A mixed methods study on factors that influence recent high school dropouts to persist in adult secondary educational programs to pursue the general educational development certificate

Latanya L. Fanion
Clark Atlanta University

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

FANION, LATANYA L.  B.S. TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY, 2003
M.ED. VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY, 2004
ED.S. MERCER UNIVERSITY, 2008

A MIXED METHODS STUDY ON FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE RECENT
HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS TO PERSIST IN ADULT SECONDARY
EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO PURSUE THE GENERAL
EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CERTIFICATE

Committee Chair: Dr. Trevor Turner
Dissertation dated May 2012

Every day thousands of students make the decision to abandon the nation's high schools for various reasons. Instead of staying in school and graduating with their high school diploma, these students opt for a life that is often inundated with personal, social, educational, and employment barriers, such as unemployment, incarceration, poverty, and a reliance on public assistance. After being out of school and experiencing these unwelcoming circumstances, many high school dropouts decide to give education a second chance. So, within years of leaving school, many high school dropouts enroll in adult education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. Although thousands of students return to extend their education, the data show that some
students persist, others continue through a cycle of “stopping out,” and many give up once again. Because of this occurrence and the reality that existing research examining this phenomenon is scarce, this study sought to disclose the specific variables that increased a student’s likelihood of persisting after returning to Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate.

To adequately understand this phenomenon, a mixed-methods approach was utilized to determine which student-input, environmental, and institutional variables showed a relationship with persistence. To analyze the findings, the researcher referred to descriptive statistics, a frequency count, $t$-tests, qualitative coding, a Pearson $r$ correlation, and analysis of observation data. The findings demonstrated that there was a high-positive relationship between persistence and self-efficacy, teacher-student relationships, the impact of family, teaching methods and pedagogy, and sense of belonging. Moreover, the qualitative data demonstrated that the convenience and flexibility of classes was also significant. Findings from the qualitative data also yielded additional variables that impacted persistence that were not in the researcher’s initial hypotheses. Implications, recommendations, and limitations were discussed in detail.
A MIXED METHODS STUDY ON FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE RECENT HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS TO PERSIST IN ADULT SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO PURSUE THE GENERAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CERTIFICATE

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

LATANYA L. FANION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY 2012
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Researching the factors that influence recent high school dropouts to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate has truly been an enlightening experience. I have been able to understand the variables that influence recent high school dropouts to give education a second chance despite an earlier decision to abandon high school. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Trevor Turner, who provided me with the guidance and support throughout the entire dissertation process. To my committee members, Drs. Moses Norman and Darryl Groves, I appreciate your insight and recommendations. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Barbara Hill and Mrs. Betty Cooke for their encouragement and kind words. My gratitude is also extended to: Sandra Kinney, Bobby Creech, Jon Collins, Dr. Martha Coursey, Stephanie Rooks, Alberto Leyva, the adult education teachers that welcomed me into their classes, and all the students who willingly participated in my research study.

Last, I would like to send my most heartfelt appreciation to my best friend and husband, Gerald A. Fanion, III for being patient and supportive throughout this entire process. When I had papers to write or articles to read, you were there. When I missed family vacations or did not have the energy to cook dinner, you were accepting. And, as I neared the end of my dissertation process, you continued to inspire and encourage me to remain steadfast and resilient in pursuing my goal. Your kindness has not gone unnoticed. Your dedication is truly appreciated.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

By the conclusion of the 2011 school year, researchers estimate that more than 1.2 million of the nation’s students will decide to dropout of high school—abandoning the very institution that is intended to level the playing field, broaden postsecondary opportunities, and allow them to transcend social structures that they would not be able to access otherwise (Diplomas Count, 2010). Consequently, scores of high school dropouts will encounter unwelcoming circumstances as they struggle to overcome personal, social, educational, and employment barriers such as unemployment, poor health, poverty, incarceration, a reliance on public assistance, and the likelihood of rearing children who also become high school dropouts (Balfanz, Fox, Bridgeland, & McNaught, 2009).

Additionally, many who leave will earn considerably less in income, averaging just 37 cents for every dollar earned by high school graduates (Rousse, 2005).

Because of these grim statistics, after dropping out of high school and experiencing the obscurities that come along with not having a high school diploma, researchers posit that many high school dropouts begin to suffer from feelings of inadequacy due in part to a lack of human capital, limited access to social capital, and little to no educational or employment opportunities (Rousse, 2005). Accordingly, many who abandon school quickly discover that surviving without a high school diploma is challenging because most are unable to find a steady job, seek career advancements,
provide for their families, or feel contentment with their progress in life. For these reasons, many high school dropouts realize that their decision to leave school was a mistake. Consequently, these distressing antecedents prompt numerous high school dropouts to take the necessary actions to correct their mistake; thus, many decide to give education a second chance. By returning to education, these students demonstrate that dropping out of high school is not always the end of their formal education (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004).

In fact, opting to reenroll and give education a second chance is a decision that a respectable number of high school dropouts make after encountering the negative consequences of leaving school prematurely. Many return to the very high schools they abandoned, while others enroll in alternative education programs within their school districts to satisfy the requirements to obtain a high school diploma. Conversely, some decide to pursue the General Educational Development (GED) certificate—a credential equivalent to the high school diploma that gives high school dropouts the chance to validate that they possess the knowledge and skills comparable to high school graduates—by seeking learning opportunities through various Adult Secondary Education programs offered by federal and state agencies within their communities (Rachal & Bingham, 2004). By and large, recent reports suggest that more than 43% of high school dropouts return to education at some point during their adulthood to complete the requirements for graduation or to pursue an alternative credential, such as the General Educational Development certificate. Moreover, most return within 2-3 years of dropping out (Perin, Flugman, & Spiegel, 2006; Rachal & Bingham, 2004; Hurst, Kelly,
& Princiotta, 2004). Although many high school dropouts return to some form of schooling to complete their education, the true problem stems from the inability of many of these students to persist after making the decision to return—an alarming trend that continues to serve as the primary reason many high school dropouts fail to complete their education.

According to the 2005 GED Testing Program Statistical Report, more than 39 million adults in the U. S. age 16 years and older lacked a high school diploma in 2005 (American Council on Education, 2006). Correspondingly, a report by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (2007) revealed that less than 1 percent of those adults were enrolled in Adult Secondary Education programs, which are designed for students age 16 and older who fail to complete high school but desire to obtain the General Educational Development certificate to increase their postsecondary and career opportunities. Similar findings were reported in the state of Georgia. During the 2008 fiscal year, a report compiled by the Technical College System of Georgia (2009) revealed that 1.3 million Georgians were without a high school diploma. As a result, these residents had fewer career choices, a more challenging time getting promoted on their jobs, and less of a chance to realize what they were truly capable of doing with their lives (Technical College System of Georgia, 2009). Despite these stifling circumstances, statistics show that less than 1 percent of the adults living in Georgia without a high school diploma were enrolled in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate 2008 (Technical College System of Georgia, 2009). Moreover, of those who reenrolled in Adult Secondary Education
classes, an even smaller percentage persisted with the tenacity needed to obtain the General Educational Development certificate. Regrettably, the potential of Adult Secondary Education programs to aggressively diminish the number of adults living without a high school diploma was and continues to be unsuccessful predominantly because many high school dropouts fail to persist after enrolling in these programs. As a result, the impact of high school dropouts on the economy and social infrastructures remains unchanged as millions of dropouts continue to struggle in a society, where education is essential.

To encourage more students to return to and persist in education, while speaking with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in his view of a complete and competitive American education, President Barack Obama (2009) stated:

My budget invests in developing . . . new efforts to give dropouts who want to return to school the help they need to graduate; and new ways to put those young men and women who have left school back on a pathway to graduation. (p. 6)

Despite President Obama’s efforts, researchers report that many high school dropouts lack the fortitude and persistence to obtain the General Educational Development certificate. Thus, many continue through a cycle of abandoning education even though they do not possess the skills or competencies needed to be successful in the workplace and society (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 1999). In substantiation with this statement, the U.S. Department of Education (2005) reported that approximately one-third of the adults who decided to enroll in federally funded programs dropped out or “stopped out” before earning the General Educational Development certificate in 2005—a cycle that
continues to prevail today. For this reason, while previous studies on high school dropout
have examined correlational variables for dropping out, characteristics of students who
leave, and why students reenroll in Adult Secondary Education programs, this study
seeks to extend contemporary research by uncovering the specific variables that influence
high school dropouts to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to acquire the
General Educational Development certificate—the documentation that opens the door for
these students to get back on track, reach their full potential, and overcome negative
circumstances.

Statement of the Problem in Context

Because of the large number of adults residing in Georgia without a high school
credential, many are alarmed at the impact that these residents are bestowing on the
state’s economy. Researchers claim that for every year Georgia’s high school dropouts
remain without an adequate education, taxpayers will be forced to pay for these mishaps,
and the state will be considerably burdened financially (Gottlob, 2009). A study
completed by Gottlob and the Foundation for Educational Choice demonstrated that
Georgia’s dropouts: earn $7,200 less than high school graduates—totaling $5.5 billion in
lost annual earnings a year; decrease the state’s tax revenue by $728 million each year;
and are twice as likely to rely on Medicaid—increasing the state’s Medicaid expenditures
by $435 million each year. Additionally, dropouts increase incarceration costs by $917 a
year per dropout. Despite these statistics, the Alliance for Education (2006) reports that
the impact of dropouts on the state can be significantly alleviated if the high school
completion rates of Hispanic, African-American, and Native-American students are
increased to the levels of white students by 2020. In fact, it is estimated that increasing
the educational attainment of these students would add an additional $8.0 billion to the
state’s economy.

To increase the educational attainment of adults in Georgia and lighten the social
and economic impact of those without a high school credential, the Technical College
System of Georgia Office of Adult Education offers an extensive selection of programs to
meet the needs of high school dropouts, including Adult Basic Education and GED
certificate preparation classes. These classes are offered through a statewide network of
37 service delivery areas, a network that consists of: 30 technical colleges, five local
school systems, and two University System of Georgia colleges (Technical College
System of Georgia, 2009). Additionally, the Office of Adult Education offers 48 official
GED testing centers throughout Georgia and more than 150 locations are provided by
affiliates, bringing the total number of testing sites available to Georgians to more than
200. Due to the accessibility of these programs, statistics show that 82,428 adult learners
were enrolled in Adult Education Programs in fiscal year 2011—a 10.1% decrease from
fiscal year 2010. However, only 9.5% (7,794) of these students were enrolled in the
Adult Secondary Education classes in pursuance of the General Educational
Development certificate (see Table 1).
Table 1

*Number of Adults Enrolled in Adult Education and Adult Secondary Education Programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Number of Adults in Adult Education</th>
<th>Number of Adults in Adult Secondary Education</th>
<th>Percentage of Adult Education Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>97,306</td>
<td>10,640</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>84,427</td>
<td>7,414</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>90,567</td>
<td>7,867</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>95,218</td>
<td>8,532</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>91,704</td>
<td>7,934</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>82,428</td>
<td>7,794</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nevertheless, although close to 8,000 high school dropouts were enrolled in Adult Secondary Education classes in 2011, according to the National Reporting System enrollment data—where enrollment is based on criteria set by the United States Department of Education—it was reported that 5,949 students, or 76.3% were actually persisting in these programs to attain the General Educational Development certificate in 2011 (Technical College System of Georgia, 2011).

According to the Technical College System of Georgia (2011), the National Reporting System persistence enrollment includes all students with an assessment and 12 or more attendance hours. In 2011, 23.7% of the students enrolled in Adult Secondary Education programs failed to persist. This was a slight decrease (1.0%) from 2010 (see Table 2).
Table 2

*Percentage of Adults Enrolled and Persisting in Adult Secondary Education Programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Number of Adults in Adult Secondary Education</th>
<th>Number of Adults Classified as Persisters</th>
<th>Percentage of Adult Secondary Education Population not Persisting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>10,640</td>
<td>9,627</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>7,414</td>
<td>5,919</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>7,867</td>
<td>6,253</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>8,532</td>
<td>6,560</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>7,934</td>
<td>6,135</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>7,794</td>
<td>5,949</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A separate statistical analysis reported by the Technical College System of Georgia (2012) showed that 44.2% of the persisters completed the program in 2011, an 8.1 decrease from 2009 (see Table 3). The data listed in Tables 2 and 3 indicate that the persistence and completion rates of students enrolled in Adult Secondary Education programs are not improving as desired. Overall, the statistics gathered by the Technical College System of Georgia signifies that a large number of high school dropouts are being left behind, an even greater amount are failing to persist once enrolling, and less than 50% of persisters are actually meeting the requirements to obtain the General Educational Development certificate.
Table 3

*Percentage of Persisters in Adult Secondary Education Programs Completing the Programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Number of Adults Classified asPersisters</th>
<th>Number of Persisters who Completed the Program</th>
<th>Percentage of Persisters who Completed the Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9,627</td>
<td>5,025</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>5,919</td>
<td>2,786</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>6,253</td>
<td>3,318</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>6,560</td>
<td>3,431</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>6,135</td>
<td>2,637</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>5,949</td>
<td>2,627</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, these statistics substantiate findings from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate, which demonstrates that 21.5% of the adult population in Georgia still possess less than a high school education (U. S. Census, 2009). Part of this is due to the fact that too few students are persisting, and fewer percentages of persisters are completing the program and passing the exam to obtain the General Educational Development certificate. As a result, the impact of these students’ decisions continues to resonate in local communities across the state, especially those in urban and rural areas. Similarly, there are substantial consequences on Georgia’s social, human, and economic capital. Table 4 displays the percentage of Georgians with less than a high school education in metropolitan Atlanta and its surrounding areas.
Table 4

*Percentage of Georgians with Less than High School Diploma in Metropolitan Atlanta by County According to U. S. Census*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Name</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bartow</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrollton</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwinnett</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering the widespread impact of the dropout crisis in Georgia, it is only befitting to take a non-traditional approach to investigating and triaging this predicament. While most researchers have analyzed the contextual causes of dropout, this study seeks to explore the crisis from a different perspective by focusing on the factors that influence high school dropouts to persist specifically in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. This particular focus is essential for various reasons. First, understanding the correlation of potential variables on the students' decision to persist has considerable benefits for P-12 educators, adult educational leaders, policymakers, high school dropouts, and the nation at large. Secondly, research shows that many dropouts leave school because of academic, cultural, or structural dissonance that impacts their ability to complete the requirements for
obtaining the high school diploma. Consequently, many enroll in adult education programs seeking an environment that is dissimilar from the one they abandoned—one that will meet their academic, cultural, and structural needs and enhance their ability to persist. Yet still, statistics show that despite the differences between high school and adult education program models, the needs of many dropouts continue to go unmet as many dropouts fall into a cyclical pattern of dropping and stopping out. Therefore, this study aims to contribute findings that can greatly minimize the number of adults residing in Georgia without a high school credential by providing strategies that have the potential to increase retention and persistence rates for high school dropouts seeking to obtain the General Educational Development certificate. Third, this study aims to produce results that will encourage educational leaders and policymakers to hold adult education providers accountable for meeting enrollment and completion objectives for students who return to education to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. The fundamental aim of this study is to enable all stakeholders to better meet the needs of these students—a group that has gone unnoticed in communities all across Georgia and the nation—so that fewer students become permanent dropouts.

**Purpose of the Study**

The intent of this study is to extend the researcher’s previous research, which analyzed the factors contributing to high school dropout from the perspectives of state custody youth and non-state custody youth who were attending an adult education program. In that study Riley (2004) found that there were multiple risk factors that caused students to leave school before acquiring their high school diploma. Both
custodial and noncustodial students reported similar variables that influenced them to drop out, such as: strict and unfair discipline policies, a lack of connectedness with school due to size and lack of school resources, uncaring teachers and administrators, little to no support from peers and family, poor academics and self-efficacy, and personal behavior and attitude problems. However, despite dropping out of school, participants from both groups considered that acquiring an education was extremely important, especially in relation to: securing a respectable job, expanding postsecondary educational opportunities, obtaining personal goals, and increasing chances of success and opportunities in life.

Moreover, the participants stated that local education agencies would need specific setting events to prevent more students from leaving school, such as: positive peer and teacher interaction styles, interesting class content, effective instruction, a relaxed and accepting school atmosphere, reasonable discipline policies, and enjoyable social activities. Considering the implications of that study, at this time, the researcher seeks to determine how a student’s self-professed reasoning for dropping out of school is related to his or her reason for returning to Adult Secondary Education programs and persisting. Also, the researcher seeks to determine the correlational significance that the following independent variables—student-input, environmental, and institutional variables—have on a student’s likelihood to persist.

By completing this study, the researcher hopes to yield research findings that will (a) assist in minimizing the impact of the dropout crisis in Georgia, (b) provide educational leaders in the Technical College System of Georgia and its affiliates with
research findings that will help them develop programs that look less like school and more like an activity in which high school dropouts would want to participate, (c) provide adult educational leaders with the specific variables that influence adult education students to persist so that students' needs can be met, and (d) assist P-12 educational leaders by sharing strategies that help schools redesign the K-12 delivery process so that more students will be encouraged to remain in high school to obtain the high school diploma rather than dropping out and enrolling in Adult Secondary Education programs to obtain the General Educational Development certificate. Furthermore, the researcher hopes to deliver results that will prompt policymakers to develop accountability for adult education providers that target student persistence. Moreover, the researcher seeks to encourage policymakers to allocate more funding to adult education programs to promote the reenrollment and persistence of high school dropouts so that more students will become contributing citizens and human capital for their families and within their local communities and society.

Research Questions

This study attempts to answer questions based from a mix-methods approach because each method—qualitative and quantitative—presents a different view of the phenomenon being studied and uses different means to persuade the reader of the validity of the conclusions drawn from the researcher's specific questions (William, 1986). From a quantitative perspective, the researcher seeks to expose the social facts from an objective reality, explain the reasons of these students' behaviors by employing objective measures, utilize a correlational design to reduce bias and errors in interpretation, and to
detach the researcher from the research to prevent experimenter bias. By incorporating questions from a qualitative approach, the researcher desires to understand the phenomenon from the participants’ perspectives by engaging with students in a naturalistic context, learn about the synthetic characteristics of the students that are often detached in quantitative research, and become immersed in the phenomenon being studied to increases awareness of the phenomenon and those involved.

By incorporating a mix-methods approach, this study sought to contribute to research by responding to the following quantitative research questions.

RQ1: To what level of significance do student-input variables (gender, age, race/ethnicity, academic competence, self-efficacy) influence high school dropouts to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the student-input variables (gender, age, race/ethnicity, academic competence, self-efficacy) and the ability of students to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

RQ3: To what level of significance do environmental variables influence high school dropouts to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

RQ4: Is there a relationship between environmental variables (impact of peers, impact of family, teacher-student relationships, sense of
belonging) and the ability of students to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate.

RQ5: To what level of significance do institutional variables influence high school dropouts to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

RQ6: Is there a relationship between the following institutional variables and the ability of students to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate: Teaching methods and pedagogy.

RQ7: To what level of significance does a high school dropout’s reason to abandon school correlate with his or her reason for persisting in Adult Secondary Education programs?

Additionally, this study sought to contribute to research by responding to the following qualitative research questions:

RQ8: How do student-input variables (gender, age, race/ethnicity, academic competence, self-efficacy) influence students to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

RQ9: How do environmental variables (impact of peers, impact of family, teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging) influence students to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

RQ10: How do the institutional variables of adult education programs (teaching methods and pedagogy, convenience and flexibility) influence
students to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

RQ11: How have students’ reasons for dropping out of high school influenced their reasons to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs?

RQ12: Are there variables other than those identified here as independent variables that substantially influence a student’s persistence towards the GED certificate, such as those specifically related to students’ reasons for dropping out of high school?

**Significance of the Study**

This is the first known study that has examined the factors that influence high school dropouts in Georgia to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs offered by the Technical College System of Georgia and its affiliates to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. Moreover, it is also the first that has attempted to show a relationship between dropout and persistence factors. Previous studies on high school dropout, though not specific to Georgia, have investigated the factors contributing to high school dropout, characteristics of high school dropouts, effects of high school dropouts on human and economic capital, and why dropouts reenroll and give education a second chance. After completing a thorough search on the phenomenon, the researcher found that only a small number of researchers have examined the reasons high school dropouts persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. However, of this small collection of research, no previous studies exist, which analyze this phenomenon using a mixed-methods approach.
within the state of Georgia. Consequently, this study has a great deal of significance for those who lead adult education programs, those who teach adult learners pursuing the General Educational Development certificate, those who make policies for adult learning, high school dropouts who are enrolled and persisting in adult education classes, and scholars who study persistence and retention factors within the context of adult education. Additionally, it adds to the current empirical basis of related research by earlier scholars.

This study will benefit related research on high school dropout by revealing findings that have the potential to reduce the number of dropouts who make dropping out a permanent condition. The results will enable educational leaders to develop and implement programs to address the unique needs of high school dropouts who desire to give education a second chance by enrolling in a program that offers a delivery method that is distinctive from the high schools the abandoned. By understanding these specific factors, educational leaders will be able to: help students manage forces that help or hinder the students’ ability to persist; decipher between the significance of intrinsic versus extrinsic factors and their ability to keep students motivated and persisting towards the high school diploma; develop a systematic way of understanding the factors that influence individual students to persist so that retention rates will be enhanced and more students will be able obtain the General Educational Development certificate to expand career and other postsecondary opportunities; and reconsider the delivery methods of traditional high schools to develop ways to intervene and prevent students from opting to leave high school for adult education programs.
Secondly, this research will enable policymakers to develop accountability measures to address student persistence and components of effective and research-based program delivery models. Moreover, they will be able to make informed decisions when allocating funds to adult education programs. Overall, by completing this research study, all constituents including high school dropouts will be able to gain a valuable understanding on how to implement changes that will have a substantial impact on the civic, social, and financial viability of the state and citizens of Georgia by increasing the educational attainment of Georgians, who are presently surviving without high school credentials.

Summary

Because Georgia has one of the highest dropout rates in the nation and the most adults between the ages of 16–24 living without a high school credential, the state is greatly impacted by the negative implications of its undereducated citizenry. While there are programs in place to help these students acquire an alternative high school credential, such as the General Educational Development certificate, only a small percentage of students are enrolling in these programs to improve their plight in life. Nonetheless, of this small fraction of students who decide to reenroll, a smaller proportion is actually persisting in Adult Secondary Education programs with the level of commitment and resilience needed to obtain the General Educational Development certificate. As a result, the efficacy of adult education programs in minimizing the impact of the high school dropout crisis in Georgia is greatly compromised as communities all across the state continue to experience losses in human and financial capital.
For these reasons, the researcher selected to use a mix-methods approach to examine the specific factors and their significance in influencing high school dropouts to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. Moreover, the researcher hopes to determine if there is an association between dropout factors and later reasons that encourage student persistence. By completing this study, the researcher desires to contribute innovative findings that will: extend current research on dropout; assist educational leaders in meeting the diverse needs of high school dropouts who reenroll in Adult Secondary Education programs; minimize the number of adults continuing to reside in Georgia without a high school credential; and assist P-12 educational leaders in modifying their current delivery system to meet the needs of those at-risk of abandoning high school for adult education environments.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

Examining the factors that influence high school dropouts to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate is critical in diminishing the number of adults across the nation and in Georgia with less than a high school education. Moreover, it is a pivotal precursor to help educational leaders develop the supports needed to improve student retention rates and the number of students attaining the General Educational Development certificate. Similarly, it is also significant in reducing the number of students who abandon the nation's high schools for adult educational environments that they feel will more likely meet their needs. Most importantly, understanding these factors considerably aids in mitigating the social, financial, and communal ramifications that resonate ad infinitum because of the existing dropout crisis. By concretely identifying the variables that have a positive correlation with the persistence of students in Adult Secondary Education programs, this study enables educational leaders, policymakers, and funding agencies to incorporate persistence as an important measure in program accountability and it strengthens their ability to provide the technical assistance needed for GED certificate preparation programs to implement effective interventions for students at-risk of dropping in and out of education due to an inability to persist (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 1999).
In the following sections of the literature review, the researcher summarizes the findings from her Master's thesis, a qualitative research study that investigated the factors contributing to high school dropout for state custody youth and non-state custody youth attending an Adult Education program (Riley, 2004). This study is significant because it incited the need for the present study. Consequently, the researcher infuses findings from her Master's thesis within the literature review to make generalizations regarding the selection of the independent variables. The researcher also substantiates each independent variable with numerous peer-reviewed, empirical studies. Moreover, the researcher methodically analyzes the scholarly work of previous educational researchers that have examined persistence from a theoretical and historical context. By and large, the literature review has been developed to (a) explain why this study is an extension of earlier scholarly work performed by the researcher and to show the significance to this particular study, (b) share current but limited research that has specifically examined the factors that influence high school dropouts to persist and attain the General Educational Development certificate, (c) facilitate an understanding of persistence from a theoretical perspective, (d) explain the development of a substantive premise for each independent variable, and (e) frame the problem around the most appropriate inquiry method so that the researcher's hypotheses can be thoroughly investigated.

To maintain its functionality, the literature review is organized into four sections. First, the researcher summarizes the findings from her Master's thesis, which corroborates the rationale for this study. Secondly, the literature review explores research on high school dropouts who return to education to obtain the General Educational
Development certificate. Third, two of the most recognized theories used to explain student persistence are reviewed, which aid in the organization of the literature review. These include Astin’s (1970) Input-Environmental-Output model and Tinto’s (1975) Theory of Student Departure. Lastly, the literature review takes an introspective glimpse into each of the independent variables and explains their impact on student persistence. Because existing research specifically examining the persistence of high school dropouts in Adult Secondary Education program is limited, literature that examines the academic persistence of high school and college-age students is shared allowing for cross-subject and cross-context generalizations. Furthermore, because previous literature uses the terms retention and school completion interchangeably to refer to persistence, these terms are also frequently utilized throughout the literature review to refer to the dependent variable—persistence.

**An Overview of the Master’s Thesis and Relationship to the Present Study**

To satisfy research requirements for the Master’s thesis, the researcher completed a comparative qualitative study, which examined the underlying reasons why high-poverty students from custodial and non-custodial backgrounds chose to dropout of high school. The custodial students were living in a local state-funded juvenile residential facility because they had criminal offenses, had been removed from their homes because of abuse of neglect, or were referred from other state agencies because they were homeless. The noncustodial students were not in state custody. These students were living with family members or friends and were enrolled in a nonprofit program that
served low-income youth who had dropped out of school, were teenage parents, or had been adjudicated because of prior criminal records. These youth were referred to the program by staff from their group homes, the Juvenile Justice Center, other community agencies, or by school personnel. To substantiate the study with credible literature, the researcher analyzed research that discussed the variables that influences students to dropout of school, including family, grade retention, neighborhood conditions, employment factors, student mobility, drug use, student demographic variables, special education identification, the impact of juvenile adjudication, and previous academic history. Additionally, Ogbu’s (1992) cultural inversion model and Finn’s (1989) two social-psychological perspectives in dropout dynamics were used as the theoretical frameworks to help explain why these students left school before acquiring the high school diploma.

Ogbu (1992) described the cultural inversion model as the tendency for involuntary minorities, or those who were brought to this country against their will, to regard certain forms of behavior, events, symbols, and meanings, including education, as inappropriate for them because they were characteristic of white America. Ogbu further asserted that many involuntary minorities disengaged with education and faced pressure from others to resist schooling and academic success to avert being perceived as *acting white* (Ogbu, 1992; McWhorter, 2001). Ogbu contended that eventually the tension that surfaced from the cultural opposition of not wanting to “act white” caused some minorities, especially African-American students, to detach from academics and plummet into a continuum of poor academic achievement that resulted in high school dropout for
many students. Finn’s (1989) two theories described how different variables intersected over a student’s academic career and resulted in early withdrawal from school. His frustration-self-esteem model indicated that a record of poor performance, such as poor academic progress, placement in special education, and grade retention, caused students to question their competence and thus weakened their attachment to school. As a result, these students dropped out of school as a means to escape from an environment that was psychologically punishing for them. Similarly, Finn’s participation-identification model indicated that positive experiences, such as goal attainment, good grades, and positive relationships with teacher and peers encouraged a sense of belonging that strengthened a student’s attachment to school and increased their likelihood of persisting in school.

Using these two theoretical frameworks along with other findings in the literature review, the researcher interviewed the 20 participants using an interview, which consisted of 13 open-ended questions that focused on (a) why the participants dropped out of school, (b) factors that affected their decisions to leave school, (c) what could have been done to prevent them from leaving high school, (d) what they liked most and least about their last schools, (e) what they would have changed about their last schools, (f) characteristics of their least and most favored teachers, (g) their perceived importance of education and obtaining their GED certificate, and (h) the future goals they sought to accomplish. To triangulate the data, the researcher also reviewed the participants’ attendance records and previous assessment data. Descriptive statistics revealed that (a) three of the participants had children, (b) five of the custodial participants reported receiving special education, (c) the participants ranged in age from 17-21, (d) the average
age at dropout was 17 for noncustodial students and 16 for custodial students, (e) noncustodial students attended an average of nine schools, while custodial students attended an average of 8 schools, (f) the highest grade completed was 10th grade for noncustodial students and 9th grade for custodial students, and (g) the attendance rate was higher for custodial students.

An analysis of the results indicated that both custodial and noncustodial participants reported similar variables that influenced them to dropout of school. These included: strict and unfair discipline policies; uncaring teachers and administrators; social reasons; poor academics; behavior and attitude problems; and a lack of school resources. However, despite dropping out of school, participants from both groups considered that acquiring an education was extremely important, particularly with finding a job, getting into college, attaining personal goals, and increasing their chance of success in life. Moreover, to help prevent more students from dropping out, participants suggested that educational leaders should foster educational environments that included positive peer and teacher interaction styles, interesting class content and effective instruction, flexibility in school policies, relaxed and welcoming school atmospheres and discipline policies, and opportunities for social integration via extracurricular and social activities.

After reviewing those findings, the researcher noted some emerging themes that had the potential to supplement research and identify the specific variables that might impact the ability of high school dropouts to persist upon returning to education. These included: the confounding impact of demographic variables, academic competency, and self-efficacy; the influence of peers, family, positive student-teacher relationships, and
sense of belonging; and structural or institutional variables that included the impact of
teaching methods and pedagogy and the students' perception of the convenience and
flexibility of classes. Because these themes continuously emerged from the participants’
responses, the researcher was led to question their relationship with this present study’s
dependent variable—the ability of recent high school dropouts to persist upon returning
to Adult Secondary Education programs.

Research on High School Dropouts Who Return to Education
to Obtain the GED Certificate

Research analyzing the factors that influence high school dropouts to persist in
adult education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate is
extremely limited. In fact, a thorough review of research did not yield any such studies,
indicating the novelty of this study, gaps in research regarding this focus, and the need
for more researchers to explore this area. A search of numerous databases indicated that
most research has focused on: the trend and demographic characteristics of dropouts who
enroll in adult education programs (Imel, 2003; Kolstad & Owings, 1986); high school
dropouts' reasons for enrolling in these programs (Metzer, 1997); similarities and
differences between high school dropouts who return to education and those who stay
away (Entwistle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004; Tyler, 2003); barriers to participation in
GED certificate preparation programs (Metzer, 1997; King, 2002); and whether high
school dropouts benefit from obtaining the General Educational Development certificate
used a collective case study approach to learn about the context in which the students
were served, why youth enrolled in the programs, characteristics of those students, and how adult educators were accommodating the large number of young high school dropouts. Although these studies have not studied the factors that influence persistence directly, each of them offers some insight into the variables that may be associated with student persistence and retention rates. In fact, educational researchers from Harvard University’s National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy pioneered one of the first known studies examining persistence among adult basic education students (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 1999). They argued that understanding persistence was critical because unlike children, adults were not required to attend school. Comings, Parrella, and Soricone (1999) stated:

A key difference between adult and child learners is that adults choose to participate in educational programs while children participate because of legal mandates and strong social and cultural forces that identify schooling as the proper ‘work’ of childhood. In fact, most school-age students probably never seriously consider dropping out. Adults, on the other hand, must make an active decision to participate in each class session and often must overcome significant barriers in order to attend classes. (p. 3)

Comings and his colleagues referred to Kurt Lewin’s force-field analysis theory to develop the theoretical framework for their study. According to the force-field analysis theory, students were often placed in situations where interrelated forces either encouraged movement toward a goal or prohibited progress in attaining that goal. Lewin (1999) referred to these as helping and hindering forces. By understanding these forces,
Comings, Parrella, and Soricone (1999) indicated that adult education programs would be able to help students acknowledge these negative and positive factors and subsequently help students make plans to manage these forces so that persistence is more likely. To conduct their study, the researchers interviewed 150 adult learners who were lacking a high school credential and who were also enrolled in an adult education program in the northeast. To ensure that students were persisting throughout the study, Comings and his colleagues followed up with their subjects a year later to complete a second interview. Their follow-up revealed a 67% persistence rate. Subjects who were over the age of 30, parents of teenage or adult children, and those from foreign-born backgrounds comprised the majority. Among these students, the researchers noticed four themes that emerged as being supportive of persistence. These included management of the positive and negative forces that helped or hindered student persistence, a strong presence of self-efficacy, the establishment of goals by students, and students’ perceptions regarding their progress towards reaching their goals. In their interviews, the subjects also cited positive relationships with family and friends, a desire to accomplish personal goals, support from teachers and peers, and a strong and positive belief in self (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 1999).

**Persistence Theoretical Framework: Astin’s Input-Environmental-Outcomes Model**

In 1970, Alexander Astin, Professor Emeritus of Higher Education at the University of California at Los Angeles, was one of the first researchers to examine the factors that influenced students to persist in postsecondary educational environments.
His unfaltering inquisitiveness regarding student persistence—an area of concern for adult education programs, community colleges, and traditional four-year universities across the nation—led him to develop the Input-Environment-Outcome model (Astin, 1970). As a theoretical frame of reference to understand student persistence, Astin stated that the purpose of this model was, “to assess the impact of various environmental experiences by determining whether students grow or change differently under varying environmental conditions” (p. 7). The model denoted three key arguments.

First, it suggested that students entered college with a preestablished set of characteristics or moderating inputs that influenced their views about college, such as: race, age, gender, and reasons for attending college. Together, these inputs helped to explain the influence of students’ background characteristics on their ability to persist when evaluating student retention or persistence in education (Ishler & Upcraft, 2004). Secondly, the model suggested that environmental variables were those aspects of educational institutions that were capable of affecting the student, such as: institutional characteristics, peer group associations, relationships with teachers, and student involvement. Third, Astin’s (1970) model described the outcomes or those aspects of the students’ development that the college either influenced or attempted to influence, such as academic motivation, knowledge, and career aspirations (Astin, 1970). By and large, this framework posited that student-inputs, the educational environment, and student outputs interacted to increase student persistence.
Persistence Theoretical Framework: Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure

Shortly after Astin (1970) introduced his theory of student persistence to academia, Vincent Tinto (1975), Professor and Chair of the Higher Education Program at Syracuse University, proposed his theory of student departure. This theory analyzed student persistence from a slightly different perspective. While Astin’s model (1970) analyzed the factors that influenced student persistence, Tinto’s model described how the incorporation of students into the academic and social atmospheres of their educational environments encouraged them to persist. Particularly, Tinto described persistence, the doppelganger to dropout, as a multidimensional process that resulted from the interaction between individual students and their institutions and that was influenced by the characteristics of both elements. Like Astin, Tinto posited that students entered educational institutions with a variety of individual and family characteristics and prior educational experiences that influenced their engagement or disengagement from their educational settings. Most importantly, these characteristics and existing educational experiences also impacted the students’ educational expectations and motivation levels, which Tinto referred to as the students’ educational goal commitment or the ultimate cause that motivated students to persist in education. Tinto indicated that it was the students’ academic and social integration into the educational environment that directly correlated with their perseverance in college and encouraged them to extend their goals and loyalty to their institutions. Institutional commitment, described as the interaction between the students’ commitment to the goal of the completing their program and the
students’ commitment to their institutions, determined whether or not the student would remain vested persisters in their institutions or opt to drop out altogether. When either of these two critical factors, goal or institutional commitment, were high, Tinto (1975) explained that students would persist. Otherwise, the persistence of students would be jeopardized.

**Student-Input Variable: Self-Efficacy**

In the researcher’s previous study, students in state custody and those who were not in state custody were interviewed to learn about the factors that contributed to them dropping out of school. Each of the students was enrolled in a GED preparation to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. While most of the questions were directly developed to inquire about variables that influenced dropout, one of the researcher’s final questions was ancillary to the topic and enabled her to draw speculations about a factor that could perhaps lead students to persist. The students were asked, “What could you have done differently to keep you in school?” This question prevented students from shifting responsibility on others, and required them to admit to their shortfalls. Half of the students reported they could have improved their attitudes and behavior towards school. This admonition indicated that many of these students lacked the self-efficacy to persist in school, which led the researcher to further speculate that more students would persist if they developed the needed self-efficacy. For this reason, self-efficacy is considered as an independent variable in this study. Supporting literature is discussed in this section.
Social psychologist, Albert Bandura, is the source of the term self-efficacy. Defined as a person's beliefs about his or her capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives, self-efficacy explains how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave in order to accomplish their goals (Bandura, 1977). Bandura contends that when people exhibit a strong sense of self-efficacy they tend to be driven to accomplish their goals; as a result, they seldom shy away from difficult tasks. Instead, when confronted with demanding tasks, people with high self-efficacy become motivated rather than shiftless, and they mobilize their effort and persistence in the face of difficulties (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). According to Bandura, it is this resilience that keeps people committed and focused on their goals. And, when faced with any barriers or setbacks, unlike those with low self-efficacy, they tend to convalesce and blame their failures on a lack of skills. Hence, in these cases, persons with high self-efficacy are increasingly motivated to accomplish their personal goals and excel in life (Bandura, 1977). On the contrary, those with little self-efficacy tend to defer from demanding tasks or those that are perceived as personal threats, such as returning to school after deciding to dropout and risking the feeling of inadequacy (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Hence, within the context of education, rather than having a positive outlook, these persons typically exhibit learned helplessness and dwell on their deficiencies, obstacles they may encounter, and other challenges that eventually hinder their ability to persist. In these cases, many high school dropouts fall into a pattern of stopout that often results in these students becoming permanent stayouts.
Researchers, Hsieh, Sullivan, and Guerra (2007) from the University of Texas at San Antonio, described self-efficacy as students' beliefs about their capabilities to successfully complete a task. Moreover, Hsieh and his associates argued that the self-efficacy of students is directly related to their goal orientation, or their reasons for approaching and persisting towards an academic task. Consequently, they assert that students with more self-efficacy or a presence thereof, "generally are more willing to persist in the face of adversity, and students with goals of mastering a task tend to invest in focused effort" (p. 456). Because of these certainties, the researchers conducted a study to determine the differences in self-efficacy and goal orientation between undergraduate students in good academic standing and those on academic probation.

To perform their study, the researchers collected data from 112 undergraduate students (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007). Sixty of these students were on academic probation and 52 were in good academic standing. Hispanic students made up the majority (46.4%) followed by white students (41.2%), African-American students (6.2%), and Asian students (4.1%). The students completed two sets of questionnaires, which used Likert scales to measure their self-efficacy and goal orientation. To analyze the data, the researchers: calculated simple correlations among all the measures; conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to evaluate how self-efficacy and goal orientations predicted the students' grade point averages; and completed an analysis of variance, or ANOVA to determine whether or not the means of the two groups were equal. The results indicated that self-efficacy and goal orientation were positively related to good academic standing, which enabled students to persist (Hsieh, Sullivan, & Guerra,
2007). Additionally, students in good academic standing reported having higher self-efficacy and tended to put forth more effort and tenacity when mastering educational goals. On the contrary, those who were on academic probation displayed minimal levels of self-efficacy and goal-orientation.

