty indicates the extent in which an individual lives without resources. Resources can include financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical resources as well as support systems, relationships, role models, and knowledge of hidden rules (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Poverty directly affects academic achievement due to the lack of resources available for student success (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Low achievement is closely correlated with lack of resources, and numerous studies have documented the correlation between low socioeconomic status and low achievement (Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

According to Jenson (2009), who authored the book, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*, children raised in poverty do not necessarily choose to behave differently, rather they are faced with unbearable challenges that children not from poverty ever have to confront (Jensen, 2009). Furthermore, Jensen (2009), contended the brain activity of children living in poverty is conditioned to inadequate outcomes, which undermined good school performance. Jenson (2009) identified emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues as four areas of under-development in children of poverty.

Rumberger (2013), indicated poverty and dropouts are inextricably connected to families, schools, and communities and effect of health and adolescent development. In 2009 poor students were five times more likely to drop out of high school than high-income students (Rumberger, 2013). Dropouts face extremely difficult economic and social prospects compared to successful graduates, who are more likely to find a job and earn a decent wage (Rumberger, 2013).

Furthermore, Rumberger (2013), suggested family poverty is associated with many adverse conditions that impact the stress levels of students, which he referred to as "toxic stressors." The toxic stressors, such as food insecurity, imprisoned parents, domestic violence, drug abuse, and homelessness create a severe level of stress (Rumberger, 2013). This stress, in most cases, has a lasting impact on a child's behavior, learning, achievement, and social-emotional skills, which are likely precursors to chronic absenteeism and dropping out (Rumberger, 2013).

Community poverty is also a major factor in dropouts (Rumberger, 2013). Neighborhoods that have particularly high concentrations of poor, jobless, unhealthy,

instable families, and welfare dependent are likely to influence the children's' behaviors (Rumberger, 2013). According to Rumberger (2013), students living in poor communities are more likely to have neighbors, friends, or family members that have dropped out, which can influence young students' decisions.

The literature review of cultural resources indicates a strong relationship between children living in poverty and their experience with inadequate parental support and home life. The conceptual framework for this study was developed on the premise that the academic performance of a selected group of ninth-grade students could be related to a lack of learning resources. The literature review clearly indicates poverty or socio-economic status as major contributing factors for adequate parent support and home life.

The impact of poverty and absences of learning resources is clearly stated in the work of Lacour and Tissington (2011). Poverty directly affects academic achievement due to the lack of resources available for student success (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Low achievement is closely correlated with lack of resources, and numerous studies have documented the correlation between low socioeconomic status and low achievement (Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

Many people are unable to attend school from an early age. The cost of proper clothing, school supplies, and transportation may all be factors (Cleveland, 2014). People living in poverty who are unable to obtain an education become illiterate and incapable of prospering independently (Cleveland, 2014). Cleveland (2014) estimated that basic education could bring 171 million people out of poverty.

Physical Resources

Like environmental resources, physical resources can cover a wide spectrum of areas. For the purpose of this study, those areas included nutrition, sleep, and personal hygiene. According to the literature review, students who lack physical resources, such as nutrition (Wilder Research, 2014), sleep (Cirelli, 2015), and personal hygiene (Downey, 2014), have a greater chance of performing poorly in school. The physical resources of nutrition, sleep, and personal hygiene can potentially overlap and in some cases influence the level of impact of another resource. For example, lack of food could impact one's sleep.

Nutrition. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) reported hunger and *food insecurity* (e.g., reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns because a household lacks money and other resources for food) might increase the risk for lower dietary quality and under nutrition. In turn, under nutrition can negatively affect overall health, cognitive development, and school performance of children (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014). A review posted in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences,* summarized the data on household and children's food insecurity and its relationship with children's health and development and with mothers' depressive symptoms (Cook & Frank, 2008). It is demonstrable that food insecurity is a prevalent risk to the growth, health, cognitive, and behavioral potential of America's poor and near-poor children (Cook & Frank, 2008).

In 2006, the American College of Sports Medicine announced the results of a four-year program in Denver, Colorado, aimed to improve nutrition, physical activity, attendance, and academic performance (U.S. Newswire, 2006). Not only did standardized

test scores improve, visits to the school nurse were reduced by 67% over the four-year period (U.S. Newswire, 2006). The program, called "Making the Grade with Diet and Exercise," consisted of 10 to 20 minutes of exercise each morning, breakfast for all students, and recess prior to lunch rather than the traditional post-meal recess. The standardized test scores revealed an increase from only two state proficiency measures to all five, averaging a 23% increase (U.S. Newswire, 2006). Attendance rose and behavioral incidents were reduced by 58% (U.S. Newswire, 2006).

School districts throughout the nation have provided students food service options to ensure all students receive two meals daily during the school day, according to the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2015). The NSLP includes the School Breakfast Program, Special Milk Program, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2015). The NSLP also offers the School Snack Program and Seamless Summer Option for all eligible students (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2015).

These programs are operated in public, non-public, and residential child care institutions (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2015). One goal of the Food and Nutrition Services Section of the Missouri public, non-public, and residential child care institutions is to provide safe food (MODESE, 2014). Another goal is to offer technical assistance to ensure well balanced nutritious meals are served to the students of Missouri (MODESE, 2014).

Michigan has taken a stand on student nutrition and has implemented various programs and information to better prepare their students for academic success (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). When students are hungry and under-

nourished, their school performance is affected (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Lower test scores, low academic performance, and behavior issues have been shown in children with poor iron and protein intake (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

According to Hildenbrandt (2010), chronically undernourished children are more likely to be irritable and lack concentration. Consequently, they attain lower scores on standardized achievement tests (Hildenbrandt, 2010). In addition, undernourished children have difficulty resisting infection and are more likely to become sick, which results in missed school days and potentially falling behind in class (Hildenbrandt, 2010).

Recent studies indicate that nutrition affects students' thinking skills, behavior, health, and academic performance (Wilder Research, 2014). Research suggests foods high in saturated fats impact learning, memory, and if younger children are subjected to nutritional deficiencies their cognitive development could be delayed (Wilder Research, 2014). School breakfast programs seem to have a significant impact on students' attendance, behavior, concentration, and academic performance at participating schools (Wilder, 2014).

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 14.7 million children under the age of 18 live below the poverty line (PSRP Reporter 2014). Teachers observe children of poverty unable to focus on math because they are hungry or not sure if they will eat over the weekend, according to a PSRP Reporter (2014). American children who live in poverty are observed asking for seconds and thirds during lunch because of their starving appetites (PSRP Reporter, 2014).

A study conducted at the Washington University School of Medicine in the United States used imaging to measure brain volumes of 145 children aged six to 12. The participants' white and gray cortical matter, hippocampus, and amygdala volumes were analyzed. The results found poverty in early childhood were associated with smaller brain volumes (Mahesh, 2013).

After further investigation, the study found malnourished infants and children deprived of nutritional diets also observed with smaller white and cortical gray matter and hippocampal and amygdala volumes (Mahesh, 2013). Furthermore, it was also discovered that early childhood stress, generated from the conditions of living in poverty, caused delayed brain development of motor skills, physical growth, and affected writing and reading skills (Mahesh, 2013). Experts with the United Nations Children's Fund, the first three years from birth are important and malnutrition can cause permanent damage to one's health (Mahesh, 2013).

Children living in poverty lag 18 months behind their classmate in cognitive development by the age of four (PSRP Reporter, 2014). By third grade, their vocabulary is one-third of the middle-income students (PSRP Reporter, 2014). Parents of poverty are typically less educated and incapable of engaging in intellectual conversations with their children (PSRP Reporter, 2014). The delays of cognitive development for children living in poverty also increase the chances of learning disabilities, according to PSRP Report (2014).

Contrary to the ill effects of poor nutrition, proper nutrition promotes the optimal growth and development of children (CDC, 2014). Healthy eating helps prevent high cholesterol and high blood pressure and helps reduce the risk of developing chronic

diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes (CDC, 2014). In addition, healthy eating helps reduce one's risk for developing obesity, osteoporosis, iron deficiency, and dental cavities (CDC, 2014).

There is evidence to support that a strong relationship lies between nutrition and poverty. According to Cleveland (2014):

> People living in poverty rarely have access to highly nutritious foods. Even if they have access to these foods, it is unlikely that they are able to purchase them. The healthiest foods are usually the most expensive; therefore, a family on a very small budget is much more likely to purchase food that is less nutritious, simply because that is all they can afford. Sometimes people in poverty are malnourished simply because they do not eat enough of anything. (p. 1)

Children living in poverty are likely to not receive proper nutrition, and in some cases, simply not enough food, according to Cleveland (2014).

Sleep deprivation. There has been a wealth of research completed on sleep and the science of understanding sleep in people. However, the study of adolescents' sleep habits and behaviors are relatively new. There are many definitions of sleep deprivation, and although most are similar, Cirelli (2015) provided specific details. Cirelli (2015) stated:

> Sleep deprivation exists when sleep is insufficient to support adequate alertness, performance, and health, either because of reduced total sleep time or fragmentation of sleep by brief arousals. Acute sleep deprivation refers to no sleep or a reduction in the usual total sleep time, usually lasting one or two days. (p. 1)

The UCLA Sleep Disorder Center (2013) reported over 24% of Americans do not obtain the recommended amount of sleep, and 54% of Americans report some type of sleeping issue that prohibits uninterrupted sleep (UCLA Sleep Disorder Center, 2013).

Most teens need around nine hours of sleep per night. (UCLA Sleep Disorder Center, 2013). According to Dusik (2011):

> Sleep or sleep hygiene declines across the college years are associated with declines in grade-point average. Although students who are "evening types" initially experience the greatest decline in GPA from high school to college, their grades improve as they shift toward a morning chronotype. Results show that poor sleep hygiene was associated with a lower grade-point average in high school. Sleep hygiene worsened upon entering college, and poor sleep hygiene tended to persist through the senior year. Students whose sleep hygiene worsened during college also showed a greater decline in their GPA during college. (p. 1)

Proper sleep hygiene is critical for college students. Dusik (2011) contended that college and high school students' GPA declines with inadequate sleep.

Willingham (2012) found only 8% of teens report optimal sleep, and 69%, report insufficient sleep. Children who are deprived of sleep display poor moods, cognition, and behavior (Willingham, 2012). Although sleep studies and experiments are extremely difficult to administer, most data are correlational to poor academic performance (Willingham, 2012).

Willingham (2012) contended students who lack sleep are associated with poor grades and likely to repeat a grade level. Inadequate sleep creates a challenge to educators where they observe sleepy students in class every day. This behavior is seen as

a common nuisance instead of a threat to education. However, the reality is a serious impact on learning, where sleep deprived students slowly deprives their learning (Willingham, 2012).

