

A Comprehensive Study of the Relationship
of Athletic Participation to
High School Dropout

by

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ABSTRACT

There has been a growing amount of attention being paid to the area of high school dropout because a student's decision to leave school does not solely affect him or her; it has far reaching affects on society as well. The purpose of this study was to look at the available research associated with high school dropout and specifically the relationship between athletic participation and high school dropout.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to examine several aspects associated with high school dropout and its relationship with athletic participation. The study focused on the following areas: current theories pertaining to high school dropout, the prevalence rates of high school dropout in the United States, the antecedents associated with the decision to withdraw from high school, the consequences of dropping out of high school, and the effects of athletic participation on high school dropout.

A review of the existing research found that athletic participation has a positive intervening effect that addresses the high school dropout issue. Participation in athletics provides a student with a positive and voluntary connection to the school and also offers access to an established social group within the school. The research indicated that this decreases the likelihood a student will withdraw from school. This study was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the high school dropout problem facing schools today. As a result, recommendations are provided to assist educators and parents who work with students that are likely to withdraw from school.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	3
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	4
<i>Research Questions</i>	4
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	5
<i>Assumptions and Limitations of the Study</i>	5
Chapter II: Literature Review.....	6
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>Existing Theoretical Framework</i>	6
<i>Prevalence of High School Dropout</i>	11
<i>Antecedents of High School Dropout</i>	14
<i>Consequences of High School Dropout</i>	19
<i>The Relationship between Athletic Participation and High School Dropout</i>	23
Chapter III: Discussion.....	32
<i>Introduction</i>	32
<i>Summary</i>	32
<i>Critical Analysis</i>	34
<i>Assumptions and Limitations of the Study</i>	38
<i>Recommendations for Educators</i>	39
<i>Recommendations of Parents</i>	40

References.....	42
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Chapter I: Introduction

Jamar is a typical young, Black male in his community. His mother is dependent on government assistance, he has no knowledge of his father, and he receives virtually no parental guidance or involvement. Most of his friends are high school dropouts who sell or use drugs and have few interests outside of sports. Academically, Jamar is also similar to his peers. He is intellectually capable, but he is completely disinterested in academics. Like most children in his neighborhood, he dreams of escaping the hopeless environment; unfortunately, his grades are unlikely to gain him admittance into college. In fact, the sole reason he attends school is to play basketball. The school principal informs Jamar that he has failed Algebra and will no longer be able to compete on the school's basketball team. Jamar leaves school and never returns (Burnett, 2000).

John is a young ninth grade student in a rural community school. He is very poor and is often absent from school because his parents need his help on the family farm. He has had very few successes both academically and socially. School has always been a struggle for him. For years he has heard about what he can't do as opposed to what he can do and this has led to the lack of confidence in his abilities in general and frequent thoughts of "I can't do anything right." Socially, he has very few friends and the transition from the middle school to the high school has made it especially difficult. He goes from one class to the next not ever feeling like he belongs. John is seriously contemplating dropping out of school. A teacher suggests that John sign up for the freshman football team. Since this is a teacher who John likes, he reluctantly does, not really expecting much of a result. Over the course of the season, John begins to experience small, but important, successes because they are the first true

accomplishments in his life of which he can be proud. He finds that his teammates are becoming his friends and he is gaining a sense of identity and belonging within the school. The successes on the field build his confidence in his abilities. This added confidence begins to transition into improvement in the classroom. Slowly the thoughts of dropping out of school fade from John's mind and he decides to remain in school and get his diploma.

Although the backgrounds of Jamar and John are quite different, their stories are not that uncommon across the United States today. Various studies have shown that the opportunities for Jamar and John will be reasonably different throughout their lives. According to the United States Bureau of Census (2005), the average income for a high school dropout in 2004 was \$16,485 compared to a high school graduate's average income of \$26,156, equaling a difference of \$9,671 per year. Not only will Jamar make less money than John, according to Rumberger (1987) he will have a more difficult time finding steady employment and will have fewer opportunities to acquire additional education and training to remain somewhat competitive in the job market.

The problems for high school dropouts are not limited to economic hardships. A study done by Brenner (1976) found that high school dropouts frequently have shorter life spans when compared to high school graduates. Dropouts also deal with higher rates of suicide and a higher incidence of mental health disorders. A more recent study done by Muenning (2005) found the same result; high school graduates live longer than high school dropouts. Liem, Dillon, and Gore (2001) found that high school dropouts have a higher incidence of depression and anxiety in early adulthood than do high school graduates.

The students' decision to dropout of school does not just affect them; it has consequences for society as well. Levin (1972) found that high school dropouts were more likely to need public services provided by the government in the form of unemployment benefits, food stamps, health care assistance, and welfare. It is difficult to estimate the total cost of high school dropouts, but estimates projected that those who did not finish high school in 2006 would cost the government roughly 309 billion dollars in lost tax revenues, social services, and crime-related costs over the course of their lifetime (Editorial Projects in Education, 2006). Research done by Rouse (2005) estimated that each dropout over the course of his or her lifetime will cost the nation an average of \$260,000.

To address the question of prevalence of high school dropout in the United States, the National Center for Education Statistics produces a report annually. The report was released in November of 2006, and was comprised of data collected from October 2003 to October 2004. The report estimated that 5 out of every 100 students in America would not finish high school. This report also indicated that roughly 3.8 million or 10% of the 16- to 24-year-old population had not received a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and were not currently enrolled in such a program to obtain one.

Statement of the Problem

With the current budget constraints facing U.S. schools today, many administrators are cutting extracurricular activity programs such as athletics based solely on financial grounds. The persons making these critical decisions are usually uninformed about the wealth of research that exists within the field pertaining to the role athletics

play in a student's development, education, and his or her decision to stay in school. More research needs to be conducted and the existing information brought to the attention of both policy makers and administrators alike so informed decisions can be made. The current research suggests that athletics can be an intervening factor in a student's decision to drop out of high school. With high school dropouts costing the American public billions of dollars, it would be logical to present all the information to administrators before a decision is made to cut an athletic program in attempt to balance a school's budget.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of high school dropout. This includes identifying the current theoretical framework that exists in the area of high school dropout, the prevalence of high school dropout in the United States, common antecedents of the decision to withdraw from high school, the effects of the decision to drop out of high school, and the effectiveness of athletic participation as an intervening factor on high school dropout. This is achieved through a literature review, an analysis, and a critique of the findings related to athletic participation and high school dropout.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What theories currently exist to better explain high school dropout?
2. How prevalent is high school dropout in the United States?
3. What are common antecedents to high school dropout?
4. What are the consequences of deciding to drop out of high school?