A study by Kerpelman, Eryigit, and Stephens (2008), researchers at Auburn University, addressed the relationships between self-efficacy, ethnic identity, and parental support and future educational orientation. The researchers concurred with a view from Skinner and his associates that proposed that students high in self-efficacy were more prone than their peers with low self-efficacy to set high goals and challenge their abilities (Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Connell, 1998). As a result, the authors drew data from 374 students, 152 males and 222 females, who were previously involved in a study that investigated the risk and resilience portrayed by African-American students. In that study, the participants completed a two-part survey measuring their future educational orientation, ethnic identity, self-efficacy, perceived parental support, current level of achievement along with demographic variables of age, gender, family structure, and educational level of parents. Analysis of variance was conducted to determine the level of variation between high-achievers, average achievers, and low achievers. Also, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the relative importance of self-efficacy, perceived parental support, and ethnic identity. The results indicated that the strongest predictors of future education orientation were self-efficacy, ethnic identity and maternal support respectively. There was not an association found for gender as speculated. In relation to self-efficacy, the researcher posited that their
findings were consistent with previous research that confirmed that self-efficacy predicted educational aspirations and persistence towards the attainment of education goals.

Principal university researchers, Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) completed a study where they investigated the joint effects of academic self-efficacy and stress on academic performance, which was measured via: first-year college grade point averages, the number of accumulated college credits, and college retention following the first year of college. The researchers selected to study these two constructs, self-efficacy and stress, because they felt these constructs were are often interdependent as self-efficacy determined how one perceived stress and subsequently decided to persist towards or retreat from their goals. The participants consisted of 107 first-semester freshmen that were attending college between 1997 and 1998 at one of the City University of New York campuses. Females comprised 72.9 percent of the participants and Hispanic students were the majority (35.5%). Each student completed a two-part questionnaire. The first part collected demographic information, and the second part queried students regarding their self-efficacy and stress levels. During the second part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate a task in terms of how stressful (stress) they found the task and how confident they were that they could successfully complete the task (self-efficacy). Zajacova and his associates analyzed the data in two parts, first using factor analysis and later resorting to structural equation modeling to examine the differences and significance between the dependent and independent variables. The results pointed out that academic self-efficacy and stress had an inverted relationship.
Moreover, the findings showed that academic self-efficacy had a strong positive effect on freshman grades and number of earned credits. In fact, after controlling for high school academic performance and demographic background variables, self-efficacy was the single strongest forecaster of grade point average (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005).

Student-Input Variable: Gender

In the demographic analysis of the researcher’s subjects, the findings revealed that more males dropped out of high school and were later persisting in the adult education program to pursue the GED certificate. While this was a trend of one isolated study, the researcher desired to obtain whether gender was a statistically significant moderator variable in the persistence of high school dropouts who later returned to Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate. Previous research examining the relationship between gender and persistence is shared.

In 2009, researchers Burks and Barrett (2009) analyzed the characteristics of 4,203 college freshmen and their activity choices on their intent to persist from their freshmen to sophomore year in private, religiously affiliated, four-year institutions. Using Tinto’s (1975) theory of student departure and Astin’s (970) theory of input-environment-outcome, which suggested that the social and academic involvement in educational environments were extremely important in the persistence and retention of college students, Burks and Barrett (2009) sought to determine if the concept of social integration was statistically related to persistence and subsequently affected by ethnicity and gender. Prefacing their hypothesis with earlier research, the authors shared that
gender differences in persistence and retention research were often inconclusive.

Referencing the work previous researchers, they reported that research findings were mixed, especially when ethnicity was not a controlled variable (Leppel, 2002; Astin, Tsui, & Avalos, 1996; Comings et al., 1999). After investigating and surveying each of the participants and employing logistic regression to analyze the data, the researchers found that gender was significant in the study, demonstrating that men persisted at significantly higher rates than women in doctoral, masters, and baccalaureate programs.

A separate study by Aragon and Johnson (2008) sought to investigate two significant areas—the differences between demographic, enrollment, academic, and self-directed learning characteristics of completers and noncompleters enrolled in online courses at one community college and the reasons students report for ceasing their persistence in their programs. To complete their study, the researchers used a comparative research design to identify the factors that influenced completion; however, they utilized a survey design to understand the factors that led to noncompletion. Aragon and Johnson (2008) collected data from 305 participants (216 females, 89 males) attending a rural community college in the Midwest. Using chi-square to determine if there was a statistical difference between student characteristics, the researchers found that there was a significant relationship between gender and completion of online courses. Female participants had a 66% completion rates, whereas 52% of males persisted and completed their programs. However, as noted by the Pearson correlation, Aragon and Johnson (2008) indicated that the strength of the relationship was considered a low negative correlation according to Davis’s (1971) interpretation descriptors for
interpretation. Consequently, the statistical difference between males and females was not considered to be a large one.

A third study conducted by Blecher (2006) also showed that gender was statistically significant with student persistence. In this study, the researcher examined the relationship of a variety of student characteristics factors to the persistence of students towards the completion of their bachelor degrees in family and consumer science. Blecher used the Beginning Postsecondary Student data set from the National Center for Education Statistics that followed a nationally representative sample of beginning postsecondary students for six academic years. From this data set, Blecher opted to only include 9,939 students (19.8% males and 80.3% females) in his study because each of these students began their postsecondary education at 4-year institutions and had an initial aspiration to complete at least the baccalaureate degree in family and consumer science. Additionally, the researcher used Bivariate statistical techniques to determine the degree of statistical significance between each of the predictor variables and student persistence. The findings revealed that gender was one of three variables with the strongest significance. Blecher also used a two-way contingency table analysis with chi-square statistics to analyze the relationship of gender to the 6-year system persistence of participants. The findings revealed that the percentage of female students who persisted was noticeably higher than the percentage of male showing a statistically significant relationship.
Student-Input Variable: Race/Ethnicity

According to Ishler and Upcraft (2004), investigating the influence of race and ethnicity on persistence is a difficult task that many educational researchers have attempted to document. Many have faced numerous obstacles because variables other than race and ethnicity, such as socioeconomic status, poor academic preparation, and culturally insensitive and hostile college climates, often are interrelated and interdependent with the variable. As a result, these unforeseen variables tend to have confounding effects and make it difficult for researchers to isolate race and ethnicity as a separate and unaffected variable. Despite these claims, some researchers have concluded that race and ethnicity do impact the likelihood of students to persist in their educational environments.

A study performed by Hawley and Harris (2005) used factor analysis and discriminant function analysis to identify the predictive factors that were positively and negatively associated with the persistence of first-year students attending a large metropolitan community college in the northeast. After collecting and analyzing data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman survey, Hawley and Harris found that race and ethnicity played a major role in predicting persistence. The findings demonstrated that African-American and Latino students were highly likely to persist into their second year of college. Additionally, they were more likely to persist above members from other racial and ethnic groups.

Burgette and Magnus-Jackson (2009), researchers from the University of Memphis, completed a longitudinal study to investigate the differences in influence of a
freshman orientation course on the year-to-year persistence and academic achievement of black and white students between 2001 and 2005 at the University of Memphis. Of the 1,382 freshmen, 52.1% were white, 35.9% were black, and the remaining students comprised other racial and ethnic groups. Because there were so few students in these racial groups, the researchers did not involve them in the study. To analyze the data, the researchers decided to employ logistic regression as the most appropriate means of analyzing the data because persistence was a dichotomous variable, which categorized data into two clusters—persisters and nonpersisters or persistence and drop out.

While there were numerous independent measures in this study including, high school achievement, freshman students’ commitment to major, freshman orientation, college achievement, and student background variables, the researchers particularly found that there were no significant differences in persistence due to race amongst freshmen enrolled in the orientation class. A statistical analysis of the data revealed that 73.3% of white students and 69.8% of African-American students enrolled in the freshman orientation class persisted. On the contrary, the findings demonstrated that race was statistically significant when students did not enroll in the orientation class indicating that 67.3% of white students persisted compared to 52.9% of black students. By and large, Burgette and Magnus-Jackson (2009) concluded that both blacks and whites experienced greater persistence after enrolling in the freshman orientation class; however, race was only statistically associated to persistence in the absence of the class and this was accurate for black students.
In 2007, researchers from the Iowa State University, used regression analysis to examine persistence and graduation completion for students attending a four-year university in the Midwest (Wohlgemuth, Whalen, Sullivan, Nading, Shelley, & Wang, 2007). Using student demographic variables and student academic characteristics as independent variables, the researchers sought to identify the particular student-input characteristics and environmental influences that could be manipulated to predict year-by-year persistence and six-year graduation rates for college students. To determine which variables most influenced student retention and graduation rates, the researchers used binary logistic regression as this analysis model enabled the researchers to study the significance or each variable simultaneously. When only analyzing the association between race and persistence and graduation rates, the findings revealed that race was statistically significant to persistence and graduation. The data indicated that minority students persisted and graduated at significantly lower rates than non-minority students. Additionally, race became exceptionally significant to persistence as students advanced through their programs. The researchers concluded that race was a disabling force and predictive force for the persistence of students as the likelihood for nonminority students to persist was lessened as they progressed through their programs (Wohlgemuth et al., 2007).

**Student-Input Variable: Academic Competence**

A major theme that evolved in the researcher’s previous study as being related to lack of persistence in high school was poor academic abilities or competence. Most students reported having poor grades, being retained at least once, possessing limited
academic skills, and having had received special education services for cognitive deficits. While students reported each of these factors separately, each was interrelated to the students' academic competence, or their ability to function successfully in school due to the capacity to access, understand, and maneuver the curriculum (Riley, 2004). Because many students were not prepared academically, many felt they were pushed out of school due to feelings of inadequacy and lack of remediation from teachers. Considering the impact of this variable on a student's reason to dropout of school, its capacity to influence or hinder a student to persist after dropping out of school and returning to an Adult Secondary Education program to pursue the General Educational Development certificate is probed. For this reason, this section of the literature review examines previous scholarly work that considers academic competence or lack thereof as a reinforcing or confounding variable in student persistence or retention.

The influence of academic competence on student persistence has been researched extensively, and most researchers agree that it is positively correlated with a student's ability to persevere towards their educational goals. In fact, Astin (1993) declared that one of the most potent predictors of postsecondary persistence was the high school grade point average of students as this evidenced that students possessed the knowledge basis to be successful in later educational endeavors. Similarly, Hoyt (1999) stated that students who are not academically prepared and lack the basic skills needed to access more rigorous curriculum are less likely to persist because of their need for substantial remediation. Akin to most educational researchers who have acknowledged the importance of the academic competencies of students, contemporary educational leaders
have also maintained that these skills are important in later school outcomes and program completion. In fact, within the context of this study, educational leaders and adult education policies require high school dropouts to submit previous school records and take the Test of Adult Basic Skills (TABE) to demonstrate their academic competence and knowledge of basic skills to help adult educators predict how students may perform in their programs and which students may be at-risk of not persisting due to academic gaps (Sabatini, 1995).

To understand the significance of this variable that can have bifurcated effects, Vaquera and Maestas (2009) initiated a research study to explore the significance of previous academic competence on college persistence. To understand the statistical significance of this variable, the researchers examined the pre-college factors that influenced the persistence of white and Hispanic students attending a predominantly Hispanic university. Precollege factors included the students’ high school grade point averages and their ACT scores. Vaquera and Maestas applied a logistic regression to analyze the data. Their findings demonstrated that between the two variables—high school grade point average and ACT scores—ACT composite scores were more significantly related to student persistence for white students. In fact, according to the descriptive statistics, as persistence for white students increased so did their ACT composite scores, evidencing a positive correlation (Vaquera & Maestas, 2009). This association was not the same for Hispanic students. The results showed the variables that influenced Hispanic students to persist included being a first-generation college student and receiving financial assistance.
Research performed by scholars from the University of Texas also examined the influence of academic competence on a students' likelihood to persist. Crisp and Nora (2010) investigated the factors that influenced the persistence of Latino students attending a community college and the factors that motivated these students to transfer to other institutions. There were 580 participants included in the study of which 300 were enrolled in developmental classes. According to the researchers, nearly half (48%) of the students had taken Algebra 2 as the highest math course in high school, 15% had taken trigonometry, and only 12% had completed calculus prior to attending college indicating that a great deal of these students lacked a strong knowledge basis in math. Moreover, 54% of the sample completed high school with less than a "B" grade point average further signifying difficulties with academic skills (Crisp & Nora, 2010). To analyze the impact of the students' academic abilities, which were defined by the authors as high school grade point average and number of mathematics courses taken in high school, dichotomous logistic regression was utilized as the most appropriate means of analyzing the data. Overall, the authors found that the academic preparation of students in high school mathematics courses was highly associated with student success in both years 2 and 3. It was speculated that students that had acquired more courses in math were more competent academically than peers with less math classes and thus more likely to persist in their studies.

Like the preceding two studies, Kiser and Price (2008) also established that the persistence of students was related to their academic competencies. While the previous authors found significant relationships, Kiser and Price confirmed only minimal
variability or significance between the two variables. In their study, the authors collected data from 1,014 college students via the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey, which provided the researchers with information regarding the students’ demographic characteristics, expectations for college, secondary school experiences, degree goals and career plans, college finances, reasons for attending college, and life goals. Using this data source as their means of data collection, the researches sought to determine the differences between the predictive variables between white, Hispanic, and African-American students on persistence and analyze the impact of these variables from a holistic perspective by controlling for race and ethnicity.

Following the data analysis which employed logistic regression, the Kiser and Price (2008) discovered that although there was some variability, high school letter grade average was not significantly related to persistence for white, Hispanic, and African-American students, or students as a whole.

**Student-Input Variable: Age**

The average age of the participants involved in the researcher’s study was 18.5; however, most students reported dropping out of high school at 16.3, indicating that on average students remained out of school for at least 2.2 year (Riley, 2004). This denotes that age is significantly related to the maturity level of students and adult roles and responsibilities indicating that age may also impact why students later persist in educational programs. For this reason, age is utilized as an independent variable in this study. Literature substantiating age on the impact of persistence is shared below.
Due to the large number of students dropping out of the nation's high schools and the increased number of adults 16 through 24 living without a high school credential, recent research shows that more students between the ages of 16 and 20 are enrolling in Adult Secondary Education classes to have a second chance to gain a credential (Zhang, Han, & Peterson, 2009; Perin, Flugman & Spiegai, 2006; Rachal & Bingham, 2004). However, despite this trend, a report by the American Council on Education (2010) demonstrates that only a small fraction of these students are persisting in their programs long enough to acquire the skills to pass the test. According to the American Council on Education, only 27.1% of students age 16 to 18 and 35.8% of students 19 to 24 passed the GED certificate exam in 2009. The average GED certificate test candidate remained out of school between 3 and 5 years, and most students stated that the 11th grade was their highest grade completed. Each of these statistics signifies that age is an underlying factor.

A study completed by scholars from Buffalo State found that age was the only demographic variable that was a significant predictor of graduation signifying that younger students were more likely to persist and graduate upon reenrolling in school (Berkovitz & O’Quin, 2007). To conduct their study, Berkovitz and O’Quin analyzed archival data from the college records of students who had stopped out of school but were later readmitted to determine the demographic, intervention, and academic variables that predicted persistence and graduation. Three hundred and ninety-nine students were originally included in the study of which 75.7% admitted leaving college prematurely and 22.3% reported being dismissed because of poor academic achievement. The researchers
referred to logistic regression to analyze the data. The findings revealed that age was significantly related to persistence and graduation as younger students persisted with more frequency. Despite the age of the students and their probable lack of maturity as compared to the older students, Berkovitz and his colleague concluded that it was possible that younger students persisted at higher rates because they did not possess as many obligations and outside commitments as the older students. As a result, this enabled the younger students to take advantage of the opportunity to return to education to further their educational aspirations (Berkovitz & O’Quin, 2007).

A study by Kinser and Deitchman (2008) used a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of “tenacious persisters” or adult students who delayed enrollment and persistence in college due to barriers and obstacles. The researchers also sought to determine the difference between tenacious persisters and those considered standard persisters. Kinser and Deitchman contrasted the two groups and defined tenacious persisters as students who stopped out of college at least once without earning a degree or credential, or who delayed their entry into college for more than three years after high school. Standard persisters, on the contrary, were described as students who never stopped out of college without earning a degree or credential, or started college within three years of high school graduation and attended continuously since then.

After interviewing the students, the researchers reported that age via maturity was a major difference between the two groups as many of the tenacious persisters stated that they lacked the maturity to understand the importance of staying and persisting in school. On the contrary, while standard persisters also reported maturity as a confounding
experience while in college, it was not an experience that absolutely hindered their ability
to persist. Instead, these standard persisters were able to overcome the immature
behaviors that came with age and continue to persist. The results from this study
demonstrated that age does in fact have bilateral impacts on persistence as a result of
maturity levels and evidenced that there is an association with persistence.

In addition to the aforementioned studies, a study by Fike and Fike (2008)
analyzed the predictors of fall-to-spring and fall-to-fall persistence for 9,200 freshmen
enrolled in a community college for the first time over a four-year period. To
disaggregate the impact of demographic variables as possible predictor measures, the
researchers separately analyzed the influence of age, race, and gender. Other measures
included student completion status of developmental courses, participation in student
support services, receipt of financial aid, enrollment in Internet courses, semester hours
enrolled in and dropped in first semester, and the education level of parents. Fike and
Fike used a multivariate model to evaluate the association between age and other
demographic variables. The model indicated that age was one of the positive predictors
of fall-to-spring retention. Largely, each of these studies confirmed earlier research that
contends that age is a contending variable in student persistence and retention.

Environmental Variable: The Impact of Peers

To determine the factors that encourage students to persist in high school, the
subjects were asked, "What kept you in school for as long as you stayed?" Peers and
family were the two most significant factors reported by participants. Likewise, when the
students were asked what they enjoyed most about the last school they attended, positive
interactions with peers was reported most frequently. On the contrary, when queried about their reasons for leaving school, some stated it was the negative influences from peers and family members. The students’ responses regarding the influence of peers and family nearly signified a theoretical doppelganger seeing that the pressure from these two sources had the potential to either hinder or enhance the students’ likelihood to persist in high school. Because of the influence from peers and family or lack thereof, each of these sources of influence is viewed as a significant independent variable for this study and is substantiated by succeeding literature in the following two sections.

Previous researchers have described peer groups as the single most effective source for students seeking advanced educational goals (Astin, 1993). Researchers contend that peer interaction and influence are critical to students because they provide positive social capital, help enhance academic identities, and aid in the retention of students at all levels of education by encouraging students to persist. The role of peers has been extensively supported in educational research and is corroborated best by the direct effect and buffering hypotheses (Cohen & Syme, 1985). According to Cohn and Syme, the direct effect hypothesis suggests that peers provide direct support to students when they are involved in stressful situations. As a result of this direct support from peers, students tend to have higher self-esteem, and they experience a sense of resiliency that influences them to endure. Similarly, the buffering hypothesis suggests that in taxing circumstances, peer support is beneficial because it buffers or protects students by coming between the students and stressful events. In these cases, peers are able to avert negative and stressful responses (Cohen & Syme, 1985). Within the context of
education, these two theories suggest that peers encourage students to persist and shield them from the barriers that may hinder perseverance.

Using these two hypotheses to develop their theoretical framework, researchers from the University of Brighton employed a qualitative study to explore students’ experiences of university life and, for those who withdrew, the process they went through in deciding to leave (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Moreover, Wilcox and his colleagues were able to understand how the presence or lack of peer networks also referred to as social integration influenced students to persist or withdraw from their universities (Wilcox et al., 2005). Twenty-two of the subjects included in this study persisted through their first year of college while 12 left prematurely. To collect data from all subjects, the researchers used in-depth interviews to learn about the subjects’ relationship with peers and how these relationships impacted the students’ decisions to persist or dropout. After using the constant comparative method of grounded theory, the findings confirmed that peers were essential in a student’s decision to persist as they: frequently provided students with direct emotional support, replaced the influence of family relationships while students were away from home, and served as buffering support when school became demanding (Wilcox et al., 2005). Overall, the researchers concluded that peers were significantly related to student persistence because they provided students with a sense of attachment, increased social integration, enhanced opportunities for nurturance, a reassurance of self-worth, a sense of reliable alliance, and positive guidance and encouragement (Wilcox et al., 2005).
Subsequently, a study by Goguen, Hiester, and Nordstrom (2011) used a quantitative inquiry approach to investigate whether peer relationships were associated with academic achievement and the likelihood of student persistence in college. Two hundred and seventy-one first-year college freshmen were included in the study. The researchers required all the participants to list the names of new peers who were considered friends. Afterwards, the participants had to complete the Intimate Friendship Scale to indicate the quality of their friendships and complete the Inventory of Peer Attachment to assess the extent of closeness. By completing these data collection procedures, the researchers were able to ascertain whether the number of friends, quality of friendships, and attachment to peers impacted the participants’ grade point averages and persistence rates. Correlational and regression analyses were conducted to substantiate the researchers’ first hypothesis. The data yielded positive associations between the number of college friends and grade point average and the number of college friends and persistence from first year to second year. Multiple and logistic regression analyses were conducted to test the second hypothesis. The results demonstrated that the quality of the friendship with one’s best college friend predicted persistence from first to second year and grade point average. Multiple regression analyses were employed to assess the third hypothesis. It was found that trust in peers and common interests were positively associated with outcome variables. Moreover, Goguen and his colleagues also concluded that when students experienced conflict with their peers, both the grade point averages and persistence rates were compromised (Goguen, Hiester, & Nordstrom, 2011).
In their study, Cox and Ebbers (2010) used a phenomenological approach to explore the persistence of adult women attending a Midwest community college. The researchers utilized a three-interview series to elicit data from the five subjects, inquiring specifically about how their persistence was impacted as a result of influences from family and friends, conflict from other roles and responsibilities, and campus experiences. After coding the interview data, Cox and Ebbers found that participants persisted when they had access to a positive learning environment, evidenced aspirational capital, or an inner drive to persist; and received support from family and friends. Cox and Ebbers reported that the women admitted to being supported mostly by other women. Moreover, they vowed that the support system of friends was effective in encouraging the female participants to persist because of their shared life experiences and tips for surviving in school and in life. Overall, these three studies confirmed earlier findings from Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), which suggested that peer interactions were a critical component of students' academic success and persistence as they pursued their educational goals. These interactions influenced students' cognitive development, identity development, self-confidence and self-efficacy, and social and academic integration into the educational environment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980).

**Environmental Variable: The Impact of Family**

For years, researchers have stated that family support and influence is paramount in the academic achievement and school completion of students. While the term "students" has predominantly referred to students in P-12 educational environments, many researchers have also suggested that that the influence of family is just as important
in the educational attainment of adult students as well. As students mature, the origin of “family support” evolves to encompass more than just the support from the usual family members, such as parents, siblings, and grandparents. Instead, the concept of “family support” expands and starts to include support from spouses and children (Plageman & Sabina, 2010). Plageman and Sabina described the two as influence from families of origin and current families. Regardless of the where the family support evolves, researchers vow that support from either family source is beneficial as students persist to achieve their educational goals.

A study by Plageman and Sabina examined the impact of family influence on the persistence of undergraduate adult female students. The authors of the study conjectured that the decision of women to persist toward attaining their degrees were due to a combination of support from their current families and families or origin. As a result they structured their study to purposely examine three factors: the difference in support from family of origin and current families and their impact on the adult female students’ decisions to enroll and persists; specific positions form both families and their relationship to the students grade point averages; and the differences in emotional and behavioral support of the current family on the persistence of female college students (Plageman & Sabina, 2010). After collecting data from 54 female participants, the findings demonstrated that female undergraduate students were more likely to persist and attend college when they had the support of their mothers. Family members with the most support in the current family included the children, as the female participants often wanted to be positive role model for their children. Plageman and Sabina also found that
female students had higher grade point averages, were more likely to develop supportive peer relationships, and attain their goals when their families stressed the importance of academic achievement. Additionally, the authors concluded that female participants persisted more when they received the behavioral and emotional support from their current families, as these were the family members with which they had the most contact.

A study by Urdan, Solek, and Schoenfelder (2007) utilized a slightly different approach to determine the impact of parent influence on student persistence. While previous studies typically examined the influence of parental aspirations and involvement on student persistence, these researchers opted instead to investigate whether and to what extent the students' parents influenced their academic achievement and motivation towards school. To substantiate their study, they researchers referred to previous work from other educational researchers. This research, based on the self-determination theory and theories of parenting styles, suggested that children valued education, had strong academic self-concepts, and persisted in education when their parents had high educational expectations and were not overly controlling (Urdan, Solek, & Schoenfelder, 2007). In this study, the authors interviewed 47 high school seniors about their achievement goals and family influences on their motivational levels. After coding the students' responses, the findings revealed that there were five distinct patterns of family influence that impacted the educational motivation for students. These included the family pleasing, family obligation, parental support, aversive family influence, and lack of influence patterns (Urdan, Solek, & Schoenfelder, 2007).
According to Urdan, Solek, and Schoenfelder, students who experienced influences from their parents that were included in the family-pleasing pattern expressed the desire to make their parents proud. Those who had influences from the family obligation pattern felt compelled to succeed because they believed they owed it to their patterns to do so, while those from the parental support pattern achieved because their parents used positive encouragement coupled with high expectations. While the aforementioned patterns of parental influence were more positive, students did report two negative patterns that motivated them to persist—the aversive family influence and lack of influence patterns. Students who stated that they were motivated due to aversive family influences indicated a desire to persist because of the negative views from their parents which suggested they would fail in school. These students also described negative role models as having an aversive family influence. Last, students who placed their parents’ degree of persuasion in the lack of influence category explained that their pattern had no direct influence on their reasons to succeed, as most of the parents were totally unconcerned with their students’ educational progress. By and large, the authors concluded that: family influences took on many forms and came from various members of the family, such as aunts, uncles, siblings, and grandparents; cultural background was an underlying variable as some students reported feeling obligated to do well in school; and many students were influenced by their families to persist and do well because of a desire to be a positive role model for younger siblings or to do better than the negative role models present within their families (Urdan, Solek, & Schoenfelder, 2007).
Similar to the previous studies, Guillory and Wolverton (2008) also examined the impact of family on student persistence. Dissimilar to the previous studies, they only studied the relationship between these two variables on Native American students in higher education. The authors singled out this subgroup of students because of they have consistently had the lowest rates of persistence in higher education mostly due to cultural dissonance, family obligations, lack of financial support, and a lack of diversity in academic programs. To understand why so many of these students fail to persist, the authors utilized Tinto’s (1975) theoretical framework of student departure to help understand why these students leave at record numbers. Additionally, the researchers used a qualitative and multiple case studies like approach to complete the study, and they conducted focus group interviews with the 30 subjects regarding their motivations for persisting and the barriers that prevented from persisting. The researchers also collected information from members of the state board of higher education from the state of each of the colleges via phone or written interviews, and they conducted individual interviews with university presidents and three faculty members representing each of the schools.

The researchers’ findings indicated that the students’ perceptions of their reasons for persisting were different from those of their institutions. When the institutions results were analyzed, Guillory and Wolverton (2008) found that university officials felt that students would persist more if they had adequate financial support. Moreover, they stated that students persisted for as long as they could because of academic programs that were specifically tailored to meet the needs of American Indian students. On the contrary, they felt Native American students were hindered from persisting because of
adequate financial support inadequate academic preparation and insufficient financial resources. Dissimilar to the institutions, Native American students indicated that family was most influential in their decisions to persist. Like Guillory and Wolverton, the students reported that family support too on many forms. They reported being supported by parents and siblings back home, the idea of being single parents and serving as role models for their children, and extended family members, such as uncles, aunts, and cousins. Subsequent persistence influences described by students included giving back to their communities and garnering support from peers and teachers. Barriers included family obligations, being single parents, inadequate financial support, and lack of academic preparation. Largely, Guillory and Wolverton reported that while Native American students experienced barriers to persist in college, the influence of family and other community supports were essential in increasing school completion for these students.

**Environmental Variable: The Impact of Teacher-Student Relationships**

When asked to describe the characteristics of their favorite teachers, subjects stated their teachers were: compassionate, understanding, cool, friendly, nonjudgmental, tolerant, and approachable outside of class. Although some reported having positive relationships with their teachers, this was not the case for all the students as the second most reason given for leaving school was negative experiences with teachers. When one student was asked would he return to school if given the chance, he responded, “Only if the teachers gave me a chance.” The data collected from these responses indicates that the relationship that students develop with their teachers can either encourage them to
persist or push them to dropout of school. For this reason, the teacher-student relationship is selected as a variable that may be highly associated with a student’s decision to persist to later obtain the General Educational Development certificate (Riley, 2004).

Teacher-student relationships are essential in a student’s ability to be successful in school. Researchers contended that these interactions gave teachers the opportunity to mentor, guide, facilitate, and influence students to persist because of their high expectations, caring attitudes, and validating remarks (Barnett, 2011; Torres & Hernandez, 2010; Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, & Aiken, 2008). While previous researchers have described academic integration as the most important factor in student persistence (Tinto, 1997), others argue that validation may be more important in student success and persistence because it allows teachers to engender feelings of self-worth and increase a student’s belief in their ability to succeed (Barnett, 2011). For this reason, validation is especially important for the participants being targeted in this study—high school dropouts who have returned to education to pursue the GED certificate—because many of them did not grow up assuming they would graduate from high school or return to education after dropping out in the first place. As a result, many of these students, who did not believe they would ever return to education, may have insufficient ease with and knowledge about educational environments to become readily integrated without additional assistance and support from their teachers (Rendon, 2002).

In 2010, Elisabeth Barnett, a senior research associate at the Community College Research Center, completed a correlational research study to examine the extent to which
community college students' experiences with validation by faculty predicted their sense of integration and intent to persist. Barnett (2011) sought to investigate whether: faculty validation had specific subconstructs; higher levels of validation predicted a stronger sense of academic integration; higher levels of validation from faculty predicted a stronger intent to persist in college; and whether the effect of faculty validation on the students' intent to persist was due to the students' academic integration into the college.

To examine test her hypotheses, Barnett surveyed 333 students attending Midwest College, an urban community college that is described by its administrators as having a low student retention rate. The students ranged in age from 17 to 71, with a mean age of 25. Sixty-one percent were female, and minorities comprised 76% of the total. The researcher used principal component analysis and multiple linear regressions to analyze the data. The findings revealed the following subconstructs of faculty validation: students feeling known and valued, teachers with caring instruction and appreciation for diversity, and mentoring. The data showed that students who experienced higher levels of faculty validation were more likely to feel a sense of integration in the college; however, Barnett noted that faculty validation only modestly predicted students' intent to persist.

Similar to Barnett’s (2011) study, a longitudinal study by Torres and Hernandez (2010) focused on the influence of teacher-student relationships via mentoring on the retention rates of Latino students enrolled in an urban community college. The authors grounded their study on the assertion that many students seeking to extend their educational opportunities are at-risk because many do not have the social capital via
parents or friends to help them navigate and access education. Consequently, this makes the need to have positive relationships where teachers guide and mentor students critical to the students' ability to stay in school and succeed (Torres & Hernandez, 2010). The researchers used a mix-methods approach to determine if having a mentor impacted the students' satisfaction with faculty, cultural affinity, academic integration, institutional commitment, and encouragement—all constructs related to persistence according to an earlier study by Nora, Kraemer, and Itzen (1997). The researchers surveyed 1,474 students and interviewed 34 students across three institutions for a total of four years. T-tests were employed to determine the differences between students who had identified a mentor and those who did not. The findings revealed that for all four years, students who reported having mentors had higher levels of satisfaction with faculty, cultural affinity, academic integration, institutional commitment, and encouragement. Overall, the results of this study indicated that when Latino students have a teacher that also serves as a mentor to help them navigate the college environment, the students' intent to persist in school to reach their goals would be significantly enhanced.

A third study opted to study the retention behavior of high school seniors enrolled in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) elective class. AVID, which is offered as college preparatory class in high schools across the nation, targets high school students from the "academic middle" and those from underrepresented and low socioeconomic backgrounds to help them acquire the skills needed to thrive in college (Watt et al., 2008). In this study, the researchers used a collective case study approach to compare the factors that influenced seniors attending four high schools in California and
four high schools in Texas to persist in AVID classes. These schools were purposefully chosen as cases by the researchers because students at four of the schools consistently displayed high retention rates in the AVID class, while students from the remaining four schools frequently did not persist. The researchers surveyed 200 students, 160 teachers, and 8 administrators to document their perceptions about the factors that influenced persistence amongst students. They also completed a focus group with current AVID seniors and those who selected to leave AVID. After analyzing the data from the focus group interviews and the open-ended survey questions, the researchers learned that the relationships students had with their teachers played a significant role in their decisions to persist. One student reported, “They weren’t just teachers to us, they were more like family” (Watt et al., 2008, p. 24). Watt and her colleagues reported that the students found encouragement and support and a feeling of personal acceptance and security from their AVID teachers. Other themes that emerged that were related to persistence included positive relationships with peers, teacher pedagogy, and support from family. Students who dropped out of AVID also noted the positive relationships with teachers; however, barriers such as a lack of family support about going to college and a lack of personal motivation superseded the influence of their teachers’ positive attitudes.

Environmental Variable: The Impact of Sense of Belonging

When students were asked about their reasons for leaving school, many reported having negative encounters with teachers and administrators. Some described alienating school policies and unfair treatment that made them feel like outsiders; while others specifically discussed how the structures of their school (size and population) pushed
them out. Essentially, each of these reasons jeopardized the students’ sense of belonging, or their ability to develop an emotional connection with their schools (Riley, 2004). Because of the consequences that arise when students are deprived of a sense of belong, this variable is targeted as one of potential significance in this study.

In recent years, many educational leaders have become concerned about students’ sense of belonging to school following the increased number of high school dropouts, stop outs, and others who fail to remain persistent in their quest to attain their educational goals. Maslow (1970), one of the earliest scholars to address sense of belonging, stated that the need of belonging had to be satisfied before other needs could be fulfilled. Likewise, in his identification-participation model, Finn’s (1989) indicated that unless students identify well with their schools, their participation and persistence will always be limited. Moreover, Vanderbilt University researchers, McMillan and Chavis (1986) also recognized the association between the students’ sense of school membership and their academic motivation, school engagement, and persistence. In 1986, they partnered to develop a theoretical basis and definition to characterize what it meant to have a sense of community or belonging. Hence, they indicated that a sense of community was, "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Overall, each of these researchers supports the claim that a sense of belonging can positively or negatively impact educational goals. In the context of this study, it is posited that a sense of
belonging will motivate students seeking to advance their education to persist in their programs.

A study funded by the Spencer and Sloan Foundations investigated how sense of belonging served as a predictor of intentions to persist among African-American and white first-year college students (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). In this study, the Hausmann and his colleagues contended that despite its association with student retention, sense of belonging had received little attention in studies examining student persistence. Consequently, they desired to expand current research by examining the impact of this variable on student persistence rates. Hausmann and his colleagues conducted their study at a predominantly white university. After randomly selecting their participants consisting of 254 African-American and 291 white students, the researchers used a three-part survey to collect data regarding the students’ financial difficulties, social and academic integration, and intentions to persist at the beginning of their first and second semesters. Next, the researchers grouped the students into three distinct groups—the experimental, the control, and the no-gift control groups.

Those in the experimental group received numerous written communications from university administrators thanking them for being valued members of the school’s community. Additionally, the university officials asked the participants to complete a survey and emphasized to the participants how much their input and participation was valued. As a token of appreciation, these students were also gifted with presents and other items decorated with the university’s logo, name, and colors. By placing the students in this group, the researchers hoped to overwhelm them with items that would
build their sense of belonging to the university. Meanwhile, those in the control and no-gift control groups received the identical survey as students in the experimental group; however, their survey was mailed from a professor at the university rather than an administrator. Also, the gift-control group received the same gifts as students in the experimental group; however their gifts were not adorned with any university insignia. Nonetheless, students in the no-gift control group did not receive any gifts. As the researchers manipulated the groups, they also studied student background variables, social and academic integration, peer and parental support, sense of belonging, institutional commitment, and intentions to persist. After employing the multilevel model for change technique to analyze the data, the researchers found that sense of belonging was significant in predicting the students’ intentions to persist after controlling for background variables and other predictors of persistence.

A study by Faircloth and Hamm (2005) investigated the relationship between sense of belonging and the motivation and achievement levels of high school students representing four diverse ethnic groups—African American, European American, Latino, and students of Asian descent. To completely understand the relationship between the students’ sense of belonging and their motivation and achievement in school, the researchers explored the students’ perceptions of their sense of belonging by analyzing the students’ relationships with teachers and peers, involvement in extracurricular activities, and feelings of discrimination. The data for this study were drawn from a previous study and included 580 African American, 948 Asian American, 860 Latino, and 3,142 European American students of whom were mostly male. Each participant
completed questionnaires that included information on demographics, and academic, social, and extracurricular experiences. The latter three constructs were associated with sense of belonging, academic efficacy beliefs, school values, and academic success. To analyze the data, the researchers referred to the structural equation modeling, a statistical technique utilized to clarify the direct and indirect interrelations among variables relative to given variable, to assess the four measures of a sense of belonging amongst the four ethnic groups (Gay & Airasian, 2003). The findings yielded mixed results for the researchers’ first hypothesis, which speculated that belonging within peer, teacher, extracurricular, and ethnic group domains would be consistent for all four ethnic groups. In fact, they discovered that bonding with teachers, having a friend network, involvement in extracurricular activities, and perceived ethnic-based discrimination were only significant variables for European-American and Latino students. Friend networks were not as significant for African Americans and those of Asian descent. Overall, Faircloth and Hamm (2005) concluded that as a construct, sense of belonging best explained the relationship between motivation and achievement across groups all groups. Hence, the researchers argued that it was this motivation and achievement that prompted students to persist.

Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) researched the effect of sense of belonging on the academic motivation of college freshman at the classroom and campus levels. The researchers prefaced their study by contending that a sense of belonging was increasingly significant to high school students and those who transitioned to college as this experience, described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as an ecological transition, made
students feel compelled to negotiate and take on new roles in their new educational environments (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). Prior to beginning their study, the researchers hypothesized that there would be a positive correlative relationship because as the sense of belonging of students in their respective classes increased so would their academic motivation and persistence. In assessing the students' academic motivation, Freeman and his colleagues sought to measure: academic self-efficacy, or the students' belief in their ability to accomplish their academic goals (Bandura, 1977); academic task values, or the students' perceptions about the importance, usefulness, and value of academic activities (Eccles, 1983); and the intrinsic motivation of students, which described their ability to engage in task for personal interest and enjoyment (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Two hundred and thirty-eight first semester freshman were involved in this study consisting of 216 Caucasian and 15 African-American students. The researchers administered surveys to each student, which assessed measures of belonging, motivational characteristics, and perceived instructor characteristics (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). In the sense of belonging category, five different areas were measured. These included: social acceptance, class belonging, university belonging, and the professor's pedagogical caring. Measured motivational characteristics included academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and task value. Additionally, warmth and openness, student participation, and instructor organization comprised perceived instructor characteristics. To determine whether the means were significantly different, the researchers used the $t$-tests and found that there were no considerable differences
related to gender (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). After using a multiple regression analysis to examine the associations between the variables being examined, the authors found significant relationships between: the students’ sense of class belonging and their academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and task value; the students’ sense of class-level belonging and their perceptions of instructors’ warmth and openness, encouragement of student participation, and organization; and the students’ sense of university-level belonging and their sense of social acceptance (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). The results from this study suggested that students who possessed a sense of belonging in their classes or to their schools were more likely to be successful with academic demands of their courses, feel motivated to participate in class activities, and feel that academic activities were useful. Additionally, they would be more likely to persist in their classes and to remain at that university.