A presentation at the Associated Professional Sleep Societies in Canada indicated when a group of students were allowed adequate sleep, they showed much better attention and mood versus when their sleep was restricted (LaRose, 2012). In addition, the students who were restricted on sleep showed poorer attention to computerized tasks and significantly lower test scores on quizzes (LaRose, 2012). The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (2008) contended:

> . . . sleep deprivation led to an overall performance deficit on an information-integration category learning task that was held over the course of two days. Performance improved in the control group by 4.3% from the end of day one to the beginning of day two (accuracy increased from 74% to 78.3%); performance in the sleep-deprived group declined by 2.4% (accuracy decreased from 73.1% to 70.7%) from the end of day one to the beginning of day two. (p. 1)

The American Sleep Academy of Sleep Medicine (2008) research indicated sleep is a factor in academic performance. For students who are sleep deprived, performance decreases in the area of information-integration (American Academy of Sleep Medicine, 2008).

The developing brain of a teenager needs between nine and 10 hours of sleep every night (Better Health Channel, 2014). The effects of chronic (ongoing) sleep deprivation may include the following: concentration difficulties, mentally drifting off, shortened attention span, memory impairment, poor decision making, lack of enthusiasm,

moodiness and aggression, and depression (Better Health Channel, 2014). This can have dramatically affect a teenager's life, including reduced academic performance at school (Better Health Channel, 2014).

Poverty can also be linked to sleep deprivation. Children living in poverty have been found to have poor sleep, which is described as shorter duration, poor quality, greater variability, and greater incidence of clinical sleep disorders (Buckhalt & El-Sheikh, 2013). Buckhalt and El-Sheikh (2013) indicated other findings in the U.S. link poor sleep in children with compromised cognitive processing, lower academic achievement, and maladaptive school behavior.

In the next section, the impact of personal hygiene on students is described. In many cases, according the literature reviewed in this study, students who do not maintain good personal hygiene can also struggle in school both academically and socially. A student's personal hygiene can also be related to a poor home life, low household income, and overall insufficient parental support (Gaskell, 2014). Students with poor personal hygiene tend to have low self-esteem, which can have a negative impact on their school attendance, according to Gaskell (2014).

Personal hygiene. Personal hygiene can include any healthy behaviors that aide in keeping one's body clean (Gaskell, 2014). Besides bathing and grooming, clothing and appearance can be included in one's personal hygiene (Gaskell, 2014). Personal hygiene is important for all children, but it becomes especially serious business after puberty (Gaskell, 2014). Failing to practice good hygiene as a teenager can be unpleasantly obvious to those in close proximity (Gaskell, 2014). Good hygiene practices during the

teen years can preserve, improve, and prevent a teen's self-esteem from digressing (Gaskell, 2014).

Teenagers experience an increased level of concern about their image including clothing, hair, and their overall appearance (Yellin Center for Mind, Brain, and Education, 2012). Researchers have indicated teenagers with good personal hygiene also have high levels of confidence and academic performance (Yellin Center for Mind, Brain, and Education, 2012). What teenagers wear is an important part of fitting into particular social groups (Yellin Center for Mind, Brain, and Education, 2012). What one wears can also impact how one feels personally. Research completed by a team at Northwestern University reported what a person wears can also impact how well one does on academic tasks, specifically on tasks related to attention (Yellin Center for Mind, Brain, and Education, 2012).

The researchers at Northwestern University coined the term, *enclothed cognition*, and defined the term as the impact of two influences occurring together; the symbolic meaning of the clothes to the subjects and the physical experience of wearing them (The Yellin Center for Mind, Brain, and Education, 2012, p. 1). The clothing that people, especially youth, choose to wear sends a message to other students; although the message it sends to one's self is even more influential (The Yellin Center for Mind, Brain, and Education, 2012). Higher motivation to learn has been linked not only to better academic performance, but to greater conceptual understanding, satisfaction with school, self-esteem, social adjustment, and school completion rates (Center of Education Policy, 2012).

Personal hygiene has a direct impact on self-esteem, according to Downey (2014). In fact, personal hygiene can goes as far as impacting your health, attitude, personality, relationships and confidence (Downey, 2014). Poor hygiene can negatively impact school and workplace performance when a person appearance causes alienation or isolation (Downey, 2014). Contrary to the negative effects, the benefits to good personal hygiene are widespread. According to Downey (2014), people who practice good hygiene are welcomed in groups at school or the workplace, which increases their confidence.

It is also suggested by Downey (2014) poor hygiene discourages people from getting to know one another. A less than desirable appearance, odor, and uncleanliness can offend classmates and prevent forming friendships or lasting relationships (Downey, 2014). However, maintaining good personal hygiene will benefit one's social life and interactions with others (Downey, 2014).

The literature review of physical resources, which included examining nutrition, sleep, and personal hygiene, provided evidence of a strong relationship between poverty and the lack of or absence of proper nutrition, adequate sleep, and good personal hygiene. Similar to cultural resources, physical resources can often be associated with a family's financial means. The conceptual framework for this study included physical resources of nutrition, sleep, and personal hygiene as important learning resources needed for successful academic performance.

The literature supports the following statements:

- Recent studies indicate that nutrition affects students' thinking skills, behavior, health, and academic performance (Wilder Research, 2014).

- Children who are deprived of sleep display poor moods, cognition, and behavior (Willingham, 2012).
- Researchers have indicated teenagers with good personal hygiene also have high levels of confidence and academic performance (Yellin Center for Mind, Brain, and Education, 2012).

Summary

The literature and research available on the topics of failing students, predictors for failing students, characteristics of failing students, and warning signs for failing students were presented in this chapter. For the purpose of this study, literature and studies were gathered to reflect the impact insufficient learning resources have on students' education. Although it was intentional to not solely focus on poverty, it became apparent that poverty directly influences learning resources.

The literature review encompassed both the cultural and physical resources that are essential to adolescent development. The literature provides supportive evidence that specific cultural and physical resources are critical to academic success. Some of those resources include financial stability, parental and family support, nutrition, sleep, and personal hygiene.

The literature and studies also indicated the difficulty in evaluating children's learning resources as it becomes a private family matter and is difficult to assess. Secondly, teenagers are typically uncomfortable sharing information that could be considered embarrassing and intentionally hide their issues. The literature review

provides supportive evidence through extensive research and longitudinal data. Research conducted on learning resources, poverty and dropouts are critical to the framework of this study.

Overall, the available literature and studies provided strong evidence that students who lack adequate learning resources are more likely to perform poorly at school and in some cases dropout. The literature also provides evidence that students who live in poverty are less likely to practice good nutrition and personal hygiene. Furthermore, the literature suggests that students who attend school undernourished or display poor hygiene are more likely to be irritable and have low levels of confidence and self-esteem. Last, the literature provided evidence that students living in poverty are more likely to experience delays in cognitive development, growth, and less brain volume development.

In the upcoming chapter, the methodology of the study is described. The purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons why a select group of ninth-grade students failed three or more of their classes during their ninth-grade year. The primary instruments were student and teacher surveys as well as student interview questions.

The surveys were created and administered to elicit responses from the students about their cultural and physical resources. The student survey questions were developed to gather individual perceptions and thoughts about the presence of specific learning resources as they relate to their academic performance. The teacher surveys were administered to collect the ninth-grade teachers' perceptions of the ninth-grade students who failed classes and the reasons those students failed.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Descriptive statistics were applied to study ninth-grade students who have failed at least three or more classes. This study was a mixed design. Interviews with ninth-grade students who have failed three or more classes and the reasons why they failed provided qualitative data. Student and teacher surveys provided quantitative data**.**

The data for this particular study were collected at five large high schools in one Missouri school district. The high schools selected were identified for their high number of ninth-grade students failing multiple classes. In addition, this study was conducted to provide teachers and administrators insight into the impact learning resources and basic needs have on overall student achievement.

In order to increase the validity of this study, the groups of students selected were extreme cases. Ninth-grade students who failed three classes during the 2013-2014 school year were selected for the study. According to academic policy of the participating school district, students who fail three or more courses the ninth-grade year are not promoted to tenth-grade. All students who fail course have the option to recover loss credits through on-line courses provided by the district and summer school courses; however, occupancy and course offerings are limited.

The ninth-grade students were selected by use of the school district's student information system, eSchoolPlus. The student data system provided a spreadsheet with student names of ninth-graders who failed three classes during the 2013-2014 school year. Included on the spreadsheet were each student's attendance percentage and

discipline infractions for the 2013-2014 school year. Those ninth-grade students were also selected for a survey that included questions or statements regarding the presence or absence of specific resources during their ninth-grade year.

Problem and Purpose Overview

The goal of this proposed project was to provide a more in-depth and authentic look into the perceptions and reasoning of failing ninth-grade students. Selecting a specific group of ninth-grade students who have failed multiple classes in a school year should increase the validity and accuracy of the research. Currently, the available research indicates there are specific behaviors failing students exhibit prior to and during their failing experience. For example, poor attendance or chronic absenteeism may be a by-product of other factors that influence the decision not to attend school.

According to United Way of Stanislaus County (2013), there are many factors that put a student at risk of dropping out of school. Many times not all risk factors apply to all students. However, research has consistently indicated the following risk factors as variables that lead to a student dropping out of school:

1. Lack of parent engagement
2. Poor academic performance
3. Work/family economic needs
4. Lack of a supportive adult
5. Disconnect between school academics and work
6. Not enough individualized attention
7. Low student engagement. (United Way of Stanislaus County, 2013, p. 1)

The list of seven risk factors created by the research of the United Way of Stanislaus County includes variables that may be related to students dropping out. This list can be connected to this study's research of student learning resources. Each of the seven can be characterized as a physical or cultural resource with the exception of poor academic performance.

In order to provide students with the necessary interventions, it is important to know why specific students display academic destructive behaviors. This study included investigation of the origin of these destructive behaviors by exploring the cultural, physical, and overall lifestyles of the selected ninth-grade students. This particular information complements the existing literature by giving a more clear understanding of why ninth-grade students' exhibit specific behaviors that lead to failing courses, and in turn falling off-track for graduation.

Specific ninth-grade students were identified as the sample, according to total number of failing grades in the 2013-2014 school year. The same ninth-grade students failing three or more courses were surveyed to determine their perceptions of parental and family support, home life, nutrition, sleep, and personal hygiene. In addition, ninth-grade teachers were also surveyed to gather their perceptions as to why certain ninth-grade students fail multiple classes. Furthermore, a randomly-selected group of ninth-grade survey participants was also asked to participate in one-on-one interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gain a deeper understanding of the students' perspectives about why they failed multiple classes during the ninth-grade year.