5. What is the relationship between athletic participation and high school dropout?

Definition of Terms

For clarification, the following terms are defined:

Athletic Participation – A sanctioned sport recognized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

High School Dropout – Students who leave school before receiving a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

It is assumed that the researchers in each study cited in this research paper provided accurate data and the participants of each study answered honestly to the questions provided. This was a review of the existing literature, not an empirical study. There was no data collected and analyzed; this study was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of athletic participation to high school dropout. As a result, this review does not contribute original data to the field of education.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter is a comprehensive review of the research and literature that exists to date associated with high school dropout and athletic participation. This chapter will focus on the current theories pertaining to high school dropout, the prevalence rates of high school dropout in the United States, the antecedents associated with the decision to withdraw from high school, the consequences of dropping out of high school, and the effects of athletic participation on high school dropout.

Existing Theoretical Framework

Many of the existing theories are developed from or in reaction to Coleman's Zero-Sum Model (Coleman, 1961). Adolescents look to gain peer acceptance and the society they exist in values academics, athletics, and social involvement. This model purports that these three aspects of adolescent culture are in competition with one another. More time spent in one arena (i.e., athletics) is detrimental to another arena such as academics. Coleman (1961) believed that adolescents do not have enough time or energy to be successful in all arenas; in essence they have to choose within which aspect they want to prosper.

Somewhat similar to Coleman's Zero-Sum Model, Marsh (1991) proposed the Threshold Model. This model perceives athletic participation as a positive aspect of a student's life, but in small to moderate amounts. This model could be thought of as a bell-shaped curve; there is a point at which excessive athletic participation leads to diminishing effects on the student's academic and social life. When a student is

preoccupied with athletics, the other arenas such as academics and social involvement suffer.

Holland and Andre (1987) discussed two different perspectives that educators may take when addressing the role of extracurricular activities (athletic participation included) within schools today. They proposed an academic perspective and a developmental perspective.

“The academic perspective focuses on intellectual competence and stresses that the purpose of schools is the *pursuit of academic excellence* and *transmission of formal knowledge*. From this perspective, extracurricular activities provide a means of relaxation or fun, but are clearly unimportant to the primary purpose of schools. In contrast, the developmental position stresses that school programs should provide *experiences that further the total development of individual students*. The developmental position is more equalitarian, stressing that the development of all individuals must be considered in planning a school program. Nonacademic programs can be as important as academic programs in facilitating the development of the individual” (Holland & Andre, 1987, p. 438).

These two different perspectives allow educators and policy makers alike to question the values and goals that they hold pertaining to education. Is the goal of education strictly to teach students reading, writing, and arithmetic or is it important to also teach social skills and life lessons that lead to well-rounded young adults?

Finn (1989) proposed a different perspective on high school dropout that was partially in response to the research in the field at the time. Finn reviewed numerous studies and found that the majority of the research focused on the identification of high

school dropouts through the common characteristics that they share. Many of these common characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status were external factors that the school could not address.

Finn (1989) took a different approach and looked at high school dropout as a developmental process that started as early as the elementary school years. He viewed high school dropout not as a single event in a student's life, but as the culmination of a chain of events that was set into motion long before the decision to drop out was made.

The first model he proposed was the Frustration/Self-Esteem Model. This model recognized that continuous failure in school leads to frustration and a general overall sense of inadequacy. This cycle of failure starts to affect the student's self-esteem in a negative fashion. The lack of self-esteem leads to increased incidence of problem behaviors, which serve as an escape function for the student. In some cases, the problem behaviors increase in intensity and frequency. This often leads to suspensions and, in severe incidences, expulsion. Not only does the school need to break this cycle by decreasing a student's frustrations and increasing his or her self-esteem, but often the school has to play "catch up" so the student can meet state graduation requirements (Finn, 1989).

The second model that Finn (1989) proposed was the Participation/Identification Model. He stated that "students who identify with school have an internalized conception of belongingness – that they are discernibly part of the school environment and that school constitutes an important part of their own experience" (Finn, 1989, p. 123). A student's sense of identification or affiliation with the school is often related to a variety of behaviors such as delinquency, absenteeism, and dropout. The other half of the model

addresses participation. Finn discussed that through athletic participation students spend extra time in the school environment, which increases the likelihood that they may feel a sense of belongingness. Second, for some students with poor academic profiles, athletic participation may be the most important and only source of attachment to the school they experience. These students have not had many successes in a classroom setting. Athletic participation allows them not only to identify with the school, but also inserts them into a social group within the school. Athletic participation gives them an opportunity to excel and focuses on the individual's strengths. This opportunity may serve as an incentive for an at-risk student to attend school on a daily basis. In theory, the more a student participates in school-sanctioned functions such as athletics, the greater he or she may identify with the school itself, which can lead to decreased absenteeism and dropout. Finn argued that increased involvement in school-based activities, such as athletics, predict positive outcomes for the student and school alike. Positive outcomes are maximized if the student "maintains multiple, expanding forms of participation in school-relevant activities" (Finn, 1989, p. 117).

Through his research on athletic participation and high school dropout, Marsh (1993) proposed a somewhat similar model called the Identification/Commitment Model. Marsh used statistics collected from the High School and Beyond (HSB) study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). He used a large database to determine if there was a correlation between athletic participation and a large number of academic (i.e., GPA, classroom achievement, and self-concept) and non-academic (i.e., absenteeism, delinquency, and occupational attainment) outcomes. This model posited that athletic participation enhances a student's identification with and commitment to the

school. Marsh argued that athletic participation promotes school-related principles; thus, a student who identifies with the school and is committed to the school's principles is less likely to drop out. The results of the study support this assumption.

Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) proposed the Investment in School construct based off their research in the area of education and adolescent employment. Similar to the Identification/Commitment Model proposed by Marsh (1993), the Investment in School construct stated that a reduced investment in school would lead to negative academic outcomes. They used a number of different factors such as the amount of time devoted to extracurricular activities, enjoyment of school, and absenteeism to measure how invested a student was in his or her own education. They found that invested individuals were more likely to have positive academic outcomes such as higher grade point averages, whereas students who were less invested in school were more likely to withdraw and drop out.

