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# The Indiana Public School Dropout Dilemma Differences in Superintendents' Perceptions

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# THE INDIANA PUBLIC SCHOOL DROPOUT DILEMMA

# DIFFERENCES IN SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This quantitative study examined Indiana public school superintendents' perspectives of efficacy toward the student dropout dilemma. A survey was administered to a random sample of Indiana superintendents, and an analysis was made to investigate whether superintendents in Indiana believe that there is an internal or external locus of control (efficacy) concerning the dropout issue. Further examination was made to determine if superintendent opinions towards efficacy differ by school geographic location (rural, suburban, town, metropolitan), socioeconomic status of the community (percent of students on free and reduced lunch), or superintendents' age. The study also compared superintendent opinions concerning the dropout issue with those of teachers and principals as reported in Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Balfanz (2009) to see if their opinions correspond.

Analysis of variance was computed for the variables of interest to identify significant difference between groups. An ANOVA was run on each research question. A factorial ANOVA was then run to determine whether significant main or interaction effects exist between the independent variables. The statistical analysis showed moderate efficacy among Indiana superintendent concerning student dropouts. The ANOVA and Factorial ANOVA showed insufficient evidence to conclude that significant differences exist between different groups of superintendents based on geographic location, free and reduced lunch populations, or age of the superintendent. The examination of superintendent responses to survey questions showed similar responses to those of teachers and principals on the national study. A general

discussion is presented on the conclusions of the research with recommendations made for reducing the dropout rate and further research on the topic.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

The public school system in the United States of America has been the hero for a countless number of students throughout its glorious history. Public schools made acquiring an education affordable, allowing all students the opportunity to improve their economic and social status. Thomas Jefferson (1818) once wrote, "Preach, my dear Sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people" (¶ 6). Before the creation of the American public school, an education was reserved for the upper class. The public schools would now educate the masses, giving all who decided to accept this gift the ability to pursue *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*! The public school would be the tool to educate the American population and in return allow for democracy and capitalism to flourish.

The U.S. Constitution does not speak to public education. A citizen's right to an education has traditionally been determined by each state's constitution. The Indiana Constitution states the following concerning the common school system (public school):

> Knowledge and learning, generally diffused throughout a community, being essential to the preservation of a free government; it should be the duty of the General Assembly to encourage, by all suitable means, moral, intellectual scientific, and agricultural improvement; and provide, by law, for a general and uniform system of Common

> Schools, wherein tuition shall without charge, and equally open to all. (Indiana General Assembly, 2009, ¶ 1)

The public school provided education for all and was free of charge. Education was no longer reserved for only the rich and upper class. The public school system would allow children to be educated despite social, economic status, religion, race, or sex. As written by Antin (1912):

> Education was free. That subject my father had written about repeatedly, as comprising his chief hope for us children, the essence of American opportunity. (We had) the freedom of the schools of Boston. No application made, no questions asked, no examinations, rulings, exclusions; no machinations, no fees. The doors stood open for every one of us. (p. 58)

The public schools, it was thought, would allow anyone, through hard work and determination, to go from rags to riches as stated in the proverbial Horatio Alger story. The public school system would be the gate to the *American dream*. Elementary students are told at the earliest of age to study hard because through education, anything is possible. You can become a doctor, a lawyer, or even the President of the United States! Hodding Carter III, the former spokesperson for the Department of State and Assistant Secretary of State in President Carter's administration, once said in a speech "The greatest single innovation of our democracy has been the idea of public school" (Carter, 2002).

For many students in the American public school system, their story ends in tragedy. Nationally, the current school year across America will produce 1.25 million dropouts (Furger, 2006). According to research, only 68-71% of students who attend public high schools will graduate (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Approximately one-third of those students

will become dropouts (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The numbers are more startling when broken down into racial classification. The graduation rate for Black, Hispanic or Native American students is roughly 50% (Bridgeland et al., 2006). For Whites and Asians, the graduation rate is around 75-77% with a quarter leaving school without meeting graduation requirements (Bridgeland et al., 2006). For those students who become public school dropouts, the situation becomes a true tragedy.

Compared to the national statistics, Indiana's graduation rates have shown improvement over the last five years. The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) reports show the state making gains in the number of students graduating with the class of 2009. The following are the graduation statistics for the Class of 2009 as reported:

- 81.5% of students graduated within four years
- 8.7% of students are reported dropouts or undetermined (meaning they either moved out of state, dropped out, or left school without formally withdrawing)
- 7.2% of students are still in school
- 1.1% of students earned a General Education Development (GED) diploma
- 1.1% earned a Special Education Certificate
- 0.4% of students earned a non-diploma Course Completion Certificate
- 90-100 % graduation rate – 101 schools (27%)
- 80-89% graduation rate – 159 schools (43%)
- 70-79% graduation rate – 12 schools (3%)
- 60-69% graduation rate – 10 schools (3%)
- Less than 50 % graduation rate – 15 schools (4%)

- 68% of public high schools met or exceeded the state average for graduation rate
- Just over 70% of public high schools graduated 80% or more of their senior class
- 27% of public high school graduated 90% or more of their senior class
- 278 schools (76%) improved their graduation rates from 2008-2009
- 36% of schools had at least 5% increase in their graduation rate (IDOE, 2010, p. 1)

One may ask that with the Indiana public schools showing such improvement in graduation rates, whether there really is a dropout problem or *silent epidemic* in the Indiana public school system (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The State of Indiana public school records show that enrollment for the 2008-09 school year was 1,046,263 students (IDOE, 2009g). If the graduation rates are accurate, 81.5% of the students will graduate in four years; this means approximately 187,968 students will not graduate in four years. History tells us that a large percentage of these students are likely never to graduate from high school thus becoming dropouts. According to the state's current dropout statistic, 8.7% or 104,426 students have dropped out of high school. This is still a large number of students who have put themselves in a position to become a financial and social burden on the state.

Another issue may be concealing a much greater dropout problem than is being reported by the state's school systems. The right to home school your child in Indiana has left a large loophole in the graduation rate/dropout statistic. In Indiana, all a parent has to do is inform the school that his/her child is being withdrawn in order to home school the child and the student can be withdrawn with no questions asked. Parents are encouraged to register with the state;

however, there is little to no supervision over this process. Parents with students at the high school level use home school withdrawal to their advantage in order to get around the age 18 requirement for legally withdrawing from school. High schools may also be using this loophole to their benefit in order to show lower dropout rates. Statistics reported by the IDOE show that during the 1987-88 school year, only 667 were registered or listed as home school students. For the 2008-09 school year, the number had risen to 30,175 students who were receiving their education through non-public school other than a state certified private school (IDOE, 2009e). This is an increase of 4,524%. This may indicate that the dropout rate in Indiana is much higher than the 8.7% reported by the IDOE.

Why is the dropout issue important in the United States? It has been reported that dropouts threaten U.S. economic growth and competiveness (Albright & Salmanowitz, 2009). Being a high school dropout is related to a substantial number of negative outcomes. Dropouts will make less money than people from the same age groups that have a high school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2007). Dropouts are much less likely to be employed (NCES, 2007). Individuals who drop out of school are less healthy than graduates are and are more likely to incarcerated (NCES, 2007). White students significantly outperform minority students in graduation rate. If minority student graduation rates were equal to that of White students, in 1998 it would have meant an additional $310-$525 billion in Gross Domestic Product (GPD) (NCES, 2007). This would equal a 2-4% increase in GPD (NCES, 2007). The cost of the current discrepancy in minority graduation rates is equal to the country being in a perpetual recession (Albright & Salmanowitz, 2009). It is estimated that cutting the dropout rate in half would raise $45 billion annually in federal taxes and cost savings (NCES, 2007).

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that in the future, 90% of high-growth, high-wage jobs will require some type of education beyond high school (Albright & Salmanowitz, 2009).

A significant amount of research has been conducted to explore why students drop out of high school. Recently, a research study was released that examined both teacher and principal perspectives on why students quit school. Not surprisingly, the report found major differences between teacher/principal opinions as compared to student perspectives. However, one important perspective that is missing from the research is opinions from superintendents.

Superintendents are the educational leaders within their districts. They work closely with educational boards and often control the flow of funds within a corporation. In Indiana, no educator may be in better position to determine educational priorities than a corporation superintendent. Research has shown that there is a direct correlation between district leadership and student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). There is also a correlation between successful school corporations and superintendents who focus efforts on creating goal-oriented districts (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Because of their position, superintendents are in a unique position to focus corporation goals on improving programs for at-risk students and improving graduation rates by aligning goals for achievement/instruction, board alignment and support of goals, monitoring progress toward goals and using resources to support achievement and instructional goals (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Through quality leadership and vision, no one educator may be in a better position to dramatically reduce the student dropout rate than school superintendents.

**Statement of the Problem**

The dropout issue in America has become a *silent epidemic*. Each year, approximately one-third of American seniors fail to graduate from high school. This failure to graduate such a

large number of students from our public high schools has a negative effect on the social climate of the country. It also has a harmful impact on the local, state and national economy reducing America's ability to compete economically on a global level. To reduce the dropout crisis in the public schools, school leadership must believe that they have the capacity to effect dropout rates and as a result, improve graduation rates.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine Indiana superintendents' perspectives and efficacy toward the student dropout dilemma. An analysis was made to investigate whether superintendents in Indiana believe that there is an internal or external locus of control concerning the dropout issue. Further examination was made to determine if superintendent opinions towards efficacy are affected by school demographic type (rural, suburban, town, metropolitan), socioeconomic status of the community (percent of students on free and reduced lunch), or superintendents' age. The study compared superintendent opinions concerning the dropout issue with those of teachers, and principals as reported in a recently published research study by Bridgeland et al., (2009) to see if their opinions correspond.

**Research Questions**

1. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents perceptions of locus of control based on the geographic location of their school corporation (metropolitan, suburban, town, rural)?
2. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on the percentage of students identified as free and reduced payment status?
3. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on superintendents' age?

4. How do Indiana Superintendent perceptions compare, as determined by this study, to teachers and principals as reported in the research study *On The Front Lines Of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem*?

**Hypothesis**

**$H_0$1**. There is no significant difference among Indiana metropolitan, suburban, town, and rural superintendents regarding perceived locus of control concerning school dropout.

**$H_0$2**. There is no significant difference among Indiana superintendents regarding perceived locus of control based on percentage of students on free and reduced payment status.

**$H_0$3**. There is no significant difference among Indiana superintendents regarding perceived locus of control based on superintendents' age.

**Significance of the Study**

This quantitative study explored superintendent efficacy and related opinions on the local, state, and national dropout issue. This study adds to the research concerning the dropout dilemma in the U. S. This study was designed to allow the researcher to make inferences on superintendents' attitudes in Indiana concerning the dropout issue. A great deal of research has been conducted on why students drop out of school and the impact of that decision on the culture and economics of the United States. Recently, a research study was conducted to determine principal and teacher opinions on the dropout issue. This study expanded that research and directed it toward Indiana superintendents. The superintendent perspectives concerning the dropout issue represents an important gap in the literature in this very important research.

**Definitions**

The following are definitions that are important for the purposes of this study.

*Dropout*. There is no universal definition for when a student becomes a high school dropout. Historically, the states have been left to their own definitions making dropout statistics very difficult to accurately report. The reauthorization of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) referred to as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) placed a requirement on public high schools to report rates of non-completion. To be fair and accurate, a universal definition for what constitutes a dropout was needed for all states (NCES, n.d.). NCLB required all states to follow the dropout definition established by the National Center for Educational statistics (NCES) (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2010). The NCES, based on information obtained from a group of experts studying the issue, in August 2004 recommended that states adopt an adjusted cohort graduation rate (IDOE, 2009c). The following year, in response to the NCES recommendation, The National Governors Association proposed that all states adopt a standard four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate that would be consistent with that recommended by the NCES (IDOE, 2009c). The following is the NCES definition for a dropout:

> A dropout is a student in grades nine through 12 who fits any of the following criteria: was enrolled in the district during the previous school year; was not enrolled at the beginning of the succeeding school year; has not graduated or completed a program of study by the maximum age established by the state; has not transferred to another public school district, to a non-public school or to a state-approved educational program; or a student who has left school for reasons other than death, illness, or school-approved absence. (NCSL, 2010, ¶ 6)

*Indiana Graduation Rate/Dropout Rate*. Well ahead of other States, the State of Indiana adopted its dropout definition and new calculation formula in 2003 (IC 20-26-13). The new formula establishes a cohort group of freshmen (IDOE, 2009f). The cohort increases and decreases based on students moving in and out of the school over the years. However, the cohort never changes throughout the state (students always stay in the same cohort group) giving a much more accurate four-year graduation rate. The state also adopted five- and six-year graduation rates in order to account for those students who graduate outside of the standard four years (IDOE, 2009f). This dropout definition and calculation is thought to give a much more accurate accounting of the state's dropout and graduation rates. The Indiana dropout definition is:

> Dropout means a student who was enrolled in school during the current school year or the previous summer recess, who left the educational system during the current school year or the previous summer recess, who has not graduated from high school, and who does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:
>
> 1. Death.
> 2. Temporary absence due to suspension or a school-excused absence.
> 3. Transfer to a public or nonpublic school. (IDOE, 2009b, ¶ 12)

*Dropout rate* means the number determined under STEP THREE of the following formula:

> STEP ONE: Determine the number of students enrolled on October 1 or the date closest to October 1 that school is in session.
>
> STEP TWO: Determine the number of students who drop out of school during the current school year and the previous summer recess.

STEP THREE: Determine the quotient of:

the amount determined under STEP TWO; divided by

the amount determined under STEP ONE. (IDOE, 2009b, ¶ 13)

Indiana was one of the first states to calculate graduation rates based on the new student-level formula (IDOE, 2009c). The IDOE started using the new calculation during the 2005-06 school year. This was the first time four years of student-level information was available (IDOE, 2009c). The Indiana definition was used for the purpose of this study.

*Efficacy*. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines efficacy as the power to produce an effect (Merriam-Webster, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the researcher tried to determine if Indiana superintendents believe that they have the power to produce an effect on dropouts. Do Indiana superintendents believe that they have the ability to curtail the dropout rate in their school district?

*Internal locus of control*. An internal locus of control is an individual's belief that he/she has control over a situation (Rotter, 1966). Again, for the purpose of this study, an internal locus of control suggests that the superintendents believe that they have control over dropout the rate.

*External locus of control*. An external locus of control is an individual's belief that he/she does not have control over a situation (Rotter, 1966). The individual believes that external circumstances or forces control the situation. For the purposes of this study, an external locus of control suggests that the respondents believe that the dropout rate is affected by circumstances outside the superintendent's control.

*Demographic*s. The IDOE groups school corporations into the following demographic types: metropolitan, suburban, town, rural (IDOE, 2009b). The following are definitions for the

categories provided by the IDOE. The categories are based on the 2000 U.S. Census definitions.

- City, Large: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.
- City, Midsize: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
- City, Small: Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000.
- Suburb, Large: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more.
- Suburb, Midsize: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
- Suburb, Small: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000.
- Town, Fringe: Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area.
- Town, Distant: Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.
- Town, Remote: Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area.
- Rural, Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to five miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

- Rural, Distant: Census-defined rural territory that is more than five miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.
- Rural, Remote: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is more than 10 miles from an urban cluster. (IDOE, 2009b)

The IDOE (2009h) takes all categories and fits them into one of four demographic types. The metropolitan demographic is made up of all city categories (large city, midsize city, small city). The suburban demographic is made up of suburban large, suburban midsize, and suburban small. The town demographic is made up of town fringe, town distant, and town remote. The rural demographic is made up of rural fringe, distant, and remote.

**Limitations**

There are 292 public school corporations in the State of Indiana. Superintendents surveyed in this study were limited to 30 participants from the four demographic regions identified for this study (metropolitan, suburban, town, rural) for a total of 120 possible completed surveys. This means that 172 superintendents were not chosen to participate in this study. This study was limited to Indiana superintendents possibly allowing for regional partiality. Response-bias may be another limitation if the superintendents' surveyed chose not to respond to the survey based on personal or professional reasons or answered questions in a manner other than according to their true beliefs.

**Delimitations**

The time frame established for this survey and data collection was the 2010-11 school year. The sample included 120 superintendents who were randomly selected to participate out of the four demographic regions that make up school corporations in the State of Indiana.

Superintendents prospectively determined to have a conflict of interest with the researcher were not eligible for selection. This study is limited to measuring superintendent perceptions concerning Indiana's dropout rate and level of efficacy.

**Organization of the Study**

There are five chapters to this quantitative study. Chapter 1 consists of an introduction, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, the null hypotheses, significance of the study, definition of terms, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 serves as a review of recent research and literature concerning the public school dropout issue in the United States of America. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the methodology of the study. In Chapter 3, the researcher briefly describes the research design, restates the research questions and hypotheses, identifies the population to be sampled in this study, outlines the data collection procedures, and details the statistical methods to be used for the study. Chapter 4 serves as an analysis of data and findings. In Chapter 4, a presentation of the data is presented along with the findings with regard to each hypothesis and research question. In Chapter 5, the researcher gives his conclusions and recommendations.

# CHAPTER 2

## Literature Review

Public education over the last several years has fallen under intense scrutiny. Gallop Polls taken in August of 2005 through August of 2009 found that the majority of Americans were either *somewhat dissatisfied* or *completely dissatisfied* with the quality of education students receive in K-12 public schools (Gallup Poll, 2010). However, no area connected with education has received more publicity than the nation's high school dropout rate. According to national statistics, one-third of public high school students and nearly one-half of African American, Hispanics, and Native Americans fail to graduate from public high schools (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Daily, 7,000 students leave school and never return (Monrad, 2007). Unbelievably, one high school student drops out of school every nine seconds (Reimer & Smink, 2005). By the end of a school year, approximately 1.2 million students have dropped out of school (Editorial Projects in Education, 2008).

The authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2001 placed unprecedented accountability and national attention on the performance of public school systems. Prior to the passage of the NCLB, the State of Indiana passed its own accountability system known as Public Law 221 (P.L. 221). P.L. 221 took effect July 1, 1999, and was designed to raise academic achievement among all students who attended public schools in Indiana (IDOE, 2009d). Primarily Indiana Statewide Testing

Educational Progress (ISTEP) scores in English/language arts, math, attendance and graduation rates, along with other assessments, measure improvement. The law works in concurrence with the NCLB. Schools are labeled based on their performance of improvement in the above listed categories. To hold schools accountable, a school that fails to improve could be placed on academic probation and eventually closed.

Criticism and scrutiny of public education is not a new phenomenon. However, federal and state accountability laws have significantly changed public education. School corporations throughout the nation are working diligently to improve performance in the areas designated for measure. No school wants to be considered a *failing* school under NCLB, or suffer the consequences of the accountability associated with the Indiana P.L. 221.

For years, no one paid much attention to America's dropouts. Traditionally, schools were designed to separate students into different social classes. Many graduates matriculated to college while others were left to staff labor-intensive or mundane factory jobs. A high school dropout was simply an accepted by-product of the system. The times have changed. Many jobs that were traditionally reserved for high school dropouts no longer exist, or the skill levels needed to successfully perform those jobs have increased. Allowing students to drop out of school can no longer be considered an acceptable solution for those students who simply do not fit into the system.

The dropout statistics are alarming and the issue has become one of the most critical facing the nation. To put it into a global perspective, the U.S. ranks 11$^{th}$ compared to other nations among adults between the ages of 25 and 34 who have finished high school; the U.S. used to rank first (Organization for Economic Co-Operation & Development, 2006). However, as of 2001, Indiana was one of only eight states to attach graduation performance to its school

improvement measurement system (Swanson, 2009). One must wonder if State Departments of Education and local school corporations really see the dropout issue as a silent epidemic?

Historically, dropping out of school has not always been seen as a negative. At the turn of the century (early 1900s) approximately 4% of the population 18 years of age and older had completed high school (Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). By 1960, the dropout rate in the U.S. was reduced to approximately 25% (Thurlow et al., 2002). Presently, research puts the U.S. graduation rate between 68-75% with nearly one third of public school students not graduating with their class (Balfanz, Fox, Bridgeland, & McNaught, 2009).

**Dropout Calculations**

One of the most difficult tasks associated with the nation's dropout rate is determining accurate data. Since the nation's education, for the most part, is left to the states for regulation and implementation, each state has used a different method of calculating graduation rates. These calculations have greatly inflated graduation rates and significantly underestimated dropout rates. The passage of the NCLB Act put an emphasis on graduation rates but no condition for accountability and enforcement (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Historically, there have been many variations in determining dropout rates that have made accurate data collection difficult and have lead to some students not being included in dropout statistics. The following are some of the main variations in reporting that make collecting dropout data difficult (Williams, 1987):

- What is the period when a student should be counted as a dropout?
- Is there a certain amount of time that should elapse when a student is absent and unaccounted for when he/she should be counted as a dropout?

- Have the differences in dropout accounting practices and data collection led to duplicate counts of students?
- What grade levels should be included in the counting of dropouts?
- Is there a certain age when students can be counted as a dropout?
- Should students who attend alternative settings be counted as dropouts?

These variations in practices and exact definitions between school districts and states, along with the complexity in keeping track of students, the incompatibility of data management systems, and financial constraints on school corporations, make accurate dropout data difficult to collect (Williams, 1987). Organizations such as the Office of Special Education Programs have used a different dropout definition than the NCES. This has also made it very difficult to track and compare special education and general education dropout numbers (Thurlow et al., 2002).

Three basic definitions have been used from state to state to track dropouts. These definitions are event rates, status rates, and cohort rates (NCES, 2000). An event rate is an annual rate that measures incidence. The event rate is based on students who drop out during a single school year. An event rate generally reports the smallest number of dropouts (NCES, 2000). Status rate is a prevalence collection that measures the number of students who have not completed high school and are not enrolled. The status rate does not take into consideration when a student dropped out of school. The status rate generally more accurately reports dropouts than event rate data collection. The cohort rate is a longitudinal study that tracks a single group (i.e. cohort/class of students) over a period and generally reports the largest rate of dropouts (NCES, 2000).