The purpose of this research was to shed light on the actual reasons and possible solutions to the ongoing epidemic of failing ninth-grade students. Secondly, there was a

vested interest for educators to find answers, strategies, or possible programs to address under-resourced learners. Many school administrators in the United States continue to investigate the causes of failing students and to implement various interventions to try and reduce the number of failing students. According to the literature, there have been many successes in reducing failing students and potential dropouts; however, there remains a gap and a challenge that requires constant attention.

This type of research could assist other school districts with their challenge to fully understand ninth-grade students who fail. It is evident by the available research and review of literature that the success of the ninth-grade year places students on the track for future success or creates obstacles that could lead to not completing high school. It can also be suggested that discovering solutions for ninth-grade students could provide helpful information to assist K-8 students, as well as tenth through twelfth graders. The following questions were developed to target, identify, and provide evidence for the study.

Research questions. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the at-risk indicators for ninth-grade students who fail three or more classes?

2. What are ninth-grade teachers' perceptions of the cultural and physical learning resources available for ninth-grade students who have failed three or more classes?

3. What are the perceptions of ninth-grade students regarding the reasons they have failed three or more classes?

Research Design

This study involved a mixed design. A mixed design, which includes both quantitative and qualitative data, provided the benefits of both methods (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). The mixed design captured the personal perceptions and revealed the true lives of the students outside the school and classroom. In addition, a mixed design appeals to different audiences and enables the researcher to look at data from a variety of perspectives, while addressing multiple questions (Wiersma & Jurs, 2008). According to Fraenkel et al. (2015), ". . . both methods provide a more complete understanding of research problems than does the use of either approach alone" (p. 555).

In addition, a purposive random sample of three students per high school was selected from the group of 81 potential participants. The secondary sample of 15 ninth-grade students were invited to participate in the interview and share information related to their learning resources and home lives. According to the Creative Research Systems' (2012) sample size calculator, the secondary sample size yielded a 24% margin of error. Although 24% is a high margin of error, the additional information gathered from the interviews allowed for further explanation of the students' perspectives and strengthened the research (Creative Research Systems, 2012).

By collecting quantitative and qualitative data, a triangulation design was possible. Maxwell (2013) described triangulation as "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods. . ." (p. 128). Fraenkel et al. (2015) determined when quantitative and qualitative methods are used to "study the same phenomenon...the two [methods] converge upon a single understanding of the research problem being investigated" and serve to triangulate the data (p. 559).

Triangulation also '. . . reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). Since the sample for this study included ninth-graduate students from the district's five high school who had failed at least three classes and three teachers from each of the five high schools, survey and interview data were "analyzed separately, [so] the convergence or divergence of the results. . [could be] discussed" (Fraenkel et al., p. 559).

The quantitative data were organized into two groups: student survey responses and teacher survey responses. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mode, percentages) were applied when analyzing the survey responses. After the interview transcripts were transcribed, open and axial coding procedures were followed. According to Maxwell (2015), interview data are organized into "categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (p. 107).

Population and Sample

The population selected for this study included students and teachers in one school district located in Missouri. The school district is located in a Missouri city with a population of approximately 160,660. Each of the five high schools in the district ranged from enrollments of 1,100 to 1,800 students.

There were a total of 1,625 ninth-grade students within the school district for the 2013-2014 school year. The schools' average free and reduced price meal population was 51%. There are 37 elementary schools, nine middle schools, five high schools, and one alternative high school within the school district. The locations of the five high schools

follow general population demands throughout the city. Two high schools are located mid-town and the other three are at or near the city limit borders.

A purposive sample of ninth-grade students was chosen based on specific criteria. The criteria, grade level, and school region created a homogeneous sample to increase accuracy in the qualitative data collection. The two criteria included (1) cohort ninth-grade students and (2) ninth-grade students who failed three or more classes during the 2013-2014 school year. Ninth-grade students ineligible for this study included students who had dropped out, withdrew to homeschool, or enrolled at another educational institution.

According to Trochim (2006), purposive sampling is used when there is a specific purpose for selecting predefined groups. The main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which best enables investigators to answer research questions (Trochim, 2006). Fraenkel et al. (2015) specified that purposive sampling is, "on occasion, based on previous knowledge of a population. . .[and the researchers] use personal judgment to select a sample" (p. 101). This strategy is particularly important for this study, because it isolated the students who have recorded failing grades in three or more classes.

The students were selected by use of the district's student information system, eSchoolPlus. The student data system provided a spreadsheet with student names of those who failed three or more classes during their ninth-grade year (2013-2014). In addition, the spreadsheet was formulated to also indicate the student's attendance percentage and number of major discipline infraction. The student attendance and discipline data was used as secondary data to indicate additional factors to their academic performance.

The specific criteria yielded 101 ninth-grade students within the district who were active students the 2013-2014 school year. However, only 81 of the 101 students remained active students within the district. All 81 students were retained as ninth-grade students for the 2014-2015 school year. The participating high schools require a specific number of credits for promotion in each grade level. The ninth-grade credit requirement for tenth-grade status is five.

These retained ninth-grade students were asked to complete a survey about their ninth-grade year. Teachers were provided a survey to offer their perceptions of ninth-grade students who fail to meet course expectations. A random sample of 15 students was selected from the same pool of 81 students to participate in an interview.

Instrumentation

There were two instruments used in conducting the research and data collection of this study. The student information system, eSchoolPlus, was used to group all ninth-grade students who had earned three or more failing grades in the 2013-2014 school year. The ninth-grade students who were surveyed were accompanied by a survey proctor to ensure test quality and to assist students with their questions.

The survey was 20 statements in length and was separated into two parts. In part one, statements were designed around the students' cultural resources, which also included their environment. Part two statements were designed around the students' physical resources, which included nutrition, sleep, and personal hygiene.

In addition, there were five teachers selected at each high school who also completed a survey. The teacher survey was 15 questions in length and asked specific questions about observations of failing ninth-grade students and whether teachers

observed evidence of inadequate learning resources. The teacher questions were aligned to the student survey and complimented the focus areas of cultural and physical resources.

The student survey and interview questions were field-tested by a panel of independent high school teachers for age-level readability and clarity of statements and questions. Furthermore, the teacher survey was field-tested by a panel of independent high school administrators for accuracy and clarity of questions. Both surveys and interview questions were also reviewed for privacy appropriateness because of the nature of the statements and questions. One particular staff member at one of the participating high schools had extensive training and experience in working with at-risk students, and provided assistance with constructing the questions and statements.

Data Collection

Following approval of the research by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Lindenwood University (see Appendix A) and approval from the participating school district, the collection of data began. The ninth-grade students who failed three or more courses were grouped by use of the student information system, eSchoolPlus. These data were printed in a spreadsheet and indicated there were 81 ninth-grade students who had failed three or more courses during the 2013-2014 school year. The additional risk indictors of attendance and discipline infractions were collected for each ninth-grade student participant as secondary data.

A letter of participation (see Appendix B) and parent informed consent (see Appendix C) were distributed to the students. Next, the 81 ninth-grade students were

administered an online survey (see Appendix D). The online software, Google Docs, was used to calculate and sort the responses.

Then, the building principal at each site assisted in generating a list of five ninth-grade teachers who would most likely participate in the study and provide additional comments. These five ninth-grade teachers at each high school were given an informed consent (see Appendix E) and were asked to complete an online survey (see Appendix F).

Three students were randomly selected from the participant pool from each high school for a one-on-one interview (see Appendix G). The random selection was done by a blind draw of students present at school on the day of the interview. The draw was completed independently by the Coordinators of Site Interventions (CSIs). The interviews were transcribed by the same independent CSI at each high school.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in three ways. First, after the risk indicators associated with the sample group of ninth-grade students were collected, the results were tallied. These data included attendance and discipline infractions. The risk indicators associated with the ninth-grade participants were compared to the non-participants.

Second, data were collected through a survey administered to the ninth-grade participants and ninth-grade teacher participants. The survey data were analyzed using frequency, mode, and percentages. The final data analysis was of the interview transcripts using open and axial coding, which generated themes.

According to Changing Minds (2015), “Open coding is particularly about labeling and categorizing of phenomena” (Section 5). The transcripts of the students’ responses were carefully reviewed by noticing key words and phrases. To guard against bias, and

maintain objectivity, the researcher is challenged to wait before drawing conclusions. As recommended by Changing Minds (2015):

> The main secret of open coding is a mental openness that allows for the discovery of the unexpected along with a curiosity that does not allow for final closure, even after texts have been read and codes identified from it. (Section 5)

The purpose of axial coding is "to develop categories, seeking relationships that will expose a category. Where open coding is about identification and naming, axial coding is about links and relationships" (Changing Minds, 2015, Section 10).

Researcher Bias

Since the researcher has been in the field of education for more than 20 years, personal attitudes and opinions surrounding teaching and learning have evolved. Maxwell (2013) cautioned:

> . . . qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding how a *particular* researcher's values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences of these. (p. 124)

To guard against researcher bias, CSIs were selected to conduct the student interviews and provide written accounts of the students' responses. These actions served to reduce possible threats to the validity of qualitative data.

Summary

The methodology for this study was to select ninth-grade students in a Missouri school district who failed three or more of their classes in one school year. An examination of three separate data sources provided information to determine if the ninth-

grade subjects who had failed three or more of their courses also lacked adequate learning resources. To determine or quantify the word adequate, surveys were completed by the ninth-grade students to identify specific resources that were prevalent in their lives.

In addition, three ninth-grade students from the test pool were randomly selected from each high school to participate in an interview. Teachers of ninth-grade students also completed a survey to respond to their perceptions of inadequate learning resources. The teachers were also provided an opportunity to comment on the survey, as to why they believed ninth-grade students failed their classes.

For the analysis portion of the study, the frequency, mode, and percentages were determined. This type of analysis was chosen to examine failing ninth-grade students and their learning resources. Considering the lingering variables with study, it was determined that straight percentages would reflect the most accurate and useful data.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the causes of failing ninth-grade students. At many schools in the United States, there are high percentages of failing ninth-grade students (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Students are three to five times more likely to fail a class in the ninth-grade year than students in any other grade (Cooper & Markoe-Hayes, 2011). The information from this study provides educators a better understanding of the impact certain learning resources have on student performance.

In many cases, schools and researchers have focused on the student behaviors that contribute to poor academic performance, but not the causes. This study was designed to investigate the causes by identifying specific learning resources that are critical to academic performance. In addition, students' perspectives and teachers' perspectives of the causes for failing were examined. This chapter is organized into the following sections: introduction and description of the research; description of the participants; district and participant demographics; data collection procedures; and discussion of trends, themes, and data highlights.