An increasing amount of attention has been given to the growing academic achievement gap between students of high socioeconomic status (SES) and students of low SES. According to research done by Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2001), the longer a student stays in school the larger the achievement gap becomes. This raises concerns that schools are not meeting the needs of their most disadvantaged students. Marsh and Kleitman (2002) proposed the Social Inequity Gap Reduction Model which predicts that students of lower SES would benefit more from athletic participation than students of a more advantaged background, therefore reducing the academic achievement gap. They argued that extracurricular participation (e.g., athletics) would increase identification/commitment to the school itself for all students, but especially for

disadvantaged students because they may not have had an established positive connection to the school like their more economically advantaged peers. The increased sense of identification would enhance the student's commitment to his or her education, therefore reducing the academic achievement gap and decreasing the likelihood of drop out.

Prevalence of High School Dropout

Calculating the exact number of high school dropouts in the United States is nearly impossible. Some students leave and return to school within a few months while others move and get lost in the shuffle. Also detracting from the accuracy is the fact that many schools across the country differ in their definitions of dropout and vary their reporting methods. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) recognized two different definitions in their annual report. According to the NCES, event dropout rate is defined as the estimated percentage of both private and public high school students who left high school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or its equivalent (e.g., a GED). The NCES defined status dropout rate as the reported percentage of individuals in a given age range who are not in school and have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency credential, regardless of when they dropped out. This rate focused on an overall age group as opposed to individuals in the U.S. school system. These definitions refer to youth who are 15 to 24 years of age (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006).

The data illustrated that about 5 out of 100 students enrolled in high school during October 2003, left school by October 2004 before obtaining a high school diploma or an equivalent. There was no measurable difference between the dropout rates of males and females. Hispanic students accounted for the largest percentage of high school dropouts

at 8.9%, followed by African Americans at 5.7%, Caucasian students were next at 3.7%, and the Asian/Pacific Islanders accounted for 1.2% (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006). A study by Stearns and Glennie (2006) found similar results based on data collected from North Carolina Public Schools. Hispanic students were most likely to drop out followed by African American, Caucasian, and Asian students. Contrary to the NCES data, they found that male students were more likely to drop out than female students.

There are some striking differences in dropout rates of students from different socioeconomic classes. According to Laird, DeBell, and Chapman (2006), students living in families of low socioeconomic status were four times more likely to drop out of school than students of middle and upper socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, a lower class student's decision to withdraw from school more than likely perpetuates the poverty cycle.

Regionally, the West accounted for the largest percentage of high school dropouts at 6.1%, followed by the South at 5.4%, the Northeast at 3.8% and the Midwest at 3.1% respectively. The state of Arizona had the highest percentage of event dropout at 10.4% and the state of Wisconsin was the lowest in the United States with 1.9% (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006).

Some people would argue that there has been improvement in the overall dropout rates of America's youth and, statistically speaking, they are correct. High school dropout rates have declined from 6.1% of the 15- to 24-year-old population in the early 1970's to 4.7% of the population in 2004, but the trend does not hold true for all groups. The dropout rate for the lower class has increased over the last ten years and this group of

students would most likely benefit from earning a high school diploma (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006).

Others disagree and cite that the educational system has not kept pace with the economy's increasing demand for skilled workers. One could argue that a high school diploma is more of a necessity today than it was in the 1970's due to the highly-skilled labor market. With increasing numbers of high school graduates going on to get a college or technical degree, 3.8 million high school dropouts ages 15 to 24 are just being left farther behind (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006).

Another statistic that assesses the prevalence of high school dropout is the completion rate. The completion rate refers to the percentage of students in a cohort who graduate with a high school diploma in a given calendar year. Barton (2005a) generated a completion rate statistic based off two different data sources. He used data from the United States Census which calculated the number of students of graduation age (i.e., 17 to 18 years of age) and compared that number to the number of high school diplomas awarded to both public and private school students as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics. The analysis of this data prompted Barton (2005a) to estimate that the completion rate for high school students in 2000 was approximately 69.9%; therefore, approximately 30% of 17- to 18-year-old students did not receive a high school diploma in 2000.

Barton was also interested in seeing if the completion rate had improved throughout the 1990's. He compared data from the year 1990 to the year 2000 and found a decrease in the completion rate for U.S. high school seniors. In 1990, the state with the highest completion rate was Iowa at 90.6% and the state with the lowest was Florida at

61.7%. In 2000, Vermont lead the way with an 88.2% completion rate and Arizona was last with a 55% completion rate. Barton (2005a) found that over the course of a decade, only seven U.S. states improved their completion rates. This study contradicts the accepted notion that the high school completion rate had been improving over the last 4 decades.

Antecedents of High School Dropout

A large amount of research has been done surrounding the common characteristics high school dropouts share with one another. One of the guiding principles of this research is to better identify at-risk students. In theory, through early identification, educators can intervene before students decide to drop out of school. There are both internal and external factors that affect a student's decision to leave school.

Stearns and Glennie (2006) cited a number of different common characteristics in their study of North Carolina high school students. They found that academic achievement, behavioral problems, and employment opportunities had an effect on a student's decision to stay in school. Due to a variety of reasons, some researchers have discussed "Pull-Out" theories in attempt to explain why a student leaves school (McNeal, 1997). A "Pull-Out" theory basically states that students perform a cost-benefit analysis of their education. They look at schooling as only one aspect of many different aspects in their lives which may include employment opportunities, family obligations, peer groups and various other organizations. When a student gets pulled in various directions, the factors listed above may be more a necessity to the student than his or her education.

A study done by Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, and Carlson (2000) found a variety of school, familial, and individual characteristics associated with high school dropout. They

noted that the student's ability to create and maintain relationships with peers was linked with dropout. Based on previous research, it was purported that students at-risk of dropping out often times do not maintain peer relationships within the school and feel alienated; therefore, the withdrawal process is accelerated. Parental involvement in the child's education and early childhood care were important factors acknowledged in the early identification of students at-risk for dropout. The researchers argued that early life experiences affected the student's self-esteem, the ability to control his or her own behavior, and the capacity to create and maintain relationships with teachers and peers. Other common factors in this study that were associated with high school dropout were intelligence quotient (IQ), socioeconomic status (SES), academic achievement, and behavioral problems.