Reliable and accurate dropout data is extremely important. If a school corporation or community is going to have the ability to successfully address the dropout issue, they must be able to start with accurate data (Bridgeland et al., 2006). In 2005, the National Governors Association addressed the issue of dropout calculations. At their 2005 conference the majority of the governors (46), one territory, and 12 organizations reached agreement on how high school graduation would be calculated (National Governors Association, 2005b). The following are the recommendations from that conference:

- Recommendation 1: Immediately adopt, and begin taking steps to implement, a standard four year, adjusted cohort graduation rate using the following formula: Graduation rate = [on-time graduates in year x] ÷ [(first-time entering ninth graders in year x – 4) + (transfers in) – (transfers out)]. (National Governors Association, 2005b, p. 7)
- Recommendation 2: "Build the state's data system and capacity to ensure that the system can collect, analyze, and report the adopted indicators and other important information.
- Recommendation 3: Adopt additional, complementary indicators to provide richer context and understanding about outcomes for students and how well the system is serving them, including five-and six-year cohort rates; a college ready graduation rate; a dropout rate; completion rates for those earning alternative completion credentials from the state or a GED; in-grade retention rates; and percentages of students who have not graduated but are still in school or who have completed course requirements but failed a state exam required for graduation.

- Recommendation 4: Develop public understanding about the need for good graduation and dropout rate data.
- Recommendation 5: Collaborate with local education leaders, higher education leaders, business leaders, and leaders of local community organization, who can help build important political and public will, and local education leaders and staff members, who play a critical role in the implementation of new data formulas. (National Governors Association, 2005a, p. 8)

Although all governors did not originally sign off on the recommendations, by the end of 2005, governors from all 50 states agreed to the recommendations (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The recommendations are a great start for the collection of accurate dropout data. However, more work needs to be done to ensure more accurate data collection between the states occur so that data systems can be developed that will allow for accurate publication of graduation rates and progress can be monitored (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

**Indiana's Dropout Profile**

Indiana developed a cohort-based graduation rate calculation in 2003 abandoning the old leaver system of graduation calculation. The leaver rate of calculation determines graduation rates by dividing the number of high school graduates by high school *leavers* (Center for Evaluation & Education Policy [CEEP], 2008). A leaver is a student who leaves school during a school year at the appropriate age in which a student is allowed to withdraw. Historically, that age was 16 in Indiana but in 2006 was changed to age 18. The graduation rate statistics from the first cohort group became available for the graduation class of 2006. For the class of 2006, their graduation rate was reported at 76.5%.

By adopting the cohort method of tracking students, where all school districts in the state track and account for all ninth graders through their senior year in high school, Indiana is now collecting much more accurate data on dropouts. The old *leaver* system used for decades reported graduation rates in Indiana anywhere from 78 to 91% (CEEP, 2008). In the 2004-2005 school year, Indiana reported an 89.95 graduation rate using the leaver system compared to the 76.5% graduation rate for the Class of 2006 using the cohort method (CEEP, 2008). This is a drastic change of 13% in the graduation rate (CEEP, 2008). Under the cohort method, graduation rates appear to be more accurate exposing dropout rates that are much lower than previously reported.

When the new system for calculating dropouts and graduation rates first released its data (CEEP, 2008), it showed that 80% of Caucasians, 57% of African American students, 63% of Hispanic students, and 70% of Native American students graduated (CEEP, 2008). Reviewing the IDOE's latest graduation data, graduation rates have shown good progress over the last three years. The graduation rate for all students has risen from 76.5% for the Class of 2006 to 81.5% for the 2008-2009 school year. Graduation rates have also shown a steady increase for all males and all females. Females have the highest graduation rate in the state at 85.3% (Figure 1).

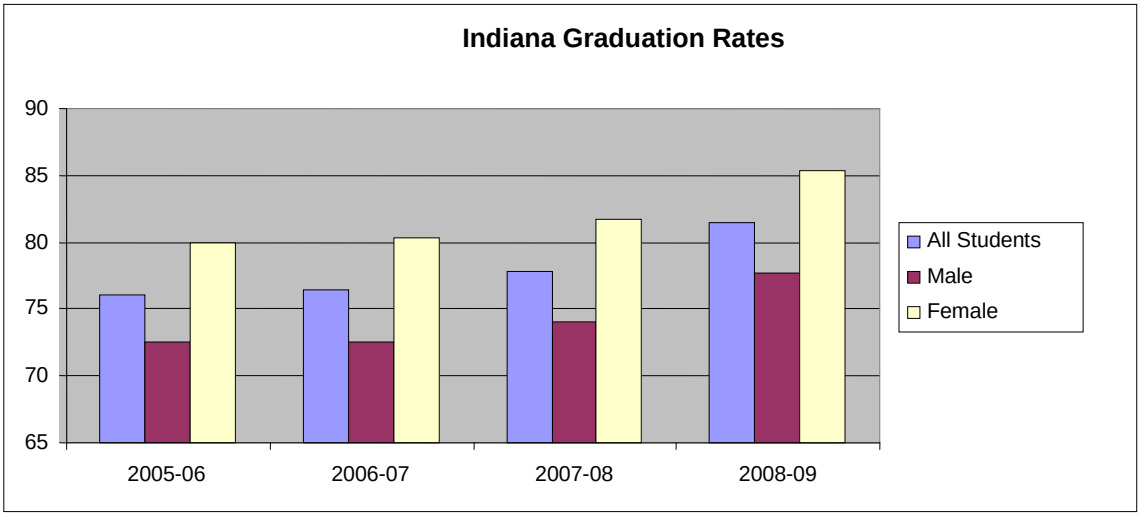


*Figure 1.* Indiana graduation rates by gender 2005-2009 (IDOE, 2009g)

Not surprisingly, free/reduced lunch (68%) and special education populations (58.6%) have significantly lower graduation rates than paid lunch students (86.9%) and regular education (84.8%) students. Limited English students (61.5%) are also graduating much fewer students than non-limited English (81.8%) students. Three groups that are generally statistically more at-risk of failing to graduate from high school (free/reduced lunch, special education, limited English) have shown much smaller gains towards reaching graduation goals than traditionally lower risk groups of students (Figure 2).

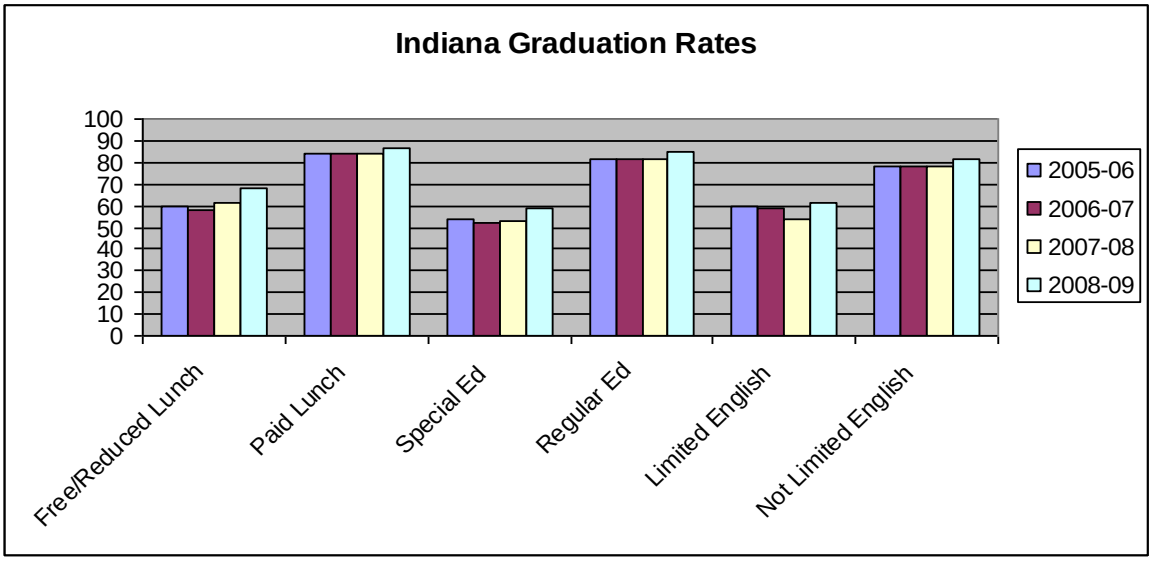


*Figure 2*. Indiana graduation rates by subgroup 2005-2009 (IDOE, 2009g)

Indiana African American students continue to be the lowest population of students in Indiana to reach graduation (66%), lagging significantly behind their White counterparts at 84.4%. However, all minority groups in Indiana have shown steady progress towards graduation gains. The Asian population of students in Indiana has the highest graduation rate at 89.2% (Figure 3).

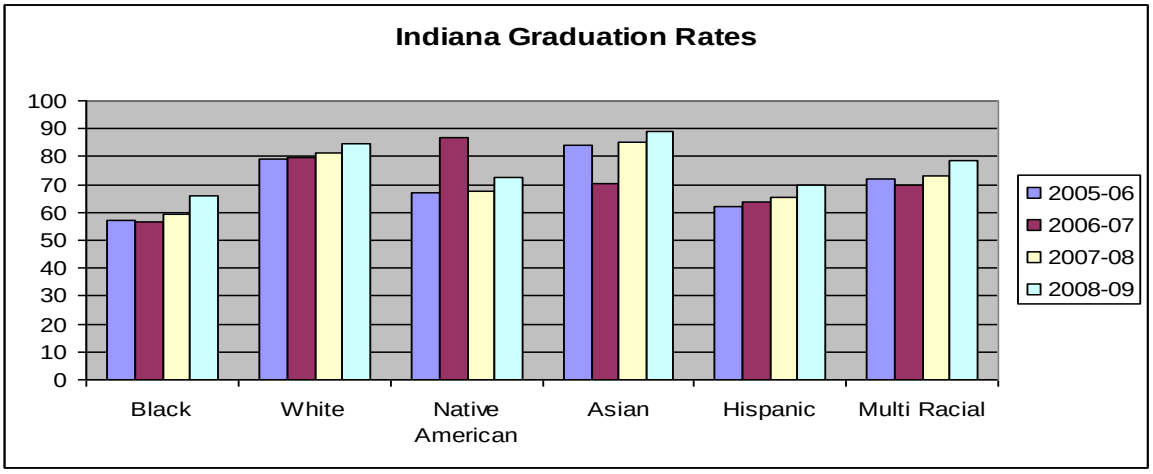


*Figure 3.* Indiana graduation rates by race 2005-2009 (IDOE, 2009g)

The cohort data revealed large graduation gaps between different groups of students in Indiana (CEEP, 2008). The continued tweaking of the cohort system of data collection allows states like Indiana to continue to assemble accurate data, which will enable strategies and resources to be directed towards those groups most in need of intervention. For instance, a closer look at home schooling data may be an area that the State of Indiana may need to address when determining accurate student dropout rates. The sharp increase in home schooling numbers over the years (Figure 4) may be the result of some students using a school withdrawal loophole to actually quit school before the age of 18. Students using this home school right inappropriately may be skewing graduation rate progress, making it look as if dropout numbers are better than reality.

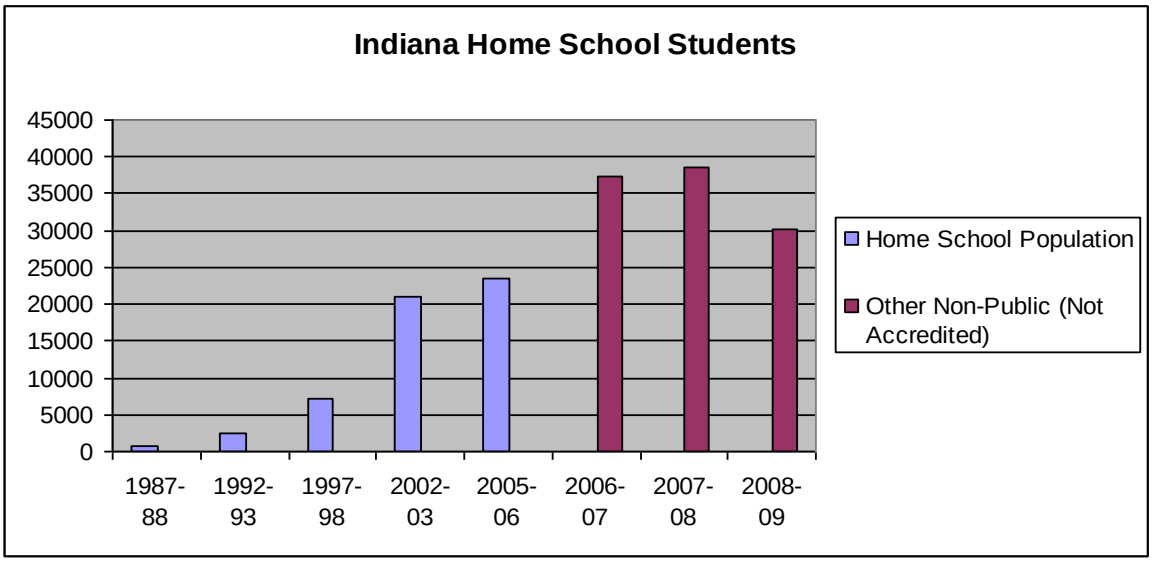


*Figure 4.* Indiana home school and non-public school students 1987-2009 (IDOE, 2009a)

Figure 4 shows a steady increase of the number of students listed as home school students in Indiana. The data provided by the IDOE (2009a) shows a low enrollment of 667 registered home school students during the 1987-88 school year to a peak enrollment of 38,645

students during the 2007-08 school year. There is no doubt that many people are using alternative means of education for their children. However, one cannot help but notice a correlation between accountability interventions and spikes in the home school enrollment. In 2006, Indiana passed a law changing the age in which a student can drop out of school from age 16 to age 18. Students who leave school to be home schooled are not counted as dropouts under Indiana's P.L. 221. Indiana has one of the most liberal home school laws in the country. Public school corporations have no responsibility or obligation to monitor home schooled students. Indiana presently has no statutes on home schooling and the IDOE has not been given any authority under law to approve home schools or hold them accountable for educational structure or outcomes. Because of the ambiguity concerning home school accountability, students and parents may be using home schooling as a means to drop out of school before the age of 18, allowing school corporations the ability to avoid accountability under NCLB and P.L. 221.

**School Dropout Age**

The compulsory school age requirements vary throughout the United States. Compulsory school attendance refers to the age students are required to begin school and the age students are allowed to leave school by state statute. Using data taken from the Education Commission of the States (ECS), as of April of 2009, 23 states allow students to leave school before graduation at the age of 16. Eight states allow students to leave school at age 17, and 20 States (including the District of Columbia) set the age limit at age 18 (Bush, 2009). According to the ECS,

> Nearly half of all states allow children ranging from age 14 to 18 to be exempt from the compulsory attendance requirements if they meet one or more of the following

> stipulations: are employed, have a physical or mental condition that makes the child's attendance infeasible, have passed the 8th-grade level, have their parents' permission, have the permission of the district court of the local school board, meet the requirements for an exit interview, or have arranged alternative education such as vocational or technical school. (Bush, 2009, p. 86)

The State of Indiana requires a student to stay in school until graduation, unless the student is between 16 and 18 and meets the requirements for an exit interview, or reaches at least 18 years of age (Bush, 2009). If a student wishes to withdraw from school before age 18, he/she must have written permission from the student's parent/guardian and principal (Bush, 2009). Regardless, the research overwhelmingly shows that allowing students to drop out of school has a substantial negative impact on the personal lives of dropouts and acute social and economic cost to this country.

**Economic Consequences of a Dropout**

The personal cost of being a school dropout is tremendous! For instance, an individual who drops out of school is much more likely to be unemployed than a high school graduate. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the unemployment rate for school dropouts from the years 2004 and 2005 was 32.9% higher than individuals who stayed in school and graduated in 2005 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). For those dropouts who find employment, their income is less than those who graduate. An 18-year-old who drops out of school can expect to earn, on the average, $260,000 less than a high school graduate (Rouse, 2005). A college graduate will earn, on the average, $1,121,183 more than a high school dropout (Doland, 2001). Beyond the financial impact, being a dropout also appears to have health consequences. Statistics show that at every age range, the more education a person has,

the healthier the individual (Bridgeland et al., 2006). According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control, the death rate for individuals with less than 12 years of education is 2.5 times higher than the rate of those with 13 or more years of education (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003).

The overall state and national economic impact of dropping out of school is staggering. The Committee on Education and Labor (2009) reported that the high school dropout crisis threatens U.S. economic growth and competiveness. Recently, Congress and the President of the United States have been much maligned for what was perceived as a *bailout* of Wall Street firms during their economic crisis. To put the dropout crisis into perspective, however, the cost of dropouts over a five-year period in the U. S. was larger than the money given to the banks, financial institutions, the auto industry and AIG (Committee on Education & Labor, 2009). The enormous cost of dropouts in this country, particularly the disparity between white and minority graduation rates, is equal to the country being in a permanent recession (Social Sector Office, 2010).

A single dropout accounts for $60,000 less in collected federal and state taxes (Rouse, 2005). Collectively, on a national level, 18-year-old dropouts can be expected to account for lost income and taxes of $192 billion or 1.6 of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in their lifetime (Campaign for Educational Equity, 2005). It has been estimated that the more than 20 million U.S. high school dropouts between the ages of 18 and 67 cost the federal and state governments more than $50 billion in income tax revenue each year (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). If school corporations across this country could raise the graduation rate of minority students, those that represent the greatest potential risk of dropping out of school (i.e., Hispanic, African American, Native American), to the same level of white students, $310 and

$525 billion more dollars could be added to the U.S. economy (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). This amount is equal to 2 to 4% of the GDP of the United States (Social Sector Office, 2010). Tables 1 through 6 illustrate various aspects of the economic impact of high school dropouts derived from Amos (2008).

Table 1

*Estimated Lifetime Income if High School Dropouts Graduated With Their Class in 2007-2008*

| | Graduation Rate 2004-05 | Projected Number of Nongraduates for the Class of 2008 | Total Lifetime Additional Income if Dropouts Graduated |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indiana | 73.6% | 22,920 | $1,828,505,479 |
| U.S. | 70.6% | 1,229,227 | $319,611,922,500 |

*Note.* (Amos, 2008)

Table 2

*Estimate of Increase in Wealth if All Heads of Households Were High School Graduates*

| | Number of Households Headed by High School Dropouts | Household Wealth Accumulated by High School Dropouts ($) | Number of Households Headed by High School Graduates | Household Wealth Accumulated by High School Graduates ($) | Potential Additional Household Wealth if all Heads of Household Were High School Graduates ($) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Indiana | 348,924 | 174,462,000 | 872,897 | 4,364,485,000 | 1,570,158,000 |
| U.S. | 16,518,815 | 8,259,407,500 | 31,117,809 | 155,589,045,000 | 74,394,667,500 |

*Note*. (Amos, 2008)

Table 3

*Estimate of Annual Savings and Earnings Benefits From a Reduced Need for Community College Remediation*

| | Annual Remediation Savings | Additional Annual Earnings | Total Benefit to State Economy |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indiana | $17,917,376 | $22,366,592 | $40,283,968 |
| U.S. | $1,417,258,558 | $2,292,808,179 | $3,710,066,738 |

*Note*. (Amos, 2008)

Table 4

*Estimate of Personal Income if the Educational Attainment of African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans Increases to that of White Students by 2020*

| | Additional Personal Income per Capita | Additional Total Personal Income |
|---|---|---|
| Indiana | $4,077 | $1,131,689,298 |
| U.S. | | $310,477,516,732 |

*Note*. (Amos, 2008)

Table 5

*Estimated Lifetime Savings for Medicaid and Uninsured Medical Coverage Costs If All Students in the Class of 2005-06 Graduated from High School*

| | State Medicaid Savings per Additional Graduate | State Uninsured Savings per Additional Graduate | Total Health Savings per Additional Graduate | Total Lifetime Health Savings if all Students in the Class of 2005-2006 Graduated |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Indiana | $11,587 | $1,140 | $12,727 | $283,844,559 |
| U.S. | | | $13,706 | $17,090,887,263 |

*Note*. (Amos, 2008)

Table 6

*Estimated Impact of 5% Increase in Male High School Graduation Rates on Crime Reduction and Earnings*

| | Annual Crime-Related Savings | Additional Annual Earnings | Total Benefit to State Economy |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indiana | $95,731,795 | $56,133,136 | $151,864,932 |
| U.S. | $4,939,017,909 | $2,799,523,519 | $7,738,541,428 |

*Note*. (Amos, 2008)

Table 7 shows the total estimated benefit to Indiana and the United States based on: benefits of students graduating with the class of 2007-08; male high school graduation rates on crime reduction and earnings; life time savings for Medicaid, and uninsured medical coverage costs if all students in the class of 2005-06 graduated from high school; increase of wealth if all heads of households were high school graduates; annual savings and earnings benefits from reduced need for community college remediation; and additional personal income if the educational attainment of African American, Hispanics, and Native Americans increases to equal that of White students (Amos, 2008). As the numbers reflect, the economic benefits associated with eliminating the State and National dropout rate are significant.

Table 7

*Economic Benefit Associated with Eliminating the State and National Dropout Rate*

| | Total Benefit to Economy |
|---|---|
| Indiana | $5,006,346,236 |
| U.S. | $733,023,602,161 |

*Note.* (Amos, 2008)

**Medical Impact of Dropouts**

Dropouts also impact medical cost. Individuals who do not graduate from high school are less likely to have health insurance resulting in less medical care and inferior health outcomes (Amos, 2008). Conversely, individuals that graduate from high school and have higher educational attainment are more likely to be in higher paying jobs that offer benefits such as health insurance (Amos, 2008). Roughly, 97% of employees with a college degree

have employee provided health insurance, compared to 77% of employees that are high school graduates, and 67% of employees that are high school dropouts (Amos, 2008).