Sanchez, Colon, and Esparza (2005), researchers from the University of DePaul studied the relationship between sense of belonging and gender in the academic adjustment of Latino adolescents. The authors collected data from 143 seniors attending an urban high school in the Midwest. Each participant completed a survey, which measured their sense of belonging, motivation, academic effort, educational aspirations and expectations, and academic achievement. Independent t tests were conducted to determine if there were significant differences based on gender. Bivariate Pearson correlations were employed to study the influence of the variables on females and males, and a series of hierarchical multiple regressions were utilized to understand the role of sense of belonging and gender in participants’ academic outcomes (Sanchez, Colon, &
Esparza, 2005). Overall, the findings demonstrated that females had more positive academic outcomes as was suggested by their higher grade point averages, educational aspirations, and exertion of academic effort; however, females and males did not exhibit noticeable differences between their levels of sense of belonging. Among female participants, Sanchez and his colleagues (2005) also found that sense of belonging was positively related to intrinsic motivation and expectancy for class success. On the contrary, when there was a limited presence of sense of belonging, the researchers found that males had higher absenteeism rates and lower educational expectations. Sanchez, Colon, and Esparza (2005) concluded by indicating that sense of belonging was positively correlated with academic effort, which eventually increased the probability for goal attainment and academic persistence.

Similarly, Booker (2006) analyzed how sense of belonging affected the educational outcomes and experiences of African-American students. The author prefaced his study by describing how Finn's (1989) models on school withdrawal illustrated how different variables related to sense of belonging intersect over a student’s academic career and result in positive or negative decisions, which usually meant an early departure from school or continued persistence in school. According to Booker (2006), Finn's frustration-self-esteem model demonstrated that a record of poor school performances caused students to question their academic competence, which weakened their belongingness to school. In these cases, Booker supported Finn's claims and contended that oftentimes the persistence of African-American students is compromised because many decide to leave their programs hastily as a means of escape from an
environment that is perceived as psychologically punishing for them. Because of these negative views, the students fail to develop a sense of belonging or connection with their institutions. Within an adult education setting, a high school dropout who returns to education failure to persist may be attributed to their earlier mishaps in high school or their lack of desired progress in the adult education programs, which ultimately impairs their sense of belonging.

According to Booker (2006), Finn’s second model, the participation-identification model, explained that positive experiences that encouraged a sense of belonging were more likely to strengthen a student’s attachment to school. Finn (1989) described positive experiences as being involved in class activities, being recognized for academic accomplishments and progress, and developing connections with teachers and peers. Booker (2006) suggested that these experiences encouraged an emotional attachment to school for students and influenced the likelihood for African-American students to persist. Nevertheless, Booker contended that an emotional detachment or a lack of sense of belonging would be an immediate impetus for students to make the decision to drop out of school again. Hence, the students’ ability to prevent from becoming a permanent dropout would be compromised. Overall, Booker contended that after reviewing the work of other researchers, sense of belonging was a significant variable in explaining why students decide to persist because it encouraged African-American students to achieve, develop an attachment with school, and persist to attain their educational goals.
Institutional Variable: The Impact of Teaching Methods and Pedagogy on Persistence

After interviewing students who had dropped out of school, Riley (2004) noticed a central theme amongst many of the participants. When asked about what they would change about their schools, a majority stated that they would improve classroom instruction, using such descriptors as boring, irrelevant, and monotonous to portray the instruction in their classes. Likewise, when the participants were queried about what they liked least about the last school they attended, the most reported abhorrence was poor and uninteresting classes and instruction. One student reported, “I used to love school, but I don’t know what happened. After freshman year, school just got boring” (Riley, 2004, p. 70). Because of this student’s encounter with poor teaching methods and a lack of culturally relevant pedagogy, he admitted that he eventually stopped persisting. Because of the contentions reported by the participants in the researcher’s previous study, teaching methods and pedagogy was employed as a significant variable that can influence or hinder student persistence. Hypothetically speaking, if this student had received quality instruction, he could have been influenced to continue on in his studies rather than dropping out.

In recent years, the impact of program quality and instructional approaches, along with other variables on the decision of students to leave or stay in school has gained considerable attention from researchers and the federal government. Because of the impact of the significant numbers of high school dropouts who lack the skills and competencies to be successful in the workplace and society, the U.S. Department of
Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (2007) funded a study to investigate the factors that influence the enrollment and persistence of high school dropouts in adult education programs (Tolbert, 2005). The research study, led by principal researcher Michelle Tolbert, aimed to understand the characteristics of students that enrolled in adult education programs as well as the characteristics of those who failed to persist. After learning that men and younger adults persisted at lower rates than their counterparts, Tolbert also discovered that adults were more likely to persist when the courses and services matched their needs and when the instruction was of high quality.

Numerous scholars have researched the relationship between high quality instruction and student persistence, and many colleges are currently referring to results from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to evaluate the relationships between student-perceived best practices and retention rates and to suggest institutional action (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008). As reported by Kuh (2007) and his colleagues, strong positive correlations exist between graduation rates and scores on the five areas examining effective instructional practices, which include academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment (Kuh, 2007). Essentially, the data from the survey substantiates the need for educational researchers and leaders to consider the instructional and pedagogical practices of teachers on a student reason to decide to persist. Furthermore, considering that many students, especially those targeted in this study, experience academic pitfalls prior to reenrolling to school to further their education, the classroom and the teaching that takes place there is virtually the only hope
to ensure that these students gain the skills needed to enhance their academic motivation and success.

Pioneering educational researcher of adult education, Kathryn Patricia Cross, spent a majority of her professional career examining the impact of pedagogy in terms of student advancement and persistence in academia. Although she did not specifically reference high school dropouts as a subgroup, in her theory on adult learning, Cross (1981) instead detailed three distinct obstacles—situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers—that impact student participation and persistence in adult education programs. She described institutional variables as those that “consist of all those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities” (Cross, 1981, p. 98). Amongst institutional barriers, there were five groups and included: scheduling problems, problems with location or transportation, procedural problems, lack of information about offerings, and a lack of interesting or relevant courses—the most critical of the five according to Cross. Primarily, Cross posited that a lack of interesting and relevant courses was highly associated with ineffective teaching and learning practices and pedagogical approaches. Referencing earlier work by (Beder, 1991), Cross averred that among the five categories within institutional barriers, a lack of interesting or relevant courses was an area that was most pliable to the control of adult education programs because institutions could improve this paucity by simply implementing practices to enhance effective teaching and pedagogical approaches for all teachers. Also, Cross stipulated that by doing so, teachers
would be able to incite apparently ordinary students to unusual efforts and make winners out of them.

Like Cross (1981), a number of scholars have hypothesized that the nature and quality of teaching and learning may not only influence learning outcomes, but it might also play a significant role in student decisions to persist at, or depart from, an educational program (Pascarella, Seifert, & Whitt, 2008; McKegney, 2008; Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2008). A longitudinal study by Pascarella, Seifert, and Whitt (2008) examined the influence of faculty teaching skills on the departure or lack of persistence by college students. In the study, Pascarella and associates followed a sample of 1,353 first-year college students at a large public university to determine if exposure to organized and clear classroom instruction increased the persistence and subsequent reenrollment for students at that institution for the second year of college. The researchers collected data at four points during the study. Demographic data and data describing the students' academic preparations were collected prior to the students' enrollment at the institution. Secondly, the researchers employed a survey to collect information on the students' experiences in college, participation in activities and programs around campus, their degree of satisfaction with the education they were presently receiving, and their projected highest level of education. Thirdly, the researchers compiled data, which disclosed the students' first-year cumulative grade point averages. In the following school year, the researchers followed each of the students in their sample to determine if they had reenrolled at the institution for a second year.
Following an analysis of the data, Pascarella, Seifert, and Whitt (2008) found that when they controlled for the background characteristics of students, ACT composite score, and other first-year college experiences, the overall exposure to organized and clear instruction significantly increased the probability of a student reenrolling at that institution for a second year. Furthermore, the researchers found that grades had a statistically significant and positive effect on the probability of second-year enrollment, as well as organized and clear instruction. Intended plans for graduate school or higher educational degree attainment, on the contrary, were not significantly linked to persistence. After conducting a series of analyses to determine if the direct effects of exposure to organized and clear instruction on persistence differed significantly according to gender, race, and student academic performance, the researchers' findings indicated that the effects of organized and clear instruction were more prominent amongst women than men; however, there was no evidence to suggest the impact of exposure to organized and clear instruction on persistence for students based on race or performance.

A second study led by researchers at Peabody College at Vanderbilt University also examined the effects of teaching and learning styles on student persistence at postsecondary institutions (Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, & Hartley, 2008). Using a longitudinal design of 408 randomly selected first-time college students, the researchers examined how active learning affected the persistence of students in eight residential and religiously affiliated colleges and universities. Active learning, as described by the researchers, consisted of class activities that “involved students doing things and thinking about the things that they were doing” (Braxton et al., 2008, p. 71). The instructional
approach included, but was not limited to such activities as: classroom discussions, role-playing, cooperative learning, engaging dialogues and debates, and effective questioning practices. In an earlier study, Braxton, Milem, and Sullivan (2000) suggested that each of these practices yielded a positive influence on the social integration of students attending educational institutions, increased the students' subsequent commitment to the institution, and ensured the students' intention to return to the focal university for the following semesters.

Prior to completing the study, the researchers positioned their theoretical framework around four hypotheses. They conjectured that the more frequently students perceive that faculty members use active learning practices in their courses, the more students will perceive that their college or university is committed to the welfare of its students, be more social integrated with their institutions, have subsequent commitment to their college or university, and be likely to exhibit persistence in that particular college or university. As a part of the data collection process, the researchers required the participants to complete two surveys. One was administered in the fall of 2002 and the other in the spring of 2003. Each of the surveys correlated with the study's theoretical framework and assessed the significance of: student entry characteristics, initial institutional commitment, faculty use of active learning practices, commitment of the institution to students' welfare, social integration, subsequent institutional commitment, and student persistence. Additionally, the researchers reviewed the enrollment records of all eight participating colleges and universities. The researchers employed four multilevel regression models, as well as a logical regression analysis to assess the
significance of each of their four hypotheses. After the researchers controlled for student demographics and initial institutional commitment, they found that the student perceptions of the faculty’s use of active learning practices had a positive and statistically significant impact on how the students perceived their institution’s commitment to the welfare of students. Likewise, the findings demonstrated that social integration was positively and significantly related to a student’s subsequent institutional commitment. Nonetheless, they discovered that there was not a significant relationship between active learning and social integration for students. Furthermore, it was explained that gender, racial status, and parent income and educational levels were not significant either.

Akin to the aforementioned studies, Laird, Chen, and Kuh (2008) compared classroom practices at institutions with better-than-expected and as-expected persistence rates to distinguish the specific instructional approaches that enhanced increased rates of student persistence. At the onset of the study, the researchers prefaced readers by explaining the disproportionate baccalaureate completion rates at colleges and universities across the nation. This presumption was analogous to research that explains the disproportionate GED certificate completion rates for students because of disrupted attendance rates and lack of persistence (Sander, 2007). Referencing a statistical report by Carey (2007) which explained ways to improve college completion rates, the researchers confirmed that more than 80% of students were completing degree requirements in four years as expected at some institutions, while at about one-third of the nation’s colleges and universities, more than 70% of first-time students were graduating in six years—a trend that shows that some universities are having difficulty
with student persisting. Because of these statistics, Laird and his associates presumed that the differences in completion where present because some institutions did not adequately support students and failed to require faculty members to use engaging pedagogies in their classrooms. As a rebuttal, Laird, Chen, and Kuh (2008) asserted that, “At institutions where faculty members more often use engaging pedagogies, students at these institutions consequently participate more frequently in educationally effective activities, which have a salutary effect of fostering higher levels of student success, including persistence (p. 88).

To collect the necessary data, the researchers identified 924 institutions based on data collected from the National Survey of Student Engagement that had higher-than-expected persistence rates (Laird, Chen, & Kuh, 2008). Then, they used a regression model to predict the rates of student persistence at these institutions by examining the various institutional characteristics. Although the multiple regression model accounted for more than 62% of the variance in persistence rates, the researchers were more interested in uncovering the particular practices of universities that had better-than-expected persistence rates. Institutions that received more than five points (174 institutions) above the model were considered doing better-than-expected, and those within five points were classified as doing as-expected (570 institutions). Next, the researchers contrasted data submitted by students and faculty on the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement respectively. Indicators of student engagement evaluated by students included: levels of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interactions, and supportive
classroom environment (Laird, Chen, & Kuh, 2008). Faculty members responded to the following indicators: deep approaches to learning, faculty-student contact, intellectual skills, practical skills, and individual and social responsibility.

After analyzing the data collected from students, the researchers found that the level of academic challenge also described as the amount of reading and writing for courses, engagement in higher order thinking skills, and time on task was higher at institutions with better-than-expected persistence rates (0.19 SD). Additionally, the findings showed that: active and collaborative learning was higher at institutions with better-than-expected persistence rates (0.32 SD); student-faculty interaction, although higher (0.12 SD), was not statistically significant; and institutions with better-than-expected persistence rates more frequently emphasized student supports and quality of relationships between students and their peers and students and faculty members (Laird, Chen, & Kuh, 2008). Data collected from faculty revealed that scores were higher at institutions with better-than-expected persistence rates in: deep approaches to learning, where emphasis was placed on higher-order and integrative learning in courses; active classroom practice, which described the time spent in class on small group work, student presentations, and teacher-student led activities; intellectual skills, or practices where the faculty emphasized writing and speaking clearly, analyzing problems, and learning independently; practical skills, which consisted of faculty emphasizing the importance of solving real-world problems, collaborating with others, job skills, and computer usage; and individual and social responsibility, where faculty required students to understand-one’s self and people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. There was no statistical
difference for faculty-student contact (Laird, Chen, & Kuh, 2008). Overall, the researchers concluded that institutions need to modify and monitor supports and faculty practices in all classes to enhance student engagement and improve persistence rates.

By and large, each of these studies validated the significance of good teaching and learning practices and pedagogical approaches on student persistence rates. Upon enrolling students in educational programs, especially high school dropouts who are extremely at-risk of leaving education for a second time, educational institutions must realize that it is not enough just to enroll these students. According Cross (1971), if higher education does not make educational programs fit diverse student learning styles, needs, and educational backgrounds, these students will continue to fail and fail to persist.

**Institutional Variable: The Impact of Convenience and Flexibility**

In the researcher’s previous study, the participants were asked what they like least about the last school they attended. One of the students’ least favorite characteristics was the flexibility and convenience of his school’s schedule. A few of the students stated that school started too early, and others indicated that they would decrease the length of time spent in classes. Overall, the theme suggested that the participants felt that the classes were inconvenient and inflexible as some students stated they would prefer school to start later and like for classes to be shorter. Additionally, when students were asked what could have prevented them from leaving school. Many stated making changes to the school’s schedule. These students’ contentions suggest that they did not view school as
being convenient or flexible—an assertion that influences why some students today persist or fail to persist in contemporary educational programs.

A study by Muller (2008) analyzed utilized a qualitative methodology to investigate the variables that influenced or hindered the persistence of undergraduate and graduate women enrolled in on-line degree completion programs at a four-year institution. Muller used purposeful sampling to query 20 female participants to determine why they persisted or failed to persist towards graduating and how the factors supporting or hindering persistence influenced them. The findings suggested that the participants failed to persist when they had multiple responsibilities, insufficient interaction with faculty, and a demanding course load. However, Muller found that the female participants were influenced to persist because of their intrinsic motivation to complete their degrees, engagement in the learning community with peers, and the convenience of the classes with their schedules. The participants indicated that they appreciated the convenience of the college’s online course option to complete their degrees because it complemented their schedules.

Stanford-Bowers (2008) examined the characteristics that influence student retention or persistence as perceived by administrators, faculty, and students. The author completed this study to specifically determine which factors were most important among the three stakeholders and to ascertain the agreeability amongst these three groups as the researcher speculated that differences in these factors as perceived by the three groups of stakeholders could possibly influence low persistence rates in some courses. As a part of the data collection, Stanford-Bowers required participants in each group to complete
three phases of an online questionnaire. During the first phase, the participants were asked to list the factors, which they perceived to support student persistence. Both administrators and students listed convenience/flexibility as the most significant variable. During the second phase, participants were asked to rate those factors that they perceived most important to supporting persistence by using a five-point Likert-type scale. The researcher then ordered the variables in the order of their frequency as being described as: very important, important, and somewhat important. Student participants most frequently cited convenience/flexibility as the very important. Lastly, the participants from each of the three groups were presented the lists of top 10 indicators for persistence, and they were to indicate their rank preferences. The students ranked convenience/flexibility as first, administrators ranked in last, and teachers did not identify the construct as a variable. Based on the results of this study, Stanford-Bowers (2008) concluded that the administrators’ and faculty’s ideas about factors which influence student persistence in online courses were closely aligned while the students’ factors presented a different perspective. The researcher indicated that the ideas of the administrators and teachers stemmed from an institutional/instructional perspective, while those of the students emerged from a more personal perspective of convenience and practicality.

Overall, each of these studies confirms the significance and relationship with the researcher’s previous study. As adult educators plan classes for students interested in obtaining the General Educational Development certificate, they should consider the a lack of convenience and flexibility as a threat as many of these students have other responsibilities that may impact their ability to persist in programs otherwise. By
ensuring this flexibility and convenience, adult educational leaders will be able improve attendance rates, hence increasing the numbers of students who may ultimately obtain the General Educational Development certificate.

Summary

Although numerous researchers have examined the factors that influence students to persist in education to attain their goals, a thorough review of the literature revealed that very few researchers have examined the factors that specifically influence high school dropouts to persist in adult education to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. This demonstrates that there is currently a gap in research as this populace of students, who are most at-risk of school failure, currently lack the empirical grounding to assist practitioners in meeting their needs. Nevertheless, the available educational research that investigates the factors that influence persistence is mostly focused on the persistence of students in higher education, including community colleges and four-year colleges. Additionally, numerous researchers use the terms student retention, academic motivation, and persistence interchangeably.

Of the existing research, the findings indicate that student persistence is associated with student-input variables, environmental variables, and institutional variables. Student-input variables include such factors as gender, age, race and ethnicity, academic competence, and self-efficacy. Environmental variables consists of influence from peers and family members, the impact of teacher-student relationships, and the students' sense of belonging or connection with school, while institutional variables—for the purposes of this study—only refers to the teaching methods and pedagogy of teachers.
Overall, the goal and organization of the literature review was to: utilize findings from the researchers previous study to determine whether there is a correlation between dropout and persistence factors; facilitate an understanding of persistence from a theoretical perspective using models from Tinto (1975) and Aston (1970); explain research that has focused on the subgroup of students involved in this study; and enable the researcher to determine the potential significance of predicted independent variables.
CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research study was proposed to examine if there was a statistically significant relationship between student-input, environmental, and institutional variables and the ability of recent high school dropouts to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. Student-input variables were the preestablished characteristics of students that impacted their views about education (Astin, 1997). These included age, gender, race and ethnicity, academic competence, and self-efficacy. Environmental variables were the factors that directly and indirectly influenced students to pursue educational goals and included the impact of peers and family, teacher-student relationships, and sense of belonging (Astin, 1997). Moreover, institutional variables referred to the teaching methods and pedagogical practices of teachers and the convenience and flexibility of classes. These variables are outlined in Figure 1 within the theoretical framework.

Definition of Variables

Persistence is defined as the extent to which high school dropouts enroll and endure in Adult Secondary Education programs, attend class regularly, and engage in study practices that advance their academic progress towards attaining the General Educational Development certificate.
**Student-Input Variables**

- Age
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Academic Competence
- Self-Efficacy

**Institutional Variables**

- Teaching Methods and Pedagogy
- Convenience and Flexibility

**Environmental Variables**

- Peer Impact
- Family Impact
- Teacher-Student Relationships
- Sense of Belonging

Persistence of High School Dropouts to Pursue the GED Certificate

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**Figure 1. Proposed Relationships among the Variables**

*High school dropout* is defined as a student who left school before completing the requirements for a high school diploma, and who is now enrolled in an Adult Secondary Education program to pursue the General Educational Development certificate.

*Student-input variables* are defined as those preestablished personal qualities that students bring to the education program with them. These qualities, or antecedent characteristics, can either have an affirmative or negative impact on the students' ability
to persist. In this study, student-input variables included age, gender, race and ethnicity, academic competence, and self-efficacy.

**Age** is defined as the length of time that one has existed or their duration of life in years as self-reported by students. 18-21 was coded 1; 22-25 was coded 2; 26-30 was coded 3; and Over 30 was coded 4.

**Gender** is defined as female, coded 1, or male, coded 2.

**Race** is defined as the way in which students self-report the race or races with which they most closely identify. Races that students are able to identify with include: white, coded 1; back or African American, coded 2; Hispanic or Latino, coded 3; American Indian and Alaska Native, coded 4; Asian, coded 5; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, coded 6; and Two or more races, coded 7.

**Ethnicity** is defined as the way in which students self-report whether or not they are of Hispanic or Latino origin. Those of Hispanic or Latino origin are coded 1. Those not of Hispanic or Latino origin are coded 2.

**Academic competence** is defined as the self-reported level of knowledge and skills acquired by students before dropping out of school that either prepares them for school or causes them to have academic deficits and continuous struggles—hence impacting their ability to persist and obtain the General Educational Development certificate. Students self-report their academic competence as the letter grades they acquired when they were last in school. Academic competence is coded in the following way: A is coded as 5; B is coded as 4; C is coded as 3; D is coded as 2, and F is coded as 1.
Self-efficacy is defined as the way in which students describe their belief in their ability to succeed and acquire the General Educational Development certificate. The way students describe these beliefs ultimately determine how they think, behave, and feel as they persist towards their goals of not becoming a permanent high school dropout.

Environmental variables is defined as the experiences that students encounter while enrolled in the Adult Secondary Education program to pursue the General Educational Development certificate that might impact their desire to persist. To meet the description of this study, peer impact, family impact, teacher-student relationships, and sense of belonging were used as identifiers.

Peer impact is defined as the influence that students receive from peers that can either influence them to persist towards or abandon their goal of acquiring the General Educational Development certificate.

Family Impact is defined as the influence that students receive from family members that can either influence them to persist towards or abandon their goal of acquiring the General Educational Development certificate.

Teacher-student relationships is defined as the interactions between the students and their teachers that can either influence them to persist towards or abandon their goal of acquiring the General Educational Development certificate.

Sense of belonging is defined as the feeling of connectedness that students feel with their programs that can either positively or negatively impacts their desire to persist towards obtaining the General Educational Development certificate.
Institutional variables is defined as the variables that the adult education programs have direct control over in altering to increase persistence rates for high school dropouts as they pursue the General Educational Development certificate. Within this study, the only institutional variable is teaching methods and pedagogy.

Teaching methods and pedagogy is defined as the approaches adult educators use in their classroom to increase learning for students. These approaches can either hinder or enhance persistence for students as they pursue the General Educational Development certificate.

Convenience and flexibility is defined the perceived accessibility of Adult Secondary Education classes that allow students to be successfully attend class while maintaining other obligations with minimal threats to persistence.

Interrelationships among the Selected Variables

It was proposed that the persistence of high school dropouts enrolled in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate would be influenced by various student-input, environmental, and institutional variables. The researchers proposed that these variables would act interdependently as forces that either helped or hindered students as they toiled to advance their education. Tinto and Cullen (1973) confirmed this interrelated relationship and contended that persistence towards educational goals was not simply driven by individual student characteristics and goal commitment alone. Instead, Tinto and Cullen posited that the persistence towards an educational goal, such as pursuing the General Educational Development certificate, should be viewed as a longitudinal outcome of an interactive
process between the student, the school environment, and the institution that the student is attending. Moreover, this longitudinal process must consider, as a factor, how well the student integrates into the academic and social structures of education (Tinto & Cullen, 1973).

This academic and social integration took into consideration the definition and significance of all the proposed independent variables. In fact, even though the demographic variables—age, gender, and race and ethnicity—were more control variables, academic competence and self-efficacy directly impacted a student’s ability to integrate into the academic atmosphere of school. It was suggested that students who displayed higher manifestations of self-efficacy and academic competence would be more likely to access the academic environments with more fidelity than those with little academic competence and self-efficacy. Additionally, these students would also continue to persist with positive influences from peers, family members, and affirmative relationships with teachers. This social capital would transcend and ultimately impact the student’s social integration. Subsequently, these students would also be affected by institutional variables, particularly the pedagogical practices of teachers. Nevertheless, in order to return to school and persist towards obtaining the General Educational Development certificate, it was very important for students to have the ability to successfully attend class while maintaining other obligations with minimal threats to persistence. By and large, it was proposed that each of these variables—student-input, environmental, and institutional—would work interactively to influence persistence rates of high school dropouts as they exert their efforts to remove their dropout labels.
Tinto (1975) developed a model referred to as the theory of student departure to indicate how the interaction of the proposed variables and the assimilation of students into the academic and social atmospheres of their educational environments based on commitments to their goals and institutions encourage persistence. He argued that students entered educational programs with background characteristics, such as differences in demographic factors and levels of academic competence and self-efficacy that interacted with each other and influenced the students' goal and institutional commitment. The students' personal goal commitments, which were manipulated by their self-efficacy and other background variables, increased their academic progress, performance, and intellectual development, which enhanced the students' academic integration. Consequently, the students' academic integration responded in a circular manner and again impacted goal commitment. Tinto (1975) stated that the students' commitment to their goals greatly impacted their persistence and diminished the likelihood that the student would fall into a stopout pattern or remain a permanent dropout. As a result, Tinto expected that the students' institutional commitment would produce positive interactions with peer groups and teacher-student relationships, which would lead to social integration and further enhance institutional commitment, another circular relationship. And again, institutional commitment, like goal commitments, also increased the students' likelihood to persist and weaken their risk of disengaging.

Likewise, via his Input-Environment-Outcome Model, Astin (1970) argued a similar position as Tinto. He maintained that three separate constructs—input, environment, and output variables—interact to impact student performance or persistence
as outlined in this study. In developing this model, Astin’s purpose was to be able to control for student-input differences and later predict, explain, and describe how environmental variables affected student outcomes—either their ability or inability to persist and attain educational goals. Through this model, Astin (1970) attempted to explain the importance of focusing on environmental variables as a way to direct outcomes. Moreover, as a premise regarding the interrelationship of these variables, Astin argued that, “the consideration of input characteristics when assessing student retention helps to understand the influence of students’ backgrounds and characteristics on their ability to persist” (Ishler & Upcraft, 2004, p. 30). Furthermore, Astin (1970) contended that the environmental variables experienced by students influenced their success of acquiring desired outcomes, or the students’ characteristics after being exposed to environmental variables (Ishler & Upcraft, 2004).

Moreover, in consideration of teaching methods and pedagogy as a variable, Fledge (2008) insisted that there was a presumption of the importance of teacher development because of the link of teacher pedagogy practices to student retention. Particularly, Fledge asserted that adult educators played an important role in the creation of an academic experience that offered students exciting opportunities and useful guidance, which established a sense of community and increased student engagement. By increasing student engagement and providing students with real world learning experiences, it was conjectured that students—especially those at-risk of early withdrawal—would be more prone to persist as they would perceive learning and
remaining in their programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate as being increasingly beneficial to them.

Again, it was essential for all of these variables to interact simultaneously to increase the percentage of students who persisted in adult education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate. Through the interaction of these variables, theoretical foundations demonstrated that fewer students would be inclined to withdraw from school. Specific to this research study, more high school dropouts who decided to give education a second chance because of aspirations to advance career, educational, and personal goals would persist with the tenacity needed to change their outcomes in life. Figure 2 demonstrates the inter-relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study was developed to have strong internal and external validity, there were some limitations were beyond the researcher’s control. First, a thorough review of existing literature surrounding the persistence of high school dropouts in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate was the most significant limitation. The available research examining the persistence of this sub-group of students was extremely limited. The last known study was completed in 1999, and all other studies examining persistence as a dependent measure were completed in higher education settings with students enrolled in community colleges and four-year universities, or in high school settings with high school students.
Figure 2. Persistence of recent high school dropouts to pursue the GED certificate and interrelationships between student input, environmental, and institutional variables.

The same is true for the theoretical frameworks developed by Tinto (1975) and Astin (1970). Consequently, the researcher had to generalize those findings and assume that they would be valid for the participants being analyzed in this particular study.
Secondly, it was very difficult for the researcher to use a historical definition for persistence. While previous researchers have defined persistence as year-to-year persistence, this was not an option for this researcher because there was not a specific time limit or program of study for students in adult education programs as these students typically attended their educational programs until they were able to pass the exam to obtain the General Educational Development certificate. For this reason, it was difficult to distinguish between actual persistence and the students' idea of their intent to persist, a small difference that had the ability to compromise the internal and external validity of the study. Moreover, this study was also limited to the students' own reports and prediction of their intent to persist. Similarly, because of the time allotted to complete the study, the researcher was unable to follow up with the participants to determine if they actually persisted to the extent needed to acquire the GED certificate—again leaving space for misinterpretation of outcomes.

Last, in existing studies analyzing persistence, there were numerous variables included in institutional factors, such as institution size, selectivity, institutional type, and gender and racial makeup that impacted student persistence. Because there was no previous research examining these variables within the adult education setting, the researcher was unable to consider additional possible institutional factors within adult education programs that might possibly be associated with student persistence. Consequently, the researcher was only included two institutional variables—teaching methods and pedagogy and convenience and flexibility.
Summary

It was proposed to examine the extent to which the persistence of high school dropouts in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate would be influenced by student-input, environmental, and institutional variables. Student-input variables include age, gender, race and ethnicity, academic competence, and self-efficacy. Environmental variables included: the influence of peers, the impact of family, teacher-student relationships, and sense of belonging. Finally, only teaching methods and pedagogy and convenience and flexibility were included in institutional variables. Astin’s (1970) input-environment-outcome model and Tinto’s (1975) theory of student departure were used as theoretical underpinnings for the study as these theories demonstrated how the interrelationships between the independent variables interacted to influence persistence.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this ex-post facto research study was to use a mix-methods approach to examine the causal factors that influenced high school dropouts to persist towards acquiring the General Educational Development certificate returning to Adult Secondary Education programs. Despite the participants’ previous decisions to abandon high school, the intention of this research was to test the hypotheses that student-input, environmental, and institutional variables influenced recent high school dropouts to persist towards attaining this educational goal. The student-input variables that were proposed to influence persistence included: age, race and ethnicity, gender, academic competence, and self-efficacy. Environmental variables consisted of: the impact from peers and family, the relationships participants had with their teachers, and their sense of connectedness or belonging to their respected educational institutions. Last, institutional variables modestly referred to the teaching methods and pedagogical practices that teachers used to increase learning and academic engagement for students as they persisted in Adult Secondary Education programs. Convenience and flexibility of classes was also included as an institutional variable.

A mix-methods research design was utilized because it offered the researcher with the best opportunity for answering the research questions because this approach
combined philosophies that were embedded in positivism and constructivism. By combining these methods, the researcher was able to bridge the schisms that existed between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms by drawing from the strengths of both inquiry methodologies and subsequently minimizing the weaknesses that evolved when either method was employed exclusively (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Moreover, the researcher also opted for a mix-methods design because educational scholars argued that this specific methodology was increasingly beneficial as it enabled the researcher to: answer a broader and more complex range of research questions; provide stronger evidence for her conclusions because of the ability to converge and corroborate findings between two schools of thought; increase the generalizability or external validity of the results; and more productively inform theory and practice (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Gay & Airasian, 2003).

**Description of the Setting**

The study was conducted at three technical colleges within the Technical College System of Georgia. Each of the technical colleges was located within close proximity to metropolitan Atlanta, and each college provided free adult education instructional classes to adults seeking to obtain the General Educational Development certificate. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in the research study, these technical colleges were referred to as: Technical College A, Technical College B, and Technical College C. Adults of any age who had not obtained a high school credential were allowed to enroll in these classes. Persons aged 16 to 19 years old were also eligible to enroll in classes; however, before they could enroll, they had to provide official
withdrawal documents from the last school they attended or a letter signed by the superintendent to verify that they were no longer enrolled in a public, private, or home school. Additionally, students who were 16 or 17 were required to enroll in Adult Education classes and complete a minimum of 12 hours of classroom work plus score a minimum overall average of 500 on the Official GED certificate Practice Test or 80% on other approved assessments before they could officially be approved to take the GED certificate Test.

Technical College A was nestled within miles of Atlanta and offered preparation classes mostly to adults living within DeKalb, Rockdale, and Newton counties. Of the adults residing within the college’s service area, the United States Census indicated that 17% in DeKalb County, 20% in Rockdale County, and 26% in Newton County had less than a high school diploma. Statistics reported by the Technical College System of Georgia (2012) demonstrated that 6,865 students were enrolled in the adult education classes at Technical College A in 2011, whereas 8,368 were enrolled in 2010. However, because this number included all Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and English Second Language students as well as Work-based Project Learners with an assessment regardless of the number of hours attended, it was difficult for the researcher to obtain an accurate count of students specifically enrolled in Adult Secondary Education programs to obtain the General Educational Development certificate. Although the data showed that a fair amount of students were enrolled, the Technical College System of Georgia (2012) also reported that 6,974 students in 2011 and 5,884 in 2010 had at least 12 attendance hours and at least one assessment, indicating some level
of persistence in 2011. Additionally, the data demonstrated that: out of all students with
an assessment and 12 or more attendance hours (total NRS enrollment), 26.6% ($n =
1,852$) in 2010 and 31.3% ($n = 1,841$) in 2011 students completed at least one level; 1,559
out of 2,685 students (59.6%) in 2010 passed the test to obtain the General Educational
Development certificate; and 23% of GED graduates in 2010 and 26% in 2011 went on to
transition to technical college.

Technical College B was located in one of Georgia’s fastest growing counties and
offered day and evening classes at three separate locations. The 2000 United States
Census reported that 15% of the adults living in Gwinnett County did not possess a high
school diploma. Similarly, the Technical College System of Georgia (2012) reported
that: 8,473 students in 2010 and 6,718 students in 2011 were enrolled in Adult Education
class; 6,336 in 2010 and 4,533 in 2011 had acquired at least 12 attendance hours and at
least one assessment; 26.7% ($n = 1,701$) in 2010 and 18.8% ($n = 855$) in 2011 students
completed at least one level; 1,118 out of 1,533 students (72.9%) in 2010 passed the test
to obtain the General Educational Development certificate; and 26.9% of GED graduates
went on to transition to technical college in 2010 and 24% in 2011.

Last, Technical College C was located northwest of Atlanta and provided services
to six counties throughout north central Georgia. These include Bartow, Cobb, Cherokee,
Gordon, Paulding, and Pickens counties. The 2000 United States Census indicated that
each of these counties had a high percentage of high school dropouts. In fact, 29% in
Bartow, 13% in Cobb, 17% in Cherokee, 34% in Gordon, 20% in Paulding, and 31% of
adult in Pickens counties had not completed high school at the time data was reported by
the United States Census. Data collected by the Technical College System of Georgia (2012) demonstrated that: 3,008 students in 2010 and 3,302 students in 2011 were enrolled in adult education classes at Technical College C; 2,054 in 2010 and 1,927 in 2011 had acquired at least 12 attendance hours and at least one assessment; 31.6% ($n = 649$) in 2010 and 34.7% ($n = 669$) in 2011 students completed at least one level; 936 out of 1,216 students (77%) in 2010 passed the test to obtain the General Educational Development certificate; and 30.8% of GED graduates went on to transition to technical college in 2010 and 31.2% percent in 2011.

**Sampling Procedures**

Although the Technical College System of Georgia offered adult education classes through 37 delivery areas throughout Georgia, the researcher utilized purposive sampling to select the actual institutions to conduct the study. By using purposive sampling to select the institutions, the researcher was able to target institutions that were deemed most appropriate for this study and those that would warrant the most diverse group of participants. Additionally, based on the researcher’s experience and knowledge of the potential subjects that were accessible at these institutions and the increased number of adults living without a high school diploma within each of the service areas, the researcher deemed that Technical College A, Technical College B, and Technical College C were most appropriate for the research study because they had the target population that were being sought. Additionally, the technical colleges served a diverse body of students from numerous counties throughout Georgia, as these counties featured suburban, rural, and urban characteristics with the concluding two being described in
By selecting such a diverse sample, the researcher was able to increase the probability that the findings from this study would be generalizable to other high school dropouts attending adult education programs in other service delivery areas, who also sought to reestablish themselves and foster their human capital potential. When selecting the actual research participants for this study, the researcher used convenience sampling to choose participants. The sampling method was preferred for numerous reasons. First, considering that students who attended the adult education classes had so many responsibilities that had the potential to affect their attendance rates, the researcher had to refer to students who were readily available at the time of data collection. Moreover, when completing the qualitative requirements of the study via the focus group study, the researcher again needed to select participants based on their availability and level of convenience. Lastly, the researcher had to conveniently select participants due to the limited time frame allocated to conducting the study. Although the researcher used convenience sampling as a sampling method, the researcher was still able to ensure that the participants were diverse. Moreover, the researcher made certain that the selection of participants was free from any bias that had the potential to impact the internal or external validity of the study.

After gaining access to the institutions and approval from the Institutional Review Board to work with the participants, the researcher aimed to survey at least 30 to 40 participants per institution. Planning for an attrition rate of at least 8%, this ensured that
data was collected from at least 100 students in order to ensure a data sample that was representative of the larger subgroup of students affected by this phenomenon. Additionally, this sample size ensured that the researcher was able to detect a real treatment effect or actual relationship between variables because a sample of this size would have a higher probability of showing if a relationship actually existed in this population.

**Working with Human Subjects**

The research for this study was conducted in a manner that ensured to uphold the tenets and provisions of the Institutional Review Board. The researcher sought permission from the Technical College System of Georgia to conduct the research study at the three selected technical colleges. Next, the researcher also contacted the directors of adult education at each technical college to seek their individual permission to include their respective programs in the study. In doing so, the researcher guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality indicating that no students would be identifiable by participating in the study. Moreover, each participant was required to give written consent to participate in the study, and students under the age of 18 were required to have parent consent to participate in the study. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher shared the findings with each of the participating institutions so that adequate supports and changes could be implemented to increase the students’ ability and desire to persist to attain the General Educational Development certificate. Additionally, a copy of the research study was sent to officials with the Technical College System of Georgia.
**Instrumentation**

The researcher designed an affective survey instrument with assistance from members of the dissertation committee. This instrument included 53 questions with an expected duration of 25 to 30 minutes. The survey was established to measure each of the variables that were outlined in the theoretical framework. These included student-input, environmental, and institutional variables. During the development of the survey instrument, the researcher was certain to maintain the item and sample validity as these two were required in order to have content validity. Also, the researcher ensured that the instrument had construct validity and measured what it was intended to measure (Gay & Airasian, 2003). The researcher ensured the validity of the instrument by keeping the focus on persistence and making certain that all the variables were represented with fidelity within the instrument to assure the reliability of the results.