Rumberger (1987) discussed the rising interest concerning the social influence peers have on one another. He suggested that many high school dropouts have friends who have already decided to withdraw from school themselves. This implies that the decisions an at-risk student makes regarding his or her education may be influenced by a peer group that consists of high school dropouts. It is possible that the decision to drop out is made in an attempt to remain part of their existing peer group, even though it may be a deviant group. The sense of belonging and identification with a social group is more important to the student than his or her education. It is not clear to what extent a student's friends and peer affect his or her decision to leave school, but Rumberger (1987) argued that it does have some predictive validity.

Barton (2006) discussed both familial and personal factors that accurately predict high school dropout. His research found that students that come from single-parent

households of lower SES are more likely to dropout than their fellow classmates. Also, students with low academic achievement, grade retention, high rates of absenteeism, and the frequency at which a student changes schools are factors that increase the likelihood of drop out.

Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007) discussed three different factors associated with high school dropout. Their study consisted of data collected from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth which was produced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The sample for their study consisted of 4,327 students who were interviewed on an annual basis from 1997 to 2001. The research identified low grade point averages (GPA), school suspensions, and students of low SES as accurate precursors of high school dropout. Students with low GPA tended to have increased levels of frustration in school which accelerated the withdrawal process. It has been well documented in numerous studies, including this one, that students of low SES are at-risk of dropping out. What is unique about this study is that Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007) found that school suspensions were accurate predictors of high school dropout. This would suggest that suspension may not be the best means of punishment for an at-risk student because it may increase the chances of dropout. They found that suspended students were more likely not to come back to school after a suspension was served. This implies that a suspension only contributes to a pre-existing truancy problem, which is very common in at-risk students and may hasten the withdrawal process.

Employment, or at least the potential for employment, seems to be a powerful factor in the decision to drop out of school. As the NCES report showed, students who live in poverty are four times more likely to drop out of high school than students who do

not (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006). Employment offers some adolescents a chance to generate an income; in many cases this is a commodity that they have never had in their lives. It is an attractive offer since their education currently offers no financial benefits. The decision to leave high school may provide short-term benefits, but will eventually cost them approximately \$10,000 in lost earnings annually over the course of their lifetime (United States Bureau of Census, 2005). High school dropouts often realize that not having a diploma is costing them more money, but they feel it is too late to return to school or enroll in a GED program; therefore, the cycle of poverty continues.

Marsh (1991) researched employment during high school and how it affects high school dropout. He found that employment during the school year had a statistically significant affect on high school dropout. Factors such as when a student began to work (e.g., sophomore year) and the number of hours they worked during the week were two very significant factors that predicted high school dropout. The job offered financial rewards and, in essence, the job allowed the students to have “one foot out the door,” implying that they began to identify with the job more so than the school itself. It is important to note that in his study, Marsh did not find any negative effects of summertime employment.

Marsh has since applied this research to many of his studies that involve athletic participation. Marsh and Kleitman (2002) argued that athletic participation encourages identification with the school and, likewise, the values that the school holds to be important. Employment allows the students more financial freedom and the value of education decreases. Athletic participation increases school identification and employment during the school year detracts from it and enhances the withdrawal process.

Another well-researched antecedent to high school dropout is grade retention.

Jimerson, Anderson, and Wipple (2002) reviewed various studies surrounding the area of grade retention and high school dropout. Their systematic review of existing literature found that grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of high school dropout. Barro and Kolstad (1987) reported that grade retention increases the likelihood of high school dropout by 30 to 50%. Cairns, Cairns, and Neckerman (1989) devised a study that used a variety of factors such as aggression, academic achievement, and grade retention combined to accurately predict dropout among seventh grade students. One of the strongest predictors of high school dropout was grade retention.

Parental involvement in education can have an effect on a student's decision to dropout of high school (Cairns, Cairns & Neckerman, 1989). Parents who are uninvolved or uninterested in their child's education often inadvertently send a message to their child that his or her efforts in school are not valued and are unimportant. A student who lives in a household that values education is more likely to stay in school than a student who does not, because his or her efforts and accomplishments are recognized.

For many parents, the only involvement in their child's schooling is supporting his or her athletic endeavors. Through athletic participation, not only does the child identify with the school, the parents also gain a sense of identity with the school as fans of the athletic programs. Although this type of involvement does not seem to correlate to the child's academic performance, it does increase parental involvement in the schooling process which, in many cases, surrounds athletic participation. Also, athletic participation usually allows parents to form a positive and voluntary attachment to their son or daughter's school.

Consequences of High School Dropout

There are numerous negative consequences associated with the decision to drop out of high school. Not only does the decision affect the student both personally and economically, the decision has far-reaching effects on society as a whole. A high school diploma provides many different opportunities to the recipient because, in theory, it is proof that he or she has acquired the basic skills needed to be successful in life. The students who withdraw from school are deemed failures and consequently do not receive the same opportunities.

According to the United States Bureau of Census (2005), high school dropouts on average earn \$9,671 less per year than their peers who obtained a high school diploma. In 2004, the average annual income for a high school dropout was \$16,485, which falls well below the poverty line for a family of four living in the U.S. today (United States Bureau of Census, 2005). The potential earnings problem is compounded by the fact that high school dropouts find it more difficult to obtain steady employment, and once they have a steady job, a high school dropout will have fewer opportunities to receive additional training to remain competitive in the job market. Also, high school dropouts do not receive promotion opportunities at the same rate as fellow co-workers who have earned their high school diplomas (Rumberger, 1987).

Not only is it more difficult for high school dropouts to find steady employment, their average annual earnings have decreased since the 1970's. Barton (2006) compared the average salaries of high school dropouts in 1970 to average salaries of dropouts in 2002. According to his research, a male high school dropout age 25 to 34 working full-time earned an average of \$35,087 annually (adjusted salary), which today is considered

above the poverty line. In 2002, the average salary for a male high school dropout working full-time had fallen to approximately \$22,903 annually, a reduction of nearly 35%. This trend is true for female dropouts as well. In 1971, a female working full-time earned an average of \$19,888 annually. In 2002, a female high school dropout's average annual salary was \$17,114. Even with this particular population working full-time, there is usually not sufficient income to support a family with children. This research prompted Barton to suggest that "in the landscape of the economy, dropouts are often lost travelers without a map" (Barton, 2006, p. 4).