Individuals with low educational attainment are more likely to die from cardiovascular disease, cancer, infection, lung disease, and diabetes (Amos, 2008). Despite being healthier, it is estimated that each student who graduates from high school would save states an average of $13,706 in Medicaid and other uninsured costs (Amos, 2008). For the class of 2006, dropouts over their lifetime will cost taxpayers approximately $17 billion in Medicaid and other uninsured health costs (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006b). The high cost of the uninsured is taking its toll on state budgets. Historically, the largest expenditure for states has been K-12 education. Recently, the escalating cost of Medicaid has now become the states' largest expenditure. For the year 2006, Medicaid exceeded K-12 spending 21.5% to 21.4% (National Association of State Budget Officers, 2007).

**Dropouts and Crime Rates**

There is a correlation between being a high school dropout and crime in the United States. A high school dropout is eight times more likely to be incarcerated than individuals who graduate from high school (Harlow, 2003). The state prison populations are full of high school dropouts. The statistics show that 75% of the state prison inmates, almost 60% of federal inmates, and nearly 70% of jail inmates in this country are high school dropouts (Harlow, 2003). Of those students who drop out of school and are arrested, 73% have emotional/behavioral disabilities and 62% have other learning disabilities (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1995).

Why do people with a high school diploma commit less crime than those without a diploma? Although there are no clear answers to this question, there are several theories. It is

thought that individuals with a high school diploma make more money than high school dropouts make and are less likely to turn to crime out of necessity (Amos, 2008). In addition, the disgrace of a criminal arrest may be greater for professionals than for a person with no diploma or for individuals working in lower-skill jobs (Amos, 2008). Since criminal behavior that starts at youth and can lead into adulthood, the time spent in school may have an effect on a student's values, keeping them off the streets and out of criminal activity (Amos, 2008). It has been estimated that dropouts are greater than eight times more likely to be incarcerated (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

It has also been projected that raising the high school and college graduation rate of male students by 5% could mean a combined savings and revenue of $8 billion a year in crime reduction (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006c). For the State of Indiana, the annual crime related savings would be $95,731,795. The additional annual earnings to the state would be $56,133,136; and the total benefit to the state's economy would be $151,864,932 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006c).

A review of the research clearly shows that dropouts have a negative impact both socially and economically in the U. S. If the U. S. is going to compete in this rapidly growing global economy, major initiatives need to be put into place that will curtail the national dropout rate, improve high school graduation rates, and improve the American workforce. However, how much of that responsibility should be placed on the public schools throughout this country? Do public school corporations, particularly public high schools, have the ability to drastically improve graduation rates, or is the national dropout problem a cultural and society issue completely out of the control of the 97,000 plus schools in the U. S.? Is there an external

locus of control determining whether a student graduates from high school? Research has been done to determine how much impact schools have on student academic success.

One of the most famous studies conducted was the Coleman Report. The Coleman Report published in the 1960s concluded that schools can be attributed only 10% of the inconsistency in student accomplishment; the other 90% is determined by forces outside of school (as cited in Coleman et al., 1966). Much to the shock of the educational community, the Coleman Report claimed that a student's academic achievement is mostly determined by his/her background and social context and not the school he/she attends (Coleman et al., 2006). The report identified the home, neighborhood, and peers as being mostly responsible for the disproportion in students' academic achievement (Coleman et al., 2006). The findings of the Coleman Report were later verified by Jenks et al. (1972). Like the Coleman Report, this study reaffirmed that the principal indicator of student achievement is family background (Marzano, 2003). However, there have been many research studies since the Coleman report that have examined the issue of school impact on student learning.

Further reports have continued to address school efficacy in relationship to student achievement. Those reports have concluded that schools can account for as much as 20% of student achievement; nearly twice as much as reported by Coleman (Marzano, 2003). Also, further research into this topic has shown that good schools, schools that are vastly effective, can entirely overcome the effects of a student's background (Marzano, 2003). Based on this information, it is correct to assume that schools can indeed improve graduation rates. However, if schools are going to overcome the powerful effects of background and circumstances of its students, it is extremely important for them to understand the key characteristics of what makes a student a candidate to be a high school dropout.

**Dropout Risk Factors**

There are many significant risk factors for students who choose to drop out of school. Unfortunately, there is no single factor that can be used to identify a student at-risk of dropping out of school (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007). However, what we do know is that a student is much more likely to become a dropout if he/she is affected by multiple key factors (Hammond et al., 2007). There is no uniformity among dropouts; "Many subgroups of students can be identified based on when risk factors emerge, the combinations of risk factors experienced, and how the factors influence them" (Hammond et al., 2007). In general, students themselves cite many reasons for dropping out of school. They are multifaceted and generally cross many risk factors (Hammond et al., 2007). Dropping out of school seems to result from a long process of events that eventually leads to disconnection from school with many factors building upon one another (Hammond et al., 2007). For many students, the factors leading to disconnection can be traced back to when a child begins school (Hammond et al., 2007). The risk factors associated with being a dropout can be divided into four basic categories: individual, family, school, and community factors (Hammond et al., 2007).

**Individual factors.** The following are many of the significant individual characteristics of a dropout. Students who suffer from a low self-esteem and believe the negative perceptions others have of him/her are at-risk of becoming a dropout (Schargel, Thacker, & Bell, 2007). The student who feels as if he/she has no control over his/her situation and the student who has a learning disability or disabilities, such as depression or other emotional problems, is more likely to leave school before graduation (Schargel et al., 2007). In fact, students who have a disability are more than twice more likely to drop out of school than students without disability (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). Students with disabilities compose 36% of dropouts with 59%

of those students dropping out of school challenged by emotional/behavioral disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

A student's attitude and associations can also affect his/her status as a dropout. Students who have 'poor peer support' or students who tend to associate with at-risk peer groups that display anti-social behaviors such as criminal activity are at higher risk of dropping out of school, particularly if members of the peer group are also dropouts (Hammond et al., 2007; Schargel et al., 2007). Being extremely social outside of school is a dropout risk factor (Hammond et al., 2007). Also, students who are sexually active at an early age, sexually promiscuous, or students who have substance abuse issues are more likely to leave school before graduation (Schargel et al., 2007).

Demographics play a significant role in determining a student's success or failure in school. Race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, and limited English proficiency are all factors associated with dropping out of school (Hammond et al., 2007). The graduation rate for white students is 78% compared to 72% for Asian students, 55% for African-American students, and 53% for Hispanic students (Greene & Winters, 2006). While the national graduation rate for female students is 72%, it is only 65% for male students (Greene & Winters, 2006). However, there is only a 5% difference between white female and male graduation rates (Greene & Winters, 2007). For minority students, the gender gap in graduation rates is much larger. Graduation rates for African-American females are 59% compared to only 48% for males of the same race (Greene & Winters, 2007). The graduation rate for Hispanic females is 58% compared to only 49% for Hispanic males (Green & Winters, 2007).

Students who have adult responsibilities are at greater risk of becoming a high school dropout. The responsibility of raising a child (teen parent), or having the obligation to care for

a sibling can lead to a student dropping out of school (Hammond et al., 2007; Schargel et al., 2007). Work responsibilities are another risk factor for students. The liability of having to work to help support his/her family or working more than 20 hours a week can lead to a student leaving school (Hammond et al., 2007).

School performance is another factor associated with the dropout rate. Students who experience low achievement academically, who have been retained a grade, or who are over-age for a grade are at greater risk of becoming a dropout (Hammond et al, 2007). Further, students who suffer from poor attendance, show lack of effort or commitment to school, and have low educational expectations are less likely to graduate from school (Hammond et al., 2007). Other school related warning signs are disengagement, non-involvement in any extracurricular activities, early signs of aggression, significant discipline problems or misbehavior (Hammond et al., 2007).

Missing school or truancy is another school-related predictor of an at-risk student (Rumberger, 2001). There are many negative effects associated with school truancy. Truancy has been linked to daytime criminal behavior, violence, and drug use (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). For truant students or students who have had a history of missing class on a regular basis, behaviors such as refusing to wake up, skipping class, and taking extended lunches made it difficult for the students to return to school (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

**The family dynamic**. The family dynamic may be the most important factor in determining a student's success in school. Students who are from a home where there is a single parent are more likely to be a dropout compared to students from homes with both parents (Schargel et al., 2007). A student from a home where the parenting style is permissive or a home where there is a poor parent relationship is at risk for not to graduating from high

school (Schargel et al., 2007). Many dropouts come from families of low social economic status (Hammond et al., 2007). For instance, a student who comes from a family that receives public assistance, or a family where neither parent nor guardian is employed has a better chance of becoming a dropout compared to his/her classmates that do not face the same family dynamics (Schargel et al., 2007). Students from the lowest economic 20% are six times more likely to drop out than students from higher income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Other family dynamics associated with dropping out of school include whether or not the parents graduated from school, and whether or not there is a sibling living in the home who is a dropout. Not surprisingly, students who come from families with a high mobility rate, parents with a low educational level and low educational expectations, a large number of siblings, students not living with both natural parents, family disruption, parents who maintain little contact, or carry on little to no conversations about school are at higher risk for dropping out of school (Hammond et al.).

The IDOE tracks important information concerning high school graduation rates. Based on a statistical analysis, the IDOE has compiled a list of variables associated with low graduation rates for Indiana school corporations. According to these statistics, qualification for free lunch is the top variable associated with low school corporation graduation rates (IDOE, 2009g). Other factors identified by the IDOE were single parent families, children with at-risk mothers, families below poverty level and minority populations were all variables associated with lower graduation rates (IDOE, 2009g). The IDOE also identified school-related factors associated with low graduation rates.

**School related dropout factors**. School related factors identified by the IDOE included remediation dollars per average daily membership spent on students, the number of

suspensions or expulsions per 100 students enrolled and state support per average daily membership (IDOE, 2009g). Further research affirms the IDOE's statistics that have identified suspensions and expulsions as a key factor in student dropout decisions. Studies have shown that schools that rely on grade retention and student suspension as a way to control student behavior have higher dropout rates (Schargel et al., 2007). Other significant school-related factors include over-burdened school counselors, a negative school climate, teachers not addressing student learning styles, weak teaching strategies that do not meet the needs of the students, a lack of relevant curriculum, low teacher expectations for student success, and fear of school violence (Schargel et al., 2007).

**Student perceptions**. Understanding the key factors that determine if a student is a candidate to become a dropout is very important, particularly if a school is going to be able to over-come those obstacles and improve student graduation rates. Because of this, it is important to hear directly from students who have dropped out of school in order to better understand the complexity of the situation. Bridgeland et al. (2006) surveyed students as to why they made the decision to leave school before graduation. The top five reasons students gave as to why they made the decision to drop out of high school were: school simply was boring (Bridgeland et al., 2006); too many days missed and could not catch up; spent time with people who were not interested in school; had too much freedom and not enough rules in my life; and was failing in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

The students in the survey expressed that they were not encouraged to work hard in school and believed that they would have worked harder if their teachers had pushed them to do so (Bridgeland et al., 2006). A large majority of the students (70%) also thought that they had the ability to graduate had they decided to make that commitment; only 29% believed that they

did not have the ability to meet graduation standards of their school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Many students reported that they had to leave school for personal reasons. The top personal reasons students gave for leaving school early was the necessity to get a job, becoming a parent, or the necessity of caring for a family member (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

The students interviewed also expressed school-related reasons for dropping out of school. Failing in school was listed as the number one school-related reason for quitting school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Another reason given was being poorly prepared for high school. The students reported falling behind in elementary and middle school and believed that they would not be able catch-up academically (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

**Dropout Factories**

In the United States, every state has a student high school dropout problem (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). There is not a state in the U.S. where the graduation rate is above 88%, with 10 states having graduation rates below 66% (Laird, Cataldi, Ramani, & Chapman, 2008). Also, every state in the U.S. has a school that would be considered a *dropout factory*. A dropout factory is a school in which at least 40% of a ninth grade class fails to reach the 12$^{th}$ grade in three years (Everyone Graduates Center, 2007). These dropout factories are responsible for the majority of the country's dropouts with five states having more than 100 such schools and 26 states having 20 or more (Everyone Graduates Center, 2007). In the U.S., there are roughly 2,000 dropout factories (Everyone Graduates Center, 2007). These dropout factories account for most of the dropouts in the United States (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

Seven thousand students drop out of school every day in the U.S. with only 70% of the students who finish high school receiving a regular high school diploma (Committee on Education & Labor, 2009). Dropouts can be traced to rural schools, suburban schools, and

urban schools. They come from virtually every social, economic, ethnic, and religious group in the United States. However, in the U. S., research shows that 2,000 high schools produce more than half of the country's dropouts with only 50% of their students graduating on time (Committee on Education & Labor, 2009). In those 2,000 high schools, the freshman class loses or more than 40% of their students before they reach their senior year (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). From a minority perspective, roughly 50% of African American students, approximately 40% of Latino students, and only 11% of white students attend the schools where graduation is not the standard (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Many years after the 1954 case of Brown v. the Board of Education, where the U. S. Supreme Court struck down separate but equal state laws, one has to question whether minority students who attend these 'dropout factories' are receiving the equal educational opportunities afforded other students (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

American's 50 largest cities have the dubious distinction of having the lowest graduation rates in the country, with only 53% of their students completing high school with a diploma (Swanson, 2004). This is much lower than the national graduation rate of 71% and even lower than the graduation rate for other urban cities at 61% (Swanson, 2004). There is a major gap between urban and suburban graduation rates. The 50 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. graduate about 59% of their students compared to 77% of their nearby suburban districts (Swanson, 2004). The largest school districts in the U. S. educate 1.7 million students, or one in every eight students in the country (Swanson, 2004). These large school districts are also responsible for one-quarter or 279,000 of the 1.2 million dropouts each year (Swanson, 2004). There are between 900 and 1,000 schools in the U.S. where a student's chances of leaving school before graduation is 50-50 (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Meeting the definition of

a dropout factory, it has been estimated that an astounding 40% of the freshman class leave school before their senior year (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Of the students who are dropping out of these urban schools, the ninth grade seems to be the time most students leave school. In fact, the freshman year is a major source of loss for the entire U.S., the majority of the states, and most large urban school districts with the ninth grade being responsible for 50% of dropouts (Swanson, 2004). Poverty seems to be the main issue that determines graduation rates among these schools (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Virtually 80% of the nation's high schools that produce the most dropouts can be found in 15 states (Arizona, California, Georgia, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas) (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Five of those (i.e. Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and Texas) lead the nation in number and level of concentration of weak promoting power (moving from $9^{th}$ to $12^{th}$ grade) (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Cleveland, Detroit, and Indianapolis graduate fewer than 40% of their students (Swanson, 2004).

The last few years have seen some urban school districts throughout the country make significant gains in their graduation rates. Approximately one-third (14 of 41) of the metropolitan areas have made progress in reducing the graduation differences between urban and suburban areas with some areas even significantly reducing the disparity (Swanson, 2009). Unfortunately, on average, the national urban-suburban difference closes by only 1.6 percentage points, less than a ¼ point, annually. Nationally, the disparity has on the whole, remained unmoved (Swanson, 2009).

**The Schools' Responsibility for the Dropout Problem**

The dropout issue in the U. S. is a very complicated matter. There is not one specific characteristic that can define a high school dropout. The decision to leave school before graduation appears to be a long process of interrelating variables starting as soon as many students enter school. While dropouts were once seen as an accepted by-product of the system, the country can no longer ignore the social and economic consequences of allowing students to quit school. A part of the country's economic future and ability to compete on a global level may be greatly affected by the public schools' ability to get more students to graduate from school. The America's Promise Alliance, an organization "devoted to improving the lives of young people," has set a national goal of cutting the dropout rate in half by 2018; this would result in a 90% graduation rate for present day fourth graders (America's Promise Alliance, 2009). With a current national graduation rate of approximately 70%, this is a lofty goal.

Dropouts quickly realize their mistake. Of the students surveyed in the *Silent Epidemic,* most expressed a desire to return to school with their classmates (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Of the adult dropouts, 74% said that they would have not dropped out of school knowing what they know now, and 60% reported that staying in school and getting a diploma was very important (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

The finger seems to be pointed at public schools to improve graduation rates. After all, what organization is in a better position than the public school corporations to make major difference in students' lives? Who else other than the public school can overcome the daunting dysfunctions students face outside of the schoolhouse walls?

**Contrasting Perceptions Among Students, Teachers and Principals**

Other than parents, teachers and principals may be in the best position to make the biggest impact in the life of a potential dropout. However, their perception of why students drop out of school is different from that of the students who were surveyed. Bridgeland et al. (2009) researched and compared student perspectives on the dropout issue with those of teachers and principals. The report found that both teachers and administrators understood that there was a dropout problem (Bridgeland et al., 2009). The teachers and principals also had a good understanding of the complexity and causes of why many students drop out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2009). However, the majority of the teachers and principals saw the dropout issue as only a *major problem* and not a *crisis* (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Unfortunately, a large expectation gap exists between students, teachers, and principals concerning the dropout issue (American Telephone & Telegraph [AT&T], 2009). There also seems to be a major difference in opinion between teachers/principals and those demanding that schools do a better job of graduating students, as to whether the schools actually have an internal locus of control concerning dropouts. This expectation gap and educators' perception of an external locus of control may be the greatest obstacle keeping schools throughout the country from reducing dropout rates and in return greatly improving the nation's graduation rate.

In the Bridgeland et al. (2006) study, students were interviewed to determine why they had left school before graduation. The report did not shed a positive light on public education in the United States. According to the survey used in the report, 69% of the dropouts surveyed said that they were not motivated to work hard at school. Two-thirds of the students stated that they would have worked harder in school if more would have been expected of them, and 70% reported that they believed they could have graduated if they had tried (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

A large percentage of students (47%) dropped out of school because they perceived school to be boring and felt disengaged from their school work (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

To get additional perspective on the student dropout *epidemic*, Hart (2008) conducted another national survey. This survey was conducted with public school teachers and principals. Not surprisingly, this group of research subjects had a much different opinion as to why students left school as compared to those of the students surveyed by Bridgeland et al. (2009).

In contrast to student opinions expressed in the Bridgeland et al. (2009) survey, only 32% of teachers believed that all students should be expected to meet high academic standards. Principals were more optimistic than teachers with 58% believing that all students should be expected to meet high academic standards (Bridgeland et al., 2009). In contrast to student opinion, both teachers (75%) and principals (66%) surveyed did not believe that students at risk of dropping out of school would have worked harder if more would have been expected of them (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Both the teachers and principals did not agree with students' opinions concerning boredom being a major cause for students dropping out of school. Teachers (42%) were of the opinion that students who said they dropped out of school because they were bored were simply making excuses (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Only 20% of teachers and 21% of principals agreed with the students in citing boredom as a major factor. However, nearly 50% of the teachers and 69% of the principals did believe that the students who stated that they had dropped out of school because of disinterest or boredom were speaking to an important reason (Bridgeland et al., 2009).

Looking at the survey results, the teachers and principals who were surveyed both seem to feel a low efficacy and an external locus of control when it comes to student dropouts. Surprisingly, only 22% of principals and 13% of teachers took responsibility for students

dropping out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Who then do the teachers and principals believe is to blame for the dropout problem in the U. S.? According to both principals and teachers, the majority of the blame falls on parents. Teachers (61%) and principals (45%) think that parents are responsible or a factor in *most* cases of students leaving school before graduation with 89% of teachers and 88% of principals expressing that they believed that parents were a factor in *some* cases (Bridgeland et al., 2009). The survey showed that teachers (74%) and principals (69%) believe that parents were responsible for all or most of why students drop out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Teachers (76%) and principals (74%) placed the most responsibility on for the national dropout rate was the students themselves (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Interestingly, few teachers and principals placed blame on the school system, broader society, the teachers themselves, or on the high school principals (Bridgeland et al., 2009).

By looking at the data compiled for the report, it is easy to see that both teachers and principals see the dropout issue as a major problem, but a problem for which there is an external locus of control. This becomes even more evident when you look at the opinions of teachers and principals concerning the national goal to cut the national dropout rate in half within 10 years. When asked if they thought that the dropout rate could be cut in half within 10 years, 49% of teachers and 39% of principals thought that the goal was either not realistic or only somewhat realistic and achievable (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Principals were a bit more confident with 61% believing the goal was completely realistic or achievable or at least fairly realistic and achievable compared to 47% of teachers (Bridgeland et al., 2009). This perception seems to suggest that principals and teachers do not think that they have much control over

whether students drop out of school. Those decisions are determined by forces outside of the school setting.

Although the majority of students surveyed believed that they could have graduated from school if they wanted to, 59% of teachers believed that there should be a different track for students who do not plan to attend college allowing them to get a diploma without meeting rigorous or high academic standards (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Principals (60%) on the other hand believed that students could meet high academic standards with a smaller percentage (41%) believing that there should be a separate track for students to meet diploma requirements without meeting rigorous or high academic standards. The results of this survey give an insight into teacher and principal belief of an external locus of control concerning the dropout issue.

If teachers and principals perceive an external locus of control concerning whether a student drops out of school, what about other educators who may be in position to have a major impact when it comes to reducing the dropout rate and cutting the rate in half within 10 years? For instance, superintendents in Indiana are in a strategic position because of their working relationship with local boards of education, control of corporation funds, and leadership in corporation strategic planning that enables them to be pivotal when it comes to attacking local, state, and the national dropout epidemic. Do superintendents in Indiana hold the same perceptions of external locus of control concerning dropouts as the teachers and principals surveyed in the Bridgeland et al. (2009) report?

**The Effect of the Superintendent**

Perhaps no single individual is in better position to exert an internal locus of control concerning a local dropout problem than a corporation's superintendent. Leadership is one of the most important aspects in effective school reform (Marzano, 2003). Collectively,

superintendents have the ability to greatly impact the nation's *dropout dilemma*. An effective superintendent, along with other key players, determine vital corporation planning and budgeting. Superintendent leaders direct the corporation's philosophy, mission, and goals. Unlike a teacher or building principal, the superintendent is in the best position to create and sustain programming that will benefit students at risk of leaving school before graduation. A superintendent works closely with education school boards, planning both short and long range initiatives, determining priorities, emphasis, and instructional programs. In short, it is unlikely that any alternative programming that would benefit students at risk of dropping out of school, or a commitment of critical resources will materialize without the support or consent of the corporation's superintendent and school board.