The researcher developed a consent form to attach to each survey. This form described to participants the purpose of the study, explained confidentiality procedures, and provided the researcher’s contact information should any participants have any questions. Moreover, the researcher explained to each student that participating in the survey was their personal decision, and their decision to participate in the study was evidenced via their written consent. Due to the time constraints of this study and the time allotted for data collection, students under the age of 18 were only considered if their parents were able to provide immediate consent granting the students permission to participate in the study. The researcher indicated that all information provided by and
collected from the students would remain confidential and would be reported with anonymity.

To ensure that each variable was represented with fidelity so as not to endanger the internal validity, the researcher designed an instrument that adequately assessed the significance of each variable. Table 5 demonstrates how the variables were organized within the survey.

Table 5

Outline of Quantitative Persistence Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Associated Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student-Input Variables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age, Gender, Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Questions 1-5</td>
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<td>Persistence</td>
<td>Questions 6-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Competence</td>
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<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
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<td>Environmental Variables</td>
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<td>Peers</td>
<td>Questions 21-25</td>
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<td>Family</td>
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<td>Teacher-Student Relationships</td>
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<td>Sense of Belonging</td>
<td>Questions 36-40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional Variables</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching Methods and Pedagogy</td>
<td>Questions 41-45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout Factors</td>
<td>Questions 46-53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the survey, the researcher also conducted a focus group study of 4 to 7 participants at each of the participating sites to foster dialogue about the factors that encouraged them to persist in adult education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate and to determine the extent to which their reasons for dropping out of school were related to their reasons for subsequently persisting. The researcher decided to utilize a focus group approach because this approach enabled the researcher to:

Stimulate talk from multiple perspectives from the group participants so that the researcher can learn what the range of views are, or to promote talk on a topic that informants might not be able to talk so thoughtfully about in individual interviews. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 109)

Additionally, the researcher conjectured that by listening to the experiences of their peers, those involved in the focus group study would be able to more competently understand and articulate the reasons they chose to persist.

The researcher developed a series of questions for the focus group study, which was expected to last between 30 to 45 minutes. The researcher also prefaced and substantiated each question with background information from an earlier study. In the consent form, the researcher explained the purpose and structure of the focus group study and indicated that there would be no compensation of any kind available for the participants. However, the researcher did agree to provide the participants with a copy of the final research paper. As a part of the focus group explanation, the researcher also specified that: there would be no risks to the participants, the session would include the
The researcher using a laptop or recording device for recording purposes; and there would be guidelines that all participants would need to follow. The participants were asked to: state their names before speaking, talk one at a time, speak clearly and at a slow pace, to respect everyone's opinion, and keep all comments from their fellow peers confidential. Last, they were reminded that their input was appreciated and would help someone else in the future. Within the focus group study, each variable was allotted one question to stimulate dialogue amongst participants and to ensure adherence to the allotted time frame.

Last, to increase the credibility and validity of the results, the researcher triangulated the data by also including observations as an additional qualitative data source. The researcher observed the classroom environment of the adult education classes along with analyzing student interactions, student-teacher interactions, and handwritten field notes. Additionally, the researcher used the transcription of the focus group studies in order to better understand the variables that influenced students to persist to pursue the GED certificate.

**Participants/Location of Research**

Because the United States Census reported that a significant amount of adults from teenagers to those in their late 1920s were without a high school credential in Georgia and across the nation, the researcher specifically targeted participants ages 18 to 30. Additionally, the researcher included students under 18 only if they were able to obtain immediate permission to participate in the study from their parents and participants over the age of 30 in the event that the number of participants in the initial...
age range was limited. All of these participants were enrolled at one of the three selected institutions—Technical College A, Technical College B, or Technical College C.

The participants and institutions were selected via convenience and purposive sampling respectfully. Additionally, the researcher included only participants who gave their written consent to participate in the study. Those, younger than 18, had to obtain immediate permission from their parents due to the limited time allocated to data collection. Otherwise, they were omitted from the study. Additionally, because persistence was relative and difficult to define because of the inability of students in adult education programs to transition from year-to-year programs like undergraduate students or those in two year colleges, the researcher sought assistance from the adult education teachers to determine which students had exhibited the most persistence based on attendance rates and other informal measures. By working with the adult educators, the researcher was able to gain access to the students with the highest level of persistence for data collection purposes.

**Data Collection Procedures**

In order to conduct this study, the following procedures were utilized to collect the data:

1. The researcher gained access from the Technical College System of Georgia to ensure the availability of the participants and setting of the study.

2. The researcher applied to Clark Atlanta University’s Institutional Review Board to gain approval to conduct the study.
3. The researcher sought approval from the Technical College System of Georgia to conduct the study at the three technical colleges. The Technical College System of Georgia served as the gatekeeper for all three selected technical colleges.

4. The researcher provided a letter of introduction and a description of the study via e-mail to the adult education directors at each of the three technical colleges requesting their permission to include their programs in the study.

5. Upon receiving permission from the adult education directors, the researchers sent an introductory e-mail to the teachers at the respective institutions. This ensured that all stakeholders were aware of the study to increase buy-in from participants.

6. The researcher secured a list of the classes detailing the class schedules at each of the three sites and contacted the teachers indicating the times data would be collected. The researcher allocated a week at each institution to collect the needed data.

7. The researcher visited each of the three sites. Because the adult education director was concerned about the limited number of potential participants available at Technical College C, two adult learning centers were utilized, which enabled the researcher to collect data at a total of four sites across three technical colleges. Once there, the researcher discussed the study, which enabled the researcher to establish an unbiased rapport with the students and start the research relationship off in a positive and professional manner. In
doing so, the researcher secured permission, support, and participation from the expected students enrolled in adult education programs to pursue the General Educational Development certificate.

8. Prior to collecting the initial data, the researcher observed the students in their adult education classes. This enabled the researcher to observe the classroom environment of the adult education classes, analyze student interactions and student-teacher relationships, and take substantial field notes.

9. Once the students signed the letter of consent, the researcher proceeded with the surveys and the focus group study. Students under 18 were required to obtain parent permission first, and they were surveyed only after the researcher received consent from their parents. Additionally, the researcher completed multiple visits as needed to ensure that the adequate number of surveys was completed at each institution and to ensure the completion of the focus group studies.

10. For those interested in the focus group study, the researcher collected the students' contact information at each of the three sites in order to remind the participants of the date, time, and location of the focus group study.

11. The researcher conducted four focus groups after all quantitative data was collected. Although the initial goal was to include 7 to 10 students, the number of students in each focus group ranged between 4 and 6 participants. Participants were informed that their participation in the focus group was strictly voluntary and an unpaid experience.
12. The researcher kept an accurate and confidential record of the recorded focus group and began analyzing all collected data. The focus groups were recorded using the researcher's laptop and a digital audio recorder.

**Quantitative Statistical Applications**

The researcher used a correlational statistical application to satisfy the quantitative aspects of the study. The correlational analysis enabled the researcher to determine whether, and to what degree, a relationship existed between the independent and dependent variables (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Additionally, it allowed the researcher to test the expected relationship between the reasons students' dropped out and why they later persisted and tested the research questions to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Also, using this statistical approach the researcher was able to yield a correlation coefficient, which demonstrated the size and direction of the relationship between the variables. The researcher also used descriptive statistics to describe, synthesize, and interpret the participants' demographic data, which included: age, race, ethnicity, gender, county of residence, and age at dropout. Moreover, a frequency count was performed to determine an accurate report of the reasons participants' shared for dropping out of high school.

**Qualitative Description of Data Analysis Methods**

The researcher referred to the qualitative analysis steps described by Gay and Airasian (2003) as data managing, reading and memoing, describing the context and participants, classifying the data, and interpreting the data. Data managing involved creating and organizing the data collected during the study. This process assisted the
researcher in organizing and checking the data for completeness and starting the process of analyzing and interpreting the data. During the reading and memoing phase of data analysis, the researcher read and wrote memos about all field notes, transcripts, memos and observer comments to get an initial sense of the data. During the describing phase, the researcher provided a true picture of the setting and participants and events that took place in it, in order to gain a clear understanding of the context of the study. During the classification stage, the researcher examined, compared, and coded the data. Additionally, the researcher placed the data into categories based on their emerging themes. Following are the steps of the data analysis process.

- First, the researcher organized the data that was collected from the focus group study. The researcher did this by ensuring an accurate transcription of the previously recorded focus groups. The researcher transcribed one question at a time, providing a verbatim transcription.

- After transcribing the students' responses for each question, the researcher then managed the data by coding the students' response. Coding the data enabled the research to also simultaneously organize the data.

- After coding the data, the researcher identified the themes that emerged and determined how those themes were associated with the independent variables.

- In the second step, reading and memoing, the researcher reviewed the field notes that were taken during the focus group study.

- In the third step, describing, the researcher addressed what was transpiring in the naturalistic setting during the time of the observation. The researcher
especially noted how the observations in the environment might have
influenced the participants’ responses to the questions.

- Next, the researcher classified and interpreted the data to notate how the
  qualitative data interrelated with the quantitative findings.
- Last, the researcher triangulated all collected data to get a more complete
  picture and to cross-check information to draw accurate conclusions by
  comparing the data collected from the surveys, focus groups, and observations
detailing student interactions, student-teacher relationships, and other
handwritten field notes of the participants’ naturalistic educational
environment. Additionally, the researcher used to the transcription of the
focus group studies as a means to analyze the data and draw conclusions.

**Summary**

This chapter outlined and set forth the research framework for carrying out the research inquiry. It specifically described the mix-methods research design and explained why this particular approach was employed. The researcher gave an in-depth description of the setting and described how the participants’ participation was secured. Additionally, the researcher described how the tenets of IRB were upheld and applied as she worked with human subjects to complete the study. Other areas discussed included the specific instrumentation, the participants and how their participation was acquired, the exact statistical applications that were utilized, as well as a description of the data analysis methods for the requirements for the qualitative aspect of the study.
CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The major findings from this study, involving the specific factors that influence high school dropouts to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate, are discussed in detail in the following sections. The results are analyzed to determine the specific student-input, environmental, and institutional variables that encourage recent high school dropouts to return and persist to enhance their educational opportunities after making an earlier decision to abandon high school. The results explain to what degree of significance a relationship exists between the independent and dependent variables. The outcomes also assist in explaining if there is a relationship between the reasons students dropout of high school and the reasons they later return and persist to pursue the GED certificate. Moreover, the results clarify if there are variables other than those identified as independent variables that substantially influence a student’s persistence towards acquiring the GED certificate. The following portions of this chapter analyze the data in three data analysis sections: demographic, quantitative, and qualitative.

Analysis of Demographic Data

Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize the survey participants’ demographic data. A total of 100 participants participated in the quantitative portion of
the study by completing the 53-question survey. The participants were diverse in age, gender, race and ethnicity, age at dropout, and county of residence. After analyzing the participants’ demographic information, the data displayed that a majority of the participants were: female \((n = 56)\), African American \((n = 42)\), not of Hispanic or Latino origin \((n = 76)\), and over 30 years old \((n = 49)\). Additionally, a majority of the participants admitted to dropping out of high school at 17 years old \((n = 38)\), and most admitted to leaving school between 16-18 years old \((n = 74)\). Moreover, most of the participants resided in Gwinnett \((n = 32)\), Cherokee \((n = 23)\), and Cobb \((n = 18)\) counties. A more in-depth analysis of the participants’ demographic data is described in Tables 6–11.

Table 6

**Participants by Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Participants by Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>95.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

*Participants by Ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino Origin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not of Hispanic or Latino Origin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

Participants by Current Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21 years old</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years old</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

Participants by Age When Dropped Out of High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age When Dropped Out of High School</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 years old</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 years old</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 years old</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 years old</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 years old</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>95.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 years old</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 years old</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 21 participants partook across the four focus groups. Five participants participated in the first focus group, 4 in the second, 6 in the third, and 6 in the fourth focus group. Collectively, more males participated in the focus group study than females, and a majority of the focus group participants were white. Hispanic and Asian students were represented the least. Tables 12 and 13 provide a collective demographic analysis of the students in the focus group by gender and race.

Table 11

*Participants’ Current County of Residence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bartow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwinnett</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulding</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12

*Students in Combined Focus Groups by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13

*Students in Combined Focus by Race*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>81.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 14 and 15 demonstrate the racial and demographic makeup in a disaggregated format for each focus group. Female participants outnumbered the male participants, and white and African-American participants were represented equally. Participants of Hispanic and Latino origin were the minority.
Table 14

*Participants by Gender in Focus Group 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15

*Participants by Race in Focus Group 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second focus group, the students were distributed equally for gender. There were two female participants and two male participants. All focus group participants were white. See Tables 16 and 17 for a detailed analysis of the second focus group.
Participants in the third focus group were more diverse than the previous two groups. Males outnumbered female participants. African-American participants were the majority. White, Asian, and Hispanic students were equally represented. See Tables 18 and 19 for a detailed analysis of the third focus group.
Table 18

*Participants by Gender in Focus Group 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Cumulative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19

*Participants by Race in Focus Group 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Cumulative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>83.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the fourth focus group, there were six participants. The participants were mostly males. African-American participants were the majority, followed by white and Asian participants. See Tables 20 and 21 for a detailed analysis of the fourth focus group.
Table 20

Participants by Gender in Focus Group 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21

Participants by Race in Focus Group 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Quantitative Data

In order to determine whether and to what degree a relationship existed between the independent and dependent variables, the product moment correlation coefficient, which is usually referred to as the Pearson r, was utilized to analyze the data in this study. The Pearson r was applied because the variables to be correlated were expressed as
continuous interval data. Moreover, the researcher exercised this particular data analysis method because it frequently results in the most precise estimate of correlation when there are multiple variables being compared. The researcher specifically utilized the Pearson $r$ to determine to what degree a relationship existed between the dependent variables of persistence and the following independent variables: race, age, self-efficacy, academic competence, peer impact, family impact, teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging, teaching methods and pedagogy. The researcher referred to the $t$-test to ascertain whether the two means—gender and ethnicity—were significantly different at a selected probability level to persistence. Last, a frequency count was performed to determine an accurate account of why students dropped out of high school. An analysis of the data is shared in the follow section. After restating each quantitative research question, the outcomes are revealed in detail.

RQ1: To what level of significance do student-input variables (gender, age, race/ethnicity, academic competence, self-efficacy) influence high school dropouts to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the student-input variables (gender, age, race/ethnicity, academic competence, self-efficacy) and the ability of students to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate?
Gender

The data revealed that males and female participants exhibited the same level of persistence. In Table 22, the observed probability value for the Levene’s test was greater than 0.05. Therefore, the top row of t test statistics was utilized. The observed t statistic value was 0.000, and its observed probability was 1.000. Because the observed probability was greater that 0.05, the data showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between males and females. Consequently, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your gender?</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>22.5000</td>
<td>2.81554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22.5000</td>
<td>2.45423</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender: Independent Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>T-Test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal Variances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed</td>
<td>.222</td>
<td>.639</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.00000</td>
<td>.53649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>96.901</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.00000</td>
<td>.52768</td>
<td>1.04732</td>
<td>1.04732</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age

The data revealed that there was not a statistically significant relationship between current age and persistence. In Table 23, the data demonstrated that the observed probability value for gender was greater than the significance level of .05, indicating no relationship between age and persistence. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 23

Correlations: Current Age and Persistence of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Race

The data demonstrated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between race and persistence. In Table 24, the data verified that the observed probability value for gender was greater than .05, suggesting no relationship between age and persistence. Hence, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.
Table 24

*Correlations: Race and Persistence of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.104</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.305</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethnicity**

The data revealed that there was not a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and persistence. In Table 25, the observed probability value for the Levene’s test was greater than 0.05. Hence, the top row of *t*-test statistics was utilized. The observed *t* statistic value was 0.617 with an observed probability ration of 0.539. Because the observed probability was greater that 0.05, the data verified that there was not a statistically significant difference between ethnicity and persistence. Consequently, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 25

*Group Statistics: Ethnicity of Participants and Independent Samples Test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your ethnicity?</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Deviation</th>
<th>Std.</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.7917</td>
<td>2.34018</td>
<td>.47769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>22.4079</td>
<td>2.74798</td>
<td>.31522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 25 (continued)

Ethnicity: Independent Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>T-Test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Levene’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Test for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equality of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Variances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed</td>
<td>.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumed</td>
<td>.671</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic Competence

The data revealed that there was not a statistically significant relationship between academic competence and persistence because the significance level of .983 was greater than the agreed upon significance level of .05, indicating no relationship between academic competence and persistence in Table 26. Accordingly, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.
Table 26

*Correlations: Academic Competence and Persistence of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Academic Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-Efficacy**

An analysis of the data revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and persistence. In fact, the data demonstrated that there was a high-positive relationship between the two variables indicating that as a student’s self-efficacy improves his or her ability to persist in the program to pursue the GED certificate may also be enhanced. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis was accepted, and the null hypothesis was rejected (Table 27).

Table 27

*Correlations: Self-Efficacy and Persistence of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Self-Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ3: To what level of significance do environmental variables influence high school dropouts to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate?
RQ4: Is there a relationship between environmental variables (impact of peers, impact of family, teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging) and the ability of students to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

Impact of Peers

The data indicated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between the impact of peers and persistence rates for students in Adult Secondary Education programs pursuing the GED certificate. The significance level of .081, which is shown in Table 28, was superior to the allotted probability level of 0.05. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 28

Correlations: Peer Impact and Persistence of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Peer Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Impact of Family

An analysis of the data demonstrated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the impact of family and persistence. The data signified a significance level of .014, which was less than the selected probability level of .05. Consequently, it can be forecasted that a student will be more likely to persist to pursue
the GED certificate if his or her family is supportive and encouraging. Moreover, the more supportive the student's family, the more likely the student would be able to persist. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted (Table 29).

Table 29

**Correlations: Family Impact and Persistence of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Family Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.245*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher-Student Relationships**

The data revealed that the relationship between teacher-student relationships and persistence was statistically significant. The data indicated a significance level of .000, which was less than the selected probability level of .05. Therefore, the high-positive relationship suggests that it can be predicted that students will be more likely to persist when they have positive relationships with their teachers.

This hypothesis was accepted. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted (Table 30).
Table 30

**Correlations: Teacher-Student Relationships and Persistence of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Teacher-Student Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sense of Belonging**

After the data was analyzed, the researcher found that there was a statistically significant relationship between sense of belonging and a student’s likelihood to persist. Because there was a high positive relationship, prediction was permissible. Therefore, it can be predicted that when a student exhibits a high degree of sense of belonging, the student’s ability to persist would also be positively enhanced. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 31

**Correlations: Sense of Belonging and Persistence of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Sense of Belonging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ5: To what level of significance do institutional variables influence high school dropouts to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate?
RQ6: Is there a relationship between the following institutional variables and
the ability of students to persist in adult education programs to pursue
the GED certificate: Teaching methods and pedagogy.

**Teaching Methods and Pedagogy**

The data revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between
teaching methods and pedagogy and persistence. The data indicated a significant level of
.000, which was less than the selected probability level of .05. Because there was a high
positive relationship between the two variables, it can be predicted that when the teaching
methods and pedagogy of a teacher were exceptional, the student would be more likely to
persist in the program to pursue his or her GED certificate. This hypothesis was
accepted. Accordingly, the alternative hypothesis was accepted, and the null hypothesis
was rejected.

Table 32

*Correlations: Teaching Methods and Pedagogy and Persistence of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Teaching Methods and Pedagogy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.420**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ7: To what level of significance does a high school dropout’s reason to
abandon school correlate with his or her reason for persisting in Adult
Secondary Education programs?
In order to determine the reasons the participants dropped out of high school a frequency count was performed. The data revealed that most students left school because they were (a) immature and did not take school seriously (15.8%), (b) did not feel motivated and did not feel education was important (13.2%), (c) did not feel connected or valued (11.9%), (d) had to work to help their families out (11.5%), and (e) felt school was boring (10.7%). See Table 33 for an in-depth analysis of the reasons students gave for dropping out of school.

Table 33

Reasons Students Gave for Dropping Out of School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46. I left high school because I was immature and did not take school seriously</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. I left high school because the work was too hard or too easy.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. I left high school because I was not motivated and did not feel that education was important.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. I left high school because my peers pressured me, and they were a negative influence.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>99.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 33 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50. I left high school because of my family:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) I had a child and needed to work to provide for my child.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) I did not have positive family role models.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) I did not have any support from my family.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) I had to work to help my family out.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. I left high school because my teachers did not care.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. I left high school because I did not feel connected or valued.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53. I left high school because school was boring.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After completing the Pearson r correlational analysis to determine if the participants' reasons for dropping out of school were related to their later decisions to return and persist to pursue the GED certificate, the data demonstrated that there was not a statistically significant relationship. The significance level of .491 exceeded the probability level of .05. Thus, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and the null hypothesis was rejected (Table 34).
Table 34

Correlations: Reasons for Dropping out of School and Persistence of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Reasons for Dropping</th>
<th>Out of School</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.070</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Qualitative Data

To substantiate the quantitative findings, the researcher conducted four focus group studies. One focus group was conducted at Technical College A and Technical College B, and two focus groups were collected at Technical College C. The researcher conducted two focus groups at Technical College C because two separate adult education sites were visited due to the limited number of available participants at one of the adult education centers. Analyses of the participants’ responses are discussed in the following section. These responses are explained around each of the five qualitative research questions for each of the four focus groups. A copy of the each of the focus group’s transcriptions is available in Appendix B. The students were asked to respond to this question considering the impact of gender, age, race and ethnicity, academic competence, and self-efficacy. The participants’ responses are listed below and are disaggregated by focus group study.
RQ8: How do student-input variables (gender, age, race/ethnicity, academic competence, self-efficacy) influence students to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

**Focus Group 1, Gender**

Participants, especially females, felt that gender negatively impacted persistence rates for women. Participants indicated that women had difficulty persisting when they were single mothers of younger children. One female participant stated, “Getting pregnant at a young age, so that was one of the hindrances, because I had to provide child care.” Another one indicated:

I’ve been wanting to come and get my GED, so that I can go into nursing. But, because my children were so young, I had to be there for them when they get back from school, help with the homework, and cook, and everything.

Although taking on the role of a mother was a hindrance for some women, another female participant indicated that she was now able to persist because her children were older. When asked about obstacles for men, all of the female participants felt that it was less difficult for males to persist. One female participant stated that it was easier for men because, “Usually the children, the housekeeping, the cooking, and the cleaning are all on the women. The men can—they have their jobs, but if they can get past that obstacle, they could have the time to do it, I would think.”

**Focus Group 2, Gender**

Participants did not feel gender impacted their ability to persist towards obtaining the GED certificate. All participants felt pursuing the GED certificate was equally
difficult for men and women. Just as women encountered obstacles such as raising their children, participants stated that men faced the obstacle of having to work. One male participant stated, “Yeah it has kind of hindered my working schedule and a little bit of social life, nothing too much though, not too bad.”

Focus Group 3, Gender

Participants described similar obstacles as students in the previous two groups. Two of the female participants felt their ability to persist was impacted because they were single mothers. The first participant stated:

Well, I was trying to get my GED years back and I had a child, a small child. So, that was really hard for me to have a trusting day care and go to school and work. It was really rough; so, I kind of just dropped out and worked for Wendy’s for like seven years.

Another participant agreed. She proclaimed, “That’s how I feel too. Being a mother—me, myself—I’m a single parent. So, it is a challenge. You’ve got to juggle so much and you’ve got to keep focused. It’s, that’s a challenge.” Men felt their ability to persist was impacted because of employment obligations. One male participant stated, “If you’re a man, you’ve got to work. Somebody’s got to bring the bacon in.” When the participants were asked if women or men encountered more obstacles, all of the women felt it was more difficult for women; however, the men felt it was equally as difficult. A female participant shook her head in disagreement and stated:

It’s harder for women because women have to be a wife, a mother, and work while balancing classes. You know, so you’re trying to balance four things, and
it’s a lot. It’s like you’re never done. You always have something to do. You never can just get caught up because there’s always something you have to do. You just get exhausted, and then you get and feel like you’re not appreciated because you’re so stressed out because you have so much on your plate.

Focus Group 4, Gender

When asked about gender-related obstacles, two of the males stated employment was a factor. One male stated that he was presently concerned about his current persistence because he was soon to be starting a new job. Although both females and males reported different obstacles that impacted their ability to persist, the men did not feel that it was easier for them to persist than women. In fact, one female participant felt it was it was more challenging for men because men cannot maintain the same nominal jobs as women. She stated, “If you look at it on every level. I could get a babysitting job. He's not going to get a babysitting job.”

Focus Group 1, Age

All of the participants felt that age substantially impacted a student’s ability to persist in the program. The participants felt that age was a significant factor because with age one’s maturity also evolved. Consequently, participants believed that many of them matured in their thoughts, beliefs, and values regarding the need for education. One participant stated:

Yeah, I think age is, because you find a pattern, and you see you can’t get over a certain bracket of income—you can’t do a lot of things. You can’t get certain
jobs. And, after getting turned down so much, you realize wow, it really was important for me to do this.”

Another student stated age was significant because as students mature, they start to think differently and take life more seriously and say, “Okay, if I want a better job, I better study now.” One participant stated:

> Coming back is much more harder than the first time because you have all those issues of life, plus bigger responsibilities. And then to work, to me, is harder because all that stuff has to be relearned. So, it’s harder the second time around.

Some participants felt it was much more difficult for younger, less mature students because they had to encounter more distractions. A male participant stated:

> Well, you have to have the seriousness to it. I mean, most of today’s kids just act like, well, I don’t need to be persistent in this. I can do it later down the road. And, a lot of them are just—I think a lot of kids are just lazy, and they don’t want to accomplish anything. And they figure, well, I can always go get my GED.

**Focus Group 2, Age**

One of the participants in this focus group also felt that age was a significant predictor of persistence in terms of maturity or immaturity. This participant stated that in the past, it was simple immaturity that hindered her ability to persist. Others felt it depended more on the students’ circumstances. One student exclaimed, “Just because you are older doesn’t mean it is easier because some kids that are young have stuff they
have to do still. Even though they are not fully responsible for stuff, they still have other things they need to do just like the older people do.”

**Focus Group 3, Age**

When queried about the impact of age, each participant felt that age was a key indicator of persistence; however, the participants’ feelings were mixed when deciding if the ability to persist was easier for younger or older students. Some participants felt it was easier for younger students to persist in the program. When asked to explain this, one participant shared:

I think when you’re younger—like I said, you don’t have a lot on your plate, a lot of obligations. You know your parents most of the time will take you and pick you up. All you have to do is just focus on that. But when you’re older it’s a little harder but you take it more seriously and you pursue it more because you know what you have to do. You know you have to get this accomplished to move forward and go to the next step.

A second participant stated:

One of the best things that I look at is that being older you don’t have the distractions that you had in high school. You don’t have the peer pressure, you don’t have to, you know, have the girlfriend or be the class clown, which I already am, but you know. You can just be more focused.

**Focus Group 4, Age**

This group also considered age a predictor of persistence. However, some participants felt it was less difficult for younger students because younger students had
been out of school for a shorter period of time than older students. Therefore, older participants assumed that many of the younger students still could recall the skills they learned in high school. A participant, who had recently left school, stated confirmed this premise. He stated, “It's only been a couple of years so I know all this stuff.” However, an older participant stated it was difficult for him because he had to literally learn everything again since he had been out of school for so long. Additionally, older participants also felt it was easier for younger students to persist because they still had their parents to support them and had not acquired many obligations, such as paying bills. On the contrary, a few participants felt it was easier for older students because they were more mature and had less distractions and peer pressure.

**Focus Group 1, Race/Ethnicity**

When asked about the impact of race on a student’s ability to persist in the program, all of the participants felt that race was not a factor. They all agreed with the first student to respond to the question when she stated, “I think it’s within you.”

**Focus Group 2, Race/Ethnicity**

Participants did not feel that race was a predictor of a student’s persistence towards pursuing the GED certificate. One participant stated, “I don’t think race has anything to do with it because there are minorities that are far more smarter than half of the Caucasians or even illegal immigrants, or any people. It just depends on the person, really.” Other students in the focus group nodded in agreement with this student’s response.
Focus Group 3, Race/Ethnicity

Participants in this group felt that race and ethnicity were not significant predictors of a student's ability to persist to pursue the GED certificate. "Maybe years ago it did. But times have changed. I mean it all depends on the individual." Another participant stated, "I don't think race is a big factor as much as your financial standing."

Focus Group 4, Race/Ethnicity

In the previous focus groups, five out of the six participants did not see race as a variable that impacted persistence. However, there was only one participant in this group that felt race was an obstacle. The participant stated:

Me, mainly, I have three strikes against me. I'm a female. I'm black, and a foreigner. So I have to work five times as hard – I have to work harder than an American black, American female, and a white female because everybody feels like, 'Oh, she came from somewhere. She came here to take something.' They're not looking at the big picture. She probably had all of this and she just, you know? So, it's hard. And I know a whole lot about my job and a lot more than my supervisor and the main idea, I am a foreign black female doesn't make it easier. And the same, I feel my race is a great influence in my ability to get my education and do better for myself.

Focus Group 1, Self-Efficacy

Instead, of agreeing that race was a variable in a student's likelihood to persist, all of the participants echoed the impact of self-efficacy as an essential factor that encouraged their persistence in the program. One student stated, "You know, once you
get that mind power that you can do it, no matter what school it is, you’re going to do it because it’s something you want to do now.” Another one shared, “No, in me, it was just like a little taunting thing that kept bothering me. Like, I know that I need this, and I’ve always wanted it. So, I think that was the drive. It was mostly me, my inner feeling.”

When the students were asked if they felt they had what it took to pass the test to obtain the GED, many were optimistic and confident. One student stated, “I’m confident. Because if I want it, I know I can do it. I find time, and there’s always something else to do. But, you always find time for that if you really, really want it.”

**Focus Group 2, Self-Efficacy**

When the students were asked if they thought they had what it took to obtain the GED certificate, they also stated that they were confident in their ability to obtain the GED certificate. Although, one participant stated that he had difficulties with basic reading skills, he stated, “I am trying. I have been coming here for going on 2 years, so I haven’t given up yet.” Another participant stated:

Yeah, I feel like I can get this now. I don’t think anything is going to hinder me. I am ready to get this over and done with. It has been way too long. I dropped out when I was 17, it has been like 2 years now. So I am just ready to get this put behind me and move onto starting onto college; just start life.

After starting the program multiples time before and continuing through a cycle of dropping in and out of the program, one participant stated, “I don’t think anything is going to stop me this time.”
Focus Group 3, Self-Efficacy

When students were asked if they were confident in their ability to obtain the GED certificate, one student stated:

I do now! But when I was younger, I didn’t have a lot of self-confidence. I was my worst enemy, and I would always tell myself I couldn’t do this—I couldn’t do this. But now as I matured, I can do whatever I need to do if I just set my mind to it.

Another participant stated, “Well, now that I have a goal in life, something to strive for, and actually find that I can do the work, that’s a great motivator, because I have a goal that’s very dear to my heart.” A third participant declared that he was motivated and on the right path to obtaining his GED certificate.

Focus Group 4, Self-Efficacy

When students were questioned about their self-efficacy and their ability to complete the program to obtain the GED certificate, most of the students seemed very confident in their ability to obtain the GED certificate. One participant stated he could obtain his GED certificate because, “It's about me.” Another participant stated, “Yes, I'm very determined. I think that I have goals that I have for my future and I'm on the road to pursuing those and hopefully fulfill them.” One male participant commented, “Yes, it's something I have to do. I'm ready. I need to get it done, get it out of the way. That can be another accomplishment that I have in my life that I know I need deep down.”

Although most of the students possessed the self-efficacy to persist in the program, one student was not as confident in his ability. He stated:
I would say yes. I'm a little worried, but I know if I put my mind to it and, you know, take it serious and study—and stuff like that—I know I can do it. It might take me a couple of tries, but I'll get it to be honest you.

Focus Group 1, Academic Competence

Although many of the participants exhibited an elevated sense of self-efficacy, not all of them felt they possessed the academic competence needed to be successful in the program. When asked if their high schools had prepared them to be successful in the program, one female participant hastily stated, “No, not at all.” Others agreed, stating that their high school teachers had not done a good job of preparing them to pass the GED certificate exam. One female participant shared, “I think I’ve learned more here, and then over years of teaching myself, and then with my kids in school, I’ve even learned from them. So I don’t think that they prepared me for a GED. No.” The only male participant, who admitted to having significant difficulties school because of poor academic skills, believed his high school experience was more of a hindrance because the teachers were not teaching him in a way that he could learn. He stated:

It was, like, easier to drop out and think about it later than it was to struggle through school, where I felt like the teachers wasn’t really making sure that we were learning and, the number of students in the class was just too large for me to get that one-on-one; so I wasn’t learning. I was better off teaching myself at home than sitting in a classroom.”

Other participants admitted to having difficulties with math in high school. Therefore, they felt their weaknesses in math had the potential to impact their ability to persist in the
program. Despite these difficulties with math, one student proclaimed, "I’m having some issues with Math, but I’m going to stick to it no matter how long it takes me. I might have to take it over and over, but I’m going to do it.” Despite her challenges in math, this student’s self-efficacy prevailed and encouraged her to continue to persist.

Focus Group 2, Academic Competence

When asked about their previous high school preparation, participants provided mixed responses. When asked about their least favorite subjects, two out of three of the participants described math as their least favorite subject. One participant stated that he felt his previous high school experience had prepared him only a little. He went on to add that he felt like he was going over the same material that he learned in 9th and 10th grade. Consequently, he felt it was now helping him in class. He went on to suggest that:

Everybody in this class has a general idea of what’s going on. I feel like everybody in the class can pass, we are all in here for a reason. I feel the school helps everybody out. I don’t know that is just my take on it.

A female participant admitted that she now sees the connection and relevancy of what she learned in high school. Two students felt that school did not prepare them. One shared that he never really learned how to read and write, and another admitted to not being a good reader or writer and forcing herself to learn to read by reading signs.

Focus Group 3, Academic Competence

When students were asked how their previous high school preparation had helped or hindered them in the program, one participant responded, “It helped me a lot.” He went on to add that he was a pretty average student in high school, and explained that he
dropped out because of motivation reasons, not reasons related to his academic competence. When asked about their least favorite subject in high school, half of the students stated their most challenging subject was math.

**Focus Group 4, Academic Competence**

After the participants were asked if high school prepared them to pass the GED test, one participant commented, “I think they did at the time but I just forgot all of it, you know?” A second participant stated:

If I hadn’t had that education, there’s no way that I could be here today because I would be starting from nowhere and there’s no way. If I hadn’t had that in high school, it would have been far more difficult now.

When the students were asked about their favorite subjects in high school, only one of the six participants admitted to being good in math. The remaining five stated that math was very difficult for them in high school and the program. One participant stated, “On the paper they gave you when you left, after the orientation. I’m in the fourth grade in math.” Another participant shared, “Yeah, me too.”

**RQ9:** How do environmental variables (impact of peers, impact of family, teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging) influence students to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate?

**Focus Group 1, Peer Impact**

Participants felt that peers played a significant role in their decisions to persist in the program. One student admitted that she did not have any friends in the program;
however, she affirmed that when she sees her classmates doing well, she wants to do well too. This participant also shared that she has had to eliminate some friends because they were so discouraging. Another participant stated everyone—church people, neighbors, friends, and coworkers—have been very encouraging. Initially, she stated she was ashamed to tell her friends she was pursuing her GED certificate. However, after their show of support, she stated that she quickly became proud and motivated to keep pressing forward to obtain the GED certificate. She went on to add, “Everybody thinks it’s wonderful that I’m doing it.”

**Focus Group 2, Peer Impact**

Similar to participants in the first focus groups, these participants also felt that peers were a factor of their decision to persist or not persist. Participants reported having friends in the program with them who were doing well. One participant noted that his friends feel like he is actually doing positive things now. Thus, they are encouraging him to keep pushing in order to finish the requirements for his GED certificate. Others described their friends as being supportive and encouraging. One participant, however, admitted that his peers occasionnally try to distract him by asking him to do, “normal teenager stuff.”

**Focus Group 3, Peer Impact**

Peers were an important factor to the participants in this focus group. One participant stated:

Well I have two friends, actually we worked together for a few years we worked at the same location. They’re doing pretty good and they’re positive and they
always encourage you to do better and just keep on trying, don’t give up. They’re really motivating.

She also explained:

The friends I have now are not like those friends I had when I was younger, they’re always encouraging and supporting me, you know just there for me. It makes a big difference to have—to be around positive people. If you stay around positive people you know, it’ll make you want to do things and just be positive.

**Focus Group 4, Peer Impact**

When asked about the influence of peers, the participants all gave nonverbal cues to suggest that peer support was important. When a younger participant stated that he did not have supportive friends, the older participants listened to his story and immediately became the supportive peers he needed. The young participant stated:

Most people I know are just dropouts, I guess. I mean I try not to involve myself in that situation, but it's just hard. So, I'm not trying to be like that by trying to get a GED and do something with my life.

The older participants in the room encouraged him to stay in the program because he had his whole life ahead of him.

**Focus Group 1, Family Impact**

Participants also felt that their families had a great impact on their decisions to pursue the GED certificate. Participants stated that mostly their children and spouses encouraged them to persist. Female participants shared that their children were great influences. They stated that since starting the program, they have observed a change in
their children. They stated that: their children were doing better in school; their grades were improving; and they now want to study because they see them studying and doing homework. Spouses were also described as being supportive. One participant stated:

My husband is now doing all the cooking, the dinner. He washes clothes and dries them, and puts them up. I mean, things that I never in 30, he is now doing it because I work full-time, and I’m coming here. He knows I can’t do it. So, they’re really helping out.

This participant stated that her daughter also was supporting her. Another participant stated that when she tells her husband she can not make it to class, he insists, “Well, remember, you’ve got to go to school! You got to go, you got to finish this!” None of the participants reported having family members that were discouraging towards them.

**Focus Group 2, Family Impact**

Three of the four participants described family members who supported and encouraged them to persist in the program. Supportive family members included parents for younger participants and spouses and children for older participants. Participants also stated that their grandparents, siblings, aunts, and uncles also supported them.

Participants felt that the impact of their family on their persistence was substantial. One participant stated that her family helps her by providing childcare, and another participant stated that the encouraging words of his family motivate him. A different participant reported being influenced by the educational aspirations of family members. Only one participant admitted to having an unsupportive family member; however, she stated that
she was committed to achieving this goal for herself despite her family member’s discouraging words.

**Focus Group 3, Family Impact**

When asked if their families were supportive, many of the students agreed. Supportive family members included spouses, parents, siblings, and children. One participant stated that family members were supportive by giving her time to study, sharing encouraging words, and keeping her on track. Although one student admitted that she did not have family support in high school, she now states that her family is one of the main reasons she is persisting because she does not want to let them down. Unlike most of the participants in the group, one participant stated, “I wouldn’t say my family’s not supportive but they’re not there to help me through this journey.” He went on to add that he supported himself towards accomplishing this goal.

**Focus Group 4, Family Impact**

Similar to the previous focus groups, these participants also believed that having supportive family members was essential. Supportive family members included spouses, parents, and children. Those who had children indicated that their children encouraged them because they wanted to be a positive example for them.

**Focus Group 1, Teacher-Student Relationships**

In addition to having positive peers and family members, participants also suggested that the influence of their teachers was just as significant in their ability to persist. When describing her math teacher, one student stated, “I mean, had I had her in
high school, I know I would have done good.” The participants described their adult education teachers as being motivating and encouraging. One participant stated that when she starts feeling defeated, her teachers proclaim to her, “Don’t give up. Don’t quit. You can do it. You will do it.” The participants also described their teachers as being approachable, helpful, and quick to answer questions. Another student shared great comments regarding the impact of his teachers on his decision to persist. He stated:

Well, it helps, when you got teachers that are willing to help you in learning, versus getting teachers that just act like, I could care less. So, I mean, it’s all based on the teachers. Are they willing to help you learn what you need to learn to get the GED?