The economic hardships of high school dropouts are well documented in the field of education, but poverty is just one problem high school dropouts face over the course of a lifetime. A study done by Brenner (1976) found that high school dropouts experience shorter life spans, increased suicide rates, and a higher incidence of mental disorders such as depression. A more recent study by Liem, Dillon, and Gore (2001) found that high school dropouts experienced a higher incidence of depression and anxiety in early adulthood when compared to their peers who had a high school diploma. It is difficult to say with certainty whether these problems are the direct result of high school dropout or if they are the bi-product of poverty in general. The fact remains that the decision to drop out of high school is usually accompanied by poverty. As a result, those that drop out of high school often deal with the individual consequences listed above.

The area of high school dropout has received increasing attention from educators and policy makers alike. One possible reason for the increased attention is the fact that a student's decision to leave high school early does not exclusively affect him or her. It

also has consequences for society in the form of lost tax revenues, welfare costs, health care expenses, and higher crime rates.

Levin (1972) found that high school dropouts were more likely to need public services in the form of unemployment benefits, food stamps, health care assistance, and welfare. Although it is difficult to estimate the total cost associated with high school dropouts in the U.S., estimates projected that students who did not finish high school in 2006 cost the taxpayers roughly \$309 billion in lost tax revenues, public service programs, and crime-related costs over the course of their lifetime (Editorial Projects in Education, 2006). Rouse (2005) conveyed the economic impact high school dropouts have on society in a different manner; her research estimated that each dropout in America will cost the nation an average of \$260,000 over the course of his or her lifetime.

The cost of high school dropout is not just limited to public assistance programs; high school dropouts cost the American taxpayers billions of dollars in the form of added police work, court cases, and imprisonment. According to a U.S. Department of Justice report (2002), high school dropouts account for a disproportionately large percentage of state, federal, and death row inmates. Current estimates project that 30% of state inmates, 40% of federal inmates, and 50% of death row inmates did not complete high school. Likewise, a study conducted by Mahoney (2001) found that both male and female high school dropouts were more likely to be arrested than their classmates who received a high school diploma. In his sample of 695 subjects, males who dropped out of school were 2.5 times more likely to be arrested and female high school dropouts were 1.5 times more likely to be arrested when compared to their fellow classmates.

To study the relationship between high school completion and criminal activity, Lochner and Moretti (2004) analyzed three different data sources: Census on Incarceration, Uniform Crime Reports, and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Lochner and Moretti (2004) found that schooling and, specifically, acquiring a high school diploma significantly reduced criminal activity. They generated numerous theories as to why this relationship was found. Earning higher wages, which is associated with having a high school diploma, increases the opportunity cost of crime. In essence, a person who is earning more money has more to lose if he or she is found guilty of a crime and incarcerated than a person who is unemployed and basically has nothing to lose. Also, they suggested that employment decreases the number of opportunities a person has to commit a crime. Finally, education enables the person to make informed and improved decisions that address the possible consequences of his or her actions.

The research done by Lochner and Moretti (2004) also analyzed the economic impact of high school dropouts. They suggested that if American schools could improve high school graduation rates by just 1% it would translate into savings of \$1.4 billion per year in decreased crime rates and crime related costs. "It is difficult to imagine a better reason to develop policies that prevent high school dropout" (Lochner & Moretti, 2004, p. 184).

It is a complex process to estimate the exact dollar amount high school dropouts cost the American taxpayer on an annual basis, but a growing number of researchers are attempting to calculate how many billions of dollars are lost in terms of unemployment benefits, welfare, health insurance, and crime related costs. Also, it is difficult to determine if these consequences are the direct result of high school dropout or a bi-

product of numerous factors in an adolescent's life. It is known, however, that dropping out of high school is a major contributing factor in this complex problem. Tight budgets have school districts performing cost-benefit analyses for all different types of extracurricular activities, including athletics. There have been attempts to compare the costs of dropout prevention programs to the potential economic gains associated with higher graduation rates. Levin (1972) estimated that each dollar invested in dropout prevention programs would produce a \$6 increase in national income and nearly a \$2 increase in tax revenue. These estimations should be taken into account by policy makers and educators before a decision is made to eliminate an athletic program because a cost-cutting maneuver in the present may end up contributing to a future loss of billions at the expense of the American public.

The Relationship between Athletic Participation and High School Dropout

With an increasing amount of attention being focused on high school dropout, the existing research surrounding athletic participation juxtaposed with high school dropout has been receiving more consideration. Contrary to popular belief, there are numerous studies that have shown the positive intervening effects athletic participation has had in addressing the dropout problem. There seem to be two common themes that run through the majority of the existing research in the area of athletic participation and high school dropout. Athletic participation appears to increase the student's connection to the school itself and allows students to be included in an existing social group within the school.

A study done by Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found that participation in extracurricular activities, including athletics, reduced the dropout rate among students in general and especially those who were at-risk of dropping out. The longitudinal study

interviewed 392 adolescents from grades 7 to 12 on an annual basis. Teachers of the participants were asked to complete an Interpersonal Competence Scale to determine if a given student was at-risk for dropout or not.

Due to the results of the study, they suggested that participation was more effective at reducing dropout in at-risk students when compared to more competent students because participation in an extracurricular activity created a positive and voluntary connection to the school itself. It was assumed that students who were successful academically would already have a positive connection to the school; therefore, they would not benefit as much as those students who struggled in school and did not have pre-existing positive experiences. At-risk students usually do not experience a positive and voluntary connection to the school, which is why it is very important for school districts to maintain extracurricular programs such as athletics. These programs may be the only source of positive success an at-risk student experiences throughout the school day.

Mahoney and Cairns (1997) also discussed how extracurricular activities differ from school dropout prevention programs. They suggested that prevention programs usually focus on the shortcomings of the individual student which does little to increase his or her self-esteem and these programs serve as a catalyst in the formation of deviant social groups within the school. Extracurricular activities, including athletics, provide an at-risk student entry into an established social group while concurrently focusing on the student's individual interests, strengths, and goals. "School dropout may be effectively decreased through the maintenance and enhancement of positive characteristics of the

individual that strengthen the student-school connection” (Eccles & Barber, 1999, p. 248).

Another research study conducted by McNeal (1995), found that athletic participation significantly reduced a student’s likelihood of dropping out. McNeal decided to examine if a student’s involvement in a particular activity (i.e., athletics, band, choir) affected the possibility that he or she would withdraw from school. He viewed these activities on a continuum from highly prominent to less recognized activities. He labeled activities such as athletics as a “high-status” activity, music and fine arts were considered a “medium-status” activity, and vocational clubs were regarded as a “low-status” activity. It was assumed that students involved in the high-status activities would be less likely to drop out when compared to students who participated in the low-status activities or did not participate at all. In essence, students who participated in high-status activities had stronger social ties to the school, therefore reducing the likelihood they would drop out.