Research has shown that leadership at the district level is connected to student accomplishment (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Good leadership is important to school-level, teacher level, and the student level factors associated with successful reform (Marzano, 2003). Effective superintendents are major players in the goal setting process for their corporations. They have the ability to set non-negotiable goals for their corporations involving all the appropriate stakeholders in the goal setting process (Waters & Marzano, 2006). A non-negotiable goal is one that all staff members must act upon (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Superintendents can work with building principals to ensure leadership for change. This type of change is most effective when a small group of educators work with the principal functioning as an interconnected team (Marzano, 2003). Involving stakeholders such as building level administrators and getting buy-in to goals is important since they are generally the ones who are going to be responsible for implementing the goals for the corporation (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Non-negotiable goals set specific achievement objectives for the school district, schools, and for special populations of students within the district (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Unlike building principals or teachers, superintendents have the unique ability to set non-negotiable goals involving a wider range of stakeholders. The superintendent has the ability to work closely with the board of education to ensure that the non-negotiable goals take precedence in the district (Waters & Marzano). This type of effective district leadership, directed towards lowering the dropout rate and improving graduation rates, can lead to a greater chance of success.

The superintendent must continually keep an eye on the corporation's goals to ensure that they are put into action (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Each building within the corporation must use the goals to as a major indicator of their success (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Superintendents in high performing districts devote resources such as time, money, personnel, and materials to ensure that corporation goals are attained (Waters & Marzano, 2006). An effective superintendent may be in the best position to reduce the nation's dropout rate by setting non-negotiable district goals aimed at improving graduation rates, ensuring that strategic goals are put into action, and by devoting the vital resources needed to ensure success of the goals.

**Dropout Solutions**

The dropout situation in the U.S. is a very complicated matter. The issue is so complicated that many educators believe that they are fighting a losing battle. Research has shown that teachers and principals think that the dropout issue is almost exclusively connected to forces outside the schools control. They refute student opinions that suggest boredom, as a reason for dropping out of school, as nothing more than an excuse for not graduating

(Bridgeland et al., 2009). Teachers and principals exhibit an external locus of control concerning the dropout rate. They blame a lack of parental involvement at home as the main reason students drop out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Teachers (74%) and principals (69%) overwhelming believe that all or most of the responsibility for a student dropping out of school is due to parenting (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Teachers and principals surveyed also believed that real life issues such as having to get a job to support their family, having a child, or caring for a family member as another major factor leading to students dropping out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2009). However, educators have not been willing to admit to their share of the blame when their students fail to graduate.

It is unfair to assume that parents are uncaring when it comes to their children's education. It seems that parents understand the importance of their involvement in their child's school success. Eighty percent of all parents and 85% of parents of students at low performing schools thought that they should be more involved in advocating for their children, helping pick teachers and classes (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008).

Involving parents can improve graduation rates in schools. Seven out of 10 dropouts said that they favored more parental involvement (Bridgeland et al., 2006). They also thought that better communication between the school and parents and getting parents more involved would improve students' chances of staying in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). To get parents involved, schools need to make an exerted effort to eliminate the barriers that keep parents from engagement (Bridgeland, Balfanz, Moore, & Friant, 2010). For instance, schools should assign parents a "single point of contact" to make communication easier, and use proven research strategies to increase parental involvement (Bridgeland et al., 2010).

There is no doubt that many students come to school disadvantaged compared to their other classmates. A student's environment is a major factor in determining success in school and eventual graduation. Research has also shown that schools can have a major impact on students allowing them to overcome their environmental obstacles. There are many strategies that school corporations can adopt giving teachers and administrators an internal locus of control over their at-risk students.

Students will experience achievement when they attend schools where; school leaders offer a guaranteed and viable curriculum, they are given challenging goals and effective feedback, there is parent and community involvement, there is a safe and orderly environment, and there is staff collegiality and professionalism (Marzano, 2003). In the classroom setting, teachers can help students be successful by using effective instructional strategies, having good classroom management, and having a good classroom curriculum design (Marzano, 2003).

For communities to get a handle on the dropout problem, they must understand the reasons behind the problem. It is important to know how many students are actually dropping out (accurate data) of school; how far the students are from graduation when they drop out of school; and which schools the students are dropping out from (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008). Once a community has accurate data on dropouts, the next step is to determine what category the students fall into concerning the reason for leaving school. Jerald (2006) identified four categories for dropping out of school: life events (outside of school, e.g. pregnant); fade outs (frustrated, bored and stop coming to school); push outs (difficult, dangerous students who are asked to leave by the school); failing to succeed (failing classes and have no school support). To fix the dropout problem in a community, effective strategies must be created that specifically target students within each dropout category. These strategies must

address prevention, and intervention programs at points where students become at-risk of not graduating (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008).

Successful transitions in elementary, middle school and high school have been found to increase student graduation (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008). For instance, making sure that all students have a good start at the elementary level in essential skills such as reading, and math are very important. Students must be allowed to believe that school can be an enjoyable place (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008). Elementary students need to be socialized into the norms of school. The students should not be overly placed in special education programs, or expelled from school (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008). Elementary teachers must monitor student progress and use intervention strategies when students are falling behind in their schoolwork (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008). From the start, a positive elementary experience is critical in determining a student's successful path in school. It also will allow for a good transition into the difficult middle school years.

The middle school can be the most dangerous time for an at-risk student. This is a time when many students can become lost in the numbers as they travel from teacher to teacher. It is important that middle school teachers and principals develop strategies that enable students to develop positive relationships with their teachers. This can be accomplished by using proven techniques such as interdisciplinary teacher teams; team teaching (two subjects taught to the same students), looping (teachers travel with students from grade to grade); and small learning communities (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008). Middle school students also benefit from a "multi-tiered public health model prevention, intervention and recovery" strategies that prevent poor attendance, behavior, and course failure (Center for Child & Family Policy, p. 25). During the middle school years, students may need even more focused interventions such as

extra classes in core subjects, mentoring, conflict management, daily attendance check-ins, wrap-around services, and whole community buy-in into getting middle school students to attend school every day (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008).

The high school is the third important transition for students. Schools wherein dropping out of school is considered normal behavior must be changed. There are strategies that high schools can employ that will help students be successful. Since the freshman year of high school is a very at-risk time for most students, high schools should work to ensure that all students earn on-time promotion to sophomore status. Teachers and principals must also realize that there are academic and social emotional components to course performance and low scores on assessments (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008). High schools should work to align course work to be relevant while at the same time teaching adult behaviors (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008). Again, one of the most important things that a high school can do is to involve parents along with adopting different diploma pathways to graduation (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008).

To help states succeed in improving the graduation rate throughout the country, the National Governor's Association (NGA) has developed an action plan. The NGA has developed four action goals: "promote high school graduation for all, target youth at risk of dropping out, reengage youth who have dropped out of school, and provide rigorous, relevant pathways to a high school credential" (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009, 0. 17).

There are several strategies associated with *promoting graduation for all*. One strategy is to increase the student dropout age to the maximum allowed by law (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). Indiana increased its dropout age from 16 to 18 in 2006 and has experienced increased graduation rates. The basic theory is that the longer you keep students in school, the more

likely they are to graduate; especially those students who continue to receive credits. Other strategies are to count graduation rates a major part of school accountability systems, encourage states to make better graduation rates a priority, and assign responsibility for dropout prevention and recovery (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009).

It is very important to target youth at risk of dropping out of school. The NGA believes that this goal can be accomplished by developing accurate data systems that will identify students at-risk of dropping out of school. Once the students have been targeted, the school (teachers, counselors, community) must be ready to aid students with prevention strategies designed to meet the needs of each individual student.

The NGA does not want communities to give up on youth who have quit school. Many students quickly realize that dropping out of school is a mistake. A survey showed that 76% of students who drop out of school would probably re-enroll in a school for people their age if they could (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Data has shown that more than half of the students who drop out of school earn a high school diploma or an alternative diploma (Hurst, Kelly, & Princiotta, 2004). The NGA wants to bring students back to school by providing incentives to school corporations to go after dropouts by developing and using outreach strategies to reconnect students who no longer attend school (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009).

The NGA is advocating for each state to challenge students with demanding curriculum that is relevant and provides students various options for earning a high school diploma. Many students who drop out of school complain that school is boring or that the classes were not interesting and were taught by uninspired teachers (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Increasing rigor for all students can be beneficial to improving graduation rates (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008). Schools and teachers should work to make courses more relevant and interesting

while at the same time providing students with the attention they need inside and outside the classroom that will promote success (Bridgeland et al., 2010). Developing connections to postsecondary and workforce interests, including dual enrollment, internships, and apprenticeships, can keep students engaged in school with a focus on their future goals (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009).

School corporations should review their student retention policies. With the increase in school accountability, many school corporations have looked at retaining students as a strategy to improve corporation scores on statewide assessments. This strategy could be counterproductive. Decades of research (longitudinal studies) have shown that retention is not a research-supported intervention (Jimerson, 2001). Retention has not produced achievement, socioemotional, or behavioral advantages for students (Jimerson, 2001). Retention has been associated with health and emotional risk factors (National Association of School Psychologist, 2003). Numerous studies (19) conducted during the 1990s showed a correlation between retention and a negative effect on achievement (i.e. reading, math and language) and socio-emotional adjustment (peer relationships, self-esteem, problem behaviors, and attendance) (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003). According to the National Association of School Psychologists, research shows that retention has a negative outcome at the secondary level.

> Students who were retained or had delayed kindergarten entry are more likely to drop out of school compared to students who were never retained, even when controlling for achievement levels. The probability of dropping out increases with multiple retentions. Even for single retentions, the most consistent finding from decades of research is the high correlation between retention and dropping out. A recent systematic review of

> research exploring dropping out of high school indicates that grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of high school dropout. (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003, p. 2)

Retention of students may be having the opposite effect of its intention. The research clearly shows that retention does not help students at risk of academic failure (Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson, & Dalton, 2002). Schools should abandon retention and look to other research-based interventions to improve student achievement.

It is important to remember that the dropout crisis is not just a school problem; it is a community problem that will take community cooperation to reduce. Schools cannot be the only solution to this problem. A community compact may be necessary to reduce the local dropout problem blending funds to allow dollars to flow between education and social services for students (Center for Child & Family Policy, 2008).

**Summary**

The U.S. public school system has come under scrutiny over the last several years. Economic competition throughout the world has caused the U. S. to reevaluate its school systems. To be competitive globally, American corporations will need a much more educated workforce. Companies in the U. S. and throughout the world have become much more sophisticated. Gone are the days when a disgruntled or bored student could quit school and find employment at a local factory working on an assembly line until retirement. Jobs that were once available to unskilled or an uneducated work force have been rapidly evaporating, being sent overseas where labor cost are greatly reduced. To remain competitive economically and to maintain the American dream or the American way of life for future generations, the U.S. can no longer allow students to drop out of school. The costs and negative impact of dropping out

of school are substantial for each individual, his/her family, society, and the local, state, and national economy.

As the country has turned its attention to raising educational standards and accountability to improve education for all students, the student dropout issue has become a point of emphasis. The national No Child Left Behind Act instituted by the George W. Bush Administration has made graduation rates a part of its accountability system. In Indiana, Public Law 221 has also designated graduation rates a part of its state accountability system to determine if school corporations and high schools have met its yearly annual progress. These accountability systems have forced schools to focus on graduating all students. High schools can no longer look at high school dropouts as 'collateral damage' or a natural part of the system.

No student becomes a dropout overnight. Although there are similarities among dropouts, the path or process of becoming a dropout is generally long and unique to each individual student. There are many factors associated with students at-risk of dropping out of school; however, none is probably more significant than a student's family situation.

The consequences of dropping out of school are devastating. Dropouts suffer economically because of their decision to drop out of school. A dropout will make much less money and is much more likely to be unemployed than a high school graduate. A dropout is also much more likely to suffer from health problems and is more likely to be incarcerated than a person who graduates from high school. There is also cost to society. Entitlement programs that help people such as dropouts cost this country a large amount of money each year. Dropouts are not only hurting the country's ability to compete economically with other nations, they are also straining tax resources and the standard of living in the country.

Throughout the U. S., much is being done to improve graduation rates. The National Governors Association (2005b) is working to improve data collection and recommend strategies aimed at reducing the dropout rate. States are looking at strategies like the age of compulsory attendance, and raising the age at which a student can make the decision to drop out of school. States are looking at local 'dropout factories' developing strategies to change the norm where low student achievement and dropping out of school is expected. The result has been a reduction of student dropouts over the last few years. Indiana, for instance, has seen a significant rise in graduation rates. However, much more work needs to be done to improve graduation rates. Also, increases in graduation rates should be thoroughly examined to ensure that results are legitimate and not produced by a loophole in data collection.

Although outside factors greatly influence whether or not a student drops out of school, there is much schools can do to improve graduation rates. Principals and teachers need to develop strategies based on research to attack the dropout problems in their schools. Data needs to be collected and reviewed so that students at risk of dropping out of school can be identified and placed in interventions. Relevance and rigor need to be expected for all students; even those that are at-risk of dropping out of school. Students need to be engaged and lessons should be taught with enthusiasm and made interesting. Principals and teachers need to break barriers developing strategies to involve parents in their child's education. One of the most important things that principals and teachers can do is to own the dropout problem and stop believing that the issue is beyond their locus of control.

There are many research-based strategies that will reduce dropout rates and improve graduation rates. Through his/her position, no educator may be in better position to improve graduation rates than a school corporation's superintendent. Research shows that leadership

from the corporate office is influential in improving student outcomes. Using proven research-based techniques, superintendents who consider the dropout issue a top educational priority can have a major impact on reducing the dropout rate. Working with principals, teachers, parents, and the community members, superintendents have the ability to implement changes that could cut the dropout rate in half in 10 years within the United States. Superintendent efficacy will be the key to public schools making major strides in reducing the state and national dropout dilemma. An internal locus of control, taking personal responsibility for positive or negative outcomes and setting high expectations for at-risk students may be the solution to increasing public school graduation rates.

# CHAPTER 3

## Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine Indiana superintendents' perspectives and efficacy toward the student dropout dilemma. An analysis was made to investigate whether superintendents in Indiana believe that there is an internal or external locus of control concerning the dropout issue. Further examination was made to determine if superintendent opinions towards efficacy are affected by school demographic type (rural, suburban, town, metropolitan). The study compared superintendent opinions concerning the dropout issue with those of teachers, and principals as reported in a recently published research study by Bridgeland et al. (2009) to see if their opinions correspond.

### Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents perceptions of locus of control based on the geographic location of their school corporation (metropolitan, suburban, town, rural)?
2. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on the percentage of students identified as free and reduced payment status?
3. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on superintendents' age?

4. How do Indiana Superintendent perceptions compare, as determined by this study, to teachers and principals as reported in the research study *On The Front Lines Of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem*?

**Hypothesis**

**$H_0$1**. There is no significant difference among Indiana metropolitan, suburban, town, and rural superintendents regarding perceived locus of control concerning school dropout.

**$H_0$2**. There is no significant difference among Indiana superintendents regarding perceived locus of control based on percentage of students on free and reduced payment status.

**$H_0$3.** There is no significant difference among Indiana superintendents regarding perceived locus of control based on superintendents' age.

**Research Methodology and Design**

This quantitative study explored superintendent efficacy and related opinions on the local, state, and national dropout issue. This study was designed to allow the researcher to make inferences on superintendents' attitudes in Indiana concerning the dropout issue. This was done by taking a sample from the population of Indiana superintendents. The superintendents were sampled by demographic identification as determined by the IDOE (2009h).

Indiana superintendents were surveyed to determine if their opinions on the dropout issue reflect those of the principals, and teachers as reported in previous research. There have been two recent research studies that were the catalyst for much of the reform initiative concerning the dropout issue in America. This study expanded on the modified research model used Bridgeland et al. (2009) and directed it toward Indiana Superintendents. The

superintendent perspective represents an important gap in the literature in this very important research.

**Population and sample.** According to the IDOE, there are 292 public school corporations in the State of Indiana (IDOE, 2009h). Of those 292 school corporations, 36 are reported as being in a metropolitan area (IDOE, 2009h). There are 61 school corporations listed as suburban school districts; 33 school corporations listed as being located in a town; and 163 rural school districts IDOE, 2009h). For the purpose of this study, a sample of 30 school corporations (superintendents) were randomly selected from each demographic type (metropolitan, suburban, town, rural) to participate in the study.

There are 36 school corporations that have a demographic type listed as metropolitan. Thirty school corporations were randomly selected via single-stage sampling. Starting in alphabetical order, six school corporations were selected with the seventh school corporation being skipped. This process was repeated five times. At the end of the fifth time, 30 school corporations were identified for participation in the survey. Six school corporations were left out of the survey from the metropolitan group.

There are 61 school corporations that have a demographic type listed as suburban. Thirty school corporations were randomly selected. Starting in alphabetical order for all school corporation identified as suburban, every other school district was selected until 30 school corporations had been selected. Thirty-one school corporations were left out of the survey from the suburban group.

There are 33 school corporations that have a demographic type listed as town. Thirty school corporations were randomly selected for participation in the survey. Starting in alphabetical order for all school corporations identified as town, 10 school corporations were

selected. The 11th school corporation was skipped. The process was repeated three times. At the end of the third time, 30 school corporations were selected from the category of town. Three school corporations in this group were left out of the survey.

There are 163 school corporations that have a demographic type listed as rural. Thirty school corporations were randomly selected from this group for participation in the survey. Starting in alphabetical order, every fifth school corporation was selected until 30 school corporations have been identified. This method left 133 school corporations out of the survey.

The following school corporations were declared ineligible to participate in the survey if randomly selected by the processes identified for random selection. For various reasons, the researcher has determined a conflict of interest with the following school corporations: Monroe County Community School Corporation, Shelbyville Central Schools, Northwestern Consolidated School Corporation of Shelby County, Shelby Eastern School Corporation, Southwestern Consolidated School of Shelby County. If selected in the random selection process, these school corporations were removed from the survey list of school corporations. A new school corporation was placed on the list in reverse alphabetical order of each demographic group requiring an additional school corporation for inclusion in the sample.

**Survey instrument.** Data was collected using a self-administered survey (Appendix A). A survey is a preferred instrument in this study because it allowed for a large cross-sectional collection of data from a sample of superintendents in the State of Indiana. The survey questions consisted of attitudinal items. The survey items were constructed using a Likert-type administered scale and was conducted online. This allowed for a larger population of superintendents to be surveyed. A larger population is preferred to ensure that the results of the data collected are valid and have sufficient power. The survey method also allowed for a

quick and economic turnaround of results. The survey responses were collected over a single two-week period.

The modified survey instrument for this study utilized many of the same questions used in the report by Bridgeland et al. (2009). The survey is the intellectual property of Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the AT&T Foundation and the America's Promise Alliance. The researcher was given permission to use the survey from Mr. John Bridgeland, the President & CEO of Civic Enterprises. Civic Enterprises is a public policy development firm in Washington, D.C. and the author of several research studies on the dropout issue in the United States.

**Validity and reliability.** Peter D. Hart Associates conducted the survey for Bridgeland et al. (2009) using 603 public high school teachers and 169 high school principals. The survey was conducted by telephone with the teachers and online and by phone for the principals (Bridgeland et al., 2009). The statistical margin for sampling error was $\pm$ 3.9 percentage points. The statistical margin for the principal survey was $\pm$ 7.5 percentage points (Bridgeland et al., 2009). To provide context and "inform the development of the survey" focus groups were conducted by Hart Associates with low-achieving schools and schools across the country (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Since this survey was conducted over the telephone and designed to question teachers and principals, the questions were modified for use as a written instrument for surveying superintendents.

In order to meet the purpose of this research study, some questions were eliminated and other questions were added to the survey. These customized questions were used to gather information directed at answering the designated research questions concerning superintendent efficacy and locus of control. The verbal protocols were used to check for instrument content

validity as described by Humboldt State University on their Survey website (Humbolt State University, 2010). A small group of superintendents were asked to take the survey aloud. Participants were encouraged to think out loud. The participants were asked to explain what they are thinking as they read each question. For example, they were asked to explain what they think each question means and to briefly explain why they are responding to the question the way they did. This enabled the researcher to check for clarity for each survey item. Five superintendents were asked to participate in the verbal survey protocols. Those superintendents were removed from participation in the study.

**Administration of survey.** The survey was administered using modified Salant and Dillman four-phase administration process to increase response rate (Salant, 1994). The 30 superintendents from each school corporation selected by demographic were notified by email a week before the survey is sent to them for completion. Their names and emails were taken from the latest Indiana School Boards Association Directory. The first contact email was used for introductions and to explain the reason for the survey. The superintendents were assured that the survey and survey results would be anonymous and that no results from the survey would be used to identify any participant or school corporations. The email specified the anticipated date of the delivery of the survey. The second contact with the superintendents was made to inform them that the survey was available for completion. The survey was sent one week after the first advance-notice email. A third email was sent four to eight days after the survey had been made available as a reminder to those who have not yet completed the survey. A fourth email was sent to the superintendent as a second reminder to complete the survey. The fourth email was sent two weeks after the second email. The survey process was closed four weeks after its start.

**Online survey and data collection.** A week after the introduction of the survey, the link to the actual survey was emailed to the superintendents for completion. The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey is a web-based company that gives individuals or organizations the ability to create and deliver online surveys. Superintendents were given a two-week window to complete the online survey. A sample size of 120 school corporations was selected for participation in the survey. Completion rates were monitored daily with a reminder email being sent every few days to those superintendents who had not completed the survey. At the end of the two-week period, the survey was shut down and superintendents were no longer able to log onto SurveyMonkey to complete the survey. The SurveyMonkey instrument was used to conduct, manage, and analyze the results of the survey.