Focus Group 2, Teacher-Student Relationships

When asked about the teachers in the adult education program, the participants agreed that their teachers were supportive and helpful. They described their teachers as being: more supportive than their high school teachers; concerned about them for missing classes; and willing to stay after class to provide them with assistance.

Focus Group 3, Teacher-Student Relationships

Positive student-teacher relationships were cited as a significant predictor of persistence. One participant stated, “My math teacher, you know who she is, she is very motivating and always pushing us, saying we can do it.” Another participant stated:

It’s amazing how these instructors are and I was totally expecting to come in here and have the instructor just be a teacher and not take interest in the students. You now, it’s like you dropped out of school, and now you’re just now coming back to
get your GED? Well, but I’m telling you, they’re the most caring, understanding, patient human beings I’ve met in a long time.

Participants also stated that their teachers were helpful and willing to stay after class to assist them.

**Focus Group 4, Teacher-Student Relationships**

Participants stated that the teachers were very inspirational and encouraged them to keep coming to class. Because of this motivation, the focus group participants were inspired to continue persisting in the program even when they felt discouraged. Their admonitions helped to explain the influence teachers possess in encouraging students to persist to pursue the GED certificate.

**Focus Group 1, Sense of Belonging**

Collectively, the participants admitted that they felt a sense of belonging to their adult education classes because most of their classmates wanted to be in class. Because of the resilience exhibited by their classmates, the participants felt that this connectedness motivated them to persist in the program. When asked about their sense of belonging to the technical school, the students were not as constructive. One student shared that she would like to be a part of the college. She stated:

We’re going here at the college, but it’s almost like we’re still isolated. You know, so it’s a little bit discouraging. I feel like, hey, I want a school ID. I want to feel a part of the school, but it’s separated. The program is still separate.

Although the other participants did not express any thoughts, they nodded in agreement to this student’s response.
Focus Group 2, Sense of Belonging

When the researcher inquired about the participants’ sense of belonging, the students all admitted to feeling connected to the class and supported by their classmates. Although many participants did not go in detail, one participant did share teachers could enhance the sense of belonging by engaging students in more group activities or just getting to know the students. Additionally, others agreed that the technical college could do a better job of making students feel like they belong. One student stated, “When you feel like you are a part of something or involved, it makes you like more determined to go there. And, if you are not a part of anything, you feel like unwanted.” He went on to add that when that sense of belonging is absent:

It makes you just feel crappy about yourself. You don’t want to go to school.
You don’t want to do anything but like hang out with your friends that actually care about you. Even if they are bad friends or good friends, you just don’t care.
Because at least someone wants you. I feel that passes or even little name tags or stuff like that, like AB Clubs, that probably makes it a lot easier for some kids.

Focus Group 3, Sense of Belonging

Similar to students in the other focus groups, these participants also admitted to feeling a sense of belonging to their adult education programs. They also felt this sense of connectedness was important in their persistence. Students shared that the professors really took the time to get to know them. When the participants were asked about the importance of feeling connected to the technical school, most of them did not feel it would impact their ability to persist. One participant contended, “I mean as long as
you’ve got the teachers that really care and really show concern, I think that’s what counts.” Another shared, “To me, it seems that those things are prestige and you know, looking for recognition. I’m not here for that. I’m here to learn.”

**Focus Group 4, Sense of Belonging**

When participants were asked if they felt connected to the program, one participant stated, “Not really.” When she was asked to clarify, she went on to add that she felt connected to her classes, but not the technical school. She explained that she could relate to the class because everybody had the same goals, and vision. However, she was unable to feel a sense of belonging to the school. She stated that students in other programs gave them funny looks when they walk through the halls towards the section of the building where the adult education classes were offered. Other students in the group felt the same way, but many stated that they really did not care about what the other student thought of them. When the students were asked what the technical college could do to increase their sense of belonging to the school, one student stated that the school should, “offer just some kind of reading material or some kind of sensitivity class” so that students will not look down on them in a condescending manner.

**RQ10:** How do the institutional variables of adult education programs (teaching methods and pedagogy, convenience and flexibility) influence students to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate?
Focus Group 1, Teaching Methods and Pedagogy

When asked about the relationships with their teachers, many participants began to describe the way their teachers taught instead. One participant immediately stated, “I mean, she needs to be teaching some of the teachers that’s in high school, because her way of teaching is just so—it’s just easy to catch on.” By and large, all of the participants agreed that the teaching methods and pedagogy of their teachers made acquiring the GED certificate so much easier. Participants stated that their adult education teachers filled the gaps, taught prerequisite skills in a way that eased their embarrassment, and prepared them for more complex skills; and expanded on their prior knowledge. When asked what their teachers could do to enhance their teaching abilities, the participants did not have any suggestions. They felt that no changes needed to be made.

Focus Group 2, Teaching Methods and Pedagogy

Participants nodded when asked if they liked the way their teachers taught them. One participant stated that, “They do a lot of activities and everything, and they just want to know what you can understand.” The participant went on to add that the teachers made learning fun. Another participant stated that the teachers engaged the students in group work, which made them feel like they belonged. Like participants in the previous focus group, these participants also felt that teaching methods and pedagogy were significant in their persistence. When asked what their teachers could do to enhance their teaching, one student stated, “Nothing in my eyes.”
Focus Group 3, Teaching Methods and Pedagogy

Participants shared that they enjoyed the way their teachers taught:

My math teacher makes it fun and she’s very supportive. And, when she shows us one way and we’re not getting it one way, she’ll show us another way to make it because everybody learns different. So, she kinds of gets a feel of, you know, what’s easier for you. She’ll show two or three different choices, and ask which one works the best for you.

When asked if they would change anything about their teachers’ teaching styles, they all proclaimed that no changes were needed because it was differentiated and relevant.

Then, one student retracted and stated that she would encourage her teacher to teach a little slower.

Focus Group 4, Teaching Methods and Pedagogy

When students were asked to rate the teaching methods of their teachers on a scale of 1 to 5, all of the participants gave their teachers the highest rating. One participant, rated a teacher a 4 because he felt the teacher taught too fast, which made it difficult for him to follow. Although the teacher was describing as teaching fast, all of the participants agreed that he was smart and excited about his subject matter. Therefore, they were eager to learn in his class.

Focus Group 1, Convenience and Flexibility

Likewise, participants also felt that classes were convenient and flexible and did not prevent them from persisting. When asked if they would change anything, they also shook their heads. “They’re pretty flexible. You have a choice to come day or night.”
Yeah, and then, they're not long hours.” Because of this flexibility and convenience, the students agreed that they were able to attend classes and thus remain persistent.

Focus Group 2, Convenience and Flexibility

When participants in the second focus group were queried about the impact of convenience and flexibility on their persistence, they indicated that the classes were mostly convenient. One student stated that they have options of taking morning or afternoon classes, and they can select the days of their classes. Because of the convenience and flexibility, they were able to attend classes more regularly.

Focus Group 3, Convenience and Flexibility

Unlike the participants in the previous two groups, two of the participants gave suggestions regarding convenience and flexibility. One participant stated:

I like the night schedule but I was trying to go to day shift, and they have a thing where you can do three days. But, when I filled it out they said I had another day which was four days, and I really couldn’t commit to four days; so, I had to go back to nights.

The student went on to add that there should be a schedule where there can be three days or four days instead of just four days, especially since most students have other obligations. A second participant stated that he was concerned about the contact hours in relation to his job. He added that if his job transferred him out of state, he would not be able to get online to do his tests. Consequently, this participant wanted more accessibility.
Focus Group 4, Convenience and Flexibility

When asked about the convenience and flexibility of classes, participants felt classes were accessible because they were offered at times that did not conflict with their work schedules. One participant, who was preparing to start a new job, was not certain if the classes would accommodate his work schedule. He was really concerned about his ability to persist with the current class schedule. He nervously laughed and stated, “I’ll find out when I start working Friday. I’ll have to get back to you on that.”

RQ11: How have students’ reasons for dropping out of high school influenced their reasons to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs?

Focus Group 1, Dropout and Persistence Relationships

Initially, the students were quiet and did not immediately respond to the question. They sincerely thought about their responses and the personal journeys that led them back to education. The first participant stated, “I left because I wasn’t supported, and now I have a little bit more support. And, I can’t explain why, I just know that I’m here. I’m here to stay until it’s over with.” Another participant described her high school as being chaotic and out of control. The adult education classes, on the other hand, were the exact opposite. She felt safe and the integrity of the learning environment was not compromised. After further thought, the first participant continued:

I dropped out to support my children, and now I’m going back to support them even more because soon or later, they’re going to be going off to college. So, you’re right. The exact reason I dropped out is the exact reason I decided to go back.
Focus Group 2, Dropout and Persistence Relationships

Similar to participants in the first focus group, these participants also had to stop and think about the implications of this question. After a long silence, the first participant to respond stated that she left high school because she was young and immature. After maturing and having kids, she stated that was now persistent and determined to obtain her GED certificate. She wanted to be in a better position to support and provide for her children. A second participant stated leaving school because of immaturity and not realizing the value of education. Now, she stated, “Now I am like, I got to accomplish something I did not accomplish a long time ago.” The next participant stated leaving school after being retained in grade and later getting a job. When asked why he was returning, he stated, “I want to do this because I have always wanted my high school education.” The last participant stated that he left school because of his behavior. He indicated that he was always getting into trouble and consequently left school. Now, he stated that:

I have grown up a little bit. I am not saying I have fully matured or even a man yet, but I feel like I am getting there. I mean, it’s just I don’t want to get in trouble anymore I just want to get this stuff behind me and get my GED and be done with all this.

Focus Group 3, Dropout and Persistence Relationships

The first student stated that her reason for leaving school was the reason she has now returned. She shared that she dropped out because she was hanging out with the wrong kind of people and was not motivated to finish school. She also stated that she did
not have a lot of support from her family. She stated that she was back in school because she was motivated, surrounded by positive friends, and determined to be a good role model for her daughter. The second participant stated that he was just not motivated and lacked support from his parents. Now, however, he stated that he was motivated.

Although his parents were still not involved, he proclaimed, "I don't have anybody to push me but I like pushing myself." A third participant stated that he left school because he had to work, and returned because he need his education to be able to press forward in his career.

**Focus Group 4, Dropout and Persistence Relationships**

Focus group participants in this group also returned to school for many of the reasons that they initially abandoned school. The first participant stated that he left school because he was a teen parent. Consequently, he had to get a job to take care of his new family. Now, more than twenty years later, he returned to pursue his GED certificate because he was unable to secure the jobs he desired—jobs that would put him in a financial position to comfortably provide for his family. A second male participant stated that he went down the wrong path, hung out with the wrong people, and was not motivated about school. Now, however, he was inspired to pursue his GED certificate, and he was trying to surround himself with positive peers. Another participant stated that he made a couple of bad decisions and was expelled from school. Now, he was back because he just wanted to learn. A female participant commented, "I was young and foolish. I just didn't think it was important. I didn't leave and get in trouble or anything. I got out and got married and started having a family." She stated that she returned
because she thought it was time because her children were older. Moreover, a male participant, who was very emotional about his return stated:

Yeah, with me it's just kind of the same thing (job) but—you know, at 18 I was out of school, B student, just drifted down the wrong path dealing with outside influences, street life. And then as I got older, gradually common sense started kicking in but by that time I was getting my certificate. I got that but it was just like that void. And then as I got older, I knew it was time to do it.

RQ12: Are there variables other than those identified here as independent variables that substantially influence a student's persistence towards the GED certificate, such as those specifically related to students' reasons for dropping out of high school?

Focus Group 1, Additional Persistence Variables

In addition to describing the independent variables as impacting their persistence, participants in the first focus group also suggested that the need to maintain present employment and seek advanced career opportunities also impacted their ability to persist. One participant noted that obtaining the GED certificate was non-negotiable, as she needed her GED certificate in order to keep her job. A second participant stated that she was pursuing her GED certificate because in previous years she was unable to get certain jobs. Moreover, she added, “After getting turned down so much, you realize wow, it really was important for me to do this.”
Focus Group 2, Additional Persistence Variables

Similarly, participants in this focus group also reported that employment was one of the reasons they persisted to obtain the GED certificate. One student reported that not having the GED certificate preventend him from getting certain jobs. Consequently, the participant responded, “So that is the reason I am here.” A second participant also stated, “I’ve found that you really can’t have a good job nowadays unless you have a high school diploma of some sort. You just got to have it. Just that piece of paper.” A third participant also cited aspirations to attend college as his reason for persisting. He added, “I am just ready to get this put behind me and move onto starting onto college.”

Focus Group 3, Additional Persistence Variables

Students in this group also admitted to persisting because they wanted to accomplish personal goals, be a role model for their children, and improve their economic standing. One female participant stated that she wanted to break that cycle and set an example for her kids. Another participant stated, “I guess now that I have children and I want to better myself now, it’s like it’s a must.” Others were determined to obtain the GED certificate to get better jobs and enhance their opportunities for career advancements, and others simply persisted in the program in order to accomplish personal goals. A male participant stated, “I’m very good at what I do, however that diploma, that piece of paper is recognized, and no matter how skilled or fluent or educated you think you are, unless you have that diploma it’s just not recognized.”
Focus Group 4, Additional Persistence Variables

Similar to the previous groups, participants in this focus group also cited additional reasons that attributed towards their reasons for persisting. Participants indicated that they were encouraged by employment and personal goals. A male participant shared that he was not getting the career or pay that he deserved for his skill set. Instead, he stated that he was getting paid meager wages. Consequently, he wanted to obtain his GED degree so that he could be afforded more employment opportunities.

The need to achieve personal goals also substantially encouraged students to remain persistent in this focus group. Although he had a good job and a supportive wife with children in college, one participant stated he felt a void without his education. Another participant desired to be an accountant, while another participant stated, “It’s very emotional for me.” Someone else contended, “Yes, I’m very determined. I think that I have goals that I have for my future and I’m on the road to pursuing those and hopefully fulfill them.” And another student stated, “I mean my goal whether I’ll never use it or not is to get my degree. That's my big picture so this is just in the pocket.” Last, a participant remarked, “I want to do something else with my life, something that I enjoy.”

Observation Data

After observing the participants in the adult education classes, the researcher learned that the students were very diverse in age, gender, and race and ethnicity. The culture of classes was very welcoming—allowing participants to feel safe and comfortable within the learning environment. The students exhibited a sense of maturity,
responsibility, and seriousness about being in class, as most arrived to class on time and prepared. Those who arrived late quickly apologized to the teacher upon entering class and scurried to their seats to open their books to prevent being left behind. Once in class, the students were very engaged. They asked questions, participated, and helped one another. Some were overheard making connections to previous material learned in high school, while others struggled to remember skills that would seem rudimentary to some. Despite this struggle, these students never gave up and their teachers and peers were quick to provide assistance. The teachers checked with students frequently to ensure their understanding and held students accountable by asking about homework or material that was previously learned. When the teachers dismissed the students for breaks, most of the students hurried out to talk with classmates and asked about their day or progress in class. Others remained in class to ask the teachers questions, inquire about their grades, or simply to continue working on tasks. At the end of the break, all students were back in class and ready to begin the second half of their classes. The teachers were observed being helpful, caring, and prompt to address students’ needs. When students did not understand a skill, the teachers would quickly explain the skill in a different way or make real-world connections. And, as the teachers ended classes, they reminded students to complete their homework or online practice tests. As many students returned to their cars to head home, many read the announcements that were posted on the bulletin boards to ensure that they were aware of important dates and new the start times of classes.
By and large, the observations demonstrated that regardless of demographic backgrounds, all the students shared a common bond—the desire to obtain the GED certificate to enhance their social, financial, emotional, and employment outcomes. Moreover, the observations showed that (a) all the students were serious about learning and mature, (b) some had academic struggles, while others did not (c) most students possessed a sense of self-efficacy, while a few were unsure of themselves, (d) some had friends in the program who encouraged them, while others were quiet and driven from personal motivation, (e) most felt a sense of belonging to their classes and exhibited a positive rapport with peers and teachers, and (f) the teaching methods were relevant and classes were convenient as a review of class rolls demonstrated that most students were present in class. A review of the observation field notes and focus group transcriptions substantiated the findings that were disclosed from the quantitative data and the focus group data.

Summary

The results of this mix-methods study revealed significant findings and helped the researcher to understand and identify the specific variables that were correlated with a student’s ability to persist in an Adult Secondary Education program to pursue the GED certificate after making an earlier decision to abandon high school. A quantitative analysis of the data found that self-efficacy was the only student-input variable that had a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable. Environmental variables associated with persistence included: family impact, teacher-student relationships, and sense of belonging. Moreover, the institutional variables, teaching methods and
pedagogy, was also discovered to be related to persistence. Overall, the findings demonstrated that there was a high-positive relationships between the these variables and persistence. There was no relationships between the following dependentet variabales: age, gender, race/ethnicity, academic competence, and peer impact.

The qualitative data substantiated the quantitative findings. The findings from the focus group revealed that students' views were mixed on the impact of gender, age, academic competence, and peer impact. Nearly all participants agreed that race was not a significant factor in persistence. On the contrary, a majority of the participants shared stories and opinions that validated the significance of self-efficacy, family impact, teacher-student relationship, sense of belonging, and teaching methods and pedagogy. Although convenience and flexibility—as an independent variable related to institutional factors—was not a port of the quantitative data analysis, the participants in the focus groups study felt this variable was significant in their ability to persist in their classes. Additionally, other themes that emerged as contributing to persistence included a student's desire to achieve personal goals and their need to seek employment opportunities or career advancements. Moreover, data from the observations confirmed both the quantitative and qualitative findings.
CHAPTER VI
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the findings of this study do not denote a cause and effect relationship, the results demonstrate that there are multiple variables that are statistically significant and related to a student's ability to persist in an Adult Secondary Education program to pursue the General Education Development (GED) certificate. An in-depth analysis of the data found that there were high-positive relationships between persistence and self-efficacy, teaching methods and pedagogy, sense of belonging, teacher-student relationships, and family impact. An analysis of the qualitative data substantiated these findings and also found that the convenience and flexibility of adult education classes was also significant and related to a student's likelihood to persist to pursue the GED certificate despite making an earlier decision to drop out of high school. Additionally, the need to accomplish personal goals, increase employment opportunities, and seek advancements also emerged as themes in the qualitative data analysis.

Findings

The findings in this study were very significant, and confirmed many of the researcher's initial speculations. After analyzing the demographic data, the results revealed that more females were enrolled in Adult Secondary Education classes to pursue the GED certificate than males. Also, older students outnumbered younger students in
the classes, as nearly half were over 30 years old. Moreover, the data demonstrated that most students (n = 84) dropped out of high between 16-18 years old.

When analyzing student-input variables—which included race, ethnicity, gender, age, and self-efficacy, the results concluded only a statistically significant relationship between persistence and self-efficacy. Consequently, the researcher was able to predict that students will be more likely to persist when they possess an elevated sense of self-efficacy, or a belief in their ability to succeed and acquire the General Educational Development certificate because this enduring belief and inner feeling in “self” ultimately determines how students think, behave, and feel as they persist towards accomplishing their goal of not remaining a permanent high school dropout. Although student-input variables were often significant in other research studies—especially those associated with the demographic characteristics of students, in this study the findings disclosed that males and females, younger and older students, academically competent or academically challenged students, and students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds tend to have the same level of ease of difficulty when persisting despite their noticeable differences. Dissimilar to other circumstances in educational issues, those pursuing their GED certificate can consider themselves as being comparable to students regardless of age, race, gender, and ethnicity. These students need to ensure, however, that they possess an undying belief in their personal ability to obtain the GED certificate, as this feeling of resiliency will likely predict their chances to accomplish this goal.

The qualitative data confirmed many of the quantitative findings. The participants’ responses were mixed when the researcher inquired about the impact of
gender, age, and academic competence. When discussing gender, a great deal of female participants believed it was more difficult for them because they were single parents or had to maintain gender-related duties, such as being a wife and mother. However, many women felt their ability to persist was less burdensome once their children got older, or when they had their family support. Men, on the other hand, felt the obstacles were equal. Men indicated that their main obstacle was the need to go to work to support their families. The views on age were varied as well. Some felt it was easier for younger students because they did not have as many obligations as older students, or because they had been out of school fewer years and were thus able to keep up in class. On the contrary, some believed it was harder for younger students because they were less mature and had more peer distractions. Those who believed older students had a more difficult time stated that they had more responsibilities and a more difficult time remembering the subject matter; whereas, those who believed it was easier for older students explained that older students were more mature, realized the value of an education, and had less peer distractions. Nearly all of the participants did not believe there was an association between race or ethnicity and persistence. When the researcher inquired about academic competence, the students’ were responses were mixed again. Some felt they were prepared, while others did not. Most of the students stated that they were struggling with math. Nonetheless, when the researchers asked the students about their self-efficacy—regardless of their gender-related obstacles, age, academic abilities, race or ethnicity—almost every student stated that he or she was optimistic in their belief to persist in the program to obtain the GED certificate.
When considering possible relationships between environmental variables on a student’s ability to remain persistent, the data revealed that there not a statistically significant relationship between the impact of peers and persistent. Therefore, the researcher was unable to predict that students would persist more when they had positive peers around to motivate, encourage, and support them. Nevertheless, the data did show that the remaining three environmental variables—teacher-student relationships, sense of belonging, and family impact—did yield statistically significant relationships with persistence. Furthermore, each of these relationships was high-positive correlations denoting that the students’ chances of persisting were increased as the support level from their families increased, the relationships with their adult education teachers were strengthened, and as they felt a sense of connectedness in their classes and with the technical schools. Between the four environmental variables, sense of belonging yielded the most statistically significant relationship. Hence, researchers and educational leaders can predict that students will most likely persist in adult education programs to pursue their GED certificates when they feel a sense of connectedness to their adult education programs.

The findings also demonstrated that participants were most likely to dropout of school when (a) they were immature and did not take school seriously, (b) they did not feel motivated and think education was important, (c) they did not feel connected or valued, (d) they had to work to help their families out, and (e) they felt school was boring. When the researcher analyzed the data to determine if there was a relationship between the reasons students dropped out of school and later persisted, the outcomes
found that there was not a statistically significant relationship. The qualitative data resulted in a similar stance. Although some students provide reciprocal reasons for dropping out and persisting in school, most students’ reasons for dropping out and persisting were very multi-faceted, making it difficult for the researcher to make a definite connection between the responses.

The findings from the qualitative data, which discussed environmental variables, extensively corroborated the quantitative findings. Similar to the quantitative finding that there was a statistically insignificant relationship between peers and persistence, the participants in the focus group study also provided comments that did not substantiate the impact of peers on their ability to persist. Many students did feel that being surrounded by positive peers was important; however, most tended to cite other variables as their reasons for persisting. Additionally, practically all of the participants’ responses explained (a) the importance of family and how their families supported them, (b) feeling connected to their adult education classes, but provided suggestions for the technical schools to enhance sense of belonging to the colleges, and (c) that having positive and supportive relationships with teachers—who were described as being funny, helpful, encouraging, and “different” from their high school teachers—was important.

When considering the institutional variables of teaching methods and pedagogy and convenience and flexibility, both resulted in significant relationships with the persistence of students towards acquiring the GED certificate. In fact, when compared with all the study’s variables collectively, teaching methods and pedagogy was the second most statistically significant variable after self-efficacy. This relationship
indicated that adult education programs have, to an extent, some control in students’ persistence by ensuring that the have quality instruction in every classroom for students. Again, the qualitative data supported these findings. When the focus group participants were queried about the teaching methods of their teachers, many shared that they enjoyed the way their teachers taught because they made learning fun, easy, and relevant. Although a couple of students stated that a few teachers taught “too fast,” these students still described their teachers as being eager and knowledgeable about their subject matter. Likewise, focus group participants felt the classes were convenient and flexible for the most part and made it easier for them to be able to attend classes.

Only one student stated that he needed for classes to be more accessible because his job often required him to leave the state. Nonetheless, although the researcher developed specific hypotheses before the initiation of the study, others unidentified themes emerged as the researcher completed the focus group studies. These emerging themes demonstrated that students were also more prone to persist when they wanted to accomplish personal goals, attain additional employment opportunities, or seek career advancements.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the researcher was able to make several conclusions about the data. When considering the student-input variables of gender, age, race and ethnicity, and academic competence, the researcher deduced that these variables did not add to or take away from a student’s ability to persist. Although males and females both encountered gender-related obstacles, the researcher concluded that females and males
should be able to persist with comparable levels of tenacity because either gender was not advantaged of disadvantaged over the other. This premise was also suitable and appropriate when considering age, ethnicity, and race. Academic competence, on the other hand, prompted the researcher to make several interpretations.

Although academic competence was often used to predict success in certain educational environments in other research areas—based on the outcomes of this study, academic competence did not impact a student’s persistence regardless of their previous academic abilities in high school. However, it could be used to predict a student’s success in terms of passing the GED exam. When considering the substantial influence of self-efficacy, it was inferred that students would persist even when they encountered other obstacles because they undoubtedly believed that (a) they had what it took to pass the exam to obtain the GED certificate, (b) they were confident that they would obtain the GED certificate very soon, and (c) no one would prevent them from achieving their goal of obtaining the GED certificate. It was concluded that self-efficacy prevailed as the most significant student-input variable because the participants believed that they could produce designated levels of performance that exercised influence over other setting events or negative circumstances that affected their lives as they were pursuing the GED certificate.

Although peers were often a statistically significant variable for high school students to persist to obtain the high school diploma, the influence of peers was not significant for recent high school dropouts who were persisting to obtain the GED certificate. The researcher concluded that younger students, particularly those in high
school and those still of high school age, were more influenced by negative pressures from peers, or they may be more likely to socially interact with their peers than older students. Older students, on the other hand, were less likely to interact socially with peers because of employment, family, and other obligations. Additionally, after being out of school for so long and living without a high school education, it was conjectured that older students were more motivated to do better for themselves and their families, rather than be influenced by peers who attempted to deter them from accomplishing their personal goals. Consequently, the researcher suggested that this explained why peers did not yield a statistically significant relationship in this study, whereas family did yield a significant relationship. Moreover, while some felt supportive peers were important, peers were not the ultimate reason that participants were choosing to persist. It can be fair to extend that peers played an auxiliary or supplementary role in the students' likelihood to persist.

The researcher also formulated that once students left high school and lived independently from their peers and aside from such a structured educational environment, many were left to live in their naturalistic environments more often surrounded by their families. Thus, the students' families, including their spouses, parents, children, and extended family members now became their personal support group, replacing the power of the peer group that many were influenced by in the high school setting. Consequently, the impact of the family became paramount, especially, since many students needed their families to help them with childcare and to take on other mutual duties and responsibilities so that they could attend classes to pursue the GED certificate. Once in
class, because many students left school because of poor relationships with teachers or still possessed a negative affinity towards school, the relationships these students shared with their teachers was essential in their ability to persist because these teachers often provided the students with support, called them if they missed classes, cared if they obtained the GED certificate, and maintained high expectations for the students to uphold. The adult education teachers were the gatekeepers, and they either provided students with the encouragement needed to persist or deterred them once again—causing students to abandon education for a second time or remain tenacious in their attempt to make education a priority.

Similarly, considering that many students left high school because they felt devalued or lack a connectedness with their schools, the findings that yielded a statistical significant relationship between sense of belonging and persistence was explicable. The researcher contended that when students felt contented about where the were, could brag about their adult education program to family and friends, or felt a sense of connection that motivated them to persist, this explained the significance of the relationship between persistence and feeling a sense of belonging. Moreover, because many students had so many obligations outside of school that negatively impacted their ability to persist, it was essential that students were able to receive their education in an environment where they felt an association to others like them with whom they could relate. Likewise, it was also critical for the teachers to make classroom instruction fun, relevant, differentiated and different from the pedagogical practices that many students experienced in high school. Considering that teaching methods and pedagogy was ranked as one of the main variables
related to persistence, it was inferred that the teaching methods and pedagogical practices that the students experienced in high school were probably perceived as being unfavorable, boring, and lacking relevancy for the participants.

Last, although most students indicated that they left high school because they (a) were immature and did not take school seriously, (b) did not feel motivated and did not feel education was important, (c) did not feel connected or valued; had to work to help their families out, and (d) felt school was boring—there was not a reciprocal relationship between the students’ individual reasons for leaving and returning to school to persist. The researcher supposed that this was the case because the reasons students dropped out of high school and persisted were so multifaceted, which was substantiated from the participants’ responses in the focus group studies. Although many students made the connection between their reasons for dropping out and returning to education, there was not an interchangeable correlation between the reasons. Furthermore, this also aided in explaining why other themes evolved. However, when the researcher discretely compared the students’ main reasons for dropping out with the variables that showed the most statistically significant relationships with persistence, it was discovered that four of the reasons were to some extent linked. For example, students stated that they dropped out because they did not feel motivated, which is a doppelganger to having self-efficacy. They indicated that they left because they did not feel valued or connected; however, students cited sense of belonging as a key determinant in persistence. Furthermore, students stated that they felt school was boring and left because they had to help their families out, which is related to the reasons found to be associated with persistence,
including teaching methods and pedagogy and family impact. Additionally, the researchers supposed that dropout and persistence reasons were not statistically significant because the participants were two different people when they left school and upon making the decision to return. In many cases, participants had been out of school for more than 10 years, thus—upon returning, participants were more mature in age, struggle, and life experiences. Therefore, there is a high probability that their initial experience with and their feelings regarding the value of education, were greatly impacted by those confounding variables. For example, those who left school because peers negatively influenced them, returned to persist because they realized obtaining employment was difficult, education is important, and because they were no longer surrounded by the peers they were influenced by in high school.

After many students stayed away from school for so long, they began to rethink the importance of education. Likewise, after experiencing the obscurities that came along after surviving without adequate education—such as little to no employment opportunities, the researcher proposed that many participants experienced the reality curve. Thus, after experiencing the negative reality of being undereducated in a society where education is critical, many began to have an apostasy about the importance of education and the critical role education played in their life socially, financially, emotionally, and professionally. Consequently, the researcher posited that this reality curve helped to explain why students also implied that they were persisting to obtain personal goals, additional employment opportunities, and career advancements.
Implications

The results from this study demonstrated that participants were more likely to persist when (a) they possessed self-efficacy, (b) felt teaching methods and pedagogy were relevant, fun, and differentiated and a sense of belonging to their classes, (c) had established positive relationships with teachers, (d) were supported and encouraged by family members, (e) described classes as being convenient and flexible; and (f) when they were seeking to accomplish personal goals, find employment opportunities, or seek career advancements. The findings also demonstrated that most participants admitted to having difficulties in math and were most likely to leave high school when they were (a) immature and did not take school seriously, (b) unmotivated and did not see the importance in education, (c) disconnected or felt devalued, (d) seeking or needing to obtain employment to help provide for their families, and (d) disinterested in school because instruction was boring. Moreover, although the data demonstrated that there were some linkages between reasons for dropping out and later returning, there was not a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. Overall, the results from the study are exceedingly significant for P-12 leaders and teachers, adult education leaders and teachers, and policy makers that develop and implement policies and practices for adult education programs.

Since this study explained the participants’ reasons for abandoning high school and later persisting, there are numerous implications for P-12 educational leaders and teachers to take into consideration. First, considering that most students admitted to leaving school between 16 to 18 years old, it can be assumed that most of these students
started making the decision well before this age range. Therefore, P-12 educational leaders need to ensure that dropout prevention programs start as early as possible, perhaps in late elementary or middle school. This will ensure that students at-risk of dropping out of high school will be adequately supported before they start contemplating the tumultuous decision to abandon school altogether. To increase students’ view of feeling supported or feeling a sense of belonging, P-12 educational leaders need to reconsider the high school program delivery model. Instead of having the large traditional high schools that are in existence in communities all across the states and country, educational leaders should seek to implement the small schools concept, which is developed on the premise that many of the nation’s high schools are too large and thus cause students to disconnect from school. As an alternative to large and overpopulated high school, P-12 educational leaders should establish schools that are more intimate and more likely to provide students with the connectedness and sense of belonging needed to enhance teacher-student relationships and surround students with peers that share similar interests and goals. This model will enable teachers and educational leaders to foster an environment of accountability and community that is absent in many larger traditional high schools that often serve the most at-risk student populations.

Furthermore, many participants cited leaving school because it was boring. Although there is not a clearly-defined definition to describe ‘boring,’” it is speculated that participants were bored for one of the following reasons—the delivery method of the instruction was not culturally relevant or related to real-world experiences, the students were high-achieving and thus did not feeling challenged in the classroom, or the students
were low-achieving and therefore disengaged from instruction, using the descriptor ‘boring’ as a scapegoat to instead refer to the teachers’ inability to make learning purposeful for them. Depending on which of these reasons holds true for participants, there are extensive implications for P-12 educational leaders and teachers. First, educational leaders should develop ongoing professional development to address the need for teachers to acknowledge students’ diversity and incorporate their pluralistic backgrounds and experiences into the learning experiences and classroom environment, as this will make certain that teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach children from diverse racial, ethnic, language, and social class backgrounds (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Secondly, to ensure that all students are learning within their zones of proximal development, educational leaders should frequently observe classrooms and monitor teachers’ lesson plans to ensure that teachers are routinely utilizing differentiated learning practices. Moreover, they should provide teachers with professional development in this area and implement with integrity and fidelity the tenets of Response to Intervention (RTI) in their buildings.

Similarly, to ensure that all students have caring teachers in their classrooms, educational leaders should recruit and hire teachers that possess the needed knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work with at-risk students. Once these teachers are in the classrooms, leaders should continuously monitor the soft skills of these teachers because empathetic, rather than apathetic, teachers are essential when working with at-risk students. In addition, taking into account that students reported leaving school because they had to help their families out, did not feel education was important, and did not take
school seriously, educational leaders and teachers should work collaboratively to (a) work with social service organizations to provide parents and students with economic or employment resources so that students will not feel obligated to abandon school to assist their families, (b) partner with local businesses and colleges in order to provide students with career education and job training so that students can realize the importance of education in attaining their postsecondary and career goals, and (c) help students with goal setting and real world learning experiences to encourage students to take school seriously and increase their intrinsic motivational levels towards education. Last, many participants reported that math was their least favorite subject in high school and others stated having many challenges in math.

Considering the participants' views regarding math, educational leaders should ensure that students are provided with rigorous instruction in basic arithmetic, as this will ensure that students obtain the basic mathematical prerequisite skills needed to access more complex math skills. Secondly, educational leaders should make certain that students are ability to exhibit an understanding of math concepts, procedures, and a fluent recall of basic math facts b encouraging teachers and parents to work with students to enhance these skills. Moreover, when teaching math concepts, educational leaders need to ensure that teachers consider the stages of child development and how these theoretical principles impact a student's ability to manipulate and learn various math skills. More importantly, leaders need to encourage teachers to make real-world connections and explain to teachers and parents the importance of dispelling the myth that math is a challenging numeric code that cannot be broken.
In addition to influencing P-12 educational leaders and teachers, the findings of this study should greatly influence the decisions and practices of adult education leaders and teachers as well because three of the five variables—teaching methods and pedagogy, teacher-student relationships, and sense of belonging—that were found to exhibit high positive relationships with a student’s likelihood to persist can be directly controlled by adult education programs. First, an analysis of the data concluded that it can be predicted that students will be more likely to persist when teaching methods and pedagogy are relevant, fun, differentiated, and different from the methods offered in high school. Consequently, adult education leaders need to ensure that they are providing their teachers with adequate training in adult learning approaches to ensure that all students in their programs are exposed to effective instructional practices that cater to the needs of students. Additionally, adult education teachers need to make certain that they are delivering the instruction in a way that learning is made easy and exciting for students. Secondly, adult education leader should recruit teacher who possess the knowledge, skills, and emotional intelligence to successfully work with adult education students. Because many of these students may have previously experienced a mediocre or poor teacher in high school that did not care about their success, it is imperative that these teachers understand that their approach needs to be different. They also need to understand that exhibiting a welcoming, supportive, and caring disposition is just as important as being knowledgeable about their subject matter. Adult education leaders, especially those who work directly with the technical colleges, need to ensure that their technical schools are doing a better job of making these students feel like they belong to
the school and their adult education programs. Last, they need to develop programs to help students navigate education and training services, set career goals, gain post-GED success skills, and obtain personal support from staff and other students.

Last, the implications of this study are also relevant for policymakers. In one of the focus group studies, female participants inquired about what was next after receiving her GED certificate. Her comment demonstrated that many students seek the GED certificate, but lack the knowledge needed to transition themselves into employment of career opportunities. Therefore, policymakers, who work directly with adult education, need to ensure that adult education services are also aimed at preparing students either for careers or for postsecondary education or training once they have obtained the GED certificate. Also, since most adult education programs are offered on the colleges of the state’s technical colleges, policymakers need to work with adult education leaders in order to develop ways to offer students dual enrollment with the technical colleges. Considering that adult education programs are hampered by severe under-funding, policymakers need to increase the funding that goes to adult education programs so that more student support services can be implemented to increase the probability that students will persist. Moreover, policymakers also need to consider providing scholarship monies to students who obtain high scores on the GED exam so that these students have options after obtaining the GED certificate. Additionally, childcare options should be a funding option as well for GED students, especially since female students shared obstacles when they had younger children.
By and large, implications can also be extended to include P-12 educational leaders, adult education leaders, and the leaders in higher education, especially those in two-year and four-year institutions. Because of the factors described in the aforementioned sections above, a triad of all constituents should be develop to address curriculum development and career paths for high school students, especially those at-risk of leaving school. The longitudinal planning from the merging relationship between P-12, adult education, and area colleges will insure that stakeholders are able to establish the continuity and strategic planning necessary to provide students with curriculum and learning opportunities that are catered to their needs and interests. Moreover, it will provide each receiving institution with the background knowledge needed to adequately prepare students for postsecondary opportunities and career paths with the intentions of minimizing the number of students who abandon high school altogether and increasing options and enhancing the preparation of student who complete high school and/or adult education programs.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations that warrant prudent inference. It is necessary to acknowledge that the small sample size is a limitation. Including a larger sample size could have increased the reliability of the results. Secondly, after completing the study and reviewing the instrument, the researcher acknowledged the need to include more questions on the survey that were directly related to persistence. For example, the survey should have asked students to indicate the length of time they have been in the program and if this was their first time enrolling in an adult education program to pursue the GED.
This would have enabled the researcher to determine the extent to which the students were persisting. Also, after completing the survey instrument, many students indicated that they left school for reasons other than those listed as choices. By allowing the students the opportunity to check “other,” and share any additional reasons, more appropriate conclusions could have been considered and students would not have felt compelled to choose one of the allotted reasons for leaving school. These additional reasons could have provided additional insight into why students leave school and later persist.

**Recommendations**

Considering the findings of this research study, the researcher extends the following recommendations and explains them around each of the variables that exhibited a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable. To improve the self-efficacy of adult education students, the researcher suggests that each adult education program should provide adult education students with a student support counselor. The student support counselor should be charged to work with students on building their self-efficacy through goal setting and confidence building. This recommendation is appropriate because—as mentioned in the literature review—students with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks and be intrinsically motivated. Similarly, given that an absence of self-efficacy was cited as one of the primary reasons students provided for dropping out of high school, P-12 educational leaders should require middle and high school counselors to develop counseling programs, where the purpose is to work closely with at-risk students on goal
setting and confidence building as well. This will help students enhance their self-actualization and gain the intrinsic motivation desired to boost their self-efficacy.