McNeal (1995) analyzed the data from 14,249 participants of the High School and Beyond (HSB) database generated by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). Participants were divided into four distinct types: athletics, fine arts, academic clubs, and vocational clubs. The results indicated that athletic participation reduced the probability of dropout by approximately 40%. These benefits remained even after McNeal (1995) factored in background variables such as race, gender, SES, and employment. It is important to note that McNeal also found that participation in the fine arts decreased the likelihood of dropout by approximately 15%. A large and diverse nationally-represented sample was used to obtain these results and the results prompted

McNeal to say, "The activity's prominence in the school and peer culture serves to keep students in school" (McNeal, 1995, p. 74).

McNeal (1995) also discussed how integration into the school's different social arenas affects high school dropout. McNeal found that "participating in the athletic arena significantly reduces the student's likelihood of dropping out, whereas participation in the academic and vocational spheres does not" (McNeal, 1995, p. 74). He suggested that participation in athletics fulfilled the student's need to be involved and met the need to belong to a group or a community which prompted students to stay in school. In addition, he argued that athletic participation decreased the probability of dropout because it integrated the student to the school itself and increased the positive attachments the student had with the school. It was also assumed that the consistent nature of athletics in terms of a daily schedule of practices and games contributed to the intervening effects of athletic participation on high school dropout.

Marsh (1993) found that athletic participation had positive effects on a number of different academic and non-academic outcomes. The data for this study was obtained from a nationally represented sample of the High School and Beyond database. Marsh (1993) analyzed data collected from 10,613 students across the United States and found that extracurricular participation, including athletic participation, had a favorable effect on school attendance, parental involvement and expectations, academic self-concept, social identity, and self-esteem. These factors are directly related to the area of dropout because truancy, parental involvement, identity, and self-esteem are well-documented antecedents to high school dropout.

The results were consistent with the Participation/Identification Model proposed by Finn (1989) and also the Identification/Commitment Model (Marsh, 1993). Participation in activities such as athletics had the potential to increase a student's commitment to the school, therefore decreasing the likelihood that a participating student would withdraw from school. "The results presented here suggest that the policy decision to continue to promote extracurricular activity participation is likely to have positive benefits across a wide variety of educationally relevant outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds" (Marsh, 1993, p. 559).

A more recent study conducted by Marsh and Kleitman (2003) found that athletic participation had positive effects on a number of different secondary (e.g., grades, attendance, self-esteem) and post-secondary (e.g., university applications, college enrollment, educational attainment) outcomes for students. The data was generated from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS) which was sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Annual data was collected via personal survey from 4,250 students in grades 8 to 12.

After analyzing the data, Marsh and Kleitman (2003) found that athletic participation had positive effects on students' grades, self-esteem, attendance and delinquency rates. Marsh and Kleitman (2003) suggested that the positive effects were due to an increased sense of identification and commitment to school, which continues to support the Identification/Commitment Model proposed by Marsh (1993). They argued that athletic participation fosters identification with the school and as a result students are more committed to school-related values. Students who feel they can identify with the school and are committed to school-related values are less likely to drop out because they

feel they belong. "In times of tight educational budgets and a version of economic rationalism based on a narrow focus on achievement test scores, it is important that cost-cutting measures do not force schools to eliminate sports" (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003, p. 223).

Eccles and Barber (1999) devised a study to determine the potential benefits associated with participation in different types of extracurricular activities. They analyzed data from a longitudinal study called the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT) in which 1,259 students filled out surveys on an annual basis pertaining to extracurricular participation. They found that athletic participation contributes to a better-than-expected grade point average, an increased sense of school attachment, and an overall increased enjoyment of school. As many theories suggested, attachment and identification with the school itself is an important intervening factor in high school dropout.

Eccles and Barber (1999) also discussed the role extracurricular activities played in the development of a student's identity and his or her sense of belonging. The research suggested that "extracurricular activities can facilitate adolescents' developmental need for social relatedness and can contribute to one's identity as an important and valued member of the school community" (Eccles & Barber, 1999, p. 29). Students who feel part of a community are less likely to feel alienated; therefore, the withdrawal process is impeded.

Not only does athletic participation increase the ties a student has to the school itself, often times athletics provide a venue for students to create and identify with certain social groups within the school. This aspect of identification is very important to

adolescents and their schooling process. In theory, athletics provides a two-pronged approach when addressing the high school dropout issue. First, it increases the positive and voluntary connection to the school itself and second, it reduces alienation by providing a student access to an established social group within the school. Both of these aspects need to be addressed if schools are to decrease high school dropout.

Mahoney (2000) conducted a longitudinal study consisting of 695 school-aged students from 7 different public schools in the southeastern United States. The students were placed into four different groups based on a variety of different characteristics such as academic performance, socioeconomic status (SES), aggression levels, and popularity. Students who had low academic profiles, elevated levels of aggression, and came from a low SES background were considered to be at-risk of dropping out. Students were interviewed on an annual basis and, based on the results, students who participated in extracurricular activities, including athletics, were less likely to drop out or be arrested as young adults when compared to fellow classmates who did not participate in extracurricular activities.

Mahoney (2000) found that male students who did not participate in extracurricular activities such as athletics were 2.5 times more likely to drop out and non-participating female students were 4 times more likely to drop out when compared to peers who did participate. Participation in athletics seemed to counteract several of the anti-social behaviors of the highly aggressive students such as a decrease in disruptive behaviors, absenteeism, and delinquency. Participation also focuses on the positive attributes of the individual as opposed to the shortcomings of the individual. This component allowed the student to feel a sense of accomplishment, which in theory led to

increased self-esteem and decreased the likelihood a student would withdraw from school.

A growing number of researchers have decided to investigate the affects athletic participation has on minority students. One of the guiding principles of this research is to distinguish if athletics address the needs of this unique population of students who are most likely to withdraw from school or not. Research conducted by Melnick, Sabo, and Vanfossen (1992) examined the effects of athletic participation on educational outcomes for both male and female African-American and Hispanic students. They evaluated data collected from the High School and Beyond (HSB) study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education. Minority students were asked to complete questionnaires as high school sophomore students in 1980 and again in 1982 as senior high school students. The study's data was generated from the questionnaire responses of 3,686 minority students involved in the nationwide HSB study. Their research found that athletic participation led to improved popularity and an increased involvement in extracurricular and school-based activities. More relevant to this paper, the study found that athletic participation was significantly related to lower dropout rates for minority students.