## Statistical Analysis

**Efficacy.** Efficacy was measured by tallying responses on a designated subscale of the survey. The efficacy subscale includes questions 2 – 10. Higher efficacy scores indicate more internal locus of control, while low efficacy scores suggest more external locus of control.

**Descriptive statistics.** Exploration of the data was conducted to assure acceptable variability and linearity between the variables. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and range) were computed for the variables of interest and compared between groups.

**Reliability and validity of measures.** Internal consistency reliability was evaluated for the modified instrument by estimation of Cronbach's alpha in this population. Content validity was determined by examination by content experts.

**Hypothesis testing.** One-way analysis of variance was conducted to determine between-group differences in efficacy by geographic location, on free and reduced lunch and superintendent age. Factorial analysis was conducted to identify any interaction effects

between the independent variables. Tukey's post hoc analysis was conducted to specify significant differences revealed by the ANOVA.

**Response to survey questions.** The following additional investigations were examined by comparison of descriptive data (percent response) of the superintendent participants in this study with teachers and principals in previous studies. Graphs were developed to show response data (percentages) for each individual question asked to superintendents on the survey. This allowed for overall analysis and summary of data. This also allowed for the comparison of superintendent perspectives with those of teachers and principals who participated in the Bridgeland et al. (2009) survey.

# CHAPTER 4

## Analysis of Data and Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine Indiana superintendents' perspectives of efficacy toward the student dropout dilemma. An analysis was made to investigate whether superintendents in Indiana believe that there is an internal or external locus of control (efficacy) concerning the dropout issue. Further examination was made to determine if superintendent opinions towards efficacy differ by school geographic location (rural, suburban, town, metropolitan), socioeconomic status of the community (percent of students on free and reduced lunch), or superintendents' age. The study also compared superintendent opinions concerning the dropout issue with those of teachers and principals as reported in a recently published research study by Bridgeland et al. (2009) to see if their opinions correspond.

### Survey

The survey consisted of 12 questions. Many (8 of 12) of the questions were also used in the Bridgeland et al. (2009) report. The survey was modified for use as a written instrument for surveying superintendents. A small group of superintendents (five) were gathered to examine the survey for content validity. Each superintendent was encouraged to *think out loud* and explain their interpretation and responses to each question. This was done to check each survey item for clarity. This process was conducted in September 2010. The superintendents who participated in this process were removed for the superintendent survey pool.

Internal consistency was evaluated for the instrument by estimation of Cronbach's alpha. For this sample, Cronbach's alpha was calculated at .63. Optimal Cronbach's alpha is generally considered to be greater than .70, suggesting that not all the items on the survey contributed to the measurement of efficacy consistently.

**Sample**

Data were collected from Indiana Superintendents using the survey method. The survey was emailed to 120 randomly selected Indiana public school superintendents: 30 metropolitan superintendents; 30 suburban superintendents; 30 town superintendents; and 30 rural superintendents. It was decided to use 30 from each category based on the fact that there are only 36 metropolitan superintendents and 33 town superintendents in the State of Indiana. It was thought that 30 from each category would provide a uniform representation.

Superintendents were randomly selected to participate in the survey. To get 30 random school corporations in each designated geographic location, school corporations and their superintendents were selected using a formula based on the total number of school districts in the designated geographic areas (metropolitan, suburban, town, rural). Starting in alphabetical order, metropolitan (36 total in Indiana) school corporations were chosen by selecting six corporations in a row and skipping the $7^{th}$ until there was a pool of 30. For suburban school corporations (61total in Indiana), every other school corporation was selected until there was a pool of 30. Town (33 total in Indiana) school corporations were chosen by selecting 10 and skipping the $11^{th}$ school corporation. For rural (163 total in Indiana) school corporations, every fifth school corporation was selected until 30 school corporations were identified.

A modified Salant and Dillman four-phase administration process was used to guide the survey collection process (Salant, 1994). Based on that process, 120 superintendents were sent

an initial request to participate in the survey on Sunday, October 31, 2010. Approximately one week after the request to participate was sent, on November 6, the electronic link to the survey site was emailed and the survey was opened for completion. The survey was housed, maintained, and tabulated using the survey services of SurveyMonkey. The participants were sent two reminders. The first reminder was sent on Sunday, November 14, 2010, asking superintendents who had not yet completed the survey to please do so at his/her earliest convenience. The second and final reminder was sent out on November 21. The survey was closed for completion approximately four weeks after its introduction on November 30, 2010.

The response rate was good. The survey completion rate was 62.5%, with 75 superintendents completing the survey. Rural superintendents had the highest rate of completion with 24 of 30 superintendents filling out the survey for a completion rate of 80%. Superintendents from town school corporations had the second highest completion rate with 23 out of 30 completing the survey for a completion rate of 76%. Suburban superintendents had a completion rate of 56% with 17 of 30 superintendents completing the survey. Metropolitan superintendents had the lowest completion rate with 11 of 30 superintendents filling out the survey for a completion rate of 36% (Figure 5).

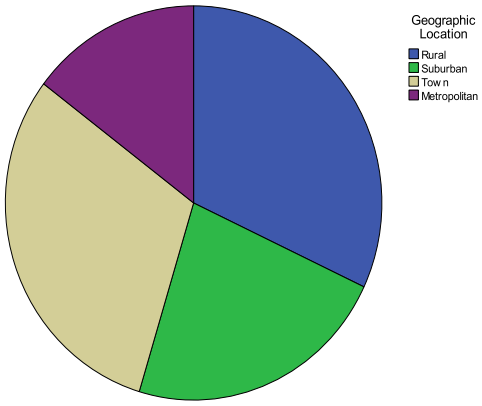


*Figure 5.* Sample by geographic location

For the purpose of this study, two other demographics were very important: the percentage of students on free and reduced lunch; and the age of the superintendents filling out the survey. Nearly half of the superintendents (46.7%) reported having a free and reduced lunch rate of 41-60%. The second highest percentage of superintendents (28%) reported having a free and reduced rate between 21-40%. The third highest percentage of superintendents (16%) reported having a free and reduced lunch rate of 61% or higher. The smallest percentage (9.3%) reported a free and reduced lunch rate of 0-20% (Figure 6).

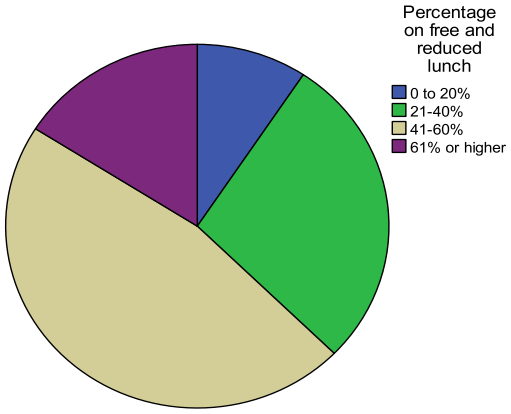


*Figure 6.* Sample by free and reduced lunch

More than half of the superintendents in the survey sample were greater than age 50; 44% were 51-60; and 33.3% were older than 61. The next highest age group of superintendents (18.7%) was 41-50 years of age. The smallest percentage of superintendents (4%) in the sample reported being from the age group of 30-40 years of age (Figure 7).

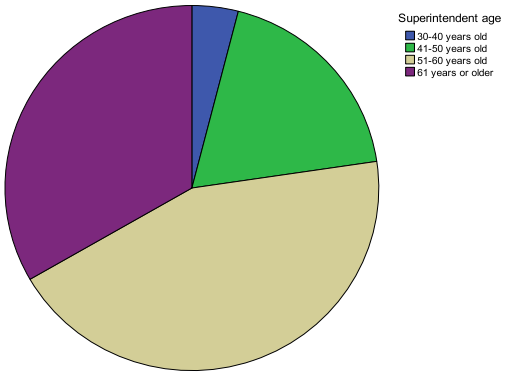


*Figure* 7. Sample by superintendent's age

## Data Preparation

The following were steps followed in setting up the data sheet to prepare for analysis. Variables were defined to represent each question on the survey. Narrative data were recoded into numeric values. Missing data were coded as "99" to allow for proper identification and handling. Missing responses were replaced by using the series mean method. Reverse-scored variables (those where high score indicates low efficacy) were recoded appropriately. The variable "efficacy score" was computed by summing keyed responses to questions 2-10 on the survey.

**Efficacy finding.** Possible efficacy scores ranged from 42 to 210. Higher scores indicate higher efficacy and internal locus of control. Lower scores indicated a lower efficacy and external locus of control. Table 8 and Figures 8-11 display efficacy scores (range, mean and standard deviation) for the superintendents who participated in the survey ($n$ = 75). The superintendents' efficacy scores ranged from 115-162 ($M$ = 136.97, $SD$ = 10.53). Efficacy scores were fairly normally distributed (Figure 8).

Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics*

| Efficacy Score | *N* | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Sample | 75 | 115 | 162 | 136.97 | 10.53 |
| Rural | 24 | 116 | 153 | 137.65 | 9.96 |
| Suburban | 17 | 125 | 162 | 138.18 | 10.08 |
| Town | 23 | 115 | 154 | 133.87 | 10.76 |
| Metropolitan | 11 | 116 | 158 | 140.11 | 11.76 |

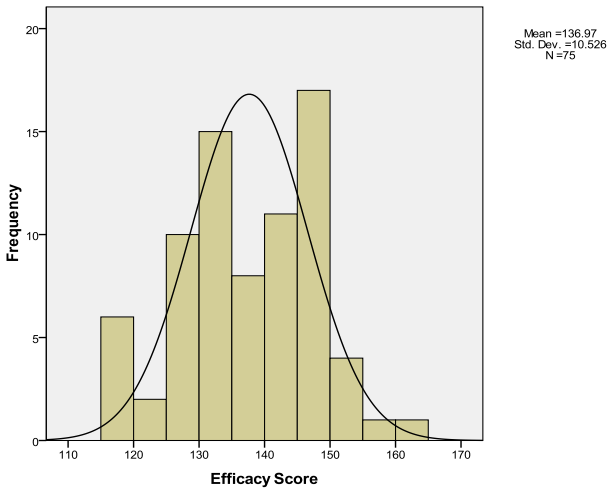


*Figure 8.* Superintendent self efficacy frequency distribution histogram

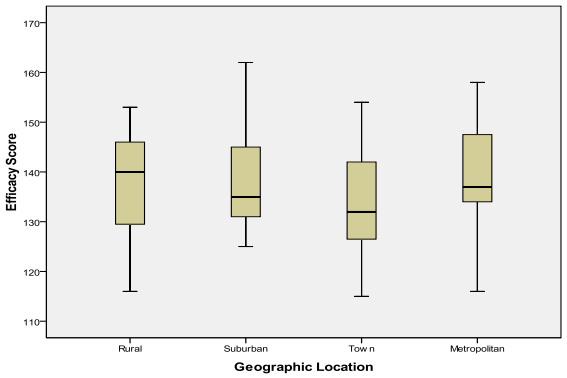


*Figure 9.* Mean efficacy scores by geographic location

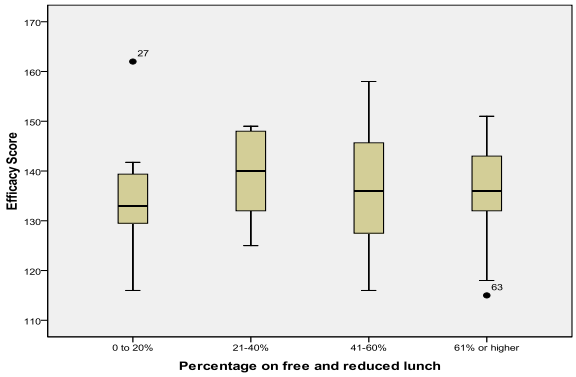


*Figure 10.* Mean efficacy score by percentage of free and reduced lunch

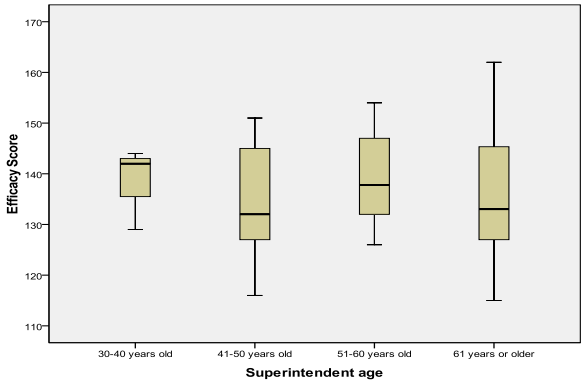


*Figure 11.* Mean efficacy score by superintendents' age

**Research Questions**

**Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents perceptions of locus of control based on the geographic location of their school corporation (metropolitan, suburban, town, rural)?** One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine differences in superintendent self efficacy between groups of varying geographic location, superintendent age, and percentage of students on free and reduced lunch. The assumptions of independence, normality, and homogeneity of variance were met for comparisons using the summed efficacy score. The sample was randomly identified, and efficacy scores represented responses from individual superintendents, assuring that the responses were independent from one another. The histogram shows scores within the population of superintendents to be fairly normally distributed. The homogeneity of variance was met for efficacy score, as evidenced by the Levene statistics for geographic location (.11, $p > .05$)), percentage of students of free and reduced lunch (.92, $p > .05$) and superintendent age (2.13, $p > .05$) (Table 9).

Table 9

*Test of Homogeneity of Variances: Summed Efficacy Scores*

| | Levene Statistic | *df1* | *df*2 | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Geographic location | .11 | 3 | 71 | .95 |
| Percentage of students on free and reduced lunch | .92 | 3 | 71 | .43 |
| Age | 2.13 | 3 | 71 | .11 |

The mean efficacy scores were first compared by geographic location. Rural superintendents had an efficacy range of 116-153 ($M = 137.65$, $SD = 9.960$). The suburban

superintendents had an efficacy range of 125-162 ($M$ = 138.18, $SD$ = 10.076). Town superintendents had a range of 115-154 ($M$ = 133.87, $SD$ = 10.755). Metropolitan superintendents had an efficacy range of 116-158 ($M$ = 133.87, $SD$ = 11.759). The one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference $F$ (3,71) = 1.104, $p > .05$ in the mean efficacy scores between geographic locations (Table 10).

Table 10

*ANOVA – Mean Efficacy by Geographic Location*

| | | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Efficacy Score | Between Groups | 365.444 | 3 | 121.815 | 1.104 | .353 |
| | Within Groups | 7833.692 | 71 | 110.334 | | |
| | Total | 8199.137 | 74 | | | |

*Note*. Geographic location: rural, suburban, town, metropolitan

While the intent was to use the summed score to measure efficacy, it is of note that question 10 directly asked superintendents if they believed that they have the ability, in their role as the superintendent of a school corporation, to reduce his/her school corporation's dropout rate, and could arguably be used as a measure of efficacy. If question 10 is used as the measure of efficacy in ANOVA, the assumption of normality is violated, (see Figure 12). The assumption of homogeneity of variance is supported: geographic location (1.73, $p > .05$); percentage of students on free and reduced lunch (1.7, $p > .05$), and superintendent age (.59, $p > .05$) (Table 11).

Table 11

*Test of Homogeneity of Variances: Single Question 10 Efficacy Measure*

| | Levene Statistic | *df*1 | *df*2 | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Geographic location | 1.73 | 3 | 71 | .17 |
| Percentage of students on free and reduced lunch | 1.69 | 3 | 71 | .33 |
| Age | .59 | 3 | 71 | .62 |

*Note.* Single survey question

The ANOVA does suggest a difference between suburban and rural superintendents when using question 10 as the measure of efficacy. Rural superintendents compared to suburban superintendents showed less efficacy with a mean difference of -.68 with a standard error of .23 ($p$ = .021) (Table 12). There was no significant difference between town and rural, suburban, metropolitan; nor metropolitan and rural, suburban, and town when using the single question as a measure of efficacy $F$ (3,71) = 3.451, $p$ >.05).

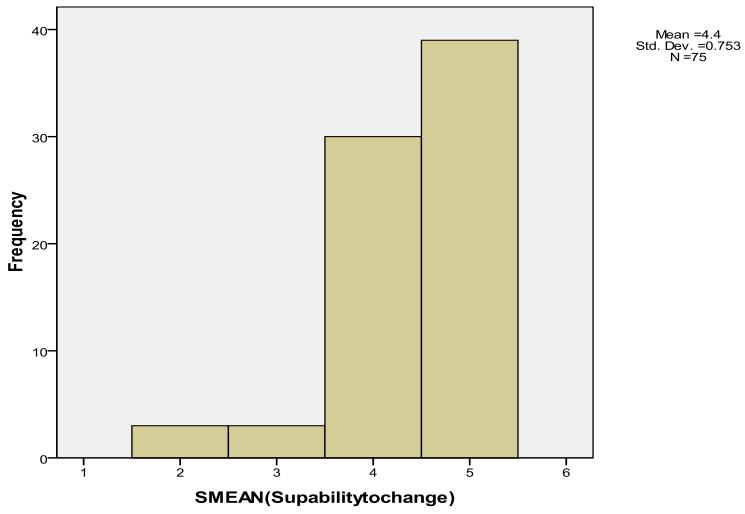


*Figure 12.* Mean efficacy by survey question number 10

Table 12

*ANOVA – Efficacy Measure Single Survey Question 10 By Geographic Location*

| Efficacy Measure | | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Survey Question 10 | Between Groups | 5.35 | 3 | 1.78 | 3.45 | .021 |
| | Within Groups | 36.66 | 71 | 0.52 | | |
| | Total | 42.00 | 74 | | | |

*Note*. Single survey question 10: In your role as the superintendent of your school corporation, do you believe you have the ability to reduce your corporation's dropout rate?

**Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on the percentage of students identified as free and reduced payment status?**

ANOVA was conducted to explore differences in mean efficacy scores by percentage of students on free and reduced lunch. Superintendents who have a free and reduced lunch population of 0 to 20% had an efficacy score range of 116-162 ($M$ = 135.53, $SD$ = 14.16). Superintendents who have a free and reduced lunch population of 21-40% had a self efficacy score range of 125-149 ($M$ = 138.81, $SD$ = 8.21). Superintendents who have a free and reduced lunch population of 41-60% had a self efficacy range of 116-158 ($M$ = 136.57, $SD$ = 11.18). Superintendents who have a free and reduced lunch population of 61% or higher had a self efficacy range of 115-151 ($M$ = 135.75, $SD$ 10.84). The one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference $F(3,71) = .318$, $p > .05$ in the mean efficacy scores based on free and reduced lunch (Table 13).

Table 13

*ANOVA – Mean Efficacy Scores By Percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch*

| | | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Efficacy Score | Between groups | 108.86 | 3 | 36.29 | .32 | .81 |
| | Within groups | 8090.28 | 71 | 113.95 | | |
| | Total | | 74 | | | |

*Note.* Percentage of free and reduced lunch groups: 0-20%, 21-40%, 41-60%, 61% or higher

ANOVA using survey question 10 as the dependent measure to compare efficacy among varying levels of free and reduced lunch showed no significant difference based on the superintendent's free and reduced lunch population $F(3,71) = .45$, $p > .05$ (Table 14).

**Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on superintendents' age?** ANOVA was conducted to examine summed self efficacy scores by superintendent age. The efficacy score for 30-40 year old superintendents showed a range of 129-144 ($M = 138.33$, $SD = 8.15$). The efficacy score for 41-50 year old superintendents showed a range of 116-151 ($M = 135$, $SD = 11.23$). The efficacy score for superintendents between the ages of 51-60 showed a range of 126-154 ($M = 138.96$, $SD = 8.28$). The efficacy score for superintendents 61 years of age or older showed a range of 115-162 ($M = 135.29$, $SD = 12.87$). The one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference $F(3,71) = .78$, $p > .05$ in the mean efficacy scores based on superintendent age (Table 15). ANOVA using survey question 10 as the measure of efficacy showed no significant difference based on the superintendent age $F(3,71) = .78$, $p > .05$ (Table 16).

Table 14

*ANOVA – Efficacy Measure Single Survey Question 10 By Percentage of Free and Reduced Lunch*

| Efficacy Score | | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Survey Question 10 | Between groups | .79 | 3 | .26 | .45 | .72 |
| | Within groups | 41.21 | 71 | .58 | | |
| | Total | 42.0 | 74 | | | |

*Note.* Single survey question 10: In your role as the superintendent of your school corporation, do you believe you have the ability to reduce your corporation's dropout rate?

**Factorial ANOVA**

A 4 x 4 x 4 Factorial ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean efficacy scores between the independent variable groups of geographic location, superintendent age, and percentage of free and reduced lunch to determine whether there were significant between-group main effects, or interaction effects between the independent variables. After running the factorial ANOVA it was discovered that the assumption of equality of error variance was violated. The Levine's test showed a $p = .02$ (Table 17), rejecting the null that variance was equal across the groups. Because of the violation of assumptions, the ability of the factorial ANOVA to accurately identify significant differences may be limited.

Table 15

*ANOVA – Mean Efficacy Scores By Superintendent Age*

| | | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Efficacy Score | Between groups | 261.90 | 3 | 87.30 | .78 | .51 |
| | Within groups | 7937.23 | 71 | 111.79 | | |
| | Total | 8199.14 | 74 | | | |

*Note.* Age groups: 30 – 40 years, 41 – 50 years, 51 – 60 years, over 60 years

Table 16

*ANOVA – Efficacy Measure Single Survey Question 10 By Superintendent Age*

| | | Sum of Squares | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Efficacy Score | Between Groups | .08 | 3 | .03 | .05 | .99 |
| | Within Groups | 41.92 | 71 | .59 | | |
| | Total | | 74 | | | |

*Note.* Single survey question 10: In your role as the superintendent of your school corporation, do you believe you have the ability to reduce your corporation's dropout rate?