The data collection process was challenging due to the logistics of acquiring permission and administering surveys to 81 student participants and 25 teacher participants at five different high schools. Early in the data collection process, it became apparent the majority of student participants were not dependable participants. This was evident through their failure to return the parent consent forms (see Appendix H).

It is important to note the student participants were selected for this study based upon their poor academic performance; however, through observation, it also became evident the majority of the students were lacking in other skills such as organization, time

management, initiative, and responsibility. The inability to keep track of paperwork, keep their commitments to the survey facilitator; and complete the paperwork and survey showed a significant lack of responsibility.

This study's conceptual framework suggests students with adequate learning resources achieve at higher levels than students with low or inadequate levels of learning resources. Students who failed multiple courses their ninth-grade year were selected to determine if their poor academic performance was influenced by inadequate learning resources. The following questions guided the research:

1. What are the at-risk indicators for ninth-grade students who fail three or more classes?

2. What are ninth-grade teachers' perceptions of the cultural and physical learning resources available for ninth-grade students who have failed three or more classes?

3. What are the perceptions of ninth-grade students regarding the reasons they have failed three or more classes?

Participants

Once the study received IRB approval, the 2013-2014 ninth-grade students who failed three or more classes and were actively enrolled with the participating school district were selected. Within the district and at the five participating high schools, 81 students met the research criteria. There were 22 total students who volunteered to participate and successfully returned the parent consent form. The students were comprised of 15 males and 7 females.

It is important to note that of the 81 selected students, 51 students verbally agreed to participate but were unsuccessful returning the parent consent form as required. There were three attempts to acquire the parent consent forms. First, the students were given a hard copy of the parent consent form to take home to their parent or legal guardian.

Then, the researcher sent a letter; parent consent form; and self-addressed, stamped envelope to the homes of the students. Furthermore, the high school Coordinators of Site Interventions (CSI), who volunteered to assist with the administering of surveys and interviews, reported there were approximately 10-15% of the ninth-grade students not on the list because they had already chosen to dropout, homeschool, or left the district to attend another educational institution.

In addition, five ninth-grade teachers were contacted by email at each high school for a total of 25 teachers. There were 21 out of 25 ninth-grade teachers who volunteered to participate in the study and signed the informed consent form. The teachers selected represented various subject areas, including non-core classes. The teaching subjects represented included Art, Mathematics, English, Health, History, Physical Education, and Science.

This study involved investigation of learning resources of ninth-grade students who failed three or more of their classes during their ninth-grade year. Specific learning resources were identified as components to successful academic performance, and the lack or absence of those learning resources appears to create barriers to success. In order to collect this information, surveys were administered to a selected ninth-grade group of students and ninth-grade teachers.

In addition, 68% or 15 of the ninth-grade students were selected for an interview to provide individual perspectives and qualitative data to the study. The student surveys were designed in two parts: 1) cultural resources and 2) physical resources. Cultural resources were identified as economic status and parental support and home life. Physical resources included nutrition, sleep, and personal hygiene. The teacher survey aligned to the student survey and focused on cultural and physical resources the teachers observed in their ninth-grade students. In addition, the teachers had the opportunity to comment about why they believe ninth-grade students fail.

The data from this study started with a breakdown of the district demographics and performance, high school demographics and performance, and then the data from the surveys and interviews. The ninth-grade students selected for this study only had two reportable demographics, which were gender and socio-economic status. Secondary data were included to provide additional quantitative data that reinforced the performance of the students outside of their academic performance. The secondary data consisted of attendance and school discipline. Discipline was categorized as critical offenses, which were defined as discipline resulting in a suspension from the classroom.

The teachers were asked for years of experience and number of ninth-grade students they were currently teaching. Survey data were presented by straight percentages. The student interviews were transcribed and themes, similarities, and trend data reported, as well as excerpts from the interviews.

In addition, the survey and interview proctor at each site recorded notes and comments about the processes. Their information was included in the research packet and reflected in Chapter Five. The teachers were provided an opportunity for comment on

their survey, and their comment excerpts were used to authenticate the study. Both student and teacher survey percentages were disaggregated and categorized into specific learning resources or focuses. The survey data tables only display a select number of questions to condense the focus on specific learning resources.

Protocol

The 81 ninth-grade students and 21 ninth-grade teachers who participated in the study were provided written information and verbal information about the study, purpose, and details of their involvement. The ninth-grade students were notified by their building Coordinator of Site Interventions (CSI) they had been selected for a study. The CSI provided each student a verbal and written explanation, parent consent form, and the opportunity to ask questions about the survey and interview questions.

Once the CSIs received parent consent, they began administering the surveys. After the students completed the surveys, each CSI randomly asked three participating students to complete an interview in addition to the survey. The students were advised they could stop the survey or interview at any time if they did not feel comfortable. Only one student stopped taking the survey. The interview process was administered one-on-one in the CSIs office. To increase the comfort level of the student, the interviews were not recorded, but the CSIs were diligent about transcribing exact statements from the student interviews.

The ninth-grade teachers selected for the study were identified by the site administration as teachers who were currently teaching ninth-grade students and were most likely willing to participate in the survey. After receiving a list of potential teachers from the site administrator, a batch email was sent to the five ninth-grade teachers at each

high school. Within the email was an explanation of the research, purpose, and a brief explanation of the potential positive impact of the research.

Each teacher was allowed to respond to the email his or her willingness to participate or not. Following the email, teachers intending to participate were sent a participation consent form. Once the consent form was returned, an electronic link was sent to each teacher participant.

Process of Analysis

A quantitative and qualitative approach was taken to collect the data. The first data collected were at-risk indicators of the selected ninth-grade group. The at-risk data included attendance percentages and discipline infractions for the 2013-2014 school year. These data points provide additional evidence that learning resources could be at insufficient levels. According to this study's review of related literature, students who have low attendance rates and a high number of discipline infractions also have poor academic performance.

In addition, a student survey was administered to 22 ninth-grade students, and a separate survey was completed by 21 ninth-grade teachers. Both student and teacher survey data were analyzed by mode, the most frequent response to the statements and questions. The mode was reflected in a percentage and actual number of responses. The survey statements and questions were categorized into areas of cultural resources and physical resources.

The student interviews were transcribed, and then open and axial coding was utilized to organize the responses. Open coding is the process of reading through the interview responses and creating labels that represent themes of the responses (Gallicano,

2013). Axial coding consists of identifying relationships among the open codes (Gallicano, 2013). The coded data allowed for comparisons to be drawn and a mode to be determined. Eventually, themes emerged from the categorical relationships.

The data from the surveys, student interviews, and at-risk indicators formed the triangulation needed to draw conclusions and test the validity of the study. When specific themes emerged from multiple data sources, the strength of the evidence leads to greater results (Kennedy, 2009). This validation is also referred to as cross verification (Kennedy, 2009). Furthermore, obtaining data from different instruments increases control and minimizes bias (Kennedy, 2009).

District Demographics

The participating school district includes five high schools. The high school sites contain grades nine through 12. The district has one alternative high school, which is located mid-town and has a total enrollment of 112 students. The alternative high school ninth-grade enrollment was 26 in 2013-2014.

During the academic year of this study, the high schools ranged in enrollment from 950 students to 1,770 students. The school district had 6,940 high school students and 1,947 ninth-grade students. The district's average ninth-grade retention rate was 4.9% in 2013-2014.

There were a total of 1,852 ninth-grade students promoted to tenth-grade in 2013-2014. Shown in Table 1 is the district demographic information. The data in Table 1 reflects all active students during the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 1

District Demographics

Descriptors	Percentage	Actual Number
Total enrollment	N/A	21,795
Total female students	48.4%	10,542
Total male students	51.6%	11,253
Total free/reduced price meal	54.5%	11,876

Note. The data reflect the percentage and actual numbers from the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 2 displays demographics of the five participating high schools. The high schools are located within the city limits, and four out of five high schools were built between the years of 1956 and 1972. The schools are all similar in size, but locations vary according to population growth trends during the past 60 years of growth.

Table 2

High School Descriptors

Descriptors	Percentage	Actual Number
Total high school enrollment	N/A	6,940
Total high school female students	49.3%	3,419
Total high school male students	50.7%	3,521
Total ninth-grade students	37.1%	1,947
Total high school free/reduced price meal	44.9%	3,115

Note. The data reflect the percentage and actual numbers from the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 3 provides additional descriptors that further explain the performance of the participating high schools as a district. The five high schools have similar demographics, but also distinguishing characteristics. For this study, only two demographics were included, which were gender and free/reduced price meals. This was an intentional strategy to focus on the students' learning resources and their behaviors, rather than their status or demographics.

Table 3

High School Performance Indicators

Descriptors	Percentage	Actual Number
Graduation rate	89.4%	1,545
Dropout rate	2.4%	160
All five high schools attendance rate	92.9%	N/A
Total high school critical discipline offenses	N/A	4,147

Note. The data reflect the percentage and actual numbers from the 2013-2014 school year.

District Ninth-Grade Descriptors

The ninth-grade students in this study were purposively selected on the criteria of poor academic performance. The poor academic performance was defined as failing three or more courses during their ninth-grade year. The ninth-grade students selected for the study were from all five district high schools. It is also important to note the 81 students selected were active students. Table 4 indicates the performance of the district ninth-grade students.

Table 4

All District Ninth-Grade Students: Performance Indicators

Indicators	Percentage	Actual Number
Dropout rate	1.1%	20
Grade promotion	95.1%	1,852
Attendance rate	93.0%	N/A
Critical discipline offenses	42.6%	1,764
Free/reduced price meal	33.1%	1,030

Note. The data reflect the percentage and actual numbers from the 2013-2014 school year.

Table 5 depicts the student performance of the ninth-grade students' at all five high schools. The total number of ninth-grade students who met the study criteria and varied at each high school. The breakdown of ninth-grade participants from each high school were as follows: high school #1: three students, high school #2: five students, high school #3: 20 students, high school #4: 30 students, and high school #5: 23 students.

It is important to note the total number of potential ninth-grade students who met the criteria was not the total number of actual participants. Only 22 students returned the parent consent form.

Table 5

Ninth-Grade Participants Selected for Study

Descriptors	Percentage	Actual Number
Female participants	31.8%	7
Male participants	68.2%	15
Female attendance rate	85.7%	24 (absences)
Male attendance rate	88.5%	22 (absences)
Total male/female attendance rate	86.3%	23 (absences)
Total male/female critical discipline offenses	15.5%	273

Note. The data reflect the percentage and actual numbers of the 22 ninth-grade participants.