These findings indicated to the researchers that athletic participation addressed several social needs of minority students. Students who are perceived as popular, identify with an established social group, and are involved in school-based activities are less likely to withdraw from school than non-participants. They argued that some students stayed in school because athletic participation was enjoyable and cultivated both friendships and popularity. Also, athletic participation served as an academic resource in terms of school retention; a student cannot learn if he or she is not in school. This study

was important because it demonstrated that athletic participation addressed the needs of the minority groups (African-American and Hispanic) most at-risk of dropping out. These results suggested that “high school athletic participation was a *social* resource for many minority youth” (Melnick, Sabo, & Vanfossen, 1992, p. 295).

Davalos, Chavez, and Guardiola (1999) devised a study to determine if athletic participation decreased the dropout rate for Mexican-American students. The sample was comprised of 2,621 students from three different school districts in the southwestern part of the United States. Students were asked to fill out self-surveys consisting of a wide variety of questions that addressed culture, athletic participation, and academic achievement. They performed an analysis of the data and found that Mexican-American students who participated in athletics were approximately 1.5 times less likely to drop out of school compared to non-participants.

Davalos, Chavez and Guardiola (1999) concluded that athletic participation was effective in encouraging school retention for all students regardless of race or ethnicity. The researchers proposed that athletics provide a voluntary connection to the school. In addition, the focus was on the student’s strengths opposed to his or her weaknesses and allowed the student access to an established social group within the school.

Chapter III: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the information attained in the literature review. A critical analysis is included regarding the current theories pertaining to high school dropouts, the prevalence rates of high school dropout in the United States, the preceding factors associated with the decision to withdraw from high school, the consequences of high school dropout, and the effects of athletic participation on the high school dropout issue. Finally, the chapter offers recommendations to those working in the educational field and parents of students who are at-risk to withdraw from school.

Summary

There has been an ongoing debate within the field of education concerning the role athletics play within a school. According to Coleman (1961), athletics are a fun and sociable activity, but do not play a critical role in the academic goals of education. Holland and Andre (1987) argued that athletics play a vital role in the overall development of an adolescent student. Some educators state that the school exists to solely teach students the needed academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Other educators certainly agree that the basic academic skills are very important, but the school also exists to facilitate the psychological and social development of their students.

Finn (1989) discussed two different models: the Frustration/Self-Esteem Model and the Participation/Identification Model. The Frustration/Self-Esteem Model stated that academic failures lead to increased frustration and lower self-esteem within a student. This process may weigh heavily on a student's decision to drop out of high school. The Participation/Identification Model (Finn, 1989) suggested that students who

participate in school functions such as athletics identify with the school more than students who do not participate. This sense of belongingness is something that most high school dropouts do not feel which may accelerate their withdrawal from school.

Although it is virtually impossible to find the exact number of students who drop out of school each year, current estimates show that about 5 out of every 100 high school students in America will not graduate. This estimate indicates that approximately 10% of the 15- to 24-year-old population, or roughly 3.8 million adolescents and young adults, in America today do not have a diploma or GED. Equally alarming is that students who grow up in families of low socioeconomic status are four times more likely to drop out than students from middle and upper class families (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006).

Antecedents such as minority status, poor academic achievement, low socioeconomic status, single parent households, parental involvement in education, absenteeism, number of school suspensions, and behavioral problems, are common characteristics of high school dropouts that were discussed in this paper. The two most powerful predictors of high school dropout include grade retention and employment opportunities. These factors most commonly appear before the decision to drop out is made.

There is no shortage of negative consequences associated with the decision to drop out of high school. High school dropouts receive smaller annual salaries, have a difficult time securing steady employment, and have fewer opportunities to advance within a company once a job is secured. Also alarming is the fact that if a high school dropout does find full-time employment, their salary is usually not sufficient to support a family with children. Consequences are not limited to just economic hardships; high

school dropouts contend with a higher incidence of mental illness, shorter life expectancies, and increased rates of suicide.

A student's decision to leave school early does not exclusively affect him or her; it has far-reaching effects for society as well. High school dropouts are more likely to need public assistance programs such as welfare, food stamps, unemployment benefits, and health care assistance. As a result, high school dropouts cost the American public billions of dollars in lost tax revenues, increased public assistance, and crime related costs.

A variety of studies have shown the positive intervening effects athletic participation has had in addressing the complex dropout problem. There were two common themes running through the existing research. First, athletic participation produces a voluntary and positive connection to the school itself and second, athletic participation allows students access into an existing peer group within the school. These two themes are of great importance in addressing the needs of students at-risk of dropping out. Dropouts frequently do not feel a connection to the school and are usually not associated with a peer group within the school.

Critical Analysis

There were several research questions that this study attempted to address. The following is a critical analysis of the original research questions.

1. What theories currently exist to better explain high school dropouts?

There were a number of different theories referenced in this study pertaining to high school dropouts and athletic participation. The Zero-Sum Model (Coleman, 1961) stated that academics, athletics, and social interactions are in competition with one

another. That is to say, if a student spends more time in athletics than any of the other arenas, his or her academics will suffer. The Developmental Model (Holland & Andre, 1987) argued that athletics play a vital role in the overall development (e.g., academic, psychological, and social aspects) of a student. The Frustration/Self-Esteem Model (Finn, 1989) purported that continuous failure in school leads to frustration and a general overall sense of inadequacy. This sense of inadequacy may lead to the student withdrawing from school and eventually dropping out completely. The Participation/Identification Model (Finn, 1989) stated that the more students participate in school-sanctioned activities such as athletics, the greater sense of belongingness or identification they feel within the school itself. The Identification/Commitment Model (Marsh, 1993) declared that athletic participation enhances a student's identification with and commitment to the school. As a result, athletic participation reduces alienation and promotes school-related principles and values.

2. How prevalent is high school dropout in the United States?

The National Center for Educational Statistics currently estimates that nearly 4 million Americans ages 15 to 24 do not have a high school diploma or an equivalent degree. About 5 out of every 100 students in classrooms across America will drop out of school and not graduate. According to the research, there is no difference between the dropout rates of males and females. Unfortunately, the majority of these high school dropouts will be Hispanic or African American students and come from an impoverished background. As a result, the poverty cycle continues.