Table 17

*Factorial ANOVA – Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variance*

| *F* | *df*1 | *df*2 | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.988 | 34 | 40 | 0.02 |

*Note.* Dependent variable: Efficacy score

The factorial analysis suggested that there is a significant main effect for geographic location, $F(3,40) = 5.22$, $p < .05$. Post Hoc analysis (Table 18) indicated a significant difference between rural and town ($p = .034$) and metropolitan and town ($p = .030$). There was a near-significant difference between suburban and town ($p = .055$). However, there were no significant interaction effects noted on mean efficacy scores between: geographic location by free and reduced lunch $F(7,40) = 1.02$, $p > .05$; geographic location by superintendent age $F(6,40) = 2.03$, $p > .05$; free and lunch by superintendent age $F(5,40) = 1.29$, $p > .05$; geographic location by free and reduced lunch by superintendent age $F(5,40) = .53$, $p > .05$ (Table 19).

Table 18

*Factorial ANOVA – Test of Between-Subjects Effects*

| Source | *df* | Mean Square | *F* | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared | Observed Power |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Geographic Location | 3 | 470.43 | 5.22 | .004 | .28 | .90 |
| Free and Reduced | 3 | 44.86 | .50 | .690 | .04 | .14 |
| Age | 3 | 32.82 | .36 | .780 | .03 | .12 |
| GeoLoc*Freeandreduced | 7 | 92.07 | 1.02 | .430 | .15 | .38 |
| GeoLoc*Age | 5 | 183.44 | 2.03 | .080 | .23 | .67 |
| Freeandreduced*Age | 5 | 115.89 | 1.29 | .290 | .14 | .41 |
| GeogLoc*Freeandreduced*age | 5 | 47.47 | .53 | .760 | .06 | .18 |
| Error | 40 | 90.20 | | | | |
| Total | 75 | | | | | |
| Corrected Total | 74 | | | | | |

*Note*. Dependent Variable: Efficacy score

Table 19

*Factorial ANOVA – Pairwise Comparisons*

| (1) Geographic Location | (J) Geographic Location | Mean Difference (I-J) | *SE* | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rural | Suburban | .41 | 3.44 | .91 |
| | Town | 7.49 | 3.42 | .03 |
| | Metropolitan | -1.55 | 3.87 | .69 |
| Suburban | Rural | -.41 | 3.44 | .91 |
| | Town | 7.08 | 3.58 | .06 |
| | Metropolitan | -1.96 | 4.04 | .63 |
| Town | Rural | -7.49 | 3.42 | .03 |
| | Suburban | -7.08 | 3.58 | .06 |
| | Metropolitan | -9.04 | 4.02 | .03 |
| Metropolitan | Rural | 1.55 | 3.90 | .69 |
| | Suburban | 1.96 | 4.04 | .63 |
| | Town | 9.04 | 4.02 | .03 |

*Note.* Dependent variable: Efficacy score

**How do Indiana superintendent perceptions compare, as determined by this study, to teachers and principals as reported in the research study *On the Front Lines Of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem?***

The superintendents who took part in this research project answered several questions related to how superintendents perceive the public school dropout issue. Those responses allowed for comparisons to those given by principals and teachers who responded to the same types of

questions as reported in the national study, *On the front Lines of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem*.

Superintendents were given several reasons as to why students drop out of high school before graduation (survey question number 2), and were asked to indicate if he/she believes that the reasons are a factor in most cases, some cases, neutral, factor in just a few cases or not really a factor (Hart, 2008). The following were thought to be factors in most or some cases:

- The student could not keep up with work (72%)
- The student could not get along with the teacher (53%)
- The student could not get along with other students (45%)
- The student is bored and does not find school interesting (73%)
- The student associates with other students who have dropped out of school (73%)
- The student misses too many days of school and cannot catch up (76%)
- The student does not have enough support at home from a parent or guardian (93%)
- The student is not prepared for high school (49%)

The following student situations were thought to be a factor in a few cases or not really a factor in any cases:

- The student has a child (66%)
- The student has to care for a family member (73%)
- The student has to get a job to make money and cannot attend school at the same time (50%)

In the Bridgeland et al. (2009) report, teachers and principals were surveyed and answered the same question concerning reasons why students drop out of school. The

following is the percentage of teachers and principals who thought that the reason is a factoring most cases or a factor in some cases:

- The student cannot keep up with school work (teachers 56%, principals 61%)
- The student is bored and does not find school interesting (teachers 60%, principals 70%)
- The student associates with other students who have dropped out of school (teachers 78%, principals 78%)
- The student misses too many days of school and cannot catch up (teachers 84%, principals 86%)
- The student does not have enough support at home from a parent or guardian (teachers 89%, principals 88%)
- The student is not prepared for high school (teachers 62%, principals 60%) (Bridgeland et al., 2009)

The following student situations for dropping out of school were thought to be a factor in a few cases or not really a factor in any cases:

- The student cannot get along with teachers (teachers 62%, principals 64%)
- The student cannot get along with other students (teachers 61%, principals 67%)
- The student has a child (teachers 55%, principals 61%)
- The student has to care for a family member (teachers 64%, principals 74%)
- The student has to get a job to make money and cannot attend school at the same time (teachers 51%, principals 56%) (Bridgeland et al., 2009)

Superintendents were asked (survey question 3) whose responsibility it is that students drop out of high school (Hart, 2008). The superintendents responded:

- All or most of the responsibility: students (80%), parents (83%)
- Some or very little of the responsibility: high school teachers (51%); principals (69%); superintendents (72%); school system (49%); broader society (55%); elected officials (73%)

Teachers and principals attribute the following groups as to having most accountability for a student dropping out of school:

- All or most of the responsibility: students (teachers 76%, principals 74%); parents (teachers 74%, principals 69%)
- Some or very little of the responsibility: school system (teachers 80%, principal 71%); broader society (teachers 81%, principals 81%); high school teachers (teachers 87%, principals 77%); elected officials (teachers 86%, principals 90%); high school principals (teachers not asked, principals 77%) (Bridgeland et al., 2009)

Superintendents were asked (survey question 4) whether they believe that the high schools do enough to intervene with students who are at risk of dropping out (Hart, 2008). The superintendents thought that their high schools do too much or do enough in the following area:

- Keeping students from skipping class (65 %)

Superintendents thought that the high schools could do somewhat more or could do a lot more in these areas:

- Keeping students interested and engaged in coursework (61%)
- Providing support for struggling students (48%)
- Helping students with problems outside the classroom that affect their school work (53%)

- Engaging parents and encouraging them to be involved in their children's education at school and at home (65%)

Teachers and principals thought that the schools could do a lot more or could do somewhat more when it came to the following issues (Bridgeland et al., 2009):

- Engaging parents (teachers 59%, principals 79%)
- Keeping students interested and engaged in coursework (teachers 59%, principals 87%)
- Helping students with problems outside the classroom that affect their school work (teachers 54%, principals 76%)
- Keeping students from skipping class (teachers 53%, principals 53%)
- Provide support for struggling students (teachers 47%, principals 75%)

Survey question 5 asked superintendents to respond to the fact that many former students said they stopped going to school because they found it to be boring and uninteresting, or they did not see the relevance of school to real life (Hart, 2008). The superintendents thought the students were:

- Speaking to an important cause of dropping out of school (73%)
- Just making excuses (26%)

Teachers and principals thought the students were (Bridgeland et al., 2009):

- Speaking to an important cause of dropping out of school (teachers 50%, principals 69%)
- Just making excuses (teachers 42%, principals 29%)

Survey question six asked superintendents to respond to the following question: "If the nation's public high schools demanded more of their students, do you agree that at-risk students

would work harder to meet these higher expectations (Hart, 2008)?" Superintendents responded:

- Strongly agree/Agree (32%)
- Disagree/Strongly disagree (46%)

Teachers and principals responded in the following manner (Bridgeland et al., 2009):

- Strongly agree (teachers 13%, principals 19%)
- Strongly disagree (teachers 63%, principals 45%)

When asked how realistic and achievable they think it would be for the national dropout rate could be cut in half within 10 years (survey question 7). Superintendents responded (Hart, 2008):

- Completely realistic/Fairly realistic and achievable (47%)
- Somewhat realistic/Not realistic and achievable (44%)

Teachers and principals responded (Bridgeland et al., 2009):

- Completely realistic/Fairly realistic and achievable (teachers 47%, principals 61%)
- Somewhat realistic/not realistic and achievable (teachers 49%, principals 39%)

The superintendents were asked several questions on what they thought would help reduce the dropout rate (survey question 8) (Hart, 2008). The superintendents answered that they thought the following would help a lot or a fair amount:

- Improve outreach to parents to better involve them with their child's educational progress and challenges (73%)
- Establish an early warning system to identify students who are struggling in middle and junior high school and get them the support they need (90%)

- Have more counselors and mentors on staff to provide guidance and support to at-risk students (78%)
- Have smaller classes so students get more attention from teachers (60%)
- Create more hands-on and project-based learning opportunities, so students can see relevance and learning in different ways (82%)
- Have smaller schools to encourage more and closer relationships with adults (60%)
- Connect classroom learning to real world experiences and career opportunities through service learning, work study, and job shadowing (91%)
- Ensure that teachers are teaching in the subject area in which they are licensed (50%)
- Increase the support that principals provide to teachers to help at-risk students (70%)

The following is a summary of how teachers and principals responded to the suggestions made to help keep students stay in school and lower the dropout rate. Both teachers and principals thought that the following proposals would help a lot or a fair amount (Bridgeland et al., 2009):

- Smaller classes (teachers 86%, principals 70%)
- Early warning system (teachers 83%, principals 86%)
- Connect classroom learning to real world/career opportunities (teachers 82%, principals 86%)
- More parental outreach (teachers 77%, principals 78%)
- More hands-on and project-based learning (teachers 75%, principals 90%)
- Ensure teachers are teaching in the subject area in which they are licensed (teachers 66%, principals 57%)

- Have more counselors and mentors on staff to provide guidance and support to at-risk students (teachers 64%, principals 76%)
- Increase support that principals provide to teachers to help at-risk students (teachers 62%, principals 66%)
- Have smaller schools to encourage more and closer relationships with adults (teachers 67%, principals 73%)

Superintendents were asked to review proposals for reducing the dropout rate (survey question 9) (Hart, 2008). The superintendents answered that they would strongly favor or somewhat favor the following survey proposals:

- Ensure a common definition for high school graduation rates across the fifty states and make graduation and dropout data available at the district and school levels and by racial and ethnic subgroups (65%)
- Create individualized graduation plans for each student and regularly communicate with parents about progress toward completing the plan (77%)
- Provide alternative learning environments with more individualized instruction that gives students at risk of dropping out more choices to make school more relevant to their lives and goals such as schools of technology, sciences, the arts, or ninth grade academies that support incoming freshmen (98%)
- Expand college-level learning opportunities in high school through dual enrollment early college programs and Advanced Placement programs (74%)
- Establish a national clearing house to assist states and school in evaluating and disseminating existing research and best practices (58%)

Teachers and principals either strongly favored or somewhat favored the following proposals (Bridgeland et al., 2009):

- Provide alternative learning environments (teachers 96%, principals 96%)
- Expanding college level learning opportunities (teachers 86%, principals 92%)
- Create individualized graduation plans (teachers 72%, principals 87%)
- National clearing house to evaluate/disseminate existing research (teachers 72%, principals 80%)
- National definition for graduation rates (teachers 70%, principals 79%)

For the purpose of this study concerning efficacy, question 10 on the survey asked if the participants thought that in their role as superintendent, they had the ability to reduce their school corporation's dropout rate. The responses show that 92% of superintendents strongly believe or somewhat believe that they have the ability to reduce their school corporations dropout rate. The following is a breakdown of superintendent responses:

- Strongly believed (52%)
- Somewhat believed (40%)
- Strongly do not believe (0%)

This question was not asked to teachers and principals on the national study.

**Summary**

An analysis was conducted to investigate whether superintendents in Indiana believe that there is an internal or external locus of control concerning the dropout issue. Further examination determined if superintendent opinions towards efficacy are affected by school demographic type (rural, suburban, town, metropolitan), socioeconomic status of the community (percent of students on free and reduced lunch), or superintendents' age. The study

compared superintendent opinions concerning the dropout issue with those of teachers, and principals as reported in a recently published research study, *On The Front Lines Of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem,* to examine how their opinions correspond.

Data were collected from Indiana superintendents using a survey. Superintendents (120) were randomly selected from four geographic categories (rural, suburban, metropolitan, town) to participate in the survey. A total of 30 superintendents were selected in each category. The survey had a response rate of 62.5%.

Superintendent efficacy scores were determined by summing keyed responses to questions 2-10 on the survey. The higher the efficacy score the higher superintendent efficacy (internal locus of control); the lower the efficacy score, the lower superintendent efficacy (external locus of control). One-way ANOVA was conducted to determine any mean differences in efficacy scores among the categories of geographic location, superintendent age, and percent on free and reduced. The superintendent efficacy summed score by geographic location showed no significant differences. Superintendent efficacy was also examined using a single survey question, survey question 10, which asked superintendents, "In your role as the superintendent of your school corporation, do you believe you have the ability to reduce your corporation's dropout rate"? This analysis suggested a difference between suburban and rural superintendents; however, the assumption of normality was violated. No significant differences between the other demographic locations were found. No differences were found on superintendent efficacy summed score by percentage of students on free and reduced lunch or by superintendent age for either the summed score or single question measures

A factorial ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean efficacy scores between the independent variable groups. The factorial ANOVA suggested that there was a significant main effect for geographic location, $F(3, 40)$ 5.22, $p = .004$, observed power .90, partial eta squared .28. Post hoc analysis suggested that town superintendents' mean efficacy scores were lower than that of the other geographic groups. However, the equality of variance assumption was violated, limiting confidence in this finding.

Superintendent responses to the survey questions were recorded and compared to a chart those given by principals and teachers in the national study, *On the Front lines of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem.* The summary of these comparisons is compiled in Appendix D.

# CHAPTER 5

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine Indiana superintendents' perspectives of efficacy toward the student dropout dilemma. An analysis was made to investigate whether superintendents in Indiana believe that there is an internal or external locus of control (efficacy) concerning the dropout issue. Further examination was made to determine if superintendent opinions towards efficacy differ by school geographic location (rural, suburban, town, metropolitan), socioeconomic status of the community (percent of students on free and reduced lunch), or superintendents' age. The study also compared superintendent opinions concerning the dropout issue with those of teachers and principals as reported in a recently published research study by Bridgeland et al., (2009), to see if their opinions correspond.

The following are the research questions that were developed to explore superintendent efficacy toward the dropout issue:

1. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents perceptions of locus of control based on the geographic location of their school corporation (metropolitan, suburban, town, rural)?
2. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on the percentage of students identified as free and reduced payment status?
3. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on superintendents' age?

4. How do Indiana Superintendent perceptions compare, as determined by this study, to teachers and principals as reported in the research study *On The Front Lines Of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem*?

**Conclusion**

A survey was sent to 120 Indiana superintendents. The superintendents were divided into geographic locations (metropolitan, suburban, rural, town). A total of 30 superintendents were randomly selected from each geographic location. The purpose of the survey was to measure superintendent opinions and efficacy on the national and state dropout dilemma. Research questions were developed to explore differences among superintendents based on geographic locations, superintendent age, and free and reduced lunch. The survey was a modified version of the survey used in the national study by Bridgeland et al. (2009). This survey was used for the purpose of comparing superintendent responses to those of teacher and principals who had previously taken the survey. Survey questions were assigned points with the intent of measuring superintendent efficacy towards the dropout issue. An ANOVA was run on each research question. A factorial ANOVA was run on the research question to compare mean scores to decide whether differences between the means are due to chance or to a systematic effect between factors or a combination of certain levels of the independent variables.

**Research Questions**

The following are the conclusions of the quantitative research project based on the research questions:

**Research question 1**. Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents perceptions of locus of control based on the geographic location of their school corporation (metropolitan, suburban, town, rural)? ($H_0$1: There is no significant difference among Indiana metropolitan, suburban, town, and rural superintendents regarding perceived locus of control concerning school dropout). One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine differences in superintendent self efficacy between groups of varying geographic location. The mean efficacy scores were compared by rural superintendents, suburban superintendents, town superintendents, and town superintendents. The one-way ANOVA showed no significant differences in mean efficacy scores between geographic locations $F(3,71) = 1.104$, $p > .05$). Based on this finding, the null hypothesis is retained on research question 1, there is no significant difference between superintendent efficacy based on the one-way ANOVA and geographic location.

An ANOVA was also run using only one survey question (10) that directly asked superintendents if they believed they had the ability, in their role as the superintendent of a school corporation, to reduce his/her school corporation's dropout rate. Since this question speaks directly to a superintendents' perception of internal locus of control (self-efficacy), a one-way ANOVA was run to determine if a differences exist between geographic locations based on this single survey question. The ANOVA did suggest that there was a difference between rural and suburban superintendents when using question 10 as the single measure of efficacy. Rural superintendents compared to suburban superintendents showed less efficacy. This difference could have resulted from violation of the assumption of normality (based on the shape of the Figure 12 histogram). The response to the question appears to be heavily skewed toward high efficacy (internal locus of control). There was no significant difference between

town and rural, suburban, metropolitan; nor metropolitan and rural, suburban, and town when using the single question as a measure of efficacy $F$ (3,71) = 3.451, $p$ >.05).

**Research question 2**: Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on the percentage of students identified as free and reduced payment status? ($H_0$2: There is no significant difference among Indiana superintendents regarding perceived locus of control based on percentage of students on free and reduced payment status.) One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine differences in superintendent self efficacy between groups of varying percentage of students on free and reduced lunch. Free and reduced lunch population categories were 0-20%, 21-40%, 41-60%, and 61% and higher. The one-way ANOVA showed no significant differences based on the superintendent's free and reduced lunch population $F$(3,71) = .318, $p$ > .05). Based on the one-way ANOVA, the null hypothesis is retained; no significant differences were found among Indiana superintendents' internal locus of control (efficacy) based on free and reduced lunch payment groupings. The ANOVA using survey question 10 as the dependent measure to compare efficacy among varying levels of free and reduced lunch also showed no significant difference based on the superintendent's free and reduced lunch population $F$(3,71) = .45, $p$ >.05).

**Research question 3**: Is there a difference in Indiana superintendents' perceptions of locus of control based on superintendents' age? ($H_0$3: There is no significant difference among Indiana superintendents regarding perceived locus of control based on superintendents' age). One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine differences in superintendent efficacy between age groups of superintendents. Superintendents age group categories were 30-40, 41-50, 51-60, and 61 years of age and older. The one-way ANOVA

showed no significant difference between age groups $F(3,71) = .78$, $p > .05$). Based on the one-way ANOVA, the null hypothesis is retained; no significant differences were found among Indiana superintendents' internal locus of control (efficacy) based on superintendent age groupings. The ANOVA using survey question 10 as the measure of efficacy also showed no significant difference based on superintendent age $F(3,71) = .05$, $p > .05$).

The factorial ANOVA suggested that there is a significant main effect for geographic location. The Post Hoc analysis indicated a significant difference between rural and town, and metropolitan and town. There was a near significant difference between suburban and town. There were no significant interaction effects noted on mean efficacy score between: geographic location by free and reduced lunch, geographic location by superintendent age; free and reduced lunch by superintendent age; or geographic location by free and reduced lunch by superintendent age. Importantly, the assumption of equality of error variance is violated for the Factorial ANOVA in this sample. The Levine's test showed a $p = .02$ (Table 17), rejecting the null that variance is equal across the groups. Because of the violation of assumptions, the ability of the factorial ANOVA to accurately identify significant differences may be limited. However, the observed power for geographic location was strong at .90, $\eta^2 = .28$ (suggesting that 28% of the variance in efficacy is accounted for by geographic location). The small sample size and unequal size in cells may have led to the geographic main effect. However, since the assumption of equality of error variance was violated increasing the possibility of making a Type I error, the researcher is careful to claim that a significant difference in efficacy exists among superintendents based on geographic location and the factorial analysis. The researcher does not think that enough evidence exists to reject the null hypothesis that there is no

significant difference among Indiana metropolitan, suburban, town, and rural superintendents regarding perceived locus of control concerning school dropout.

**Research question 4**: How do Indiana Superintendent perceptions compare, as determined by this study, to teachers and principals as reported in the research study *On The Front Lines Of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem*? When comparing superintendent responses on survey questions to those of teachers and principals, superintendents responded not much differently than teachers and principals. Superintendent responses were not that dissimilar to those of teachers and principals with the answers leaning toward low self-efficacy and an external locus of control. For instance, when asked to identify who has responsibility for students dropping out of high school, superintendents, like principals and teachers, place most of the blame on students and parents. Also, like teachers and principals, superintendents accepted little of the blame for students dropping out of school. Similarly, superintendents placed little blame on high school teachers, the principal, the school system, broader society, or elected officials at the local, state, and national levels.

The national survey indicated that many students said they stopped going to school because they found it boring and uninteresting or they did not see the relevance of school to real life (Bridgeland et al., 2009). The majority of principals, teachers, and superintendents all agreed that the students were speaking to an important cause of dropping out with a much smaller group believing the student were just making excuses. Not surprisingly, more so than superintendents and principals, the teachers were much more likely to think that the students were just making excuses (Bridgeland et al., 2009).

In the same way as principals and teachers, superintendents were asked "if the nation's public high schools demanded more of their students, do you agree that at-risk students would work harder to meet these expectations (Hart, 2008)?" Superintendents were skeptical that the students would indeed step up to meet these higher expectations with the majority either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Correspondingly, principals and teachers strongly disagreed that the students would meet the expectations (Bridgeland et al., 2009).

Superintendents, teachers, and principals were asked about a goal for improving graduation rates. The question asked the educators, "If there were a commitment to making needed changes and reforms at the local, state, and national levels, how realistic and achievable do you think it would be that the national dropout rate could be cut in half within 10 years? (Hart, 2008). Principals thought that the goal was attainable with the majority believing the goal was either completely or fairly realistic. The majority of superintendents and teachers on the other hand, thought the goal only somewhat or not realistic and achievable.