To address the impact of family, the researcher contends that adult education leaders should collaborate with their staff members to institute routine family support meetings. These family support meetings should be held at the beginning of each semester and should be a part of the students’ orientation. At the family support meetings, families should be informed about of various ways they can support students as they matriculate through the program. For students with younger students, it is recommended that adult education leaders partner with policy makers to offer students childcare for during class hours. This will help students persist in the program without the worry of finding someone to care for their children. Also, adult education leaders should partner with local public schools to determine the educational needs of parents and the local community. In schools where parents desire to obtain the GED certificate, classes should be offered in those schools either during or after school hours. This will help build the educational level of the school’s community and increase the number of parents who return and persist to obtain the GED certificate—a decision that would benefit both P-12 schools and adult education agencies. Within the realm of P-12, educational leaders should identify students that have consistently had little support from their families. Upon identifying these students, educational leaders should meet with these parents to discuss the essential role they play in the educational attainment of their children. This will help the parents understand the consequences of their absence and
lack of support, or their presence. Moreover, parents that improve their involvement should be provided with incentives and recognition.

To improve, teacher-student relationships in adult education settings, teachers should be required to meet with students individually to discuss their strengths, weaknesses, and goals following their attainment of the GED certificate. By fostering these relationships, teacher will be able to learn ways they can support their students. Moreover, they will have the opportunity to establish a rapport with students that will keep students motivated about coming to class and obtaining the GED certificate. Likewise, after identifying students at-risk of leaving high school prematurely, educational leaders within P-12 should assign each student a teacher mentor in the building. By assigning these students mentors, educational leaders will be able to enhance teacher-student relationships for at-risk students and—to some degree, ensure that students are partnered with teachers who can help them recognize and discover their assets and full potential. Implementing such a program would be essential. Furthermore, there would be lasting benefits because teachers will be able to develop relationships that extend beyond the typical student-teacher discussions.

To develop sense of belonging for students in adult education programs, the researcher recommends that technical colleges develop ways to include these students in the academic and social fabric of their schools because students need to feel connected to their adult education classes and the school in order to exhibit the highest possibility of remaining persistent. Moreover, since the adult education classrooms are typically the first environments that many students encounter and thus feel connected or disconnected,
the researcher contends that every adult education teacher should be allowed to attend trainings that will help them employ a sense of community in their classes. In this training, adult education teachers should learn how to foster a sense of community in their classes by supporting collaborative learning and cooperative problem-solving, developing activities in the classroom that require students to assist one another, reiterating to students that all of their ideas are valued and needed, and by being models of community builders themselves.

Also, adult education agencies should consider enrolling students in cohorts as a means of building the students' sense of belonging. By offering the cohort method, students would be able to matriculate through the program with a select, small number of students. As a cohort, these students would be able to forecast when they would complete their program to obtain the GED certificate. They will also have the opportunity to build relationships with peers who have similar goals and interests. These students would also have increased opportunities to collaborate with teachers and peers, who would transition with them throughout their time in the program. The researcher recommends that these same tenets should extend to the P-12 setting. In the P-12 setting, educational leaders should consider the small schools concept, encourage teachers to engage students in cooperative and group learning activities, and establish extracurricular and social organizations to address the needs and interests of all students.

In regards to teaching methods and pedagogy, adult education teachers should be provided with ongoing training to ensure that they are using the best instructional practices and curriculum in their classes as the objective is to make certain that the
learning environment is not a negative one for students. The researcher posits that it is important for students to feel that the teaching methods and instruction in adult education programs is not the same as the high school classrooms they abandoned. Consequently, adult education teachers should receive adequate training to help them understand adult learning theories and thus implement the premises of these theories successfully in their classrooms. Moreover, adult education teachers should learn about specific research-based strategies that elicit and encourage learner motivation. Within the P-12 setting, educational leaders need to work with teachers to ensure that instruction is culturally relevant. Moreover, they need to make certain that students are treated as active members in the learning environment, rather than passive and empty vessels, where the teachers are the experts. Teachers should be required to demonstrate in their lesson plans how they plan to differentiate the instruction to meet the diverse learning and cultural needs of their students.

Since, math was considered the least favorite subject by many of the participants in the study, the researcher calls for P-12 educational leaders to reconsider: how the math curriculum is aligned and the curricular content; the ways teachers teach math to students; and who is recruited and hired to teach math in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms. When considering the alignment of the math curriculum, the researcher described five aspects of curriculum alignment that educational leaders must consider. These include the acknowledgement and understanding of the prerequisite skills needed in order for students to master more complex math skills, the understanding of the developmental process and how math skills fall within this schema, the alignment of
knowledge and skills to be taught, along with the materials used to teach them, the coordination of teaching practices and strategies used to deliver instruction, and the improvement of assessment practices used to validate and monitor student learning and inform instruction. When analyzing the various ways that teachers teach math skills, educational leader should ensure that teachers streamline math as much as possible in grades K-8. Teachers should follow a coherent progression and emphasize the mastery of key topics such as number and operations, algebra, geometry, data analysis and probability, and problem solving. In algebra, which is a high predictor of student math success, educational leader should focus on the critical foundation of algebra as described National Mathematics Advisory Panel (Department of Education, 2008). These include proficiency with whole numbers, fractions, and aspects of geometry and measurement. Educational leaders should also encourage teachers to teach for mastery rather than exposure. School leaders must especially monitor teachers to make certain that they understand math themselves at the early childhood, elementary, and middle school levels. More importantly, training should be provided to ensure that teachers understand the learning processes of math and the importance of making real-world connections when explaining math to students. It is also important for educational leaders to focus on recruiting and hiring teachers, who are competent in math content and pedagogical practices as it is critical for math teachers to know the content and be able to teach the content at a level that increases understanding for students. To support the math initiatives, policy makers should (a) raise base salaries for teachers if mathematics to attract more qualified teachers to the nation's schools, (b) provide incentives to ensure
that at-risk schools have knowledgeable and certified math teachers in every classroom, and (c) award teachers with performance base pay for increasing student achievement in math. Last, educational leaders should ensure that teachers are utilizing research-based instructional practices in their classrooms to address the needs of all learners.

To address class flexibility and convenience, adult education agencies should continue to offer morning, afternoon, and evening classes. Additionally, weekend classes should be considered for students that have rigorous work schedules during the week. Considering that many students are referred to adult education programs via workforce development programs, these stakeholders should work with adult education leaders to consider adding GED classes as a part of the student’s work schedule to increase student persistence. Moreover, childcare should be provided or adult education leaders should develop partnerships with P-12 schools to offer GED classes in the schools’ parent resource centers.

Last, the researcher recommends policymakers to foster collaboration among P-12 educational representatives and leaders, adult education leaders and staff, and college administrators in order to aid in reforming curriculum development to boots postsecondary opportunities and career paths for high school students. Additionally, policymakers should work with state agencies, community groups, employers, families and other key stakeholders to collectively identify needed reforms to develop an exemplary and sustainable statewide system of quality education and support that is available for high school students and students returning to adult education programs to pursue the GED certificate. The goal of each of these collaborative efforts should seek to
increase the proportion of high school students or students seeking to attain the GED certificate with high-quality degrees and credentials to enhance students' human capital—a shift that would have long-lasting positive consequences for local communities economically and socially. Moreover, the stakeholders should consider tenets from a program model that is presently utilized in Illinois (Pleasant, 2011). This model requires constituents to (a) collaborate to align student learning standards and assessments to reflect the knowledge and skills students will need for the 21st Century, (b) coordinate education and workforce data systems to improve career counseling and career preparation for students, (c) improve educational attainment of students through attention to prevention, early intervention, and reengagement, (d) increase public engagement and buy-in across the entire spectrum of high school and adult education environments, and (e) track and report progress toward the goal, which is to increase the proportion of high school students and adult education students who enhance their career opportunities after acquiring their high school credentials.

By and large, the researcher recommends educational researchers to continue to research this multi-faceted phenomenon. Although statistics show that many students are dropping out of high school at record numbers, a large number of students are also returning and giving education a second chance. However, the empirical basis is not there to inform best practices for this sub-group of underrepresented students. Additional research needs to be completed to determine (a) which practices increase sense of belonging for students, (b) what can be done to improve self-efficacy for students, (c) which teaching methods and pedagogical practices yield the best results for adult
learners, (d) how families can be included to increase persistence, (e) how program models can be changed to enhance convenience and flexibility for students, and (f) which steps P-12 and adult education leaders, college administrators and other key stakeholders need to take to reduce the number of high school students who abandon high school and increase the number of high school dropouts who persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate.

Summary

Overall, this study has yielded significant findings—showing that as self-efficacy improves, family support increases, teacher-students relationships are strengthened, sense of belonging is enhances, and teaching methods and pedagogical practices are made more relevant and focused on the needs of students—students will be more likely to persist in Adult Secondary Education programs to pursue the GED certificate. Substantial conclusions were drawn and implications were addressed towards adult education leaders and teachers, educational leaders in P-12, and educational policy makers. Additionally, the researchers addressed limitations that evolved from the methodology and made recommendation for further research.
APPENDIX A

Consent Forms and Instrument

You are invited to be in a research study, which analyzes the specific persistence factors that influence recent high school dropouts to persist in adult secondary education programs to pursue the General Educational Developmental (GED) certificate. The Technical College System of Georgia selected you as a possible participant because you are currently participating in a program to obtain the GED. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Latanya L. Fanion, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership at Clark Atlanta University, is conducting this study. The purpose of the study is to understand the specific factors that encourage students to return and persist in adult secondary education programs to pursue the GED following an earlier decision to dropout of high school. Additionally, the researcher desires to understand if there is any relationship between the reasons students decide to leave high school and the reasons students later decide to persist to attain the GED.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a brief survey that should last no more than 25-30 minutes. When completing this, it is critical that you are as honest as possible as your responses will help educational leaders to develop policies and procedures to encourage more students to stay in school and/or pursue the GED. If you need any assistance or have any questions, please contact the researcher immediately. Please be reminded that there will be no compensation of any kind available for your participation. However, the researcher does agree to provide, at your request, a copy of the final research paper.

As you complete this survey, there will be minimal risks to you. You may feel uncomfortable with some of the questions that are asked, such as the ones that inquire about: previous academic performance and reasons for leaving school. While some of the questions may be difficult, just remember that your input will be beneficial for other students with similar educational experiences as you.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that the researcher might publish, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and only the researchers will have access to the records. It is important to note that all data collected from you will be destroyed after three years.
Appendix A (continued)

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher, or Clark Atlanta University. The researcher understands that your participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any point or skip any question you prefer not to answer.

The researchers conducting this study are the Principal Investigator, Latanya L. Fanion, and Dr. Trevor Turner, the Research Advisor. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Latanya L. Fanion at (770) 377-6707. You may also contact Dr. Trevor Turner, the Research Advisor at (404) 880-6015.

If you have any questions now, or later, related to the integrity of the research, you are encouraged to contact Dr. Georgianna Bolden at the Office of Sponsored Programs at (404) 880-6979) or Dr. Paul I. Musey at (404) 880-6829 at Clark Atlanta University.

*You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.*

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature ___________________________ Date:_____________________

Signature of Investigator ___________________________ Date:_____________________

NOTE: Children under the age of eight (8) require the permission of their parent(s) or legal guardians to participate in any type of research; those over the age of eight (8) require permission from their parent(s)/legal guardian, in addition to their Assent to participation.
Appendix A (continued)

County of Residence ______________________

Quantitative Persistence Instrument

Directions: Answer each question to the best of your ability and be as truthful as possible. These results will only be shared with the researcher. Circle the response that best fits you.

Student-Input Variables: Gender, Race, Age

1. What is your gender? Circle one.
   a. Female               b. Male

2. What is your race? Circle one.
   b. White               b. Black or African American
   c. Hispanic or Latino
   d. American Indian or Alaska Native
   e. Asian
   f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   g. Two or more races

3. What is your ethnicity? Circle one.
   a. Hispanic or Latino origin
   b. Not of Hispanic or Latino origin

4. What is your current age?
   c. 18 – 21               b. 22 – 25               c. 26 – 30
   d. Over 30

5. How old were you when you left high school?_________________________

Independent Variable: Persistence

6. I believe that I can remain persistent in the program no matter what obstacles I may face.
   a. Strongly Agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly Disagree
Appendix A (continued)

7. I believe that I can manage pursing the GED while maintaining my family obligations.
   a. Strongly Agree       b. Agree       c. Neutral
   d. Disagree            e. Strongly Disagree

8. I believe that I can manage pursing the GED while maintaining the obligations with my employer.
   a. Strongly Agree       b. Agree       c. Neutral
   d. Disagree            e. Strongly Disagree

9. If I am confronted with a problem while in this program to pursue my GED, I will find a way to get over it so that I can persist on.
   a. Strongly Agree       b. Agree       c. Neutral
   d. Disagree            e. Strongly Disagree

10. Even if no one supports me, I will still persist in this program to attain my GED.
    a. Strongly Agree       b. Agree       c. Neutral
    d. Disagree            e. Strongly Disagree

Student-Input Variables: Academic Competence

11. Before I left school, I made mostly.
    A’s    B’s    C’s    D’s    F’s

12. While I was in high school, I made mostly___________ in my Reading and Language Arts classes.
    A’s    B’s    C’s    D’s    F’s
Appendix A (continued)

13. While I was in high school, I made mostly__________ in my Mathematics classes.
   A’s    B’s    C’s    D’s    F’s

14. While I was in high school, I made mostly__________ in my Science classes.
   A’s    B’s    C’s    D’s    F’s

15. While I was in high school, I made mostly__________ in my Social Studies classes.
   A’s    B’s    C’s    D’s    F’s

**Student-Input Variables: Self-Efficacy**

16. Now that I am back in school pursuing my GED, I feel that high school prepared me
to past the test.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

17. Now that I am back in school pursuing my GED, I am struggling to understand the
material.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

18. I believe that I have what it takes to pass the exam to obtain my GED.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

19. I am confident that I will obtain the GED very soon.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree
Appendix A (continued)

20. No one will prevent me from achieving my goal of getting my GED.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
   d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

*Environmental Variables: Peers*

21. My friends believe that getting an education is important.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
   d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

22. My friends have all graduated from high school.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
   d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

23. My friends encouraged me to get my GED.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
   d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

24. My friends try to distract me from getting my GED.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
   d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

25. My friends are the reason I am pursuing my GED.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
   d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree
Appendix A (continued)

*Environmental Variables: Family*

26. My family thinks getting an education is important.
   a. Strongly Agree    b. Agree    c. Neutral
   d. Disagree         e. Strongly Disagree

27. My family encouraged me to get my GED.
   a. Strongly Agree    b. Agree    c. Neutral
   d. Disagree         e. Strongly Disagree

28. My family tries to distract me from getting my GED.
   a. Strongly Agree    b. Agree    c. Neutral
   d. Disagree         e. Strongly Disagree

29. The family encourages me to stay focused and do well.
   a. Strongly Agree    b. Agree    c. Neutral
   d. Disagree         e. Strongly Disagree

30. My family is the reason I am pursuing my GED.
   a. Strongly Agree    b. Agree    c. Neutral
   d. Disagree         e. Strongly Disagree

*Environmental Variables: Teacher-Student Relationships*

31. I have a great relationship with the teachers in my adult education classes.
   a. Strongly Agree    b. Agree    c. Neutral
   d. Disagree         e. Strongly Disagree
Appendix A (continued)

32. I value the relationship I have with the teachers in my adult education classes
   a. Strongly Agree        b. Agree            c. Neutral
   d. Disagree              e. Strongly Disagree

33. The teachers in my adult education classes are supportive and care if I obtain my GED.
   a. Strongly Agree        b. Agree            c. Neutral
   d. Disagree              e. Strongly Disagree

34. The teachers in my adult education classes call or question me when I miss class.
   a. Strongly Agree        b. Agree            c. Neutral
   d. Disagree              e. Strongly Disagree

35. The teachers in my adult education classes have high expectations for me and the other students.
   a. Strongly Agree        b. Agree            c. Neutral
   d. Disagree              e. Strongly Disagree

 Environmental Variables: Sense of Belonging

36. I feel a sense of connectedness in my adult education class.
   a. Strongly Agree        b. Agree            c. Neutral
   d. Disagree              e. Strongly Disagree

37. I feel a sense of connectedness to the technical school.
   a. Strongly Agree        b. Agree            c. Neutral
   d. Disagree              e. Strongly Disagree
Appendix A (continued)

38. I frequently brag about my adult education classes to family and friends.
   a. Strongly Agree   b. Agree   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree        e. Strongly Disagree

39. The connection I feel with my teachers, peers, and the school motivates me to persist.
   a. Strongly Agree   b. Agree   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree        e. Strongly Disagree

40. When I come to class, I feel like I am around family.
   a. Strongly Agree   b. Agree   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree        e. Strongly Disagree

**Institutional Variables: Teaching Methods and Pedagogy**

41. I love the way the teachers in my adult education classes teach.
   a. Strongly Agree   b. Agree   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree        e. Strongly Disagree

42. The instruction in my adult education classes is boring.
   a. Strongly Agree   b. Agree   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree        e. Strongly Disagree

43. The teachers in my adult education classes make learning fun.
   a. Strongly Agree   b. Agree   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree        e. Strongly Disagree
Appendix A (continued)

44. If my teachers in high school had taught the way my adult education teachers teach, I would have stayed and graduated.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

45. The teachers in my adult education classes are able to explain the content in a way that is easy for me to understand.
   a. Strongly Agree  b. Agree  c. Neutral
d. Disagree  e. Strongly Disagree

**Dropout Factors**

Directions: In the following section, please an X on the line that describes why you left school. You can choose more than one reason.

46. I left high school because I was immature and did not take school seriously.

47. I left high school because the work was too hard or too easy.

48. I left high because I was not motivated and did not feel that education was important.

49. I left high school because my peers pressured me, and they were a negative influence.

50. I left high school because of my family (See reasons below).
   a. I had a child and needed to work to provide for my child.
b. I did not have positive family role models.
c. I did not have any support from my family.
d. I had to work to help my family out.

51. I left high school because my teachers did not care.
Appendix A (continued)

52. I left high school because I did not feel connected or valued.

53. I left high school because school was boring.

Thank you for completing this survey. Your feedback is truly valued and will assist educational leaders and policymakers to better support other students so that more students who leave school will return and persist just as you have. Good luck on your educational journey.
Focus Group Consent Form

You are invited to be in a research study, which analyzes the specific persistence factors that influence recent high school dropouts to persist in adult secondary education programs to pursue the General Education Diploma. The Technical College System of Georgia selected you as a possible participant because you are currently persisting in a program to obtain the GED. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Latanya L. Fanion, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership at Clark Atlanta University, is conducting this study. The purpose of the study is to understand the specific factors that encourage students to return and persist in adult secondary education programs to pursue the General Education Diploma following an earlier decision to dropout of high school. Additionally, the researcher desires to understand if there is any relationship between the reasons students decide to leave high school and the reasons students later decide to persist to attain the General Education Diploma.

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate in a focus group study that will include you and approximately 7 – 9 other students. You will be asked a series of questions about your reasons for persisting and leaving school. This focus group study should last between 30 to 45 minutes. There will be no compensation of any kind available for your participation. However, there will be light refreshments. The researcher does agree to provide, at your request, a copy of the final research paper.

If you decide to participate in this study, there will be minimal risks to you. Please note that the researcher cannot guarantee that your comments will be kept confidential. However, it is expected that all participating members of the focus group study will maintain ethical and will refrain from sharing anything discussed during this session. Additionally, you may feel uncomfortable with some of the questions that are asked, such as the ones that inquire about: previous academic performance and reasons for leaving school. While some of the questions may be difficult, just remember that your input will be beneficial for other students with similar educational experiences as you.

Please note that this session will be recorded. Therefore, please adhere to the following guidelines. To maintain the confidentiality of every student in the focus group, each participant will be assigned an alias. Before speaking, each participant will need to state his or her alias before speaking so that the researcher will not encounter difficulty when transcribing and associating the responses. During the focus group:

- Please talk one at a time, so that the researcher will be able to capture everyone’s comments as the researcher values what everyone has to share. Please speak clearly and at a slow pace.
Appendix A (continued)

- Please remember that your input will help someone else in the future.
- Please respect everyone's opinion and keep everything your fellow peers say confidential.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that the researcher might publish, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and only the researchers will have access to the records. It is important to note that all data collected from you will be destroyed after three years.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher, or Clark Atlanta University. The researcher understands that your participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any point or skip any question you prefer not to answer.

The researchers conducting this study are the Principal Investigator, Latanya L. Fanion, and Dr. Trevor Turner, the Research Advisor. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Latanya L. Fanion at (770) 377-6707. You may also contact Dr. Trevor Turner, the Research Advisor at (404) 880-6015.

If you have any questions now, or later, related to the integrity of the research, you are encouraged to contact Dr. Georgianna Bolden at the Office of Sponsored Programs at (404) 880-6979 or Dr. Paul I. Musey at (404) 880-6829 at Clark Atlanta University.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature ___________________________________________ Date: ______________________

Signature of Investigator __________________________________ Date: ______________________

NOTE: Children under the age of eight (8) require the permission of their parent(s) or legal guardians to participate in any type of research; those over the age of eight (8) require permission from their parent(s)/legal guardian, in addition to their Assent to participation.
Appendix A (continued)

Qualitative Persistence Instrument

Focus Group Questions

Background to Question 1:

After completing an extensive review of the literature, I found that the overall conclusions on the impact of gender on student persistence are inconclusive. While some researchers state that females persist more than males, others say the exact opposite.

1. As a young lady, what obstacles have you encountered as you persist towards acquiring your General Educational Development? How do these obstacles prevent you from persisting?
2. As a young man, what obstacles have you encountered as you persist towards acquiring your General Educational Development? How do these obstacles prevent you from persisting?
3. Do you all think females and males face different obstacles? Explain.

Background to Question 2:

When reviewing the literature, I also found that age was highly associated with persistence. Most of the research confirmed that older students persisted at higher rates than younger students because they were more mature. On the contrary, others purported that younger students had a better chance to persist because they had less obligations that older students.

4. For older students, is it easier for you to pursue your GED now that you are older and more mature versus when you were younger and immediately out of high school?
5. For younger students, is it easier for you to pursue your GED now that you have fewer responsibilities than older students? Or, do you feel you have too many distractions?
6. Do you all think age makes a difference in the ability for students to persist? Explain.

Background to Question 3:

Although a lot of the researchers analyzing persistence factors studied students in four-year colleges, they found that race was often related to persistence. They stated that minority students often felt discriminated in school because of their race, while more white students persisted because they had more social capital than their minority counterparts—meaning that statically minority students were less likely to have educated parents and more likely to be confounded with interrelated issues of: low SES, lack of access to “good” schools, and poor or a lack of mentors.
Appendix A (continued)

7. When you all consider your race, what role do you think it plays in your likelihood to persist?
8. How do racial stereotypes or prejudices affect your ability to persist to pursue your GED?
9. Are your parents supportive? Do they encourage you to complete school? Did they graduate from high school? College?
10. Do you have mentors in your community that encourage you to persist?

Background to Question 4:

A few years ago I completed a study where I interviewed high school dropouts attending an adult education program in Tennessee about the factors that encouraged them dropout of school. I learned that the students either where academically competent or academically incompetent—meaning that some felt they did not possess the academic knowledge to graduate while others felt they had the knowledge but did not feel challenged.

11. How does your high school preparation help or hinder your ability to persist now to pursue your GED?
12. Do you feel your high school teachers prepared you to pass the GED?
13. What was your favorite subject in school?
14. What kinds of grades did you make?
15. What strengths and weaknesses did you have in high school?

Background to Question 5:

Additionally, a few students just admitted that they were not motivated enough to graduate from high school. They reported that they did not care about school and did not feel that they had the ability to graduate from high school. So, most demonstrated that they lacked self-efficacy or a belief in themselves regarding their ability to attain their goals.

16. Do you feel that you have what it takes to obtain your GED?
17. Are you confident in your ability to pass the exam to receive your GED? Explain.
18. Are you having difficulties in any areas that may hinder you from acquiring your GED?

Background to Question 6:

Research shows that many student stay in school when they are surrounded by positive peers and friends, and at other times students disengage with school when they lack positive peers and friends to encourage them to do well.
Appendix A (continued)

19. Do you have friends in this program with you? How are they doing?
20. How do your friends outside of the program feel about your decision to get your GED?
21. Do your friends support or distract you from getting your GED?
22. Do most of your friends have their GED or high school diploma?
23. Do you have any friends in college?

**Background to Question 7:**

*Likewise, research also shows that students are less likely to persist when they do not have support from their family members or when they have family obligations that conflict with their educational goals.*

24. Describe how your family supports your decision to pursue the GED.
25. Do either of you have family members who discourage you from pursuing your GED? If so, how?
26. For those of you who have kids, how does your family support you with your kids? If so, how? If no, how?
27. Which family members besides your parents support your decision to pursue the GED?

**Background to Question 8:**

*One of the key reasons student gave for dropping out of high school was poor relationships with their teachers. Many described their teachers as being unsupportive, uncaring, mean, just collecting a paycheck, etc. On the same hand, when students were asked what kept them in school for as long as they stayed, many credited a special teacher.*

28. How do your teachers encourage you to persist to obtain your GED? Describe what your teacher does to motivate you to persist?
29. Are they readily accessible and approachable?
30. Do you stay after class to assist you?
31. How do they support you outside of class?

**Background to Question 9:**

*The students in my previous study also consistently stated that they did not feel like “a part” of their schools. They either felt there were too many rules, the administrators were too strict, or the culture was unwelcoming. As a result, these students did not feel like they belonged to the school. They did not have any sense of belonging.*

32. Do you like the program? The school?
Appendix A (continued)

33. Do you feel you are a part of the program? School?
34. What could the program do to make students feel more connected?
35. Are there social organizations, clubs, and extracurricular activities available for you to join?
36. What could the school do to make you feel more included?

**Background to Question 10:**

*Many students just stated they left school because it was boring. The instruction was irrelevant. The teachers stood in front of the class and lectured all day. The teachers never taught so they could understand. And, learning was never fun or engaging.*

37. Do you like the way your teacher teaches? Explain.
38. Do you feel the material you are learning is going to help you in the future? Explain.
39. What could your teachers do to enhance their teaching abilities?

**Background on Question 11:**

*Many students also felt the scheduling of classes was not flexible or convenient for them. Students felt classes were too long, conflicted with other responsibilities, or started to early. As a result, they factors did not encourage them to stay in school.*

40. Do you feel your classes are flexible and convenient, start to early, or are too long? Explain.
41. How would enhance the flexibility and convenience of your classes?

**Background to Question 12:**

*After completing my last research study and reviewing research for this study, I learned that in some cases students decide to persist in adult education programs to pursue the GED for the very reasons they dropped out. For example, students who drop out because of poor relationships with teachers later persist because of positive relationships with their adult education teachers. Or, students drop out because they have kids to take care of, and many later return to adult education programs and persist to obtain the GED to be positive role models for their kids.*

42. Why did you dropout of high school?
43. Will you persist in this program? Why?
APPENDIX B

Focus Group Transcriptions

Focus Group 1: CT-NMC

Moderator: Ok, so the first question says, "After completing an extensive review of literature, I found that the overall conclusions on the impact of gender on student persistence is inconclusive. While some researchers think that females persist more than males, others say the exact opposite. So ladies, as a young lady, what obstacles have you encountered as you persist to acquire your GED, and how did these obstacles prevent you from persisting?"

Speaker 2: I would say for me the high school's where getting pregnant at a young age, so that was one of the hindrance, because I had to provide child care and all of those other things that I couldn't afford at the time going to school, and then I had to find someone everyday to watch her, and it kind of got a little bit aggravating to the whole family. So I felt like the easiest thing to do for me to just work and take care of her.

Moderator: Okay, anyone else have any input on there for ladies? Do you feel like your role as a mom may impact your ability, maybe feel like obligated to go home and help with homework, or to cook dinner or wife duties, anything to that effect?

Speaker 3: Oh yes, for me, I've been wanting to come and get my GED, so that I can do nothing, and because my children were so young, so I have to be there for them when they get back from school, help with the homework, and cook, and everything. So, now they've grown, so I decided to come and get my GED.

Moderator: Okay, and gentlemen? As a young man or a male, what obstacles have you encountered as you persist toward acquiring your GED?

Speaker 4: Well, I got started in school late for once, because I had some problems when I was little, where I got started in school late, and the reason I didn’t complete high school was I just felt there was too much pressure for me to
catch up on what I should have been able to start in, and it just got too “pressureous” to where I just felt like I’ve had too much catching up to do, so I figured no sense in trying to keep going at this. So I just felt like it was time for me to get out, and I wish I hadn’t done it, but when you start school late, you just feel like I can’t take any more of this, so I’m just going to just leave, and later down the road, just go for a GED, rather than going through all this mess of aggravation.

Moderator: Okay, and do you all think females versus male have different obstacles, or do you think they’re equally the same? So, do you think it’s easier for a lady to get their GED or a male?

Speaker 2: I would think it’s a male.

Moderator: Okay, why do you say a male?

Speaker 5: Because, usually the children, the housekeeping, the cooking, and the cleaning, and now, work all on the women.

Speaker: Right.

Speaker 5: The men can – they have their jobs, but if they can get past that obstacle, they could have the time to do it, I would think.

Moderator: Okay. Also, second question, “When reviewing the literature, I also found that age was highly associated with persistence. Most of the research confirmed that older students persist in higher rates than younger students, because they are more mature. On the contrary, others reported that younger students had a better chance to persist, because they had less obligations than older students.” So if you were older, (and consider yourself older), is it easier for you to pursue your GED now that you are older and more mature, versus going back when you were younger?

Speaker 2: Yes, it is, because my kids are older now, and they’re easily tamed, and I don’t think I have to work as harder, because they understand, so it is easier.

Moderator: Okay, anyone else have any input?

Speaker 5: I agree with her, it’s easier to come back now than when my children were small.
Appendix B (continued)

Moderator: Okay, and do you all think age makes a difference?

Speaker 3: Yeah, because you – yeah, you think different. You take the life seriously and say, “Okay, if I want a better job, I better study now.” I mean, to get something better, because if you’re not getting education, you will be at the same level all the time.

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 2: Yeah, I think age is, because you find a pattern, and you see you can’t get over a certain bracket of income, you can’t–a lot of things, you can’t get a certain jobs, and after getting turned down so much, you realize wow, it really was important for me to do this.

Moderator: Okay, going on to question number 3. “All doing a lot of researches, analyzing persistence factors, studied students in four-year colleges: they found that race was also often related to persistence. They say that minority students often felt discriminated in school because of their race, while more white students persisted, because they had more social capital in their minority counterparts, so things like low SES are often associated with race, good schools, versus not so good schools. So when you all consider race, what role do you think it plays in your likelihood to persist, or do you think it plays any role?

Speaker 2: I think it’s within you.

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 2: You know, once you get that mind power that you can do it no matter what school it is, you’re going to do it, because it’s something you want to do now.

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 4: Well, you have to have the seriousness to it. I mean, most of today’s kids just act like, well, I don’t need to be persistent in this, I can do it later down the road. And, a lot of them are just – I think a lot of kids are just lazy, and they don’t want to accomplish anything, and they figure, well, I can always go get my GED, so…

Moderator: So as you all made your decision to come back, did you have like mentors in your neighborhoods or someone in church who encouraged you to come back?
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 2: No, in me, it was just like a little taunting thing that kept bothering me. Like, I know that I need this, and I've always wanted it, so I think that was the drive. It was mostly me, my inner feeling.

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 2: Just wanting to accomplish something.

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 5: I wasn't able to be able to keep my job, because the state's requiring more and more of you, and I've got to take college courses to be able to keep a job that I've been doing for 37 years. I can't take those courses unless I have a GED.

Speaker 2: That's true, too. That's one of them, yeah.

Moderator: Okay, a few years ago I completed a study where I interviewed high school drop outs attending an adult-ed program in Tennessee about the factors that encouraged them to drop out of school. I learned that these students either were academically competent or academically incompetent. Meaning, that some felt they did not possess the academic knowledge to graduate, while others felt they had the knowledge, but did not feel challenged enough in school. How has your previous high school preparation helped or hinder your ability to now persist?

Speaker 2: Well, for me, I feel like mine's a more of a hindrance, because kind of what he said, like, most of the kids in my class and my age group didn't want it, you know, and it was discouraging. It was, like, easier to drop out and think about it later than it was to struggle through school, where I felt like the teachers wasn't really making sure that we were learning, and the number of students in the class was just too large for me to get that one-on-one, so I wasn't learning. I was better off teaching myself at home than sit in a classroom.

Moderator: Classroom, Okay.

Speaker 6: With me, I quit school for many reasons. I lived in downtown Atlanta during the civil rights, and at my school, there were many fights (whites and blacks), and there were whites that were stabbing black people, and I mean, it was always stuff--and I was afraid, I was afraid of the whites and the blacks, because, I mean, they both were doing--you know, they were young, the uneducated, and they know somebody's, you know, bullying
Appendix B (continued)

them, and they just were – and so for me, it was out of fear. I quit. I said, no, I’m not going to – you know, I mean, my mother fought me, my counselors fought me, you know, everybody wanted me to stay, and I’m not--I mean, I had nightmares. For years, I had nightmares about this. I was afraid for my life, and that’s why I quit school.

Moderator: Oh, wow!

Speaker 2: Safety issue wasn’t there.

Moderator: Yeah.

Speaker 6: Yeah.

Moderator: So, leading to the next question (because you kind of alluded to this), “Do you feel your high school teachers prepared you to pass the GED?”

Speaker 2: No, not at all.

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 2: I think I’ve learned more here, and then over years of teaching myself, and then with my kids in school, I’ve even learned from them. So I don’t think that they prepared me for a GED, no.

Moderator: Okay, what was your favorite subject in high school? Was it reading or Math, Science, Social Studies? Or can you all remember that?

Speaker 4: I don’t. I didn’t really have any favorite subjects. I mean, to me, it was like, let’s get done with this and go home. I’m tired of pressuring my brain with all this stuff, and I just – I personally, didn’t really enjoy school. To me, it was like this is a real waste of time and I mean,…

Speaker 3: I think the teachers have a lot of thing to do if you’re ready to learn English, or Math, or whatever. Because if they teach good, you can have fun, and learn faster. And it’s okay, I like this one, but because the teacher teach you better than different ones.

Speaker 2: Right.

Speaker 4: But, the problem also is a lot of these teachers don’t want to take control of their classrooms, and their kids are distracting other people from wanting to learn. I mean it’s hard.
Moderator: It's frustrating.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Speaker 6: Yeah, that was me. They couldn't get control in our high school. They ended up closing my school down. The year that I quit, about three or four months later, the violence was so bad they couldn't control—this was O'Keefe high school, Atlanta, and they ended up closing it.

Moderator: Wow!

Okay, so what strengths and weaknesses did you all have in high school? Like, were you good in Math, were you like a great writer, were you good in reading?

Speaker 2: My strength was Math and reading was my weakness, like literature and stuff like that.

Moderator: Okay, next question, "A few students just admitted that they were not motivated enough to graduate from high school. Therefore, they did not care about school, and did not feel they had the ability to graduate from high school, so most demonstrated that they lacked self-efficacy or belief in themselves regarding their ability to retain their goals. Do you feel you have now what it takes to pursue your GED and obtain a test to pass?"

Speakers: Yes.

Moderator: Okay, are you confident in your ability to pass the exams to receive your GED, and why?

Speaker 3: I'm confident. Because if I want it, I know I can do it. I find time, and there's always something else to do, but you always find time for that if you really, really want it.

Speaker 4: Well, it helps, too when you got teachers that are willing to help you in learning, versus getting teachers that just act like, I could care less. So, I mean, it's all based on the teachers. Are they willing to help you learn what you need to learn to get the GED?

Speaker 3: Yeah.
Appendix B (continued)

Moderator: Okay, and are any of you having any difficulties in any areas that you think may hinder your progress?

Speaker 5: I’m having some issues with Math, but I’m going to stick to it no matter how long it takes me. I might have to take it over and over, but I’m going to do it.

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 4: Yeah, I have issues with decimals, and fractions, and converting.

(group laughs)

Speaker 4: My brain feels like it’s going to explode from all this fractions, and decimals, and junk.

Speaker 3: Well, for me, it’s another language. So, it’s really, really difficult English, so I have to be very, very focused. And, yeah, I’m learning, and I know I’m going to do better.

Moderator: Okay and going to question six, “Research shows that many students stay in school when they are surrounded by positive peers and friends. And at other times, students disengage from school when they lack positive peers and friends to encourage them to do well. Do you have friends in this program with you, and if so, how are they doing?”

Speaker 2: Well, I wouldn’t say friends, but you get to know people, you get to befriend them in a different – you know, in a much mature kind of way, and when you see them doing good, you want to do good too. It’s not a jealousy thing. It’s just you want that, too.

Moderator: Okay, how do your friends outside the program feel? So, do you friends back home who are not in the program with you? Do they encourage you, or do they think you’re being silly for going back?

Speaker 2: Well, I’ve eliminated a lot of people. Me, personally, yeah, I’ve had people who are, like, “Girl, how many years you got to go there?” and “You crazy! Don’t you got to work and take care of home and all this?” It’s discouraging, but I eliminate them. Those are the ones that I don’t want to deal with.

Moderator: Okay.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 5: Everyone to me has been very encouraging. Everyone I tell--at first, I was kind of--I wasn’t going to say. I just said, I’m going back to school, and then they would say, “What are you taking?” you know, “Where are you going? And then I was ashamed at first, and then I finally said, “Well I’m going back to get my GED, so I can take some college courses.” “Oh, that’s wonderful.” I mean, church people, my neighbors, my friends, my co-workers, everybody thinks it’s wonderful that I’m doing it.

Speaker 2: I think my kids’ been more supportive than anybody I know, yeah.

Speaker 5: Mine too.

Speaker 3: They like their mama to do like…

Speaker 2: Yeah, you know, and then they’re doing better at school now, because of…

Speaker 3: So, we both have homework together.

Speaker 2: Yeah, my kids’ grades have improved since I’m in school, because they see me studying, and then, I notice they’re trying to study harder. So, you know, I think I’m the biggest role model for them, so it’s a good thing.

Moderator: That’s excellent!

Speaker 3: One of my girls’s kind of, a little, like lazy. I have one really smart and the other one… And I was like, I’m going to show her that Mama is going back to school, and then she’s going to be ashamed, and then she was, and she’s like, now she’s putting, like, more, like, into the school. She’s like, I got to go to school, Mama’s going, I have to go.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Moderator: Exactly. So, do any of you have any friends right now who are currently in college?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I do.

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 3: My two girls.

Moderator: Okay.
Speaker 3: Yeah.

Moderator: So going to the next question, "Likewise, research also shows that students are less likely to persist when they do not have support from their family members, or when they have family obligations that conflict with their education goals. Describe how your family supports your decision to pursue your GED."

Speaker 6: My family is very supportive. My husband is now doing all the cooking, the dinner, he washes clothes and dries them, and puts them up. I mean, things that I never in 30—(we've been married 38 years) that he's really done before. He is now doing it, because I work fulltime, and I'm coming here. He knows I can't do it. So, they're really helping out. My daughter is, also.

Speaker 3: Yeah, my husband he— one day I was—I had to do something else, and I tell him that I think today I'm not going to school. He said "Well, remember, you've got to go to school!" he's like "You got to go, you got to finish this!" okay, yes.