Student Survey Data

The student survey was comprised of two parts. Part one focused on cultural and/or environmental resources and was constructed of statements that targeted the students' everyday experiences with their family support system, peer support system, and home life, which included the learning resources within the home and transportation.

The survey was constructed with a Likert-style format to provide the students with statements that best fit their situations. Students were able to select *strongly agree*, *agree*, *somewhat agree*, or *disagree* with certain questions and *always*, *sometimes*, *occasionally*, *very seldom*, or *never*, according to their level of conviction. The surveys were intentionally constructed without the response options *I don't know, undecided,* or *neutral* to improve data results. StatPac (2013) suggested questions that exclude the "don't know" option produce a greater volume of accurate data.

Table 6 represents targeted areas for cultural and/or environmental resources. The data reflect the students' most frequently selected responses and the actual number of respondents.

Table 6

Ninth-Grade Participants: Part I Survey Results

Survey Statements: Part I	Mode	Percentage	Actual Number
2. The home you live in is pleasant and a place you enjoy spending time.	Agree	36.4%	8
5. The home you live in has a good place to study.	Always	54.5%	12
8. Someone within your family or friends has the knowledge to assist you with most or all of your homework.	Somewhat agree	41.0%	9
11. You are provided transportation or have the opportunity for transportation to and from school.	Always	72.7%	16

Note. These data reflect the responses of the 22 ninth-grade students selected for the study.

The second part of the survey focused on physical resources. Those statements targeted the students' diet, sleep, clothing, personal hygiene, and healthy living choices. In Table 7, there are four statements that capture the targeted areas and the students' most-selected response. It is important to note most survey statements contained a short explanation or example of specific behaviors to assist the students in answering correctly.

Students were able to select *strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree,* or *disagree and always, sometimes, occasionally, very seldom,* or *never* according to their levels of conviction.

The statements selected for Table 7 represent targeted areas for physical resources. The data indicate the students' most frequently selected responses and the actual number of respondents.

Table 7

Ninth-grade Participants: Part II Survey Results

Survey Statements – Part II	Mode	Percentage	Actual Number
13. Your family, parents, or guardians provide at least three meals, or give you money to buy meals each day, including weekends.	Always	99.6%	21
16. Your family, parents, or guardians provide adequate clothing or money for clothing and transportation to a clothing store.	Always	81.9%	18
20. You practice staying active and exercising on a regular basis.	Somewhat agree	45.5%	10
21. You participate in unsafe behaviors that could potentially cause immediate impairment or long-term impairments.	Never	50.0%	11

Note. These data reflect the responses of the 22 ninth-grade students selected for the study.

Teacher Survey Data

The data in Table 8 reflect the years of teaching experience in the ninth-grade teachers' current role, the number of ninth-grade students observed, and the percentage of students who failed their class. The data indicates the most frequently answered response. The teachers represented various teaching areas, years of experience, and perspectives.

Table 8

Teacher Participants' Descriptors

Descriptors	Percentage	Actual Number
1-3 years teaching experience in current role	42.9%	9
More than 81 ninth-grade students observed daily	61.9%	13
Less than 10% of ninth-grade students failed your class	57.1%	12

Note. The data reflects the percentage and actual numbers of 21 ninth-grade teachers surveyed.

In Table 9, the data reflect the five main focus questions on the teacher survey.

Table 9

Teacher Survey Responses

Questions	Percentage	Actual Number
10. Of the ninth-grade students who failed one or more of your classes, what percentage have shared with you, or you have discovered on your own, they receive little to no encouragement about their education or academic achievement?	d. More than 50% 38.0%	8
11. Of the ninth-grade students who failed one or more of your classes, what percentage have shared with you, or you have discovered on your own, they were experiencing family issues that are negatively impacting their academic achievement?	d. More than 50% 33.3%	7
15. Of the ninth-grade students who failed one or more of your classes, what percentage have shared with you, or you have discovered on your own, who do not have a stable living environment that promotes good decision making?	c. 31% - 50% 33.3%	8
6. Of the ninth-grade students who failed one or more of your classes, what percentage verbalized they were hungry and/or appeared to be malnourished?	a. Less than 10% 81.0%	17

7. Of the ninth-grade students who failed one or more of your classes, what percentage have you observed inappropriately dressed for the weather conditions, and/or dressed in unclean clothing?	a. Less than 10% 52.4%	11

Note. The data reflects the percentage and actual numbers of 21 ninth-grade teachers surveyed.

Teacher survey question 16 allowed the teacher participants the opportunity to make open comments about what they believed caused ninth-grade students to fail. Eight out of 21 teachers commented.

16. Please feel free to make additional comments about the causes of failing ninth-grade students. Teacher 1 (T1) identified two main reasons ninth-grade students failed classes:

> I believe the students who are failing 1) don't have parents or guardians who care about their failures. Most of my 17 failing students have four or more Fs at the present time. I try and call or email their parents to speak with them, but I get no answer, disconnected number, or no reply to my call or email. 2) I believe most of the students don't think they have to pass anything to graduate. They learn that attitude from elementary and middle school where they just get passed on, even if they didn't pass their classes. Then when they get to high school, it is very hard attitude to break. Last year I had a student that got all Fs and three Ds their 8th grade year, and they still entered high school. High school is not the problem. We get the problems and have to try and undo learned behaviors.

The comments by Teacher 2 (T2) are similar to T1, stating the causes can be linked to past educational performance and irreversible learned behaviors.

> Why haven't the above concerns been addressed long before the students get to high school? Most are unable to read a non-digital clock or do simple two column math. Most have trouble reading at grade level, which immediately puts them any learning curve. High school teachers are always reading about the wonderful things that are happening at the elementary level, but yet we don't see a better product walk through our doors. Secondly, if the parents do not have a stake in their children's future, the task of educating them is that much more difficult. If a student needs to be "held back" in elementary school...hold that student back. The school system is not doing that student a favor by "passing" him/her along to the next grade level. Reading, writing, and arithmetic should never be shoved to the back seat.

In addition to past performance issues, T2 indicated parents do not have a stake in their child's future.

Teacher 3 (T3) commented about the cultural learning resources, and the impact of parental support. "Often, the students who are failing do not seem to have support at home to succeed. The reasons for this are varied." Teacher 4 responded, "I think attendance is a major contributing factor for failing freshman students." Teacher 5 specified, "Ninth-graders lack of organizational skills, such as keeping a planner, holding on to papers, remembering, and preparing for test, etc."

Teacher 6 stated, "I teach honors classes mostly, and I find it interesting that I give, give and give multiple opportunities for students to take advantage of my willingness to help, yet they do not do anything to help themselves." Teacher 7 commented, "The big thing about students that fail my class is they fall behind early and

then give up the rest of the time." Teacher 8 replied, "I find it interesting that you don't have any questions regarding their laziness or choice to fail. I teach honors classes mostly, and I find it interesting that I give, give and give multiple opportunities for students to take advantage of my willingness to help, yet they do not do anything to help themselves."

The teacher comments provided additional evidence there are a variety of perceptions and theories for the reasons ninth-grade students fail. Three of the seven teachers commented about the inadequate preparation for high school, which are indicated by a lack of organizational skills, content knowledge, work ethic and attitude, and overall poor study habits. It was also mentioned by two teachers that the practice of promoting eighth-grade students who have not passed any classes is a significant challenge for the student and teachers.

Student Interview Data

The student interview was administered to 12 random ninth-grade students within the sample. The interview was comprised of five questions. The CSIs conducted the interviews and transcribed student statements. There were three questions selected for further investigation.

The questions selected were from specific categories that were also targeted in the student and teacher survey. Overall, the students were open and candid about their reflection of their academic performance and the reasons they failed. Presented are the five interview questions, which are followed by several student statements.

1. What are the main factors or reasons you believe led to failing multiple courses your ninth-grade year?

Once the responses to the question were coded, three themes emerged from the transcripts. The themes were “motivation,” “poor decisions,” and “negative influences.” Of the three themes, the students responded with comments that indicated their main reasons were related to a lack of motivation. Student 1 stated, “I really didn’t want to come to school and make good grades.” Student 2 responded, “I never bothered to pay attention in class, and didn’t care.” Similarly, Student 3 commented, “My work ethic was very poor.”

Student 4 responded, “I lacked attention and got caught up in school drama.” Similarly, Student 5 stated, “I did not listen to my teachers.” Student 6 commented, “I stayed out late and did bad things. I really didn’t want to come to school.” Student 7 stated, “I really didn’t care or like school. I felt like it was pointless.” Student 8 responded, “I slept in class, skipped class, and didn’t complete the work. I was also immature.”

Student 9 commented, “I didn’t care and was lazy. I knew the work, but didn’t feel like doing it.” Student 10 stated, “I had no motivation.” Student 11 responded, “I never remembered to do my work, and some teachers didn’t explain things very well.” Student 12 commented, “It was stressful, and coming to school increased my anxiety.”

2. What are your study habits?

The responses to these questions were used as secondary data to provide evidence for the students’ lack of learning resources. Student 1 stated, “I don’t study, because I do better on tests when I don’t study.” Student 2 specified, "I only study at school. I don’t want to study at home.” According to Student 3, “I have to be monitored, or I won’t study.”

Student 4 responded, “I use study guides and my text books, and sometimes I do additional research on-line.” Student 5 commented, “I listen to music while I study. I usually write things down in my notebook.” Student 6 also stated, “I listen to music and study a little every night. I try and ask my teacher a lot of questions.” Student 7 responded, “I sit in my room and focus on one thing at a time.”

Student 8 stated, “I didn’t have very good study habits. I go to Panera with friends sometimes.” Student 9 commented, “I don’t study, because it doesn’t make any difference.” Student 10 specified, “I read over my notes and study materials multiple times. I use flash cards, too.” Student 11 responded, “I didn’t ever study.” Student 12 stated, “I didn’t study my ninth-grade year.” These comments indicated the students interviewed had less than desirable study habits.

3. Please give me an example of what a typical evening looks like when it comes to homework and studying.

The responses to question three were also used as secondary data and not coded to establish themes. This question produced a variety of responses. Most students described an evening that had little to no school work or studying involved. Student 1 stated, “I sit around at home, and when I do homework, I sit in the kitchen. It’s not very quiet, because my brother is always running around making noise.” According to Student 2, “I go to work.” Student 3 indicated, “I do school work in the living room with my dad, and he checks over it.”

Student 4 stated, “I get home late, eat dinner, shower, and then work on homework.” Student 5 commented, “I get home and have a snack and work on assignments, then my parents get home and we eat. I go to bed around 9:30 pm.” Student

6 indicated, “It is peaceful and quiet around the house.” Student 7 responded, “I go home but don’t work on school stuff. I don’t like school, so I do things I can’t do at school.”