3. What are common antecedents to high school dropout?

Numerous research studies have attempted to identify common characteristics that high school dropouts share. One of the guiding principles of this research is to better identify at-risk students. In theory, through early identification, educators can intervene before the students decide to drop out of school. A record of a student's behavior and academic performance can be a "red flag" in identifying an at-risk student. Students who perform poorly academically and cause problems in the school are often at-risk of dropping out of high school. Employment, or at least the possibility of employment, is an accurate predictor of high school dropout. Regular employment during the school year allows students limited financial freedom and may accelerate the withdrawal process. Other common identifiers include minority status, socioeconomic status, absenteeism, and parental involvement in their child's education. Possibly the most accurate predictor of high school dropout is grade retention. Students are usually retained in the elementary school years because of poor academic performance or because they do not possess the maturity level of their peers. As these students grow older, they continue to struggle in school and feel alienated within their cohort. This commonly leads to a decision to withdraw from school before graduation.

4. What are the consequences of deciding to drop out of high school?

Past research has identified a variety of consequences associated with high school dropout. Economic, psychological, and social consequences are well documented in educational research. Perhaps one reason educators and policy makers are paying more attention to the high school dropout issue is the fact that high school dropouts cost the American public billions of dollars annually. The many negative consequences

associated with the decision to drop out of high school may be the result of what society feels a high school diploma represents. A high school diploma provides many different opportunities to the recipient because, in theory, it is proof that he or she has acquired the basic skills needed to be successful in life. The students who withdraw from school are deemed failures and consequently do not receive the same opportunities.

5. What is the relationship between athletic participation and high school dropout?

The literature review discovered a number of different relationships that exist between athletic participation and high school dropout. Athletic participation addresses the needs of a unique population of students within a school in a variety of ways. High school dropout programs regularly focus on shortcomings of individual students, which do little to increase the student's motivation to attend school or increase his or her self-esteem. Also, these programs serve as catalysts in the formation of deviant groups. When a student participates in athletics the focus is on his or her individual strengths, interests, and goals. Likewise, students are involved with an established peer group within the school.

A growing body of research suggests that athletic participation decreases the likelihood that minority students will drop out of high school. This finding is of importance because athletic participation may address the needs of the group of students who, according to the research, is most likely to drop out. Athletic participation generates opportunities for all students, including minority students, to create and maintain friendships with students and staff, increases their popularity within a school, provides access to an established social group, and establishes a positive and voluntary

connection to school itself. These factors may provide a minority student incentive to attend school on a daily basis, thus decreasing the likelihood he or she will drop out.

Athletics seem to provide all students, but especially those at-risk of dropping out, with a positive and voluntary connection to the school itself. Oftentimes, high school dropouts struggle academically and/or socially and do not have a pre-existing connection to the school. This lack of a connection or a sense of belongingness frequently accelerates the withdrawal process. Athletics may provide the only positive connection an at-risk student may have with the school.

Numerous studies highlighted the fact that athletic participation addresses the social needs of a student. High school dropouts frequently feel like outcasts or loners and do not identify with a social group within the school. Athletics can facilitate or contribute to a student's social identity within the school, which leads to a sense that he or she is an important and appreciated member of the school community. When a student feels they are part of the school community, he or she is less likely to feel alienated and the withdrawal process is hindered. Athletics provide a two-pronged approach in addressing the high school dropout issue. First, it increases the positive and voluntary connection to the school itself and second, it reduces alienation by providing a student access to an established social group within the school. Both of these aspects need to be addressed if schools are to decrease high school dropout rates.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

It is assumed that the cited research studies provided accurate data and the participants of each study answered honestly to the questions provided. This was a review of the existing literature, not an empirical study. There was no data collected and

analyzed; this study was conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of athletic participation to high school dropout. As a result, this review does not contribute original data to the field of education.

Recommendations for Educators

To assist educators in decreasing dropout rates in their schools, the following recommendations are provided as a result of the literature review.

1. It may be beneficial for educators to look at the high school dropout problem not as a single event in a student's life, but a series of events that begin as early as the elementary school years and culminate with a decision to leave school without a diploma. By looking at high school dropout as a sequential process, educators can address the needs of students earlier and increase the chances of a successful school experience. Addressing the needs of students before a decision to withdraw from school is made could reduce the number of high school dropouts in America today.

2. Early predictors can aid educators in accurately identifying at-risk students. Common characteristics of at-risk students that educators should be aware of include students of minority status, low socioeconomic class, poor academic performance, behavioral problems, grade retention, and employment during the school year. Through identification, educators can begin to intervene and decrease the risk of a student dropping out of school.

3. Schools need to provide all students with opportunities to generate positive and voluntary connections with the school itself. Providing opportunities such as athletics allows students to gain a sense of belonging in the school, identify with a peer group within the school, and motivates students to attend school. This sense of identification

and belonging decreases the likelihood that a student will drop out because of the voluntary nature of the relationship. In athletic participation, the student has a choice to attend practice and/or games; the same is not true for attending class. School districts need to address these factors before cutting an athletic program because they may inadvertently remove a student's only voluntary tie with the school. The removal of an athletic program may accelerate the withdrawal process and the decision to drop out may become imminent.

4. The continuation of athletic programs may be beneficial in meeting the needs of a culturally diverse student population. A growing amount of research has shown that athletic participation decreases the likelihood a minority student will drop out of school. Athletic participation facilitates the development of a strong school connection that many minority students lack and allows students to create and maintain friendships with staff and peers alike.

Recommendations for Parents

In order to assist parents of potential dropouts, the following recommendations are provided as a result of the literature review.

1. High school dropouts often do not identify with a peer group in the school; as a result, they feel alienated and the withdrawal process is accelerated. If parents feel their child is socially withdrawn, athletics may provide an opportunity for their child to identify with and become part of an established social group within the school.

2. If truancy is an issue, athletics may provide a positive and voluntary connection to the school that may not exist for students who struggle academically and/or

who profoundly dislike school. This connection may provide motivation for a student to attend school on a daily basis, who is otherwise frequently absent and/or withdrawn.

3. Parental involvement in a child's education is an important intervening factor in addressing the dropout issue. Athletics may provide parents access to and/or involvement in their child's education. This involvement may increase the likelihood a student will earn a high school diploma.

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