Moderator: So do any of you have family members who are discouraging?

Speakers: No.

Moderator: They're supportive. Okay.

Speaker 2: Not my family, no.

Moderator: Okay, good.

Speaker 2: Maybe a few friends, not my family. I think the friends are just jealous.

(Laughter)

Speaker 1: Okay, going to the next questions, "One of the key reasons students gave for dropping out of high school was poor relationship with their teachers. Many describe their teachers as being unsupportive, uncaring, mean, just collecting a paycheck. On the same hand, when students were asked what kept them in school for as long as they stayed, many did credit special teachers at some point during their career."

Speaker 2: Yeah, I had one special teacher.
Moderator: One special teacher? So how did your teachers encourage you to persist presently? So the teachers you have now, how do they encourage you to persist to pursue your GED?

Speaker 2: Well, at that time, he would always say, “You can do it!” It would be home visits, it would be letters to my mom, but that was the only teacher out of, like, six or seven teachers that I had. He was, like, really on me. In the days that I was in class, he would be, like extra attentive to me, because he saw that I was the one that was like, I guess, the less likely to graduate or pass to the next grade. So, that teacher was definitely a big influence on me staying as long as I did.

Moderator: And what about the ones here?

Speaker 2: Oh yeah, there’s good teachers here especially the— to me, especially the Math teachers. I mean, I wish if—I had her in high school, I know I would have done good.

Speaker 3: Oh, yeah. Teachers like that; they should be in high school teaching high school.

Speaker 2: I mean, she needs to be teaching some of the teachers that’s in high school, because her way of teaching is just so – it’s just easily to catch on.

Speaker 3: She’s so easy. You can catch it like this [Snap]. Well, you can do this—well it’s always this way.

Speaker 2: Because she’s filling the gaps. It may be a little embarrassing. She may do 1+1, but then you’re doing 100+1. She makes it easy, and then it grows and you easily pick on, and so she – I love her.

Speaker 5: She’s very encouraging. “Don’t give up. Don’t quit. You can do it. You will do it.”

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Moderator: Do you think she’s very approachable as way of teaching?

Speakers: Yeah.
Appendix B (continued)

Moderator: Okay

Speaker 3: And she’s always, like, willing to tell you if you had any questions, you just come over at the end.

Speaker 2: She’s very open.

Speaker 4: Yeah, if she had been in my high school, things would have been so much better. Because she’s the type of teacher that tells you don’t get pressured on anything, you’ll get it.

Speaker 2: You’ll get it, just come.

Speaker 4: But, if she had been down at the high school down in Florida. Lordy, things would have been so much better.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Moderator: Okay, so going to question nine, “The students in my previous study also consistently state they did not feel like -- feel a part of their schools. They either felt there were too many rules, the administrators were too strict, or the school culture was not welcoming. As a result, these students did not feel like they belong to the school. As a result, they did not have any sense of belonging. So in this current program, do you feel there is a sense of belonging?”

Speakers: Yes.

Moderator: Okay, why so?

Speaker 2: Because, overall, most of the people want to be here (most of the people). You know, it’s a very few, but most of the people want to be here.

Moderator: Okay.

Speaker 2: That’s encouraging in itself.

L. Fanion: What could the program do to make students feel more connected?

Speaker 6: I don’t know.

Speaker 5: What could they do? That, I don’t know, either.
L. Fanion: Okay, so do you think just overall, for most of your peers in your class, everyone feels like accepted, connected...?

Speaker 6: Yeah.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 5: From what I see, yeah.

L. Fanion: Are there any social organizations or clubs that you all can get involved in on campus?

Speakers: No.

L. Fanion: Would it make a difference?

Speaker 2: Yeah, because, like, I want to be a part of the – you know, we’re going here at the college, but it’s almost like we’re still isolated. You know, so it’s a little bit discouraging. I feel like, hey, I want a school ID, I want to feel a part of the school, but it’s separated. The program is still separate.

L. Fanion: Still, like down from us?

Speaker 2: Yeah.

L. Fanion: Okay. So next question, “Many students just state they left school because it was boring, the instruction was not or was irrelevant, the teachers stood in front of the class and lectured all day, the teachers never taught so they could understand, and learning was never fun or engaging. Do you like the way your teacher here teaches?”

Speaker 5: Yeah.

L. Fanion: Okay, and do you all feel the material you are learning is going to help to help you in the future?

Speakers: Yes.

L. Fanion: Okay, what could the teachers do here to enhance their teaching abilities?

Speaker 4: I think they do just fine.

Speaker 3: Yeah, they do.
L. Fanion: Okay, so going to the next question, "Many students also felt that the scheduling of classes was not flexible or convenient. Students felt classes were too long, or conflicting with personal responsibilities, or started too early. As a result, these factors did not encourage them to stay in school. Do you feel your classes are flexible and convenient, or they start too early?"

Speaker 2: They’re pretty flexible. You have a choice to come day or night. Yeah, and then they’re not long hours, so...

L. Fanion: So, if you can change anything about when your classes are offered, would you change anything?

Speakers: No.

L. Fanion: Okay, and the last question, "After completing my last research study again, and reviewing research for this study, I learned that in some cases students decide persist in adult-ed programs to pursue a GED for the very reasons they dropped out. For example, students who dropped out because of poor relationship with teachers, now persist because the teachers are supportive. Those who had negative peer influences, now persist because they feel supportive with positive peers in their classrooms."

Speaker 2: Right, that’s true.

L. Fanion: So, we talked earlier about why some of you all dropped out. "Do you feel the reason you left school is now the reason you persist?"

Speaker 2: Yeah.

L. Fanion: Why so?

Speaker 2: That’s a good question. The reason I left is the reason I persist, because it just makes sense. I left because I wasn’t supportive, and now I have a little bit more support, and I can’t explain why, I just know that I’m here. I’m here to stay until it’s over with.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 4: Well, I think the problem with a lot of schools is teachers have way too many kids to work with, and they just don’t have the time to work with
students in the class, because they get so booked with so many kids, and
then you got kids that don’t want to learn, you got kids that trying to cop
attitudes with the teacher, and just sit in class like they don’t want to do
anything, learn anything. So, I just think that a lot of schools today just
don’t know how to control their classrooms, so...

Speaker 6: I would like to say that when I went to school, I think we had wonderful
teachers back then they really tried, they worked hard, they were good. I
went to O’Keefe 8th and 9th grade, and I was making better grades that I’d
ever made in the elementary school. I was really getting it. The other
issues came out in 10th grade, and they just lost control. They just weren’t
used to what was going on, and they didn’t know how to handle it no
better than we did, so...

L. Fanion: And so now you feel this environment is more controlled.
Speaker 6: Yeah, this is nothing in comparison, but the teachers I had in high school
were good, also. I’m not blaming anything on the teachers, it was just I
think they lost control then, I mean...

L. Fanion: Okay.
Speaker 6: Yeah.

Speaker 2: I had to think about that question, because when you say the reason I
dropped out is the same reason why I’m coming back, right? I dropped
out to support my children, and now I’m going back to support them even
more. Because soon or later, they’re going to be going off to college, and
you’re going to need the extra help. They’re going to need the extra
financial stability and all of those things. So, you’re right. The exact
reason I dropped out is the exact reason I decided to go back.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 4: That’s if they’re going to be able to afford college. By the time they’re
ready, it’ll probably be like $200,000.

(Laughter)

Speaker 2: That’s why we got to make it happen as long as it’s determined.

L. Fanion: Well, I definitely appreciate you all participating. Many of the answers
you all gave were right on target for what I was already thinking.
Hopefully, my goal – the reason why I chose to do this research study is
because when I look at the numbers in the State of Georgia, of course, a lot of students drop out of school. We know that. That’s a problem we need to address, but what’s not always discussed is there are students who come back to pursue a GED. There’s not a lot of money to that goes to programs like this to support the programs. Teachers aren’t paid a lot. And even though a lot of students come back to pursue, a lot don’t persist in the program, so they drop in and out for years, so it’s not consistent. So there’s not a lot of accountability, so it’s kind of a gap.

We know students are coming back. Some are persistent, some are not. So, for those who are not persisting, what can we do to get those students to persist? Do we need to fund and provide more fund in those programs? Some programs have even--I suggested, once I finish, is what about--because you said, “Just give me a student ID. If we had social clubs, yes, I would join.” or you know, just things for you to feel a part of the school. So what if the state of Georgia said “Okay, we will pilot this program at Kennesaw State for students who are serious about getting their GEDs, the stay on campus. Would that increase persistence rates? Because then, it’s not distractions of paying your mortgage or your rent. You’re right there, you feel connected; you have people you can relate to, or mentors, and the undergraduate students. So, just give us some different alternatives or program delivery methods that could also help to meet their subgroup’s needs. Because you look at news, all you hear is high school drop outs. What about those who come back? There’s nothing there that talks about it.

Speaker 2: And then, coming back is much more harder than the first time.

L. Fanion: Exactly.

Speaker 2: Because you have all those issues of life, plus bigger responsibilities, and then to work, to me, is harder, because all that stuff has to be relearned. So, it’s harder the second time around.

L. Fanion: And most of the money right now is going in P-12, the public schools, and the younger students, but there’s not a lot in adult-ed, just because there’s not really...

Speaker 6: They really need to do more, I feel. Because there’s so many young bright people here. They need to spend more money—

L. Fanion: Exactly.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 6: --on trying to educate them. I mean, look at us, we’re statistics. They’re going to be like us.

L. Fanion: *O'Keefe state you want to go to college.*

Speaker 6: Yeah.

L. Fanion: When you come here [inaudible]

Speaker 6: Get it done, yeah.

L. Fanion: For those two years, here, we have paid for you to Kennesaw State. That way, you reinvest in the students. Because at the end of the day, the state of Georgia would benefit anyway. There’s workforce, there’s social capital, there’s human capital, but there’s--for some reason, it’s not there.

Speaker 2: That’s even more drive if you had that stability—

L. Fanion: Exactly.

Speaker 2: --knowing when I do this, here, I’m guaranteed to get an education,—

L. Fanion: Exactly.

Speaker 2: --because what’s next? Ok, we get our GED and then what? Even the students that are starting school now in K-12, they might not even be able to go to college, because of funds and stuff, so even though we’re doing a GED, do we have a chance? It’s almost like, you know, it’s like between a rock and hard plate.

Speaker 5: Well, the problem is that the state wastes so much money on unnecessary stuff. By the time they come up with all this stupid stuff, they don’t have any money to put towards education.

Speakers: Right.

Speaker 3: In Mexico, they have — I mean, you finish, like, high school; you can go to public school, like college is universities. You don’t have to pay anything. It’s just the books, and that’s it. And I don’t understand why in here, if you get well educated, it’s even harder and harder, I mean, moneywise.

Speaker 2: Yeah, financially.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 3: I mean you have money, you have education. If you don’t have money,...

Speaker 2: No you don’t, you’re limited, right.

L. Fanion: It’s like the gateway.

Speaker 2: Exactly.

Speaker: You have to get through that gate.

Speaker 5: Yeah, my daughter’s in college. She’s going to be a school teacher, she’s got a year left, but she—her books—she just bought books last week, and two books was $600. That is ridiculous. It doesn’t cost that much to make those two books, nowhere near!

Speaker 2: Even my daughter, she goes to like a mixed school. She goes to Kennesaw Mountain, and it’s a mixed school, but it’s more white than black, and a lot of those kids’ parents can afford to put them to go to college and stuff like that. She’s in 10th grade, and she’s already made the decision that she’s going to the Navy, because she’s concerned about being able to have further education. And, I can’t stop her, or make her decisions for her, because I know that I can’t afford for her to go to college.

Speaker 3: Yeah, I had a friend, and she was so worried because her daughter wanted to enroll to the army, because she wanted to go and learn to be a doctor. And she say, you can’t afford it. I have to enroll in this. And she was so worried about that.

Speaker 2: Yeah, and she’s so worried about that.

Speaker 6: But there are ways. Yeah, there are student loans, and my daughter is...

L. Fanion: Not student — Not—you mean, scholarships—I don’t want to tell my age, but I went to undergraduate for free. I did my masters’ program for free. I did my specialist program for free, but I was on the Internet researching everyday for scholarships. And there are a lot of a need-based scholarships when your parents don’t make a lot of money, you qualify as long as your grades are to par, which is why I always stress, like, make sure your grades are up. Like, if you’re poor, you can go to college for free, because there are so many need-based scholarships.

Speaker 6: You’re right in that middle—you’re right there where we don’t get nothing.
L. Fanion: But if you’re middle class, yeah, you’re going to suffer. Because you’re the class, you’re going to suffer that.

Speaker: That’s why she’s having to charge it all, and then she’ll pay it off the rest of her life.

L. Fanion: Yeah, middle class always suffers.

Speaker 2: But then that information is not even always available. You have to do individually research.

Speaker 3: And it’s like only few kids like you or, you know? And since a lot of kids they just want to have fun, they don’t think in the future, and they don’t have good grades, just go to school and pass the thing, you know what I mean? But yes, just a few, like, small, and mature, and researching, and all that, but not many.

Speaker 4: Well, the thing that makes it hard too is government. Government is so wasteful that by the time they spend everything, they can’t afford to pay teachers more money, and then they make it harder on the students. Because they got all this other wasteful stuff that they want to spend money on, and I mean, look at how medical insurance is going, and all these other insurances, by the time they blow the money on that stuff,...

L. Fanion: It’s gone.

Speaker 4: So that’s why I don’t ever understand the situation we’re in now. We’re up to like $14 trillion in debt.

Speaker 2: Yeah, definitely.

Speaker 4: I mean, how is a student got to be able to go to school and all this with all this wasteful government spending?

L. Fanion: But definitely stay motivated. I definitely applaud you all. I call my niece every night and try to encourage her like, please, just go back. She left school in 10th grade for she had a child in 10th grade. She didn’t like her teachers for various reasons. So maybe when she gets older but she still is 19. She’s young, life hasn’t set it in, we still help her out, so if they never stop helping her out, [inaudible]
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 2: You should drag her on a couple of these interviews with you and let her see. She don’t want to be our age and still...

Speaker 3: Maybe it’s like if the government advertised more to encourage the people on TV; you can go back to school. And then, okay, yeah, we’re tired of hearing every single time like this, but get into your head, and then maybe some people say okay, yeah they’re right, maybe I have to go to school.

L. Fanion: And it has to be something different, because you don’t want to come back and think, oh it’s the same horrible teachers, it’s the same way of teaching, they don’t care, there’s too many people in class. It has to be something different.

[Cross-talk]

Speaker 2: Because if I walked in the same old class, I think I would turn right back around.

L. Fanion: It has to be something different to keep people interested.

Speaker 3: Yeah, or some people don’t have information.

L. Fanion: Exactly, and that is a problem.

Speaker 3: They don’t know where to go.

L. Fanion: Where to go--and receive the help. But, I’m very interested to see why research shows, and if you all are interested in receiving a copy, I would definitely put your contact information on the back of your form.

Or if you have an email?

End of Audio
Duration: 35 minutes

Focus Group 2: CT/CLC

L. Fanion: Okay the first question says: After completing an extensive review of literature, I found that the overall conclusions on the impact of gender on student persistence is inconclusive. While some researchers state that females persist more than males, others say the exact opposite.
Appendix B (continued)

As a young lady, so for you two, what obstacles have you encountered as you persist towards acquiring your GED, and how would these obstacles prevent you from persisting?

Female 1: I haven’t seen them on the agenda thing.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Female 2: What did you say? What obstacles has stopped me from participating?

L. Fanion: What obstacles, that as being a woman do you think, you know, mother’s duties has affected your persistence or a wife duties having to go home to cook or clean. Do you think any of those have prevented you or been obstacles with your persistence?

Female 2: In the past or now?

L. Fanion: It can be the past or now.

Female 2: I think in the past, just simple immaturity.

L. Fanion: Okay. Okay. And gentlemen? Has there been any work duties or anything?

Male 1: Yeah it has kind of hindered my working schedule and a little bit of social life, nothing too much though, not too bad.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Male 2: It had stopped me from getting certain jobs. So that is the reason I am here.

L. Fanion: Okay. Have do you all think, the ladies have it easier or men in pursuing a GED? Or, do you think it is equal?

Female 2: I think it is equal.

Female 1: Yeah, I think it is equal too. They have outside GED, they have obstacle to work around like being a mom and having kids which is an obstacle work around that so the guys have work also that is an obstacle for them.

L. Fanion: Do you all feel the same way?
Appendix B (continued)

Everyone: Yes.

L. Fanion: Ok, because my other groups thought that men had it easier so this is a huge debate. (laughter)

Male 1: It is about 50-50.

L. Fanion: Okay second question. While reviewing the literature I also found out that age was highly associated with persistance. Most of the research confirmed that older students persisted at higher rates than younger students because they were more mature. However, others reported that younger students had a better chance to persist because they had less obligations than older students.

Do you all think older or younger students have more obstacles in persisting?

Male 1: Depends on the circumstances really.

Female 1: Yeah really, it varies.

L. Fanion: Why would you say it varies?

Female 1: Just because you are older doesn’t mean it is easier because some kids that are young have stuff they have to do still, even though they are not fully responsible for stuff. They still have other things they need to do just like the older people do.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Female 2: If they want to be here, they’ve made an open choice to do that. So, either sex is not going to let anything interfere with it.

L. Fanion: Okay. Okay, and going to question 3. Although a lot of researchers and a lot of persistance factors, study students and colleges, they found that race was often related to persistance. They say that minority student’s often felt discriminated in schools because of their race, while other students persisted because they had more social gap than their minority counterparts.

Do you all consider race has any impact in a student’s ability to persist?

Male 1: It is really the person’s goals.
Appendix B (continued)

Female 2: What they grow up around, I always say you are in the predicament because you choose to be there. We can always make a change and a lot of us don’t make a change because like I am 60, and I didn’t choose to make a change with my education, but I am here now making a change. For a long time I felt well, maybe I am too old. You are getting too old, you are getting too old, but you are never too old to get an education.

Male 1: I don’t think race has anything to do with it because there are minorities that are far more smarter than half of the Caucasians or even illegal immigrants, or any people. It just depends on the person, really.

L. Fanion: For the younger students or if their parents are still living; are your parents very supportive of your decision to return?

Male 2: My family is, my brothers and sisters and my kids.

Female 2: Mine is not.

L. Fanion: Really?

Female 2: It is like, one of the fall downs for me not finishing my schooling was because my family. My sister, which is like a year younger than me, she can tell you what page and answer it is on, which paragraph it is in. And me here, I am studying and studying for 3 hours and still can’t pass the test, or barely pass the test. So, she was praised and openly with anybody my father and mother came in contact. It was degrading to me, I felt like a lesser person. I became disinterested in trying to do good in school, so therefore I lost total interest of it because I had no support. I also have no support now. My son he is 33, my youngest child, and I told him I was going to be late coming home – because I live with him and his wife and my grandson. He said, “Well why?” I said, “Well I am going to get my GED, I am going to class.” “Well you don’t need to do that.” “You are too old for that.” I said okay, whatever. I didn’t let that affect me this time because you know it’s for me, it’s not for somebody else. It’ for me, you know.

L. Fanion: Do either of you have any mentors in your community that encourage you, like church members or maybe a role model that you look up to?

Everyone: (Silence)

L. Fanion: Okay we go to the next question? (laughter)
A few years ago, I completed a study where I interviewed high school dropouts who attended an Adult Ed program in Tennessee and I asked them what reasons or what caused you to leave school?

I learned that the students either were academically incompetent or they had challenges in school with as far as struggling in math or reading. So a lot of those students felt discouraged because they felt they were not smart enough to graduate.

How has your high school preparation helped or hindered to your progress in the program?

Female 2: Well, for me I was very, very smart. I made straight A’s in biology and science and that was just my bag. Even to this day, when I have idle time, I find myself reading something about medical information, diet information, you know stuff like that. Nutrition. But my average was a good C, so it wasn’t that issue. For me, it was just a lack of interest and immature. Not knowing what the future had to come, because they don’t show you that or teach you that in school. You have no idea what’s out there.

Even my daughter when she finished her second year of college, she’s 35 and gone back to college and finished her degree and got her masters and that encouraged me.

I think if the schools would show you. Maybe take a year off and say, okay you go and you feel like you would like to do this certain profession and let them experiment, 6 months into that profession. Then we would have a better idea of what is out there as a young person. Because my daughter like I say, she is like, “Gosh if I had known all of this, I would have stayed at home and not got a job and done all this other stuff.” She had bills, bills, and bills and then she realized she needed to further her education.

L. Fanion: Okay, and what else did you feel that high school prepared you, or did they not prepare you?

Male 1: I feel like they prepared me a little bit, going over the same classes pretty much basic stuff that we learned in 9th -10th grade that is now helping us in class. Everybody in this class has a general idea of what’s going on. I feel like everybody in the class can pass, we are all in here for a reason. I feel the school helps everybody out. I don’t know that is just my take on it.
Appendix B (continued)

Female 2: And also you know when you are in school at that young age, I am like “What is this going to show me in the future? What is this for?” But now when I am doing it, I am saying, “Oh that is what that was for?”

Male 1: And you remember little bits and pieces.

L. Fanion: What was your favorite subject in high school. I will just go around. Favorite subject?

Male 2: I just go to school.

Male 1: Social Studies.

L. Fanion: Least favorite.

Male 1: Math.

L. Fanion: Favorite subject?

Female 2: Biology.

L. Fanion: Least favorite?

Female 2: Least favorite was probably math.

L. Fanion: Favorite?

Female 1: Math.

L. Fanion: Least favorite?

Female 1: Social studies.

L. Fanion: Okay. (laughter) So as you think back, you said you made A’s, but your average was probably a C in school. What types of grades did the rest of you make?

Female 1: Mine was all A’s, other than that B’s and C’s, sometimes lower.

Male 2: I struggled all the way through, because my dad died when I was just 6 months old, and if I wanted anything I had to start working for it. I was working before I went to school. I never really learned how to read and
write. I overheard one of the teacher’s telling one of them we will just pass him and get grant money out of him, and that is when I quit. When I heard that song. They really didn’t care all they wanted was their grant money. So I didn’t see no use staying.

That is when I came here, and I still can hardly read and write. I asked them, “Do they want me to quit?” They said, “No don’t you quit because you will learn how, so try to stick it out.”

Female 1: Yeah I wasn’t a good reader. I’m sorry go ahead.

Male 1: It’s fine.

Female 2: I wasn’t a good reader either or writer, I scribbled. So, earlier to help myself, I would read signs, I would ready anything I could find to read. I didn’t know the vowels and I didn’t know the sounds of the syllables and all of that, but I forced myself to do better.

Male 1: I had mostly C’s. I had a few honor classes but like halfway through it I dropped out. I don’t know. I did good in some classes, unless it was something like physical stuff like P.E. or weight lifting. I was mostly like C’s and B’s. Like high C’s, low B’s.

L. Fanion: Okay. Question 5. A few students also just admitted that they were not motivated enough to graduate from high school. They reported they did not care about school, and did not feel that they had the ability to graduate from high school. So most demonstrated that they lacked self-ethicacy or belief in themselves regarding their ability to attain their goals. Do you feel that you have what it takes to obtain your GED?

Male 2: Yeah, I am trying. I have been coming here for going on 2 years, so I haven’t given up yet.

Male 1: Yeah, I feel like I can get this now. I don’t think anything is going to hinder me. I am ready to get this over and done with. It has been way too long. I dropped out when I was 17, it has been like 2 years now. So I am just ready to get this put behind me and move onto starting onto college; just start life.

Female 2: I don’t think anything is going to stop me this time. I tried to get started 3-4 different other times in the past. I started my profession in a restaurant, and a restaurant takes up all of your time that you don’t have anything to do. It pays good money. I was like 21 years old, making $35,000, it pays
good money, but you don’t have a life. Years ago, they didn’t offer insurance, so I am here I am 60 years old, I have no savings because all I have done is work in a restaurant all my life; managed restaurants. So, it’s time for me now. I have 4 children and it is time for me.

Also, I’ve found that you really can’t have a good job nowadays unless you are, “in the restaurant business” because it takes all your time. But you got to have a high school diploma of some sort, you just got to have it. Just that piece of paper.

L. Fanion: Okay. Currently are any of you having any difficulties in any areas in class right now?

Female 2: Math. (Laughter)

Male 2: Not all of them.

L. Fanion: Okay next question. Research shows that many student’s stay in school when they are surrounded by positive peers and friends. And at other times, student’s disengage with school when they lack positive peers or friends who encourage them to do well.

Do you have any friends in this program with you, and if so, how are they doing?

Female 1: Yes, and they’re good.

Male 1: No.

Male 2: No.

Female 1: My sister.

L. Fanion: Oh okay. How do your friends outside the program feel about your decision to get your GED?

Male 1: Good. They feel like I am actually doing stuff now and they are encouraging me to keep pushing through and get this done.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Female 1: Supportive.
L. Fanion: Okay. Do any of you have any friends who distract you?

Male 1: Yes, many.

L. Fanion: How do they distract you?

Male 1: “Let’s go to the club tonight.” “Let’s go do something.” You know, just normal teenagers stuff.

L. Fanion: Do any of you have any friends in college?

Male 1: Yes, lots.

Female 1: Yes.

Male 2: I got a niece.

L. Fanion: Your niece? Okay, going to question 7. Research also shows that students are less likely to persist when they do not have support from their family members or when they have family obligations. Describe how your family supports your decision to pursue your GED? Does anyone have a supportive family at home, who supports you?

Female 1: Mine helps with my boys, I have 2 little boys and I had to go out an get daycare and [inaudible] keep my mind clear [inaudible] for a few hours.

Male 1: I have a pretty supportive mom and dad base. Everybody besides that, I mean they matter, but that is my main roots right there, so they are pretty supportive.

Male 2: My wife [inaudible].

L. Fanion: Your wife, okay. Do any of you have any family members who discourage you from persisting? I think you said your son?

Female 2: Well he is like, what is the use, at my age?

L. Fanion: Okay. Do any of you have any family besides your parents or kids who support you?

Male 1: Yes, my uncle and my grandma, they support me.
Appendix B (continued)

Female 2: My oldest daughter, she went back to school, she dropped out. She went back to school, that was probably 20 years ago and she encourages me.

L. Fanion: Okay. Going on to question 8, we have 2 more left. I hope I am not driving you crazy. One of the key reasons students gave for dropping out of high school was poor relationships with teachers. Men describe their teachers as being unsupportive, uncaring, mean, or just collecting a paycheck. On the same hand, the students were asked what kept them in school for as long as they stayed, many did credit a special teacher they could remember.

How have your teacher’s in the past encouraged you to persist?

Female 1: Some that I didn’t like or like who downgraded me I just stayed there to prove them wrong and show them that I can do it. Everyone has their favorites. [inaudible].

Female 2: Yeah, I think favorites and “clicks” sort of speak, groups are a lot of pressure on teens, especially if there is a shy teen or withdrawn person. That was one main reason why I wasn’t also interested in school, everything was a click. But my biology teacher, you couldn’t ask for a better supportive person to the whole classroom. My history teacher is like, “Okay, well this is just how it is.”

L. Fanion: Are your teachers here very supportive?

Female 2: Yes. They are yeah.

L. Fanion: Would you say more supportive than your high school teachers?

Everyone: Definitely.

Male 1: Yeah.

L. Fanion: Okay. So just say, one day you didn’t come to class, what do they do, call you at home, or do they question you the next day?

Male 1: Yes for sure, definitely.

L. Fanion: Okay. Do they stay late after class to assist you in any way?

Male 1: Yes.
Female 1: Yes.

L. Fanion: Okay. Question 9. The students in my previous study also consistently stated that they did not feel like a part of their schools. They either felt there were too many rules, the principals were too strict, or the culture was unwelcoming. As a result these student’s did not feel like they belonged at the school, they did not have a sense of belonging. So in this program here, do you feel like you belong? Do you feel like you are supported by everybody in class?

Everyone: Yes.

L. Fanion: Okay. What could the program do to make student’s feel more welcome?

Maybe those who don’t feel as welcome as you do, can they do anything differently?

Male 1: Maybe just more group activities or just getting to know people is all.

L. Fanion: Many students just stated that they left school because it was boring. Their instruction was irrelevant, the teachers just stood in front of class and just lectured all day.

Do you like the way your teachers here, teach? And if so, why?

Female 1: They do a lot of activities and everything and they just want to know what you can understand, especially Heidi she makes it fun, she makes up jokes [inaudible].

Female 2: They care, I am sure they care, but it is not vitally important how long it takes for everybody to participate. The participation gets us together, it makes us feel that we belong.

L. Fanion: Okay. Okay. Do you feel the material or the subject matter that you are currently learning is going to help you in the future?

Everyone: Yes, definitely.

L. Fanion: Okay. What could your teacher’s do differently to enhance their teaching abilities?

Female 1: Nothing in my eyes.
Female 2: What can they do different? I think they are doing great. Classroom participation is so important, like you say. A lot of teachers when you are young, and you are in school, they just stand there and lecture, they don’t care if you are listening or not. You know, and no classroom participation. “Did you do your homework?” “Hand it in.”

Okay this is what we are going to study today, and on and on and on and talk. For me, that gets very boring, very boring after awhile. You are just like, duh, one class to the next class for 6 hours.

L. Fanion: Do you feel that the classes here are very convenient and flexible?

Male 1: For the most part.

Female 1: They give you the options of morning and afternoon and what days and stuff [inaudible].

L. Fanion: Okay could they change anything there with the flexibility of classes, maybe weekend classes?

Male 2: Maybe, perhaps.

Female 1: Maybe for someone else it might be better, but for me I like the week classes.

L. Fanion: The last question. After completing my last research study and reviewing research for this study, a lot in some cases students decide to persist in their programs to pursue their GED for the very same reasons they dropped out.

For example: Student’s who dropped out because of poor relationship with teachers, now persist because they have encouraging teachers. Or students who left probably because they were teenage parents, now persist because they have kids they want to be a role model for.

Why did you leave school and do you think this reason now encourages you to persist?

Male 1: That is a tough question.

Female 1: I left because I was stupid and moved out at a young age. I was in the tenth grade when I moved out and I moved clear across town and I had
one vehicle and I was sharing it with the guy that I was with at the time, and in order to get up and get to work and for him to get to work and for him to get to work and for me to get to school, I had to get up at 4:30 every morning and then going to work after school and everything and getting home late and getting up at 4:30 [inaudible] and now I have kids that I have to support to get my GED and get a degree and support them.

Female 2: I left because I was immature and I wanted, well how old are you?

Male 1: I am 53 in March.

Female 2: Okay, and years ago, we were taught, we grow up as girls and have families. So I was ready to have my family. School was just not interesting. What was the reason for it? Now I am like, I got to accomplish something I did not accomplish a long time ago.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Male 2: I failed in the ninth grade, I got a job and I just quit. So I just moved on.

L. Fanion: Okay, so now you persist because you want more job opportunities?

Male 2: I want to do this because I have always wanted my high school education. So, [inaudible].

Male 1: I feel that mine, really I was a trouble maker in high school, like class clown and stuff and I would just do stuff to get laughs. Then I turned 17 and that’s when you go to real jail. You know, I had a few run ins with that so, school was just kind of always on my back page because I was always getting in so much trouble. Now that I have grown up a little bit, I am not saying I have fully matured or even a man yet, but I feel like I am getting there. I mean, it’s just I don’t want to get in trouble anymore I just want to get this stuff behind me and get my GED and be done with all this.

L. Fanion: Okay, this is the very last one I promise. The student said the [inaudible] campus stated they would like the school to do things like giving the students id’s and have clubs for them to join.

How do you all feel about that, do you think you would be a part of what social clubs are doing?

Male 1: Yes.
Appendix B (continued)

L. Fanion: Do you think that would increase you to persist?

Male 1: Yes.

L. Fanion: Okay, why so?

Male 1: Because when you feel like you are a part of something or involved, it makes you like more determined to go there, like get what you need to get done and if you are not a part of anything or like you feel like unwanted. Like this lady said, it makes you just feel crappy about yourself. You don’t want to go to school. You don’t want to do anything but like hang out with your friends that actually care about you. Even if they are bad friends or good friends, you just don’t care. Because at least someone wants you. I feel that passes or even little name tags or stuff like that, like AB Clubs, that probably makes it a lot easier for some kids.

L. Fanion: Do you all agree?

Everyone: Yes.

L. Fanion: Okay. Well thank you all for your participation. That was my last question. I am going to pause it. Does anyone have any questions, or anything?

Everyone: No.

L. Fanion: I definitely wish you all much success. I think it is very admirable that you are definitely persisting now. Just definitely stay positive. I am so tired of school right now, I don’t know what to do. But definitely stay positive. That is definitely a great thing that is something you can look back on and say I did this for myself. So, definitely good luck.

Everyone: Thank you.

L. Fanion: Thank you.

Male 2: No problem.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 26:58
Focus Group 3: GPC

L. Fanion:  Ok so before we get started I’m going to ask you all a few questions about your reasons to persist this is a time to tell because at the end of the day this research is used to help others. Plus it would really help me too, as well. When you speak try to speak one at a time. Don’t be shy, don’t whisper. Just be honest, tell how you feel, because this is your chance again to state how you felt throughout this process. So I’m going to audio record you, I will not use your name again, it’s just for me to give the data. So we have two records, I’ll put one in the middle. So if you speak just speak loud so it can pick your voice up. Ok, so the first question says after completing an extensive review of literature I found the overall conclusions on the impact of gender on student persistence is inconclusive. While some researchers state that females persist more than males, others say the exact opposite. So ladies, as a young lady what obstacles have you encountered as you persist towards acquiring your GED, and how did these obstacles prevent you from persisting?

Speaker 2:  Well I was trying to get my GED years back and I had a child, a small child, so that was really hard for me to have a trusting day care and go to school and work, it was really rough so I kind of just dropped out and worked for Wendy’s for like seven years. I’m not working at Wendy’s and I want to better educate myself because I have a 12 year old daughter and she – I want her to be able to come to me if she needs help in areas you know, and I want to get my GED so I can get a better job. Because you can’t even get a job cleaning in the hospital without a GED. You know you’ve got to have a GED to survive. So that’s why I pursue it, my GED.

L. Fanion:  Ok. Anything to share? We’ll get you warmed up. So gentlemen, what obstacles have you faced as a man? Do you think it’s like anything work related? You know, you have to go work versus coming class?

Speaker 3:  If you’re a man you’ve got to work

L. Fanion:  Ok.

Speaker 3:  You’ve got to work. Somebody’s got to bring the bacon in.

L. Fanion:  Yeah. Anyone have anything else different?

Speaker 4:  Mainly it’s during my life and finding the things I’m interested in. if you don’t have a GED well guess what, you just can’t excel. I’m very good at
what I do, however that diploma, that piece of paper is recognized, and no matter how skilled or fluent or educated you think you are, unless you have that diploma it’s just not recognized.

L. Fanion: Ok. Do you all think women versus men have more obstacles or do you think it’s equal?

Speaker 3: I think it’s equal.

Speaker 2: I think it’s – I think women have more obstacles.

L. Fanion: Why do you say that?

Speaker 5: Because we’ve got to be a wife, we’ve got to be a mother. You know, most now day times you’re working; it takes two to make it in this day and time, both father and mother. You know, so you’re trying to balance four things and it’s a lot. It’s like you’re never done, you always have something to do, you never can just get caught up because there’s always something you have to do. You just get exhausted and then you get and feel like you’re not appreciated because you’re so stressed out because you have so much on your plate.

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker 2: That’s how I feel too. Being a mother, me myself I’m a single parent. So it is a challenge. You’ve got to juggle so much and you’ve got keep focused, it’s – that’s a challenge.

Speaker 5: Yes it is.

L. Fanion: And Jerome have any input? No he said he thinks it’s equally important, right? Or equally the same?

Speaker 3: Equally the same.

L. Fanion: Ok. So going to question two. I also found that age was highly associated with persistence. Most of the research confirmed that older students persist at higher rates than younger students because they were more mature. On the contrary others report that younger students don’t have any obligations, they’re not working, they’re stay at home mom and dads, so they feel that younger students may persist more. So students, if you consider yourself older are it easier to get your GED now versus when you were younger?
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 5: I don’t think, I think when you’re younger like I said you don’t have a lot on your plate, don’t have a lot of obligations. You know your parent most of the time will take you and pick you up. All you have to do is just focus on that. But when you’re older it’s a little harder but you take it more seriously and you pursue it more because you know what you have to do, you know you have to get this accomplished to move forward and go to the next step. So that’s what I think.

L. Fanion: Ok. Anyone else?

Speaker 4: One of the best things that I look at is that being older you don’t have the distractions that you had in high school. You don’t have the peer pressure, you don’t have to, you know, have the girlfriend or are the class clown, which I already am, but you know. You can just be more focused. And I have to admit when I do good in a class and a teacher says so, or an instructor, it makes me feel great.

L. Fanion: Ok. Were you going to say something?

Speaker 6: Well I know me as a 22 year old, I just couldn’t do it in school. First of all my parents didn’t give a crap. And now I have two really good jobs, I own my own home, I find it easier for me to come in now and get my GED versus back when I was a student.

Speaker 2: So you all do think that age makes a difference?

Crowd: Yes.

L. Fanion: Yes, so going to question three. Although a lot of researchers analyzing persistence factors study students in four year colleges, they found that race was often sometimes related to persistence. They say that minority students often felt discriminated in school because of their race while more white students persist because they had more social capital than their minority counterparts. So thinking about race, do you all think race has anything to do with students likelihood to persist?

Speaker 2: At the same time I don’t think so, but maybe years ago it did. But times are changed. I mean it all depends on the individual. You now, and like I said how mature and how willing how far you are willing to go to pursue your education.

L. Fanion: Ok.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 6: I don’t think race is a big factor as much as your financial standing versus like going to school when – I forgot what I was going to say.

Speaker 2: I mean when it comes to money it has no color, either you’ve got the money that you’ve got to do it or you don’t have the money and that could be anybody. And it doesn’t play a part in the race.

L. Fanion: Ok. Going to question four. A few years ago when I was in my master’s program I completed a study where I interviewed high school dropouts about the reasons they initially left school. I learned that those students were either academically competent or they had challenges in school with math or reading. So meaning some felt they did not possess the academic potential to graduate, while others felt school was too easy. How has your previous high school preparation helped you in the program, or has it hindered you in the program?

Speaker 6: It helped me a lot.

L. Fanion: High school? Ok.

Speaker 6: I mean I was a pretty average student in school. I left school because of motivation reasons. My reading skills, my reading and writing skills are higher than – they’re at like an 11th grade level. My speaking skills aren’t as high because I have a speech impediment but my speaking skills are there.

L. Fanion: Ok, anyone else?

Speaker 7: Well I have to say that I’m 54. The things that they’re teaching the kids today would have been 12th grade in my era, in today its fourth grade. It’s phenomenal. It’s amazing what I remember from high school, however I didn’t’ leave high school because of academics. It was kind of a completely different reason. I mean basically I was a C student, I wasn’t great, I wasn’t bad however I was in a really bad car wreck and two psychologists and a psychiatrist told me don’t go back to school. And I went why? Because the ridicule that you’ll receive as a 15 year old boy. And I went, well if people can’t accept me for the way I am, oh well. However, they were right. So the ridicule and the fact that I almost killed a boy for reasons that I couldn’t take it anymore, really set me aside and back then in those days you didn’t have home school. So it was like quit, get a job, go to work, do the best you can with the information you’ve got and build on that.
Appendix B (continued)

L. Fanion: Ok. So what kind of grades did you all make in high school? I’ll just start here.

Speaker 2: I was a B/C student.