Student 8 commented, “I get home and have a snack, then I complete my homework before doing anything else.” Student 9 stated, “I go home and listen to music while studying and doing homework.” Student 10 indicated, “I work 25 hours a week at Taco Bell.” Student 11 commented, “I don’t get home until 8:00 or 9:00 at night, so I try and do my work during school.” Student 12 stated, “I go to the kitchen table to work on my homework. My mom helps me.” These 12 students indicated a variety of study habits.

4. Describe your family’s support and involvement with your education.

Two themes emerged from the students’ responses. Those themes were supportive and unsupportive in regard to family support and involvement. The following three students made these statements. Student 1 stated, “If I am failing a class, my mom gets on me, and I get grounded from a lot of things.”

Student 2 detailed, “My parents know that I don’t want to go to college, but they encourage me to graduate high school, because they never did.” According to Student 3, “They support me a little too much. Always involved with my homework and trying to help me.”

Student 4 responded, “I have really good support. My mom always tries to get me to do everything and asks me about my grades. She encourages me to improve, and I have consequences when I don’t.” Student 5 similarly stated, “My mom is very involved and makes sure I am completing everything. My brother helps me with stuff I don’t understand.”

Student 6 specified, “My parents help and support me when I ask. They check my grades on the website and attend parent/teacher conferences.” Student 7 also commented, “My mom and older brother help me. But my parents typically do not contact the school.” Student 8 indicated, “I have super good support. My dad is always trying to get me to do good. And Mom too.”

Student 9 stated, “My mother supports my after school programs and wants me to graduate. Getting involved with theater has helped me.” Student 10 commented, “My mom and brother quiz me, and my brother helps me.” Student 11 responded, “I have a lot of support.”

Student 12 also commented, “My support is good, and they’re always checking.” These 12 comments indicated the students have very different family support structures, but the majority reported supportive and involved families.

5. Do you believe that you come to school each day ready to learn? Why or why not?

Question five was also coded, and three themes emerged. Those themes were simply *yes* and *no*. Three of the students responded with the following statements. Student 1 stated, “No, most days I do not want to do anything.” According to Student 2, “Yes, I always wake up in a good mood and ready to see my friends and teachers.”

Student 3 articulated, “No, I have sleeping problems and do not feel ready for school in the morning.” When I am in a bad mood, I cannot focus.” Student 6 stated, “Yes, I am ready to learn something new. It takes me awhile to get going after I get here.”

Student 7 commented, “Yes, I get knowledge. I am tired, but after I eat breakfast and talk to friends, I am more ready.” Student 8 responded, “No, I am tired and just want to go home. I feel like there are better things I could be doing.”

Student 9 stated, “Yes, it is important to get an education.” Student 10 also commented, “Yes, it is important and I like to learn, but sometimes I am not in the mood.” Student 11 specified, “I am most of the time. I try to come ready, but not really prepared.”

Student 12 stated, “My mind is somewhere else a lot. I don’t want to be here, so I daydream a lot.” These student comments also varied; however, none of the students indicated he or she was decisively ready to learn.

Table 10 reflects data from the five student interview questions. The questions were designed to generate the students’ thoughts about the reasons that may have contributed to their poor academic performance. These five questions were coded, and themes emerged.

Table 10

Student Interview Results

Interview Questions	Responses	Percent
1. What are the main factors or reasons you believe led to failing multiple courses your ninth-grade year?	a. Motivation b. Poor Decisions c. Negative Influences	a. 66.6% b. 6.6% c. 16.6%
2. What are your study habits	a. Structured b. Unstructured	a. 75% b. 25%
3. Please give me an example of what a typical evening looks like when it comes to homework and studying?	a. Learning environment b. Non-learning environment	a. 58.4% b. 41.6%
4. Describe your family's support and involvement with your education?	a. Supportive b. Unsupportive	a. 50% b. 50%
5. Do you believe that you come to school each day ready to learn? Why or why not?	a. Yes b. No	a. 41.6% b. 58.4%

Note. The data reflects the responses of 12 student interviews.

Summary

This study produced a wide range of perceptions from the ninth-grade students and ninth-grade teachers. The surveys were constructed to create a level of comfort for both students and teachers, but to also generate personal viewpoints of why ninth-grade

students fail their classes. The participating district, high schools, and ninth-grade students' data were analyzed to illustrate the demographics, characteristics, and performance of the participating subjects. The data did not expose any unusual deficiencies for a large-city school district with five high schools.

The student and teacher surveys were constructed and designed to align specific categories. In addition, the interview responses were analyzed by the use of open and axial coding to produce themes. The themes were analyzed and frequency, mode, and percentages were calculated.

The student interviews were transcribed and analyzed by open axial coding to produce themes. Like the surveys, the themes were then analyzed and frequency, mode, and percentages were calculated. The student surveys and interview themes were then compared and contrasted.

The student interviews provided the most useful and authentic information. The 12 students who were interviewed provided honest testimonials to their cultural and physical resources, and the reasons they believe caused them to fail. Unlike the student survey, the interview questions were open-ended questions that allowed for the student to elaborate.

The teacher survey included a comment box which provided the teachers an opportunity to comment about what they believed were the reasons for failing ninth-grade students. The teacher comments were similar and indicated three main reasons for ninth-grade failure. One, a history of failing that had become a learned behavior. Two, students were ill-prepared for high school. In addition, three, students did not have proper support and encouragement.

The ninth-grade students selected for this study created research and data collection challenges. The CSIs, who administered the student surveys and interviews, indicated that the students' poor attendance and inability to return parent consent forms reduced the number of completers drastically. In addition, the students did not seem to take the survey seriously, as many finished in half the designated time.

In Chapter Five, findings and conclusions were summarized. The themes that emerged, implications of practice, and the student and teacher perceptions of why ninth-grade students failed multiple courses were discussed. In addition, at-risk indicators were included as secondary supporting data. Recommendations were also provided for future research.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the reasons and perceptions of why ninth-grade students fail a high percentage of courses their ninth-grade year. In addition, the conceptual framework of this study was built around the understanding all students must possess specific learning resources in order to be academically successful. The work of Payne (2008) and her best seller "Under Resourced Learners" inspired and motivated this research.

Payne (2008), who has spent over 20 years studying, writing, and presenting on poverty and inadequate learning resources, suggested that students who do not possess adequate learning resources are much less likely to be academically successful. Three main research questions guided this study:

1. What are the at-risk indicators for ninth-grade students who fail three or more classes?

2. What are ninth-grade teachers' perceptions of the cultural and physical learning resources available for ninth-grade students have failed three or more classes?

3. What are the perceptions of ninth-grade students regarding the reasons they have failed three or more classes?

Data Collection Limitations

The challenges of studying ninth-grade students with multiple at-risk indicators, which included poor attendance and poor behavior, were underestimated. Of all ninth-grade students who had failed three or more classes during the 2013-2014 school year, it

was discovered through the selection process that 20 had already dropped out of school. This reduced the total eligible active students from 101 to 81.

The 81 active ninth-grade students were then provided information about the study, including parent consent forms, which were to be delivered to their parents. The 20 dropouts and 59 students who did not complete and return the necessary paperwork reduced the participant pool by 72.8%. This limitation was unexpected and created a less-than-desirable number of participants.

The construction of the surveys was a difficult process with limitations. It was critical to consider multiple factors while drafting the surveys. First, it was important to develop statements and questions that would generate specific themes while maintaining a level of personal comfort and honesty, assuming the students would be reluctant to share personal viewpoints. Second, it was important to align the statements and questions for the student and teacher surveys to increase the likelihood of themes and connections in perception.

Furthermore, it was discovered through the survey and interview process that many of the students who had failed three or more classes were very difficult to manage. The CSIs, who proctored the student survey and interview, indicated that many of the students selected for the study had poor attendance, which made it difficult to coordinate meetings with them. Furthermore, a majority of the students selected for the study were listed with discipline infractions and some were serving suspensions.

It was also reported by the CSIs the students were irresponsible and forgetful, which led to incomplete paperwork and follow-through. This is supported by the following quote from one of the CSIs:

The pool of selected students was extremely difficult to test. Their poor attendance and lack of responsibility made it very difficult. I made multiple copies of the consent form for many of the students who lost the original copy, and I have rescheduled student's surveys multiple times, because they were absent.

Findings

Several conclusions and a variety of perceptions emerged from this study in regard to the causes of academic failure amongst ninth-grade students. The anticipation for significant support of learning resources being directly related to academic performance of ninth-grade students was not as evident as originally predicted. The guiding questions for this study are presented. Following each question is an explanation of the findings and the evidence of learning resources impacting students' academic achievement.

1. What are the at-risk indicators for ninth-grade students who fail three or more classes?

The primary data points that emerged from the at-risk indicators of the ninth-grade students selected for the study indicated significantly high percentages in low attendance and high percentages of discipline infractions. The 22 ninth-grade students collectively had 86.3% attendance rate, which is an average of 23 absences in a school year. This attendance rate is 6.6% lower than all other district students. A study in Utah found that students who were chronically absent in any year between eighth and twelfth grades were 7.5 times more likely to drop out of high school (Balfanz & Chang, 2013).

Furthermore, the 22 ninth-grade students accounted for 15.5% of all ninth-grade students discipline infractions. The data collected on the ninth-grade students indicated 84.3% of the 21 students had at least two at-risk indicators. Of the 21 students who participated in the study, 78.4% were listed with one or more discipline infractions. The second guiding question analyzed the ninth-grade students' perceptions.

2. What are the perceptions of ninth-grade students regarding the reasons they have failed three or more classes?

The ninth-grade students selected for this study participated in a 22 question survey about their cultural and physical learning resources. In addition, 12 of the 22 students completed a one-on-one interview. On survey Part I, cultural resources, students indicated there was not a significant deficiency of cultural resources.

However, when the survey data were combined with the interview data, 60% of the students indicated they do not have family or friends who can assist them with their homework. Secondly, when the data of the surveys and interviews were combined, 50% of students indicated they make poor decisions that negatively impact their academic performance.

On survey Part II, physical resources, 90.2% of the students indicated no significant deficiencies of physical learning resources. When the survey data were combined with the interview data, the students confirmed that they were not experiencing a lack of physical resources. In fact, of the 10 survey statements targeted on physical resources, only two students responded in a category that suggested any type of physical learning resource deficiency. Although, the interview questions did not specifically ask

questions about physical resources, 0% of the 12 students indicated an issue with physical resources when responding to the interview questions.

Overall, the student interview responses indicated lack of motivation, poor decisions, and not making school a priority as the main reasons for failing multiple classes. Six of the 12 students who were interviewed stated they did not take their schooling seriously, and when they realized it, they were too far behind to try and recover.