Superintendents, principals, and teachers were nearly in agreement in regard to suggestions that have been made to help keep students in school and lower the high school dropout rate. The three groups of educators agreed that the following suggestion would help a lot or a fair amount: Improve outreach to parents to better involve them with their child's educational progress and challenges; establish an early warning system to identify students who are struggling in middle and junior high school and get them the support they need; have more counselors and mentors on staff to provide guidance and support to at-risk students; have smaller classes so students get more attention from teachers; create more hands-on and project based learning opportunities, so students can see relevance and learning in different ways; have smaller schools to encourage more and closer relationships with adults; connect classrooms

learning to real world experiences and career opportunities through service learning, work study, and job shadowing; increase support that principals provide to teachers to help at-risk students (Hart, 2008).

Superintendents, principals, and teachers were in agreement concerning proposals for reducing the dropout rate. The majority strongly favored or somewhat favored the following proposals: ensure a common definition for high school graduation rates across the fifty states and make graduation and dropout data available at the district and school levels and by racial and ethnic subgroups; create individualized graduation plans for each student and regularly communicate with parents about progress toward completing the plan; provide alternative learning environments with more individualized instruction that gives students at-risk of dropping out more choices to make school more relevant to their lives and goals such as schools technology, sciences, the arts, or ninth grade academies that support incoming freshmen; expand college-level learning opportunities in high school through dual enrollment early college programs and Advanced Placement programs; establish a national clearinghouse to assist states and schools in evaluating disseminating existing research and best practices (Hart, 2008).

Superintendent opinions were also similar when it came to reasons why students drop out of high school. The three groups agreed that the following reason was a factor in most cases or a factor in some cases: the student cannot keep up with the school work; the student is bored and does not find school interesting, the student associates with other students who have dropped out of school; the student misses too many days of school and cannot catch up; the student does not have enough support at home from a parent or guardian; the student is not prepared for high school (Hart, 2008). Superintendents were more likely to believe that

students not getting along with teachers and students not getting along with other students as factor for students dropping out high school. While teachers and principals did not see those two reasons as a significant factor (Bridgeland et al., 2009).

When it comes to taking action to keep at-risk students from dropping out of school, superintendents, principals and teachers believed that their high school could do more in the following areas to keep students in school: engage parents and encourage them to be involved in their children's education at school and at home; help students with problems outside the classroom that affect their school work; keep students interested and engaged in coursework (Hart, 2008). Principals and superintendents thought that the high school could do more to provide support for struggling students. However, the majority of teachers thought that the high schools did enough to help these students (Bridgeland et al., 2009). Superintendents thought that high schools did enough to keep students from skipping class, but principals and teachers thought that high schools could do more in this area (Bridgeland et al,. 2009).

Question 10 on the survey asked superintendents directly if they thought they had the ability to reduce their corporation's dropout rate. The question was intended to directly measure superintendent perception of efficacy concerning the dropout dilemma. Superintendents overwhelmingly responded that they believed that they either strongly believed or somewhat believed that they had the ability to reduce their school corporation's dropout rate. This response rate is not surprising since superintendents are expected to be their school corporation's leaders. However, their efficacy scores may suggest another conclusion. The efficacy score for superintendents on the survey had a range of 42-210. The higher the superintendent's score, the higher the efficacy; the lower the score, the lower the efficacy. The mid-range for the efficacy scores was 127. The total sample showed superintendents with a

mean efficacy score of 137. This just places the mean efficacy score for all superintendents 10 points into the upper half of the scoring range. The efficacy scoring range based on geographic location showed no real significant differences with the lowest mean at 133.7 and the highest mean at 140.11. Looking at the fact that superintendents put such a large percentage of blame for a student dropping out of school on the students and parent; while at the same time placing a much smaller percent of the blame on the teachers, principals, superintendents, and the school system, it would be reasonable to conclude that superintendent efficacy toward the dropout rate is at best moderate.

**Summary of Statistical Analysis**

The ANOVA indicated that there is no significant differences in the mean efficacy scores based on geographic location, free and reduced lunch, and superintendent age. The factorial ANOVA did suggest a main effect for geographic location; however, this may be due to the fact that the equality of error variance was violated. The factorial ANOVA showed no other significant interaction effects between the independent variables. Comparing superintendent responses to principals and teachers on the report by Bridgeland et al. (2009), showed that superintendent responses followed the same pattern of responses as the teachers and principals survey. Superintendents appear to view the dropout issue in the same vain as both teachers and principals. Responses to survey questions lean toward low efficacy and an external locus of control. The efficacy score of superintendents has led the researcher to conclude that superintendents have moderate efficacy and show more of an external locus of control toward the high school dropout rate. But when asked directly, they report high efficacy. That might indicate social pressure to claim they can control, when they really don't see how they can based on resources and the complexity of the situation.

**General Discussion**

It would be hard to find a school system in the State of Indiana that did not have a statement in their school improvement plans (vision statements, mission statements, belief statements, goals, objectives, etc) that speaks to high expectations for students. School improvement plans tend to reflect the current rhetoric coming from *experts* in school reform. The push for better student academic achievement and school accountability has school leaders preaching the concept of higher expectations to all school personnel with the hopes of better student and school results. The reality is that it is easier to talk about high expectations for all students and much more difficult to actually believe in the concept that all students are capable of graduating from school. The survey sent to Indiana superintendents showed that only 17% of the superintendents surveyed thought that cutting the high school dropout rate in half was completely realistic and achievable while 44% thought the proposal was either somewhat realistic and achievable or not realistic or achievable. More alarming might be the question that asked superintendents about higher expectations. The survey question asked superintendents "If the nation's public high schools demanded more of their students, do you agree that at-risk students would work harder to meet this higher expectation?" Only 4% of the superintendents surveyed strongly agreed that the students would meet these higher expectations. The larger percentage of superintendents disagreed (41%) with an additional 5% of superintendents strongly disagreeing. This is not exactly a testimony to the effectiveness of setting high expectations.

The question is why superintendents and other educators have such low expectations for at-risk students. The answer might be in our cognition; the concept of self-serving bias. Self-serving bias is the tendency for individuals to take credit for things that produce positive

outcomes while at the same time redirecting accountability or blame for negative outcomes (Shepperd, Malone & Sweeny, 2008). This concept can be seen in the survey question that asked superintendents about who has the responsibility for students dropping out of school. Superintendents placed most of the blame on students (80%) and parents (83%) while at the same time taking little personal responsibility for a student dropping out of school (17%). A large percentage of superintendents don't even place much blame on the school system. Fifty percent of superintendents surveyed thought that the school system itself deserved only some of the responsibility or very little of the responsibility for a student dropping out of school. This shows low self-efficacy and an external locus of control concerning the dropout rate by externalizing the blame for the negative outcome of students dropping out of school.

Research shows that it is very important for educators to possess high efficacy and an internal locus of control. It is important because of the concept known as the Pygmalion Effect or the self-fulfilling prophecy theory. Pygmalion was a mythological character in ancient Greece whose statue was brought to life by the Greek gods. The concept was related to student educational outcomes in the 1960s (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

The self-fulfilling prophecy research has shown that when a person (teacher) has higher expectations for his/her students, generally, students perform better. The concept of the Pygmalion Effect was made popular by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968). Their research showed that teacher expectations had a major impact on student performance. The experiment tested the hypothesis that a person's (teacher's) biased expectations can affect reality and create a self-fulfilling prophecy. In this research, Rosenthal and Jacobson predicted that if a teacher was given information that led him/her to believe that some students in the class were smarter than others, the teacher would unconsciously behave in a manner that could result in a student's

higher achievement. The experiment showed, especially in lower grades, that student improvement was as much as double that of other students in the same class (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). This same type of research has been duplicated several times in educational settings, business and the military proving that higher expectations lead to better results. Expectations seem to matter! When it comes to the dropout rate, it may not be what students think that they are capable of achieving that is important; it may be what educators believe the students are capable of achieving that determines if a student graduates from high school.

Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson (2010) recently released a new report that researched the importance of principals on student achievement. The study identified two important concepts; holding high expectations and fostering a sense of efficacy in leaders (Louis et al., 2010). The study found that successful school leadership had three integrated traits: high expectations, efficacy in leaders, and engagement with stakeholders (Louis et al., 2010). Principals were found to be very important in the success of schools. Support and professional development for principals was associated with higher efficacy and greater school success by utilizing a collective leadership (Louis et al., 2010). Once again, efficacy and high expectations have been found to be important concepts in student and school success.

The dropout issue in the United States and Indiana is a very complex issue. There are no easy answers or solutions to the problem. However, research has shown that strong leadership can make a major difference in student achievement and school success. If school corporations throughout the state and country are going to improve graduation rates by reducing dropout rates, it is going to take collective leadership from individuals and groups that have the ability to make a difference. Superintendents are the leaders of their school corporations and may be in the best position to make the goal of cutting the dropout rate in half within 10 years a

reality. They have the ability to set goals and direction for their corporations. Superintendents develop budgets and determine what programs get funded. They also have the closest working relationship with school boards. Because of this, it is vitally important that superintendents understand the importance of developing a sense of self efficacy, high expectations, and an internal locus of control concerning the dropout dilemma.

Based on the results of the survey, superintendents need to make reducing the dropout rate a corporation goal. They need to work with building principals and teachers to ensure that proper remedial and alternative programs are developed to meet the needs of the students they serve. Superintendents need to work with school improvement teams to figure out ways to get parents better involved in their child's education, to develop early warning systems to identify students who are struggling in middle/ junior high school. The superintendents need to make room in their budgets for more counselors and ways to have more mentors on staff. Budgets are tight; however, priority needs to be given to having smaller class sizes for at-risk students. Superintendents need to be instructional leaders ensuring that students receive more hands-on project based learning opportunities to bring relevance to subjects such as service learning, work study, and job shadowing. Superintendents must push for each student in their corporation to have individualized graduation plans and to push for an expansion of college-level learning. These are all areas that the majority of superintendents agreed would help reduce the high school dropout rate.

Superintendents need to provide principals and teachers with guidance and professional development. The support must be designed to allow principals and teachers an opportunity to develop a feeling of efficacy. Along with teachers and principals, superintendents must

emphasize the importance of having high expectations for students at-risk of not graduating from high school and be willing to hold people accountable for unacceptable graduation results.

Superintendents need to audit their school corporations along with other school improvement members looking for areas that could be contributing to students becoming at-risk and a potential dropout. Superintendents should be looking at all aspects of their school corporations searching for areas that could be contributing causes of students dropping out of school. It is important that superintendents change the paradigm that the dropout problem is a high school issue. All teachers and employees in a school corporation must believe that they have high efficacy toward better graduation rates. Teachers in the elementary and middle school/junior high must understand that they also have responsibility in determining if students graduate from high school. The high school dropout is not created over-night, the process of becoming a dropout is generally shaped over many years of school failures. Superintendents must determine what programs must be created and what challenges must be addressed to help at-risk students be successful.

If public school systems are going to reduce the dropout rate, superintendents are going to have to take the lead in developing a collective leadership within the community to attack the dropout issue. The reality is that a dropout is not just a school issue, it is a community issue. A community action team needs to be developed to plan and execute strategies that will help students succeed and graduate from high school. This group also needs to involve school officials, parents, community members, local government, law enforcement, child protective services, the courts, clergy, foundations and other interested parties. This group needs to meet regularly to continually measure improvement and to continually evaluate programs and

develop strategies. Importantly, this group also needs to be willing to help find the resources needed for program implementations.

An area that superintendents stated that they strongly favored or somewhat favored on the survey was a common definition for high school graduation rates across the 50 states and make graduation and dropout data available at the district and school levels and by racial and ethnic subgroups. If the data is going to be a benefit to school corporations in the State of Indiana and nationally, the data needs to be accurate. It is of vital importance that superintendents ensure that data being reported is accurate. Currently a loophole exists in Indiana that does not count students who choose to participate in home-school education as a high school dropout. This is appropriate if all students who choose the home-school route are actually being home-schooled and not choosing this route to by-pass age of 18 dropout requirements and driver license laws that revoke a student's license who leaves school before graduation. Superintendents can ensure accurate data by setting the expectation that building administrators not offer the home-school as an option to students who are attendance or discipline problems. State officials may want to look at counting all students who leave high school as a dropout. State officials may also want to put more restrictions/requirements on what appears to be a completely unregulated education option. The home-school option has exploded in Indiana over the last several years; it is very difficult to believe that all these students are receiving an adequate education.

**Recommendations For Further Research**

This research project focused on the opinions of Indiana superintendents. Those opinions were compared to those of teachers and principals in the study *On The Front Lines Of Schools: Perspectives of Teachers and Principals on the High School Dropout Problem* using

a modified survey that was used in that national study. Further research could be done by expanding the survey of superintendents beyond Indiana. To get a better picture of superintendents' thoughts on the dropout dilemma, a national survey would be beneficial. The survey done on Indiana superintendents could be affected by regional bias. Indiana superintendents are mostly white males with similar educational and professional experiences. Expanding the survey to different regions of the country and expanding the number of superintendents taking the survey could lead to more statistical power.

Surveying teachers, principals and superintendents at the same time and using the exact same survey instrument could also provide beneficial data. The superintendents were surveyed using an electronic instrument; teachers and principals were surveyed by Hart and Associates using a telephone interview. One survey used for all three participants could lead to more consistency.

Expanding the areas for statistical analysis could be important research data. This research study looked at demographic location, free and reduced lunch populations, and superintendent age for statistical analysis. With the importance of school accountability, it may be beneficial to look at areas such as standardized testing scores, school designations that are applied based on those testing results (failing school, etc.) and other demographic information to see if those variables affect superintendent efficacy. It may also be significant to measure efficacy over time correlating results with actual graduation rates. School finances are very important in school improvement efforts. Using school finances as a variable could provide interesting insight into superintendent efficacy. Further research may need to be done on home school students, in Indiana, to determine if this population of students is being properly

educated and to determine if this educational option is inappropriately skewing graduation rates.

**Final Thought**

The superintendent has to be a key figure in the solution to Indiana's and America's dropout dilemma. The superintendent must cultivate a culture of high expectations. The self-fulfilling prophecy can become one of high school graduates. The high school dropout rate can be cut in half within 10 years! Strong leadership from the superintendent's office can rise above the negative effects of self-serving bias that places the blame of correctable school issues on others. As Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe once said, "Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be and he will become as he can and should be." By promoting self-efficacy and an internal locus of control concerning the dropout issue, despite the daunting obstacles our students face, graduation for all students can become a reality making for stronger communities, states, and country.

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**APPENDIX A: Indiana Public School Dropout Dilemma: Differences in Superintendents' Perceptions Survey**

1. Which of these geographic locations describe the school corporation where you are superintendent (based on the IDOE classification)?

   - Rural…….. 1
   - Suburban…… 2
   - Town……. 3
   - Metropolitan……. 4

2. The following are some reasons why students drop out of high school before graduation. Please indicate whether you think that the reason is a (1) Factor in most cases, (2) Factor in some cases, (3) Neutral, (4) Factor in just a few cases, (5) Not really a factor in any cases. (Hart, 2008)

   - The student cannot keep up with school work. 1 2 3 4 5
   - The student cannot get along with teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
   - The student cannot get along with other students. 1 2 3 4 5
   - The student has a child. 1 2 3 4 5
   - The student has to care for a family member. 1 2 3 4 5
   - The student is bored and does not find school interesting. 1 2 3 4 5
   - The student associates with other students who have dropped out of school. 1 2 3 4 5
   - The student has to get a job to make money and cannot attend school at the same time. 1 2 3 4 5
   - The student misses too many days of school and cannot catch up. 1 2 3 4 5

- The student does not have enough support at home from a parent or guardian. 1 2 3 4 5
- The student is not prepared for high school. 1 2 3 4 5

3. There are different groups and individuals that could have responsibility for students dropping out of high school. Please indicate how much responsibility you think each of the following groups has for students dropping out of high school. Please indicate whether you think that the reason is: (1) All the responsibility, (2) Most of the responsibility, (3) Neutral (4) Some of the responsibility, (5) Very little of the responsibility. (Hart, 2008)

    - The student 1 2 3 4 5
    - The parents of the students 1 2 3 4 5
    - High School teachers 1 2 3 4 5
    - Principal 1 2 3 4 5
    - Superintendents 1 2 3 4 5
    - The school system 1 2 3 4 5
    - The broader society 1 2 3 4 5
    - Elected officials at the local, state, and national levels 1 2 3 4 5

4. When it comes to students at your high school(s) who are at risk of dropping out, do you feel that your high school (1) Does too much, (2) Does enough, (3) Neutral (4) Could do somewhat more (5) Could do a lot more? (Hart, 2008)

    - Keeping students from skipping class 1 2 3 4 5
    - Keeping students interested and engaged in coursework 1 2 3 4 5
    - Providing support for struggling students 1 2 3 4 5
    - Helping students with problems outside the classroom that affect their schoolwork 1 2 3 4 5
    - Engaging parents and encouraging them to be involved in their children's education at school and at home 1 2 3 4 5

5. In a recent national survey of high school dropouts, many former students said they stopped going to school because they found it boring and uninteresting or they did not see the relevance of school to real life. Do you think that these students were speaking to an important cause of dropping out or were they just making excuses? (Hart, 2008)

    - Speaking to an important cause of dropping out 1
    - Just making excuses 2

6. If the nation's public high schools demanded more of their students, do you agree that at-risk students would work harder to meet these higher expectations? (Hart, 2008)

    - Strongly agree 1
    - Agree 2
    - Neutral 3
    - Disagree 4
    - Strongly Disagree 5

7. If there were a commitment to making needed changes and reforms at the local, state, and national level, how realistic and achievable do you think it would be that the national dropout rate could be cut in half within ten years? (Hart, 2008)

    - Completely realistic and achievable 1
    - Fairly realistic and achievable 2
    - Neutral 3
    - Somewhat realistic and achievable 4
    - Not realistic and achievable 5

8. The following are some suggestions that have been made to help keep students in school and lower the high school dropout rate. For each one, please indicate how much you think it would help reduce the number of students who drop out of high school—(1)Would help a lot, (2) A fair amount, (3) Just some, (4) A little, or (5) Would not help at all. (Hart, 2008)

    - Improve outreach to parents to better involve them with their child's educational progress and challenges. 1 2 3 4 5

    - Establish an early warning system to identify students who are struggling in middle and junior high school and get them the support they need. 1 2 3 4 5

    - Have more counselors and mentors on staff to provide guidance and support to at-risk students. 1 2 3 4 5

    - Have smaller classes so students get more attention from teachers. 1 2 3 4 5

- Create more hands-on and project-based learning opportunities, so students can see relevance and learn in different ways. 1 2 3 4 5

- Have smaller schools to encourage more and closer relationships with adults. 1 2 3 4 5

- Connect classroom learning to real world experiences and career opportunities through service learning, work study, and job shadowing. 1 2 3 4 5

- Ensure that teachers are teaching in the subject area in which they are licensed. 1 2 3 4 5

- Increase supports that principals provide to teachers to help at-risk students. 1 2 3 4 5

9. The following are proposals for reducing the dropout rate. For each one please indicate whether you (1) Strongly favor, (2) Somewhat favor, (3) Neutral, (4) Somewhat oppose, or (4) Strongly oppose the proposal. (Hart, 2008)

    - Ensure a common definition for high school graduation rates across the fifty states, and make graduation and dropout data available at the district and school levels and by racial and ethnic subgroups. 1 2 3 4 5

    - Create individualized graduation plans for each student and regularly communicate with parents about progress toward completing the plan. 1 2 3 4 5

    - Provide alternative learning environments with more individualized instruction that gives students at risk of dropping out more choices to make school more relevant to their lives and goals such as schools of technology, sciences, or the arts, or ninth grade academies that support incoming freshmen. 1 2 3 4 5

    - Expand college-level learning opportunities in high school through dual enrollment early college programs and Advanced Placement programs. 1 2 3 4 5

    - Establish a national clearing house to assist states and schools in evaluating and disseminating existing research and best practices. 1 2 3 4 5

10. In your role as the superintendent of your school corporation, do you believe you have the ability to reduce your corporation's dropout rate?

- Strongly believe 1
- Somewhat believe 2
- Neutral 3
- Somewhat do not believe 4
- Strongly do not believe 5

11. What percentage of your school corporation's students are on free and reduced lunch?

- 0 to 20% 1
- 21 to 40% 2
- 41 to 60% 3
- 61% or higher 4

12. What is your age?

- 30 to 40 years of age 1
- 41 to 50 years of age 2
- 51 to 60 years of age 3
- 61 years or older 4

## APPENDIX B: Indiana Public School Dropout Dilemma: Differences in Superintendents' Perceptions Survey Scoring Tool

1. Which of these geographic locations describe the school corporation where you are superintendent (based on the IDOE classification)?