Speaker 4: Pretty average.

Speaker 3: B/C.

Speaker 7: A/B

Speaker 5: Math was one of my hardest subjects so that was always at a D level, or maybe even F it was really one of my hardest ones, but other than that C.

L. Fanion: And what was your favorite subject in high school? I’ll start here.

Speaker: Science.

Speaker 2: Social studies.

Speaker 7: Science too.

Speaker 3: Shop

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker: Science.

Speaker 5: Language arts.

Speaker: Ok, and least favorite. I’ll start here.

Speaker 5: Social studies.

Speaker 7: Math.

Speaker 3: Math.

Speaker 2: Math.

Speaker 7: Social studies I would guess.
L. Fanion: Next question five. Additionally a few students admitted they were not motivated enough to graduate from high school. They report they did not care about school and did not feel they had the ability to graduate. So most demonstrated that they lacked self-efficacy or belief in themselves regarding their ability to obtain their goals. Do you all feel you have what it takes to obtain your GED? If so, why?

Speaker 2: I do now, but when I was younger I didn’t have a lot of self-confidence. I was my worst enemy and I would always tell myself I couldn’t do this, I couldn’t do this. But now as I matured I can do whatever I need to do if I just set my mind to it. So I think that’s got a lot to do with maturing.

Speaker 6: I’m motivated, on the right path I mean things are going good and it seemed like a good time to jump back on the bandwagon.

L. Fanion: Ok, anyone else?

Speaker 3: There ain’t no better time than now.

L. Fanion: Exactly.

Speaker 7: Well now that I have a goal in life, something to strive for, and actually find that I can do the work, that’s a great motivator. Because I have a goal that’s very dear to my heart so hopefully.

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker 5: I think a goal, that motivates you. You know need this now and back then when I was younger I probably could have graduated but I guess I didn’t have so much support. It was just that my mom works more, my step dad he was out, it was just me and my brother so I didn’t have so much support. I guess now that I have children and I want to better myself now, it’s like it’s a must. So yeah.

Speaker 2: Can I say one more thing? Reflecting on what she was saying, when I was growing up my mom had seven kids, two boys and two girls and she split with my dad when I was just a baby so she worked two jobs. So my mom wasn’t home a lot and my oldest brothers were drop outs and doing things that they shouldn’t be doing instead of being a good role model for me. I wanted to do what they did. As soon as I could I didn’t go to school because I wanted to hang out with older people and I didn’t have a lot of motivation when I was growing up too. I think that plays a big role in children. They say it’s like, my 12 year old daughter, I’m always on her
Appendix B (continued)

about school she’s a really good student and I want to break that cycle. I want her to graduate and do the things that she wants to do.

L. Fanion: Exactly go. So going to question 6, research shows that many students stay in school when positive peers and friends surround them. Or they can disengage and stop persisting in perusing GEDs if they have negative peers around them. Do you have friends in this program, and if so how are they doing?

Speaker 5: Well I have two friends, actually we worked together for a few years we worked at the same location. They’re doing pretty good and they’re positive and they always encourage you to do better and just keep on trying don’t give up (inaudible 15:50) they’re really motivating.

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker 5: I was really glad to see them here.

L. Fanion: That’s good to have a familiar face. How do you all think your friends outside of the program feel? They support you?

Speaker 7: Yeah. They’re amazed, let’s put it that way.

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker 5: The friends I have now are not like those friends I had when I was younger, they’re always encouraging and supporting me, you know just there for me and if I need help with anything and they all know I’m in school, especially at church. They’re all if you need help with math, my son is great at math, you know they’re always encouraging me so. It makes a big difference to have – to be around positive people. If you stay around positive people you know, it’ll make you want to do things and just be positive.

L. Fanion: Do most of your friends have their GEDs or high school diploma?

Speaker 7: All of my friends have their high school diplomas. And then some.

Speaker 5: My husband, he went to school, went to college. Gavin’s a smart man and he’s too smart for his pants.
Appendix B (continued)

L. Fanion: So next question research also shows students are less likely to persist when they don’t have support from their family. If your family does support you, how do they support you?

Speaker 5: I’ll go first I guess. Well my family does support me, and like I said I have a husband and a daughter and you know they’re always giving me my time to study. Making sure ok, you need to work on school, yeah and they just encourage me, do your best, we know you can do it and so they’re always saying little things like that that helps me.

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker 2: My mom and my family, my mom and brother, youngest brother. And he’s always pushing me because he’s just earlier this month entered in the military, into the army so he’s supported me and saying when I’m gone, I want you – when I get back I want you to have at least almost finished up your GED and so I want you to keep pushing, I want you to keep focused so yeah, my family I love them. They support me, yeah.

L. Fanion: So does anyone have family who is not supportive?

Speaker 6: I wouldn’t say my family’s not supportive but they’re not there to help me through this journey. I’ve got – they didn’t want to help me when I was in high school so I’m just kind of myself.

Speaker 7: Just like my oldest sister is an English major, PhD and she just retired from the board of education in Pollard County and when I put on my Facebook that it was time for me to get back get my GED the first comment I got was from her and she asked me are you sick, are you dying? What’s the problem? So that’s –

L. Fanion: Ok, go on to question 8. One of the key reasons students gave for dropping out of high school was poor relationships with teachers. Many described their teachers as being unsupportive, uncaring, mean or just collecting a paycheck. On the same hand when students were asked what kept them in school for as long as they stayed at least several students cited there was one special teacher that pushed them through school. So thinking just presently in this program, how do your teachers encourage you to persist toward your GED?

Speaker 5: My math teacher, you know who she is, she is very motivating and always pushing us, saying we can do it and she makes it fun ad she’s very supportive and if when she shows us one way and we’re not getting it one
way she’ll show us another way to make it because everybody learns different. So she kind of gets a feel of, you know, what’s easier for you. She’ll show two or three different choices, which one works the best for you. And she’s really just very motivated.

Speaker 7: It’s amazing how these instructors are and I was totally expecting to come in here and have the instructor just be a teacher and have not take interest in the students. You now, it’s like you dropped out of school and now you’re just now coming back to get your GED? Well – but I’m telling you they’re the most caring, understanding, patient human beings I’ve met in a long time.

L. Fanion: So if you have a question after class they stay after class and answer that question?

Speaker 7: Absolutely.

Speaker 5: Yes.

L. Fanion: And going to question 9, students in a previous study also consistently stated they do not feel like a part of their schools. They either felt there were too many rules, too strict, or the culture was unwelcoming. As a result these students left school because they felt like they did not belong. Do you feel like you belong to this program? Everyone pretty much yes?

Speaker 7: Yes, very much so.

L. Fanion: Ok. What about to the school as a whole. When you consider Technical College A College?

Speaker 7: I’ve got to tell you, the first what was it, it was the first week that I was here the instructors found out a little bit about me with the American Red Cross Disaster team and taught in a lot of things including medical. There were two medical emergencies in the building and one of the instructors came to the classroom and said Robert, can I see you for a minute? And you know, to help in the situation. That was amazing. But then they just take so much interest and the school is so – it actually has interest in how we do.

L. Fanion: Ok. So some of you didn’t feel connected to the school as a whole maybe as far as Technical College A to the program. What could the school do to make you feel more connected? In my other sites people say that giving student ID cards that said Technical College A College or having clubs for
Appendix B (continued)

you all to join like having social organizations. What do you all think? Would it matter?

Speaker 5: I mean as long as you’ve got the teachers that really care, you know that really show concern I think that’s what counts.

Speaker 7: To me it seems that those things are prestige and you know, looking for recognition. I’m not here for that, I’m here to learn and –

L. Fanion: Ok. And going to the next question, students also felt their teachers in high school were not very engaged, they just stood up to the front of the class and lectured. So consider and compare high school to now, do you like the way your teachers teach in class now?

Speaker 5: Yes, absolutely.

Speaker 3: Yes.

L. Fanion: And do you feel in the school you are presently learning is going to help you in the future?

Crowd: Yes.

L. Fanion: Do you? Or do you feel some is like, why are we learning this?

Speaker 5: Yeah some of the things, I mean there’s two things that I’m thinking. When it comes to math, we do math every day and every bit that they teach you helps.

L. Fanion: So what could your teachers do here to improve how they teach? Could they do anything differently?

Speaker 2: Take time. If you don’t understand they’re willing to help.

L. Fanion: Ok. So everything is fine, you wouldn’t do any changes to anything?

Speaker 5: Well just this one teacher of mine will call me names but I think she teaches a little too fast. Like you know, we’re going over stuff and she’ll give us a few weeks to do it and then she’ll go over it but I can’t even mark my answers different she’s done went over it. But other than that, just slow down a little bit. Not all of them, it’s just this one that’s like my goodness. But other than that they’re all pretty great.
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L. Fanion: Many students felt the scheduling of classes were not convenient or flexible. Do you feel your classes here are flexible?

Speaker 7: Absolutely.

Speaker 5: Well, I like the night schedule but I was trying to go to day shift and they have a thing where you can do three days, but when I filled it out they said I had another day which was four days and I really couldn’t commit to four days, so I had to go back to nights. And I think there should be a schedule where it can be three days or four days instead of just four days because you know, we do have other things we have to do at home and stuff, and you still have to work and pay bills. You know, so I think they should have a three day daytime class for people that can’t do four days.

L. Fanion: Ok, does anyone else have an answer?

Speaker 6: The only thing I’m worried about is the contact hours, you’ve got to spend so many hours online or do with the skills tutor, and I also work in emergency management. I work with FEMA so I—they could deploy me to Iowa for a snow storm and the whole program would be shot for me.

L. Fanion: So if you left this program and went to Iowa, (inaudible 2535)

Speaker 6: It can because that job would be 24 hours.

L. Fanion: Got you. So you would need some more accessible -

Speaker 6: Yes, I wouldn’t be able to get online to do the tests.

L. Fanion: Ok. And this is the last question. After completing my last research study in doing the research for this study I’m learning on some cases students persist in their programs to pursue their GED for the same reasons that they dropped out. For example students who dropped out because they did not like their teachers, they now persist because they have supportive teachers. Or students who were teen moms in high school left school because they had kids, they now come back to be a role model for their kids. First question is why did you leave school, and do you think the reason you left school now is related to why you persist? I know it’s kind of a heavy question.

Speaker5: I left school, and it’s the reason why I left school I’m here now. It’s not for me. I left school because I was hanging out with the wrong kind of people, negative people. And dropped out and wanted to hang out and do
whatever, didn’t want to, you know, didn’t have no motivations so that’s the reason. I didn’t have, like I said, my mom had seven kids, but not having a lot of support there is the reason why I dropped out. The reason why I’m back today is because I want to better myself, in order to do that I have to get a GED to get a better job and be a good role model for my daughter.

L. Fanion: Ok. Anyone else? So I’ll just start here, tell me why you left school initially, ok?

Speaker 2: I left school because of peer pressure. Hanging out the wrong negative people, because they weren’t caring about their education and so – I’m the same way. Pretty much that, yeah.

L. Fanion: Ok, you said now you have some positive friends around you, so they have some influence as to why you persist? Like knowing you can come to class and see your previous co-worker? If you don’t come she may call and say girl why weren’t you in class tonight? Do you think that makes a difference?

Speaker 2: Well, it does. It really do. Like I said my mom and my brothers, they may be supportive also but they not here. They in another city, so yeah, pretty much it helps, yes.

L. Fanion: So why’d you leave school?

Speaker 6: Just unmotivated and my parents weren’t there to pressure me. But now I am motivated. My parents are still not there, I don’t have anybody to push me but I like pushing myself.

Speaker 3: I had to go to work.

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker 3: And I don’t have no family here. There ain’t nobody here but me, myself and I.

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker 3: That’s it.

L. Fanion: OK. So why’d you choose to come back?
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Speaker 3: I needed it to be able to press forward in my job.

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker 4: Because of the country education system. In my country when we fail two times in high school, we are not allowed to attend anymore. So –

L. Fanion: So if you fail two classes –

Speaker 4: Two years. You are not allowed to study in the same.

L. Fanion: And where are you from?

Speaker 4: Burma. And then when I was in high school I have enough education but I failed because when I – when we have exam, I how do you say, (inaudible 30:12) in exam a lot of people cheat. They went ahead and score my concentrate and three times over and I fail somebody who would never study, a drinker person, they pass and they’re now they’re colleagues. Any time my level is A or B, (inaudible 31:02) exam test two years over, and then I’m not allowed to go into our education system.

L. Fanion: Oh wow. So is that the reason why you’re coming here back?

Speaker 4: Yeah. I joined Theology and now I’m a pastor. I got my doctor of theology now in religion, but that’s it. But here I think I need to get something from this so I need to develop my education.

L. Fanion: Ok.

Speaker 7: So you’re excited about learning, to be able to go more than two years.

L. Fanion: Well thank everyone. Did you go?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I went. I was the first one remember?

L. Fanion: Thank you everyone for participating. I really appreciate it, I really think it’s admirable that you all did choose to come back because what better time than now. My goal in doing this research is to – it’s a really lofty goal here – is of course present this research to the state to see what type of models could we offer differently. For example if we have younger students, what if we take those students out of their home environments, place them in college campuses to get their GEDs and maybe Georgia State. If they obtain their GED then offer them tuition to go to college so
there's some continuity. Because my question is once students get their GED, then what? What option do you have in place for those students, you know to make sure they get the jobs they want. So it's a lofty goal, but that's what I'm shooting for. We'll see what comes from it. So keep persisting forward, keep doing a great job, and it's definitely something I've been trying to convince my niece to go back. My mom says when she's ready, you know she'll go back.

Speaker 7: That's right.

L. Fanion: We'll just be the support system for her.

Speaker 7: You can't force anybody.

L. Fanion: I feel like I'm talking to a wall sometimes, but I know she's listing but it's on her time. So I'm fine with that.

Speaker 5: She'll realize oh I've got to go back to school.

L. Fanion: She's still young. But thank you all so, so, so much. Nice meeting you all.

Speaker 5: Good luck on your research.

Speaker 7: And you'll get your PhD.

L. Fanion: My goal is to be finished in May.

Speaker 5: I don't know I was just thinking, you know as like I said most of us didn't have that motivation when we were growing up, maybe they could come up with programs for parents to teach them to be motivators for their kids, you know so I think that'd be – because a lot of people don't have a place where they can be motivated. So I don't know, it could help.

L. Fanion: It's a lot. Thank you all. This wasn't so bad was it?

[End of Audio]
Duration: 35 minutes

Focus Group 4: GTC

L. Fanion: Okay. The first question, after completing an extensive review of literature, I found that the overall conclusions on the impact of gender on
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student persistence are inconclusive. While some researchers state that females persist more than males in programs to get their GEDs, others state the exact opposite. So I'll start with the ladies. As ladies, what obstacles have you encountered as you persist towards acquiring your GED?

Speaker 1: Well, for my part, right now it's a perfect time for me. And I waited because I raised a family and during that whole period it was just something I couldn't do, I couldn't pursue, and now that they've all grown, I feel that now I can really focus on that.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 1: So it's taken me this long because of that.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 2: With me basically it's the same thing but it's not so much – it's more time.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 2: This is – Like you tell yourself, you have to do it, because it's time.

L. Fanion: Okay. And men, what obstacles do you all have as men in the program?

Speaker 3: I would say I wasted a bunch of years not doing anything and I never really thought about, you know, I got kicked out of school when I was 17 years old and I went down the wrong path, and I feel like I've wasted 12, 13, 14 years of my life.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 3: But another thing is I start a new job on Friday and I don't know how I'm going to juggle getting to school on time and going to work, so.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 3: I'm kind of concerned about that.

Speaker 4: Yeah, with me it's just kind of the same thing but, you know, at 18 I was out of school, B student, just drifted down the wrong path dealing with outside influences, street life. And then as I got older gradually common sense started kicking in but by that time I was getting my certificate. I got
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that but it was just like that void. And then as I got older, like she said, you get older you know it’s time to do it.

L. Fanion: Exactly.

Speaker 4: And plus the job that I have, I have to do it now, so –

L. Fanion: Okay. Do you all think it's easier for women or men to go back?

Speaker 4: That’s a myth. That has to be a myth, but go ahead.

Speaker 2: I had one pet peeve and I asked you about it earlier, not everybody is doing it because they drop out of high school. And in my case, I didn't drop out of high school I came from [inaudible]. So I agree with you, that wasn't an option. I went through the whole nine yards, graduated, did everything but when I moved to the United States, I was in New York for a while. I had two kids, raised them and everything. Moved here for a different life and it's like, for me to get into college, instead of having to pay to transcribe my transcript which the credits wouldn't be worth anything, the next bet for me is come and get my GED because my desire is to be an accountant. And that's the only way I have to go unless I decide to pay. It still isn't going to be worth anything if I pay to get my credits transferred so I might as well just do it, so.

Speaker 4: Okay, well, go ahead.

Speaker 5: For me too, I can understand based on her, but all my life I tried to support my family, even work at the night and so the day or night for traveling. Since young, I'm grandpa already but since young, I'm just working, working and even if I got a diploma from my country, I had to get in this way. Because mentally we had to change it, and together the language, the real form or the form that grammar is or anywhere they start on a school for us is in the opposite way. So everything had to be translated. For us there's no numbers or title, it's like comprehend –

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 5: Converter, I get it into it. Most of the time is work, work and work.

L. Fanion: Okay.
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Speaker 6: Well in my case, well, I'm 18 right now and I just made a bad decision I guess, that's what got me kicked out of school, so – I was in my last year 12th grade, I could have finished and everything but went down the wrong path and I –

Speaker 4: So was I.

Speaker 3: I had too.

Speaker 6: Yeah. I went down the wrong path and now that's my only choice.

L. Fanion: Okay. So do you all think it's any different in men and women going back or do you think it's the same?

Speaker 3: I think it's the same.

Speaker 6: Yeah.

L. Fanion: Oh, that's what most people say too.

Speaker 4: The struggle's the same. It's one struggle.

Speaker 6: It depends –

Speaker 3: Yeah, if she's like pregnant or something like that –

Speaker 2: I think it's harder for men.

L. Fanion: You think it's harder for men?

Speaker 2: I think it's harder for men, I mean –

Speaker 6: The mindset.

Speaker 2: If you look at in on every level. I could get a babysitting job.

Speaker 6: She's right.

Speaker 2: He's not going to get a babysitting job. I can go work at a supermarket. If he'd get arrested it'll be like uh-uh. It's hard enough for the male point of view, it's really hard, I would say it's harder on a man's side any day.

Speaker 6: Yeah, yeah.
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L. Fanion: Another group feels they have to work, [inaudible] learn so they can, you know, 'cause they have to make time coming to class because they have to make the money for their family.

Speaker 3: Another thing for me is I haven't been in school in 13 years and I'm like—I feel like I'm not going to be able to do it, you know? I'm still kind of worried about how am I going to do this.

Speaker 2: Don't feel bad.

Speaker 6: But you know—

Speaker 3: I have to relearn everything literally.

Speaker 2: I haven't been in school—

L. Fanion: 30 years.

Speaker 2: I'll tell you my age, and—

L. Fanion: Tell me about it.

(Laughter)

Speaker 2: Almost: 30 years.

L. Fanion: Yeah, 30, 35 years.

Speaker 2: 30 plus years.

Speaker 4: The whole thing about it, I'm the same way, I'm 40 years old, you know, so, and I hadn't been in school in a long time but I got stuff that proves it. But the thing is I'm constantly reading, I do a lot of reading and everything. I know a lot but just the thing is I need to have this. I got a 25 year old daughter that graduated from [inaudible]. I have a son that just graduated from college – high school, he's going to school – I have to do this. I have to, you know?

Speaker 3: Set an example in the house, yeah.

Speaker 4: It's emotional for me.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 2: Like me, for me I have two teenagers.

Speaker 4: Yeah, it's very emotional for me, so.

Speaker 2: My son, I mean, I had to basically send him back to his dad because he just wasn't getting it. And I work for the government. I'm a state employee and I work with people — I wouldn't make it bad for me. Me mainly, I have three strikes against me. I'm a female. I'm black, and a foreigner. So I have to work five times as hard — I have to work harder than an American black, American female, and a white female because everybody have like, "Oh, she came from somewhere. She came here to take something." They're not looking at the big picture. She probably had all of this and she just, you know? So it's hard. And I know a whole lot about my job and a lot more than my supervisor and the main idea, I am a foreign black female doesn't make it easier. And the same, I feel my race is a great influence in my ability to get my education and do better for myself.

L. Fanion: Okay. So going to question 2, do you all think age makes a difference? Do you think it's easier for young people to come back or do you think it's —?

Speaker 3: Well I would say it was easier for younger people because a lot of them had just gotten out of school, you know?

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 3: Like you're only 18, you haven't been out of school long.

Speaker 2: He's fresh.

Speaker 6: It's only a couple of years so I know all this stuff.

(Laughter)

Speaker 4: Yeah, but he's 18 being here, you have a lot of people — kids that drop out of school won't. Once they get trapped at something that got them out of high school they're not going to come back unless they got pressured. But if they don't get pressured they'll never go back and get it unless — and once they get old like me. I was 18 nobody pressured me and tells me you need to go back to school. So since they didn't do it —

Speaker 6: Yeah.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 3: I'm the same way.

Speaker 4: I never went back.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 4: So, somebody's probably on his shoulder, you either have a subconscious or a conscious that's telling him when somebody's on it, you know, telling him you need to go and get that.

Speaker 2: And a lot of young people today don't have a conscience.

Speaker 4: Yeah, or subconscious.

Speaker 2: They don't have a subconscious. They just do it because —

Speaker 4: So, you know?

Speaker 2: Whatever. They understand the consequences, they're like whatever. I understand the consequences at the end of the day.

L. Fanion: And other people — some people thought it was harder for younger people because they have more distraction, there's more peer pressure.

Speaker 4: Now, yeah.

L. Fanion: Versus being older you understand why —

Speaker 2: They don't realize how good they have it.

L. Fanion: They don't understand why, we have real bills, you don't have your parents at home to rely on, so you can look at it both ways.

Speaker 5: My opinion is — I don't try to blame the culture of the countries or so — but in this culture, the young kids they got more — they got the right to do this. Have the right to drive, to get my own life. In our culture it's more like you stay with your parents even if you're 20, 40, or 23 and you try to work together. So family here or groups here or young students they have the right to do it without pressure. Even they stay at school or leaving the school and start to work.
L. Fanion: Okay. So going to question 4 – I lost my place. On our previous study I learned that students were either academically competent in high school or they had a lot of challenges in high school. Do you all feel that your high school preparation has prepared you for this program?

Speaker 3: I think they did at the time but I just forgot all of it, you know?

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 3: I had two credits to go to graduate. I just got kicked out. I'm like you, I made a bad – you made a bad decision, you know, and that was it.

Speaker 1: Getting an education, I mean it's a basic right for anyone that lives in this country, and so you just didn't appreciate it like I didn't appreciate what I was getting at the time. I just wanted to go a different way. And so I felt like I knew better. But if I hadn't had that education, there's no way that I could be here today because I would be starting from nowhere and there's no way. I had learned to read, write, and then from there on, the things like science and so forth that we're studying now, math and so forth. If I hadn't had that in high school, it would have been far more difficult now.

L. Fanion: Okay. I'm going to start here. What was your favorite subject in high school?

Speaker 1: Language Arts.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 2: History.

Speaker 4: Social Studies.

Speaker 3: Social Studies, for sure.

Speaker 5: Biology, Social Studies.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 5: Math and Science.

L. Fanion: Okay, okay. Least favorite?

Speaker 2: Biology.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 1: Math.
Speaker 4: Algebra.
Speaker 3: Any kind of math.

(Laughter)

Speaker 6: Math.
Speaker 4: Yeah, any kind of math for me too.
Speaker 6: That's what scares me.
Speaker 4: Any kind of math will be too bad.

Speaker 3: On the paper they gave you when you left, after the orientation. I'm in the fourth grade in math.
Speaker 4: Yeah, me too so [inaudible].
Speaker 2: One thing that was bad for me with math we learned the English version and this is the American version so we come up with the same answer but the formulas –
L. Fanion: Are different.
Speaker 2: Are different. Okay. So math is killing me right now.
Speaker 6: See somebody told me before that don't let nothing scare you and then when people see all the numbers, it scares them.
Speaker 2: No, I work with numbers, numbers don't scare me.
Speaker 6: Yeah, you are – yeah. I was just about to say that.
Speaker 2: Numbers don't scare me, but the formula, remember, I went to school and did it in one week.
Speaker 6: That's what I was just about to say about you.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 2: I have to re-program my brain because I couldn’t teach – I couldn’t help my kids with math the way they teach it in school. I couldn’t help him. My daughter would be like "Mommy, I don’t know what you're doing. Don't help."

(Laughter)

L. Fanion: Okay. Okay, so going to the next question, do you think you have what it takes to obtain your GED, and why?

Speaker 2: Yes, because it's about me. Nobody knows better than you and what you want to be when the time comes.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 1: Yes, I'm very determined. I think that I have goals that I have for my future and I'm on the road to pursuing those and hopefully fulfill them.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 4: Yes.

L. Fanion: Why?

Speaker 4: Yes, it's something I have to do, like she said, you know, I'm ready. I need to get it done, get it out of the way. That can be another accomplishment that I have in my life that I know I need deep down. We all need it. Everybody that's in here needs it.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 4: So it's an accomplishment that I will--

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 3: I would say yes. I'm a little worried, but I know if I put my mind to it and, you know, take it serious and study, and stuff like that, I know I can do it.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Speaker 3: I mean there's – I know I can. It might take me a couple of tries, but I'll get it, to be honest you.
Appendix B (continued)

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 6: Yeah. Yes.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 5: These are one of the reasons that I'm determined to do it. First, I don't have to bring any things or utilities to get to school. Everything is offered to me. I have to take advantage of that.

Speaker 4: Yes.

Speaker 5: It's there, I have to. I mean it's knocking in my door right now and I have the opportunity and I'm going to take.

L. Fanion: Okay. Do you all think your friends impact your persistence or do you have encouraging friends right now who encouraged you to pursue and do the program?

Speaker 2: It's good you asked that question because the guy that I'm dating is an Alpha Phi Alpha.

(Laughter)

Speaker 2: I mean my goal whether I'll never use it or not is to get my degree. That's my big picture so this is just in the pocket.

L. Fanion: Does he support you?

Speaker 2: 100% because I'm like, I have to do it. That is my goal, to get my degree whether I use it or never use it. Just to even look at it collect dust.

L. Fanion: So you do. Anyone else? Do your friends support you?

Speaker 4: Yeah. That's a coincidence 'cause my dad's an Omega so and, you know, he's been talking – he's a minister too so he's been talking to me, telling me – he's always in my ears, so they know about this so, you know.

L. Fanion: Supportive friends or not supportive friends?

Speaker 3: Yeah, I got lots of supportive friends.

(Crosstalk)
Speaker 6: Most people I know are just dropouts, I guess. I mean I try not to involve myself in that situation, but it's just hard. So they really don't care, I guess.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 6: So I'm not trying to be like that but trying to get a GED and do something with my life.

L. Fanion: Okay.

(Crosstalk)

Speaker 4: You see you're starting here so, yeah.

L. Fanion: And you're starting in the right place.

Speaker 6: Yeah.

L. Fanion: And you get started at a young age.

Speaker 4: 18.

Speaker 6: Yeah.

L. Fanion: Time is on your side.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

L. Fanion: So do you have any family who supports you?

Speaker 6: My mom is always supporting me.

Speaker 3: Everybody in my family is supporting me.

L. Fanion: Okay, all have supportive family?

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Speaker 6: No.

Speaker 2: I wouldn't know.
L. Fanion: Okay.

(Laughter)

Speaker 5: My son and my daughter and my wife.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

L. Fanion: Okay. For those of you who have kids, do you think you're persisting to be a better role model?

Speaker 4: Of course.

Speaker 5: Of course. I agree, strongly agree.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 4: Of course.

L. Fanion: And going to the next question. How do you think your teachers here encourage you to persist?

Speaker 3: I've only been here –

L. Fanion: Or do they encourage you to persist?

Speaker 3: This is my first day so I couldn't really tell.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 4: Yeah. They encourage you, you know? They know what's in jeopardy here, you know, grown people coming back for something. Mostly, grown people are in classrooms. You see a handful of the youth, you know, like my man, but mostly, adults are here. And they pretty much know. But the teachers are pretty much motivational to keep them coming to class, to keep them online doing their tutors. So, you know, and let them know what the rule is to keep coming to keep them motivated for coming, and the motivation is getting your GED.

L. Fanion: Exactly.

Speaker 4: They're constantly driving that, so yeah.
Appendix B (continued)

L. Fanion: And do you all like the way the teachers here teach?
Speaker 4: They're cool.
Speaker 6: Yeah. I can learn. It's easy.
L. Fanion: On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate it?
Speaker 6: Five.
Speaker 5: Five.
Speaker 3: I would say five so far.
Speaker 4: Four.
L. Fanion: Okay.
(Crosstalk)
Speaker 3: At least you're honest.
Speaker 4: I said four. Yeah. I got a teacher – 'cause I mean, this math teacher –
(Laughter)
Speaker 2: I knew he was going to say that.
Speaker 4: This math teacher, I tell you – you know how it is.
Speaker 3: What math teacher do you have?
Speaker 4: He's an Asian guy. He is – all the same.
Speaker 2: Oh, don't talk about my teacher. Don't be talking about my teacher.
(Laughter)
Speaker 4: I got you.
Speaker 2: Don't be talking about my teacher.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 4: Boy, he's –

Speaker 2: Mr. Lo.

Speaker 4: Oh, my.

L. Fanion: Is it the way he teaches that's difficult?

Speaker 4: He's funny.

Speaker 2: He has an accent.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 4: Boy, he's –

Speaker 2: He has an accent.

Speaker 3: Is he hard to understand or?

Speaker 2: He's not hard to understand.

Speaker 4: No, no, no. No, no. He's cool.

Speaker 2: But he's like excited.

Speaker 4: Very excited, very excited.

Speaker 2: He's very excited so I understand his – he has that.

Speaker 4: Yeah, he's very excited. I mean like they're just –

Speaker 3: Hard to keep up with him.

Speaker 4: But he's smart, super smart.

Speaker 5: My teacher had me to change [inaudible]. Before there was nothing something to develop and my teacher said something that is familiar and his everyday action [inaudible] make big difference for me right now.

(Crosstalk)

L. Fanion: Okay. Do you all feel connected to the class or program?
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 6: Not really.
Speaker 4: Yeah.
Speaker 2: To the program, not to the class.
Speaker 6: Yeah, to the program.
Speaker 4: You're connected to the program, not to the school.
Speaker 2: You could relate to the class because everybody have the same — you would hope everybody have the same goal, same vision, the same — but as far —
L. Fanion: But not to the school?
Speaker 4: Not to the school, no.
Speaker 2: Not to the school, because you still get that feeling when you come through the door and head for this way, a GED and anybody walking down the hall, the way they look at you like —
Speaker 6: Yeah.
Speaker 2: They give you a smile, but you can tell they are like, oh, another GED class.
Speaker 4: I don’t care about none of that.
Speaker 2: No, I don’t care. The thing is you can tell. You can see it.
L. Fanion: Okay.
Speaker 2: I mean you can look at somebody's face and —
L. Fanion: And see their expression.
Speaker 2: See the expression, like —
L. Fanion: And you said no too, why you say no?
Speaker 6: Not with the class, but —
L. Fanion: It's the program.

Speaker 6: Yeah.

Speaker 3: I would say the same thing too. Are you finished? I'm sorry.

Speaker 6: No, it's okay.

Speaker 3: I have a hard time focusing. I have always had a hard time focusing on things and I'm in here going through all this stuff and trying to learn at the same time, so.

L. Fanion: So what do you all think, the school, Technical College B, could do differently to make people feel included, not like it's them and us?

Speaker 4: One way, they don't bother you for not coming in.

Speaker 2: It's not going to change. One way or the other –

Speaker 4: I walk straight through the hall, straight to class.

Speaker 2: There's nothing to actually change.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 4: It's just the program happens to be in Technical College B.

Speaker 2: In Technical College B.

Speaker 4: That's the only thing. I just walk in here and go straight to class.

Speaker 2: And the only other thing I think they can do, you know, you could probably have a sensitivity class or sensitivity material. Yes, you will see – we do offer GED, you may know someone that needs to get a GED, not because you are a college student you look dumb, you don't know what circumstances that person had that they didn't finish or they may have finished, and they might be from another country and they – just some kind of reading material or some kind of sensitivity class or sensitivity materials. You know when I pass down the hall, they say, "Oh, good job." I mean some people would say from their mouth, I don't care what people say but deep down in your heart it's like –
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 4: Some of them, same folk will be looking like that, they just got their GED in another school, so.

Speaker 2: Yeah, but then guess what? We will never know. And we may – human nature again, in my country people tend to forget where they come from and only focus on where they're going.

Speaker 3: I agree.

Speaker 2: You understand? So their goal right there, full focus right now is I'm in college, I'm doing this, and trying to distance their self to be exact from where they were.

L. Fanion: Do you all feel the classes here are convenient and flexible?

Speaker 2: For me it is, for me it is.

Speaker 5: For me yes.

Speaker 3: I'll find out when I start working Friday.

(Laughter)

Speaker 3: I'll have to get back to you on that.

L. Fanion: So for that question yes for everyone?

Speaker 4: Yes.

L. Fanion: Okay. And so I just – I'm going to start with you 'cause you say you left school – you didn't leave school, you're from a different country, so I'll start here, why did you leave school?

Speaker 1: I just didn't – I was young and foolish. I just didn't think it was important. I didn't leave and get in trouble or anything. I got out and got married and started having a family.

L. Fanion: And why did you return?

Speaker 1: Because I thought it was time and I've worked all my life. I mean even with my children, I raised all my children by myself. And I worked all this time, so I never really had time to go to school.
Appendix B (continued)

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 1: But now I took--I left my job that I had for 15 years. I was in management but I'm going through a different phase in my life and like I've said, I raised all my children and they're there to support and I just left my job and just--I want to do something else with my life, something that I enjoy.

L. Fanion: Enjoy, okay.

Speaker 1: And so that's what I'm doing now.

L. Fanion: Okay. Why did you leave and why did you return?

Speaker 4: Well, I emphasize on and I go back to eighth grade, I mean, 18 years old and just adolescent, you know, just immature, returning, filling the void, accomplishing something that I needed to accomplish, so.

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 3: I made a couple of bad decisions and I got kicked out and I came back just because I want to learn, you know?

L. Fanion: Okay.

Speaker 3: It's really simple.

Speaker 6: Yeah, I got kicked out, I didn't want to come back really 'cause the people that I was with was not really that, it wasn't like--how do I explain it, like suitable for me. And then I had a talk with my mom and she convinced me to get on track and come here. I still don't--like sometimes I wake up Mondays and Tuesdays 'cause that's when we have class, I didn't even want to come but something's telling me to go basically, so.

Speaker 4: If you don't come you're going to be 40 years old.

Speaker 2: Yeah, look at the big picture.

Speaker 6: Looking in the mirror, look at the big picture man.

Speaker 2: You're doing a great thing.

Speaker 4: Yeah, please.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 6: Yeah, that's another thing, that's a distraction because my mom always taught me to stay away from that, my area. Yeah, but my mom is like not right I guess. I keep going back.

Speaker 3: You're not the only one, don't feel bad.

Speaker 1: Listen to your mom.

(Laughter)

Speaker 4: You're not perfect so you're going to always make mistakes but when you make decisions just think about your decisions, go ahead.

Speaker 2: Listen to this quote and remember it every time you think about doing something wrong. "He who does not have an education is deemed to serve." Go home, look in the computer and look that said that quote. "He who does not have an education is deemed to serve." And I refuse to serve, any more.

Speaker 4: It sounds like Marcus Garvey. It sounds like Marcus Garvey but –

Speaker 5: My major reason was 18 years old I was already a dad so I started to work, study at nighttime. I'm working daytime and by the time I realized I 45 years, 48 and keep working all my life, to get my family the food but now I realize with no graduation or education here or in any country, they pay you whatever they want to. That's what you deserve because you don't get a title, you don't get a career, and you don't keep going. If you are in that group, just get paid – 10 hours, $8.

Speaker 1: Okay. Sometimes you can look back. I mean there are some people who have actually been very – they have accomplished things without a high school education but that's very rare. It's not the common thing. It's actually the opposite. It's very – you're really taking a chance when you decide that you want to quit and you don't want to do that because – and you will hear people that have done that. Like they're accomplished and are millionaires and billionaires and they never graduated from high school. But that's not the common thing.

Speaker 6: My older brother he dropped out and he – he's no millionaire or nothing but he has a life. He's on the street, got a job on it, his own house and living with his girlfriend. So when I got kicked out I was like, maybe if I didn't go get a GED I could still do the same.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 4: You can do it but your times are different, you can do that, you know, 'cause, you know, I don't have a diploma. I have a house, nice house. I got a lot of things but I work hard, work hard. My wife's a real estate agent, we work hard now. She's like one of the things I have that's driving me, so I got you.

Speaker 4: Yeah, that's why I got my mom. She's a lawyer so always pushing.

Speaker 1: I mean I have been accomplished – like I said, I was in management for 15 years but it was such a struggle just to get there because I didn't have my education. It took me longer than someone else who did have an education. They would just come in and take the title and the position and like that and I had to fight and I had to – I literally had to fight so hard just to get from here to here. And you just don't want to do that. It's just –

Speaker 2: You know what's the next thing? You may know the job but somebody come off the street that has education and they are paying them but they have to prove and you have to train them.

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 6: Yeah, I learned that already. I was trying to get a job designing 'cause that's what I do, but they offered it to me, another guy came in, he had education, I was better than him but since he had education they gave it right to him and –

(Crosstalk)

Speaker 6: Graphic design.

Speaker 4: See, that's why you need to get this, go to school man, graphic design. That's a lot of money there so you need motivation for you.

Speaker 3: Do they have graphic design at Technical College B?

Speaker 4: You need to do it.

Speaker 2: That's a great area.

Speaker 4: Don't – listen or don't get side tracked.

Speaker 6: I know, I have to do it but it's just hard.
Appendix B (continued)

Speaker 4: I can see you in college now. So just go and get your GED.

Speaker 3: I wish I could go back to 18 and do it all over, you know?

Speaker 4: Exactly. You're 18.

L. Fanion: You're still young, there are tons of scholarships.

Speaker 4: [inaudible].

L. Fanion: Totally, I mean, you have your whole life ahead of you. Just stay – keep yourself surrounded by the right people that makes a huge difference when you're –

Speaker 3: That's the main thing really.

Speaker 4: Businesses are looking for young prospects.

L. Fanion: Exactly. Well thank you all for participating.

Speaker 4: That was fun.

L. Fanion: I hope I didn't keep you too long. I just need you to just sign the consent form for participating and definitely stay persistent. I definitely admire you all. I know it's hard 'cause I'm struggling right now to stay awake. I work full time and I'm still in school too, so.

Speaker 4: We all do.

Speaker 2: [inaudible].

L. Fanion: No, I'm always –

Speaker 2: When you reach my age anyway you'll know you're old.

(Laughter)

L. Fanion: Thank you.

Speaker 4: Thank you.
Appendix B (continued)

L. Fanion: Thank you. Stay focused. Thank you. Thank you. I'm going to get you all sign a consent form, come back [inaudible]. Hopefully the teacher is not mad at me for keeping you all too long.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 31 minutes
REFERENCES


*Journal of Higher Education, 51*(1), 60-75.