Also, 58.4% of the students indicated they did not arrive at school ready to learn. The reasons for the lack of preparedness varied, but 33% stated it was because they simply did not care. The third guiding question was developed to gather the ninth-grade teacher perceptions.

3. *What are ninth-grade teachers' perceptions of the cultural and physical learning resources available for ninth-grade students have failed three or more classes?*

The teachers' perceptions of failing ninth-grade students were collected through a survey. The survey, like the student survey, was categorized into the areas of cultural resources and physical resources. Teachers were asked to reflect on their observations of ninth-grade students and/or recall conversations with students and their parents about factors or reasons that led to their child's poor academic performance.

The ninth-grade teachers' perception was similar to the students' perception. The teachers did not indicate physical resource deficiencies, but did indicate a high percentage of their students do not receive adequate family support. Also, the teachers indicated that culturally, many of the failing students have long histories of failing prior

to high school. Teachers also stated that many of their students who are failing do not seem to care about their education.

Furthermore, the teachers indicated through their comments that poor attitude and work ethic were prevalent with most failing ninth-grade students. Teachers also commented a majority of their failing ninth-grade students have a "don't care" attitude and seem to think they will get a second chance or will be promoted regardless of their performance. One of the CSIs stated:

> They know what they know, and they don't know what they don't know. In other words, many of the students involved in the study have a lifetime of educational experiences with behaviors and habits that have influenced their decisions for most of the lives. When they are asked to reflect on the reasons they failed, they cannot see their deficiencies.

A teacher participant also commented about learned behaviors, such as the students who fail are practicing poor study habits and have no interest in changing those habits to do better or improve.

Conclusions

Overall, the data collected in this study reflected the body of research regarding the impact of learning resources on failing ninth-grade students. The study provided data that did not support the conceptual framework; however, the data did indicate that failing ninth-grade students, collectively, have similar thoughts and conclusions about why they believe they failed multiple classes during their ninth-grade year.

The data, although limited in quantity, indicated that the students selected for this study did not believe they lacked physical resources. In the area of cultural resources, the

students only mentioned lack of parental support and assistance with homework as areas of concern. These perceptions are interesting and can easily lead one to believe there is more to the story. Could the teachers and CSIs be correct about the majority of the students being destined for failure due to the history of failing and the theory of it being a learned behavior?

This study, although lacking in total participants and affected by limitations, indicated there are numerous factors affecting nearly each and every student who experienced academic failure. The goal of this study was to look beyond the surface of school behaviors and investigate the cause of the behaviors that led to failing multiple courses. Although the results were not decisive, it did become evident studying at-risk students was very challenging.

These challenges led to the conclusion that when attempting to seek ways to improve ninth-grade students academic performance, research must go beyond one year, and the instruments for data collection must be more comprehensive to fully assess the causes of their poor academic performance. It also became apparent that longitudinal data need to be incorporated into the study of learning resources and academic performance.

The participating teachers in this study provided the most helpful and accurate data. The teachers accounted for multiple years of observation and most observed more than 80 students daily. Their insight concluded the majority of failing ninth-grade students arrived at high school ill-prepared. Those ill-preparations included, content knowledge, study skills, work ethic, attitude, and a history of failing classes with no recourse.

These characteristics and behaviors most likely do not emerge instantly and without reason. It is more likely that they are learned and ingrained in the culture and decision-making process of the student. Although the CSIs were not included in the surveys or interviews, their comments about managing the student participants and administering the surveys and interviews were very insightful and valuable to understanding the challenges involved with highly at-risk students.

Two of the CSIs commented prior to data collection process that the students' reliability would be disappointing and would most likely not yield definitive results. One of the CSIs attempted to make phone contact with the parents of 20 participants and only made contact with three parents. Seventeen of the parents had non-working numbers, did not answer, or did not return the call.

This type of challenge and lack of cooperation is typical for the at-risk community, according to the CSI who called parents. The district CSIs main job responsibility is providing interventions for at-risk students. The CSIs work with a roster of 100 at-risk students at the building site each year—25 students in each of the four grade levels. Their insight to the challenges associated with at-risk students is most likely accurate.

Implications for Practice

This study produced several implications for practice for the ninth-grade students' academic performance and their learning resources. The history of academic performance in previous grade levels, study skills, and content knowledge or competency in specific subject areas should be considered as factors for retaining eighth-grade students. The participating district does not appear to have a strict policy on retaining eighth-grade

students, however, several teacher participants indicated they receive ninth-grade students who have not passed any eighth-grade classes during their eighth-grade year.

Promoting students who have not mastered grade level or course objectives is a common practice that yields poor results; however, retaining students may be just as detrimental to their academic success. By providing students the resources they lack, the students will have fewer barriers to overcome, which may lead to incremental academic gains. According to Payne (2008), "When you know the resources of an individual, then you can determine the intervention(s) that will work best. Interventions that are successful work the individual's strengths to enhance his/her under-developed resources" (p. 2).

Research restrictions are placed on minor-aged students; therefore, the inability to administer research without parent consent limits the pool of eligible participants. In this particular study, only 27.1% of the students completed the necessary paperwork to participate in the research. In order for schools to provide the necessary interventions for at-risk students it is critical that research be completed on a larger sample of students. The survey and interview facilitators (CSI) indicated the ninth-grade student participants' dependability was typical of the at-risk population.

This study also revealed the issue of student mobility. Three of the five high schools involved with this study have mobility rates 35% to 54%. Although mobility was not analyzed and included in this study as a factor for failing, the question of its impact on academic performance could be considered as a factor.

Mobility can easily be associated with poverty; however, it is a fact that the country has become increasingly mobile. According to Song (2015), students who change

schools frequently, regardless of the reason, could be negatively impacting their own education, according to a new report by the National Education Policy Center.

Recommendations for Future Research

According to the data collected, review of literature, and the findings of this study, recommendations for future research would focus on two main areas. The first topic is to expand the research to include a multi-year and/or multi-grade level study. In order to fully understand and capture the presence of learning resources, it is essential to follow a group of poorly performing students for several years.

The second topic of research would be to include the parents and guardians into the data collection process. The inclusion of the student's parents or guardian into the data collection would deepen the knowledge of the cultural and physical aspects of the child's home.

The first suggestion, a multi-grade level study, would decrease or eliminate outliers and increase the accuracy of students who have cultural and/or physical resource deficiencies. A multi-year study would isolate factors and decrease the issue of the ninth-grade year transition difficulty. It would also reduce lingering variables that can impact a student's performance without reason and with no correlation to past or present behaviors.

A multi-year study could include data collection on skill development and core competencies and whether students are equipped with the necessary skills to be successful in the next grade level. The supportive literature and teacher comments from this study indicated that ill-prepared ninth-grade students are a major factor in their academic performance, and cannot be overcome or corrected by conventional measures.

The second suggestion, inclusion of parents and/or guardians, would provide important perceptions for a future study. Parents and/or guardians should be the persons providing the cultural and physical resources necessary for learning. Surveying or interviewing parents and/or guardians would introduce the perspective of the provider and role model. The impact parents and/or guardians have on their child's academic performance is profound and should, theoretically, increase the probability of identifying the causes of inadequate learning resources.

The literature review in this study indicated parents and family support is essential in a child's academic performance. This is evidenced in the relationship study of 300 families of six-year olds by Professor Mark Cummings at The University of Notre Dame. Cummings (2010) contended cohesive families who tend to be warm and responsive to each other, and where problems are resolved, have children who cope well, which increases the likelihood of doing well in school.

Continuing the examination of failing ninth-grade students and expanding research to include multiple years are essential to identifying the causes of course failure. The preponderance of antidotal data regarding why ninth-grade students fail is ineffective when attempting to change student behaviors. In addition, it seems reasonable to assume that certain populations of students will continue to be at-risk of failing in the United States. This is supported by the ongoing challenges of poverty, generational cycles of dysfunctional families, and changing the culture of poor and uneducated communities.

Summary

The findings from this study yielded several conclusions that appeared to support the related literature, although there was not a significant agreement with the conceptual

framework. The preexisting research around the reasons for ninth-grade students failing courses pointed to multiple factors. This study investigated the learning resources of ninth-grade students who had failed three or more classes during ninth-grade year.

The learning resources were categorized into cultural resources and physical resources. The cultural resources, which included environmental resources, were identified as parental support, home life, and economic status. Physical resources were identified as diet, sleep deprivation, and personal hygiene.

The researcher also investigated the at-risk indicators of the ninth-grade participants. It was determined that the 22 student participants had high percentages of at-risk indicators in low attendance and discipline infractions. The additional at-risk indicators showed that the students are exhibiting multiple destructive behaviors that negatively impact their academic performance (Neild, 2006). Each additional percentage point increase in attendance decreases the odds of repeating 9th grade by 5% (Neild, 2006).

The categories of cultural and physical learning resources were then embedded into the survey instruments to reflect the perceptions of the ninth-grade student participants and the teacher participants. In addition, a student interview was administered as a third instrument to gain a deeper understanding of the students' perceptions. The findings of student surveys indicated that the students' believed they lacked motivation, lacked adequate home support and were not prepared to learn on a daily basis.

In addition to the factors that negatively impact student performance, there is also the compounding issue of inadequate family engagement. Research repeatedly correlates

family engagement with student achievement, yet the strategy is rarely used as an integral part of school reform (Lopez et al., 2010).

The teachers' perceptions were very similar to the students. The teachers indicated that the failing ninth-grade students did not have adequate home support and were lacking in motivation. The teachers believed failing ninth-grade students are also ill-prepared for high school. It was also revealed that both student and teacher participants did not perceive that physical resources were a factor in academic performance.

Appendix A

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE:	March 25, 2015
TO:	Eric Ramsey, Ed.S
FROM:	Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board
STUDY TITLE:	[714270-1] Failing Ninth-grade Students in a Missouri School District, and the Comparison to Learning Resources
IRB REFERENCE #:	
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	March 25, 2015
EXPIRATION DATE:	March 25, 2016
REVIEW TYPE:	Full Committee Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Full Committee Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of March 25, 2016.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

If you have any questions, please contact Megan Woods at (636) 485-9005 or mwoods1@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to mwoods1@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

Appendix B

Letter of Participation

Date_____

Dear Student,

You have been selected for a study based on your academic performance during your ninth-grade year. This study will include a 20-question survey, and some of you will also be asked five additional interview questions by your CSI. If you decide to volunteer your time, you will be provided a permission form for your parent/guardian to sign, which will allow you to complete a survey and respond to statements about your freshmen year. The entire process will take 10-15 minutes.

The information that you provide will help the [redacted] schools better understand the obstacles you faced during your ninth-grade year and the reasons that led to your low grades. It is our hope to use this information to improve our interventions and assistance for ninth-grade students and other struggling students. It is important that you are honest with your answers, and at any time you are not comfortable with completing this survey, please notify your CSI.

Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix C

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS TO SIGN FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

"Failing Ninth-grade Students, and the Comparison to Learning Resources"

Principal Investigator Eric W. Ramsey

Telephone: (417) [redacted] E-mail: EWR588@lindenwood.edu

Participant_____Parent Contact info_____

_____

Dear Parent,

1. Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Eric Ramsey under the guidance of Dr. Sherry DeVore. Although your child is no longer a ninth-grade student, he/she will be asked questions about his/her ninth-grade year.

The purpose of this research is to determine the at-risk indicators for ninth-grade students who fail three or more classes and their perceptions regarding the reasons they have not succeeded academically.

2. a) Your child's participation will involve the following:

- The tenth-grade students who are selected will be issued a participation form that explains the details of their participation responsibilities. The student may choose to not participate.

- The tenth-grade students who are selected will be issued a 20 question survey to determine the level and availability of adequate learning resources.

- Approximately, 10% of the tenth-grade students will be randomly selected to participate in a follow-up five question interview to further explain their answers about learning resources.

- This study will be conducted during the 2014-2015 school year.

- Approximately [100] (district total) students may be involved in this research.

b) The amount of time involved in your child's participation for completion of the survey will be 10-15 minutes. An additional 10-15 minutes will be required for the students selected to complete the interview portion of the research. The interviews will be audio taped and later transcribed.

3. The risks associated with the survey and interview are minimal. It is possible that some students may be upset to respond to statements about their home life and the learning resources they do not have access to.

4. There are no direct benefits for your child's participation in this study. However, your child's participation will contribute to the knowledge about student resources.

5. Your child's participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to let your child participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent for your child's participation at any time. Your child may choose not to answer any part of the survey that he or she does not want to answer. You and your child will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to let your child participate or to withdraw your child.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your child's privacy. As part of this effort, your child's identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Eric Ramsey at (417) [redacted] or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Sherry DeVore at (417) 881-0009). You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I may retain a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my child's participation in the research described above.

Parent's/Guardian's Signature	Date	Parent's/Guardian's Printed Name

Child's Printed Name

Signature of Investigator Date Investigator Printed Name

Revised 8-8-2012

Appendix D

Student Survey Statements

Part I - Cultural & Environmental Resources:

1. The home you live in is pleasant and a place you enjoy spending time.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

2. The home you live in has a bed for you to sleep in.
   - Always
   - Sometimes
   - Occasionally
   - Very seldom
   - Never

3. The home you live in has a bathroom where you bathe.
   - Always
   - Sometimes
   - Occasionally
   - Very seldom
   - Never

4. The home you live in has a good place to study. *(For example, quiet, orderly, and comfortable).*
   - Always
   - Sometimes
   - Occasionally
   - Very seldom
   - Never

5. Your parents / guardians communicate to you their support for your educational success. *(For example, assist, take an interest, encourage, promote good decision making)*
   - Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

6. Your family (those you live with) communicate their support for your educational success. *(For example, assist, take an interest, encourage, promote good decision making)*
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

7. Someone within your family or friends has the knowledge to assist you with <u>most</u> or <u>all</u> of your homework.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

8. Friends communicate or provide positive support for my academic success. *(For example, encourage, assist, promote good decision making)*
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Somewhat Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree

9. You are provided transportation to and from school. *(For example, bus, vehicle, city bus)*
   - Always
   - Sometimes
   - Occasionally
   - Very seldom
   - Never

10. The only way you can get to school is by walking.
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Occasionally
    - Very seldom
    - Never

Part II - Physical Resources:

11. Your family, parents, or guardians provide at least three meals or give you money to buy two meals each day, including weekends.
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Occasionally
    - Very seldom
    - Never

12. The food that you eat when you are not at school is healthy. *(For example, proper amounts of grains, vegetables, & fruit, dairy, and meats)*
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Occasionally
    - Very seldom
    - Never

13. You arrive at school hungry.
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Occasionally
    - Very seldom
    - Never

14. Your family, parents, or guardians provide adequate clothing or money for clothing and transportation to a clothing store.
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Occasionally
    - Very seldom
    - Never

15. The home where you live has a washer and dryer that works properly.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

16. Your clothing fits correctly and is appropriate for indoor and outdoor conditions.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

17. You have appropriate shoes for the climate and conditions of the environment.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

18. You practice staying active and exercising on a regular basis. *(For example, walking long distances, jogging, biking, swimming, playing sports, or physically active games)*
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Somewhat Agree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

19. You participate in unsafe behaviors that could potentially cause immediate impairments or lifelong impairments. *(For example, drugs or alcohol)*
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Occasionally
    - Very seldom
    - Never

20. You get a minimum of 8 hours of sleep at least 5 days a week.
    - Always
    - Sometimes
    - Occasionally
    - Very seldom
    - Never

Appendix E

LINDENWOOD

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

"Failing Ninth-grade Students, and the Comparison to Learning Resources"

Principal Investigator Eric W. Ramsey

Telephone: (417) [redacted] E-mail: EWR588@lindenwood.edu

Participant_____Contact info _____

_____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Eric Ramsey under the guidance of Dr. Sherry DeVore. The purpose of this research is to determine if there is a significant difference between ninth-grade students' academic performance and their learning resources.

2. a) Your participation will involve the following:
   - Teachers who are currently teaching ninth-grade students will be selected to assist in a study about inadequate learning resources of ninth-grade students. Teachers selected will be asked to participate in a 20-question survey.
   - The ninth-grade teachers will be asked to recollect the observations they have had about students lacking specific learning resources and their academic performance in class.

   b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 15 minutes.

   - Approximately [20] (district total) will be involved in this research.

3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about student achievement

inadequate learning resources.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Eric Ramsey at (417) [redacted] or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Sherry DeVore at (417) 881-0009. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I may retain a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____	_____
Participant's Signature Date	Participant's Printed Name
_____	_____
Signature of Principal Investigator Date	Investigator Printed Name

Revised 8-8-2012

Appendix F

Teacher Survey Questions

1. How many years have you taught at least one class of ninth-grade students at your present high school?
    a. 1-3 years
    b. 4-7 years
    c. 8-11 years
    d. More than 12 years

2. How many ninth-grade students are you currently observing in all of your classes at your present high school?
    a. Less than 20
    b. 21-50
    c. 51-80
    d. More than 81

3. What percentage of ninth-grade students failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes?
    a. Less than 10%
    b. 11% to 30%
    c. 31% to 50%
    d. More than 50%

4. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage are failing due to lack of attendance?
    a. Less than 10%
    b. 11% to 30%
    c. 31% to 50%
    d. More than 50%

5. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have verbalized their fatigue and/or you observed their abnormal fatigue in class?
    a. Less than 10%
    b. 11% to 30%
    c. 31% to 50%

   d. More than 50%

6. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage verbalized they were hungry and/or appear to be malnourished?
   a. Less than 10%
   b. 11% to 30%
   c. 31% to 50%
   d. More than 50%

7. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have you observed inappropriately dressed for the weather conditions, and/or dressed in unclean clothing?
   a. Less than 10%
   b. 11% to 30%
   c. 31% to 50%
   d. More than 50%

8. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have verbalized they did not have a place at home to successfully read and /or study?
   a. Less than 10%
   b. 11% to 30%
   c. 31% to 50%
   d. More than 50%

9. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have a parent or guardian who shared that he or she could not provide adequate learning resources for their child? *(i.e. computer, tutoring, school supplies, or academic support).*
   a. Less than 10%
   b. 11% to 30%
   c. 31% to 50%
   d. More than 50%

10. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have shared with you, or you have discovered on your own, they receive little to no encouragement about their education or academic achievement?
    a. Less than 10%
    b. 11% to 30%

c. 31% to 50%
d. More than 50%

11. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have shared with you, or you have discovered on your own, they are experiencing family issues that are negatively impacting the academic achievement?
    a. Less than 10%
    b. 11% to 30%
    c. 31% to 50%
    d. More than 50%

12. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have shared with you, or you have discovered on your own, they are taking care of younger family members or adult family members due to the inability of parental care or responsibility?
    a. Less than 10%
    b. 11% to 30%
    c. 31% to 50%
    d. More than 50%

13. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have shared with you, or you have discovered on your own, **do not** have parents or guardians who have a high school education?
    a. Less than 10%
    b. 11% to 30%
    c. 31% to 50%
    d. More than 50%

14. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have shared with you or you have discovered on your own **do not** receive positive encouragement and/or assistance with their school work.
    a. Less than 10%
    b. 11% to 30%
    c. 31% to 50%
    d. More than 50%

15. Of the ninth-grade students who failed or are currently failing one or more of your classes, what percentage have shared with you or you have discovered on your own that **do not** have a stable living environment that promotes good decision making.
    a. Less than 10%
    b. 11% to 30%

c. 31% to 50%
d. More than 50%

Appendix G

Student Interview Questions

1. What are the main factors or reasons you believe led to failing multiple courses your ninth-grade year?
2. What are your study habits?
3. Please give me an example of what a typical evening looks like when it comes to homework and studying.
4. Describe your family's support and involvement with your education.
5. Do you believe that you come to school each day ready to learn? Why or why not?

Appendix H

Follow-up Letter

Date _____

Dear Student,

During the month of May, your high school CSI contacted you about completing a survey. Your CSI indicated to me that you completed the survey, but your permission form was not turn in. In order for your survey to be accepted, your parent or guardian must sign and return the permission form.

Thank you for completing the survey. The information that you provided will help the [redacted] schools better understand the obstacles you faced during your ninth-grade year and the reasons that led to your low grades. It is our hope to use this information to improve our interventions and assistance for ninth-grade students and other struggling students.

There is a return envelope enclosed that does not require a stamp. Please complete the permission form and drop in the mail at your earliest convenience. Thank you again for taking time to complete the survey and return the permission form.

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Vita

Eric Ramsey currently serves as a high school principal in the Springfield School District in Springfield, Missouri. He has eight years of classroom experience at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. In addition, he has completed 13 years of education administration at the secondary level. His studies have included a Bachelor of Science degree in physical education with a minor in science, a Masters of Education Administration with a K-12 principal certification, and a Specialist in Education Administration with a superintendent emphasis.

Eric is a life-long learner who has received extensive training in the Professional Learning Communities model and implemented PLCs in two school districts. He has led and implemented a late start schedule, a weekly teacher collaboration model, and a "school-within-a-school" concept to develop student leadership skills throughout a school and community.