    - Rural…….. 1
    - Suburban…… 2
    - Town……. 3
    - Metropolitan……. 4

2. The following are some reasons why students drop out of high school before graduation. Please indicate whether you think that the reason is a (1) Factor in most cases, (2) Factor in some cases, (3) Neutral, (4) Factor in just a few cases, (5) Not really a factor in any cases. (Hart, 2008)

    - The student cannot keep up with school work. 1 2 3 4 5
    - The student cannot get along with teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
    - The student cannot get along with other students. 1 2 3 4 5
    - The student has a child. 1 2 3 4 5
    - The student has to care for a family member. 1 2 3 4 5
    - The student is bored and does not find school interesting. 1 2 3 4 5
    - The student associates with other students who have dropped out of school. 1 2 3 4 5
    - The student has to get a job to make money and cannot attend school at the same time. 1 2 3 4 5
    - The student misses too many days of school and cannot catch up. 1 2 3 4 5
    - The student does not have enough support at home from a parent or guardian. 1 2 3 4 5

- The student is not prepared for high school. 1 2 3 4 5

3. There are different groups and individuals that could have responsibility for students dropping out of high school. Please indicate how much responsibility you think each of the following groups has for students dropping out of high school. Please indicate whether you think that the reason is: (1) All the responsibility, (2) Most of the responsibility, (3) Neutral (4) Some of the responsibility, (5) Very little of the responsibility. (Hart, 2008)

   - The student 1 2 3 4 5
   - The parents of the students 1 2 3 4 5
   - High School teachers 5 4 3 2 1
   - Principal 5 4 3 2 1
   - Superintendents 5 4 3 2 1
   - The school system 5 4 3 2 1
   - The broader society 1 2 3 4 5
   - Elected officials at the local, state, and national levels 1 2 3 4 5

4. When it comes to students at your high school(s) who are at risk of dropping out, do you feel that your high school (1) Does too much, (2) Does enough, (3) Neutral (4) Could do somewhat more (5) Could do a lot more? (Hart, 2008)

   - Keeping students from skipping class 1 2 3 4 5
   - Keeping students interested and engaged in coursework 1 2 3 4 5
   - Providing support for struggling students 1 2 3 4 5
   - Helping students with problems outside the classroom that affect their schoolwork 1 2 3 4 5
   - Engaging parents and encouraging them to be involved in their children's education at school and at home 1 2 3 4 5

5. In a recent national survey of high school dropouts, many former students said they stopped going to school because they found it boring and uninteresting or they did not see the relevance of school to real life. Do you think that these students were speaking to an important cause of dropping out or were they just making excuses? (Hart, 2008)

    - Speaking to an important cause of dropping out 5
    - Just making excuses 1

6. If the nation's public high schools demanded more of their students, do you agree that at-risk students would work harder to meet these higher expectations? (Hart, 2008)

    - Strongly agree 5
    - Agree 4
    - Neutral 3
    - Disagree 2
    - Strongly Disagree 1

7. If there were a commitment to making needed changes and reforms at the local, state, and national level, how realistic and achievable do you think it would be that the national dropout rate could be cut in half within ten years? (Hart, 2008)

    - Completely realistic and achievable 5
    - Fairly realistic and achievable 4
    - Neutral 3
    - Somewhat realistic and achievable 2
    - Not realistic and achievable 1

8. The following are some suggestions that have been made to help keep students in school and lower the high school dropout rate. For each one, please indicate how much you think it would help reduce the number of students who drop out of high school—(1)Would help a lot, (2) A fair amount, (3) Just some, (4) A little, or (5) Would not help at all. (Hart, 2008)

    - Improve outreach to parents to better involve them with their child's educational progress and challenges. 5 4 3 2 1

    - Establish an early warning system to identify students who are struggling in middle and junior high school and get them the support they need. 5 4 3 2 1

    - Have more counselors and mentors on staff to provide guidance and support to at-risk students. 5 4 3 2 1

    - Have smaller classes so students get more attention from teachers. 5 4 3 2 1

- Create more hands-on and project-based learning opportunities, so students can see relevance and learn in different ways. 5 4 3 2 1

- Have smaller schools to encourage more and closer relationships with adults. 5 4 3 2 1

- Connect classroom learning to real world experiences and career opportunities through service learning, work study, and job shadowing. 5 4 3 2 1

- Ensure that teachers are teaching in the subject area in which they are licensed. 5 4 3 2 1

- Increase supports that principals provide to teachers to help at-risk students. 5 4 3 2 1

9. The following are proposals for reducing the dropout rate. For each one please indicate whether you (1) Strongly favor, (2) Somewhat favor, (3) Neutral, (4) Somewhat oppose, or (4) Strongly oppose the proposal. (Hart, 2008)

- Ensure a common definition for high school graduation rates across the fifty states, and make graduation and dropout data available at the district and school levels and by racial and ethnic subgroups. 5 4 3 2 1

- Create individualized graduation plans for each student and regularly communicate with parents about progress toward completing the plan. 5 4 3 2 1

- Provide alternative learning environments with more individualized instruction that gives students at risk of dropping out more choices to make school more relevant to their lives and goals such as schools of technology, sciences, or the arts, or ninth grade academies that support incoming freshmen. 5 4 3 2 1

- Expand college-level learning opportunities in high school through dual enrollment early college programs and Advanced Placement programs. 5 4 3 2 1
- Establish a national clearing house to assist states and schools in evaluating and disseminating existing research and best practices. 5 4 3 2 1

10. In your role as the superintendent of your school corporation, do you believe you have the ability to reduce your corporation's dropout rate?

- Strongly believe 5
- Somewhat believe 4
- Neutral 3
- Somewhat do not believe 2
- Strongly do not believe 1

11. What percentage of your school corporation's students are on free and reduced lunch?

- 0 to 20% 1
- 21 to 40% 2
- 41 to 60% 3
- 61% or higher 4

12. What is your age?

- 30 to 40 years of age 1
- 41 to 50 years of age 2
- 51 to 60 years of age 3
- 61 years or older 4

**Scoring Key:**

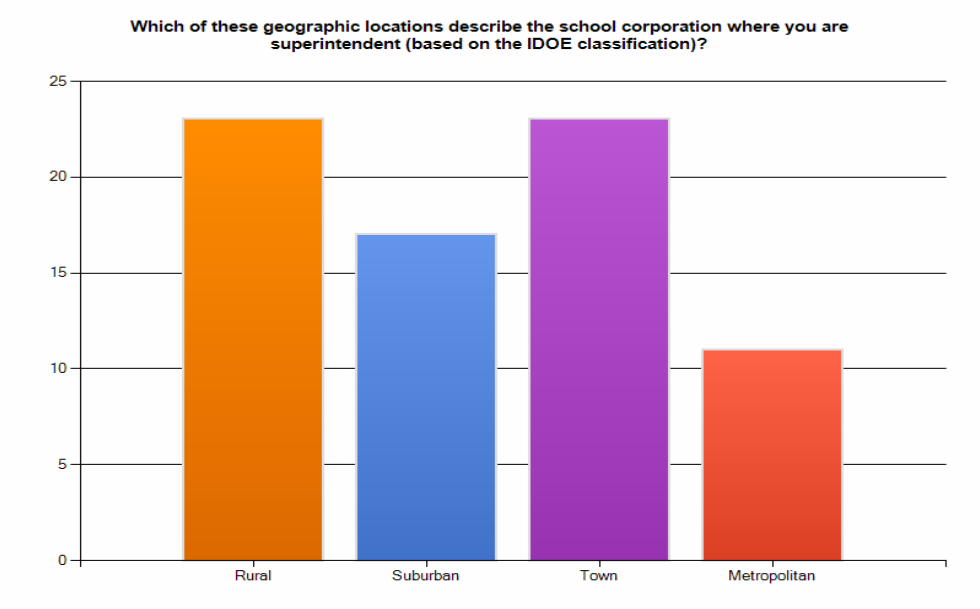
Efficacy score is determined by summing the answers for questions 2-10.

Higher scores indicate higher efficacy and internal locus of control.

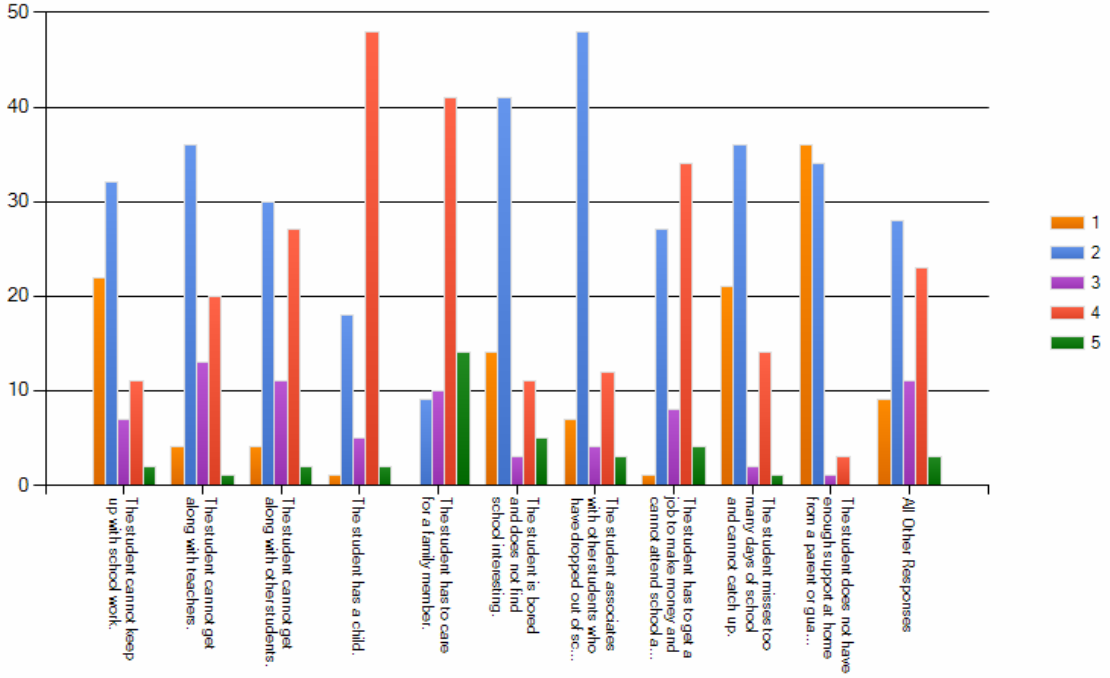
Lower scores indicate lower efficacy, and external locus of control.

Efficacy scores range from 42 to 210.

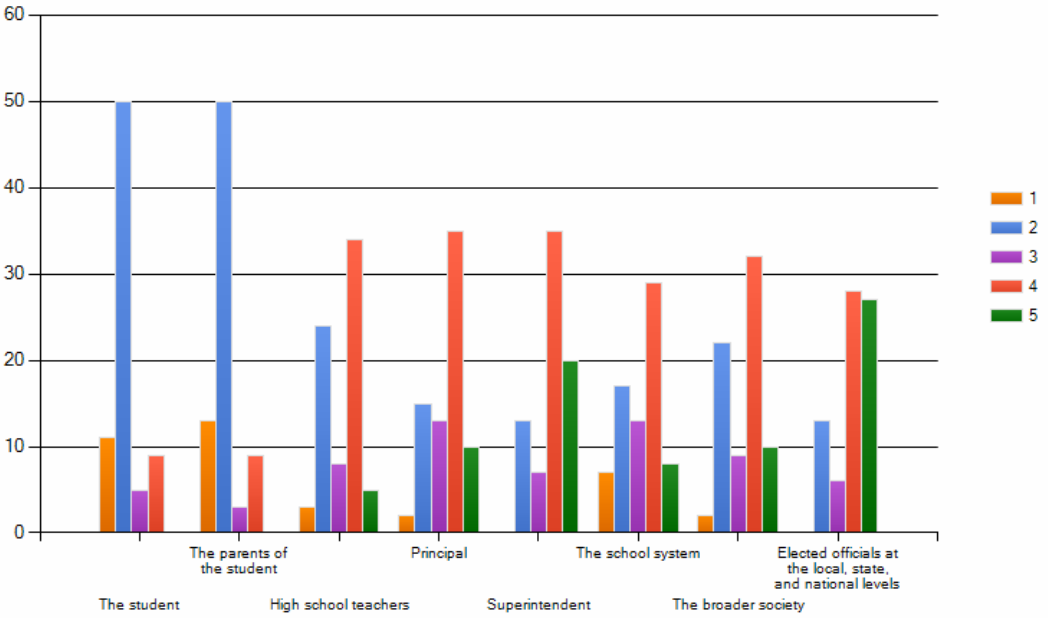
# APPENDIX C: The Indiana Public School Dropout Dilemma: Differences in Superintendents' Perceptions Survey Results



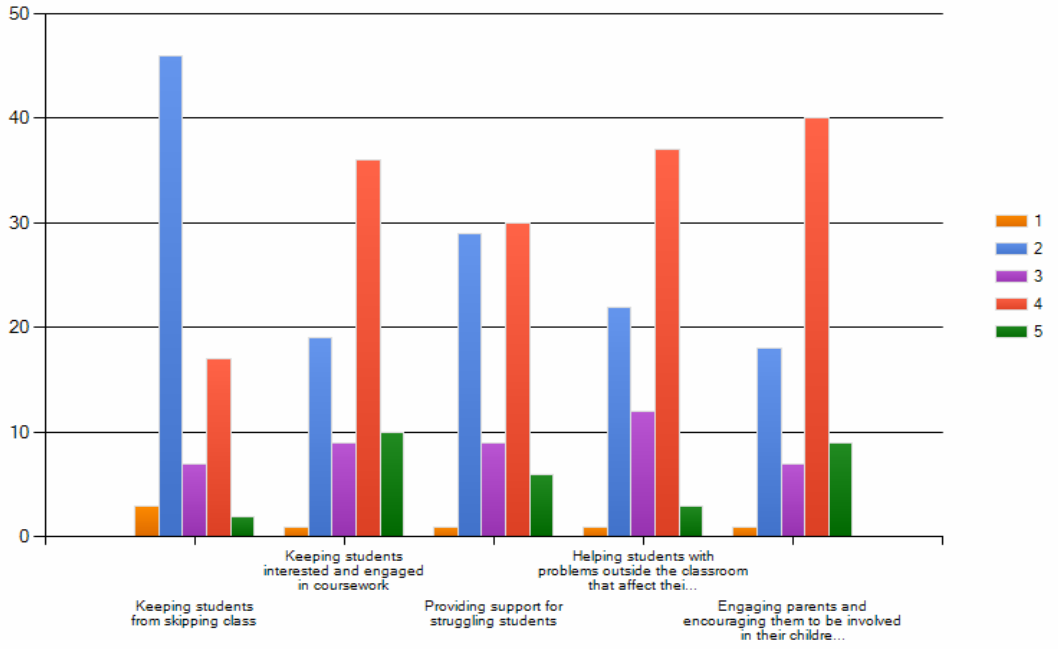
**The following are some reasons why students drop out of high school before graduation. Please indicate whether you think that the reason is a (1) Factor in most cases, (2) Factor in some cases, (3) Neutral, (4) Factor in just a few cases, (5) Not really a factor in any cases. (Hart, 2008)**



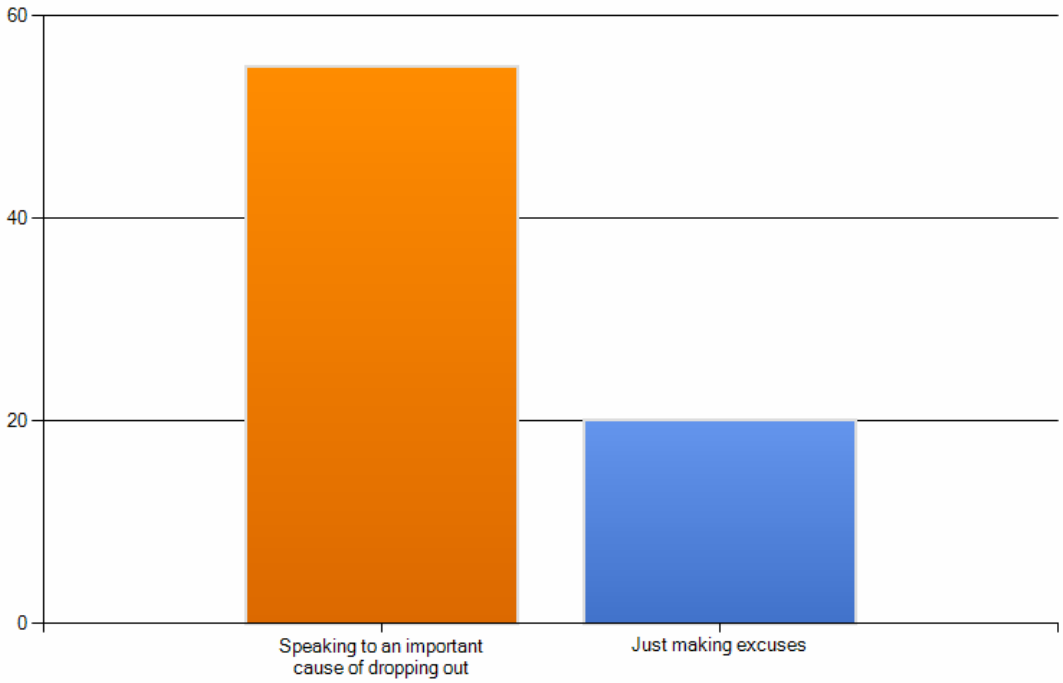

**There are different groups and individuals that could have responsibility for students dropping out of high school. Please indicate how much responsibility you think each of the following groups has for students dropping out of high school. Please indicate whether you think that the reason is: (1) All the responsibility, (2) Most of the responsibility, (3) Neutral, (4) Some of the responsibility, (5) Very little of the responsibility. (Hart, 2008)**



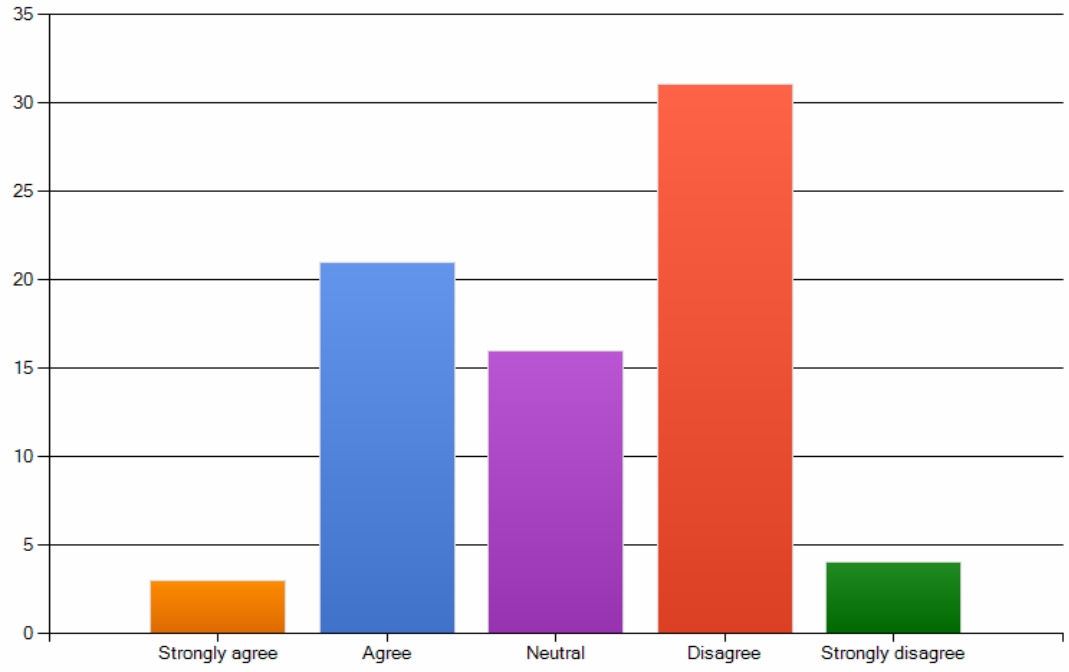
**When it comes to students at your high school(s) who are at risk of dropping out, do you feel that your high school (1) Does too much, (2) Does enough, (3) Neutral, (4) Could do somewhat more, (5) Could do a lot more? (Hart, 2008)**



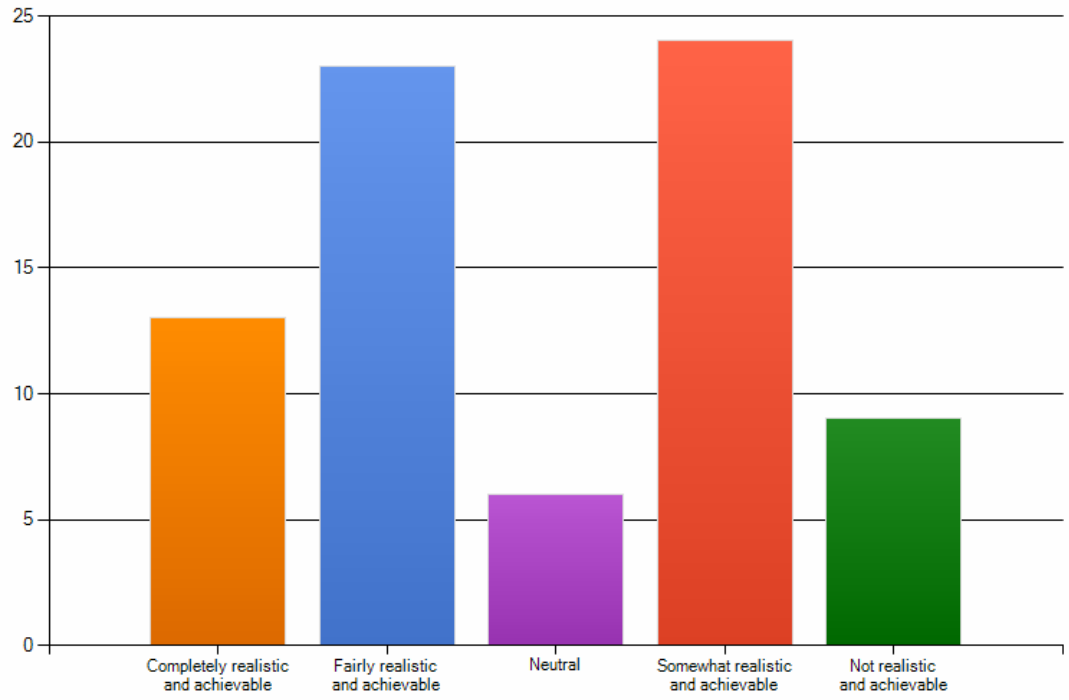

**In a recent national survey of high school dropouts, many former students said they stopped going to school because they found it boring and uninteresting or they did not see the relevance of school to real life. Do you think that these students were speaking to an important cause of dropping out or were they just making excuses? (Hart, 2008)**



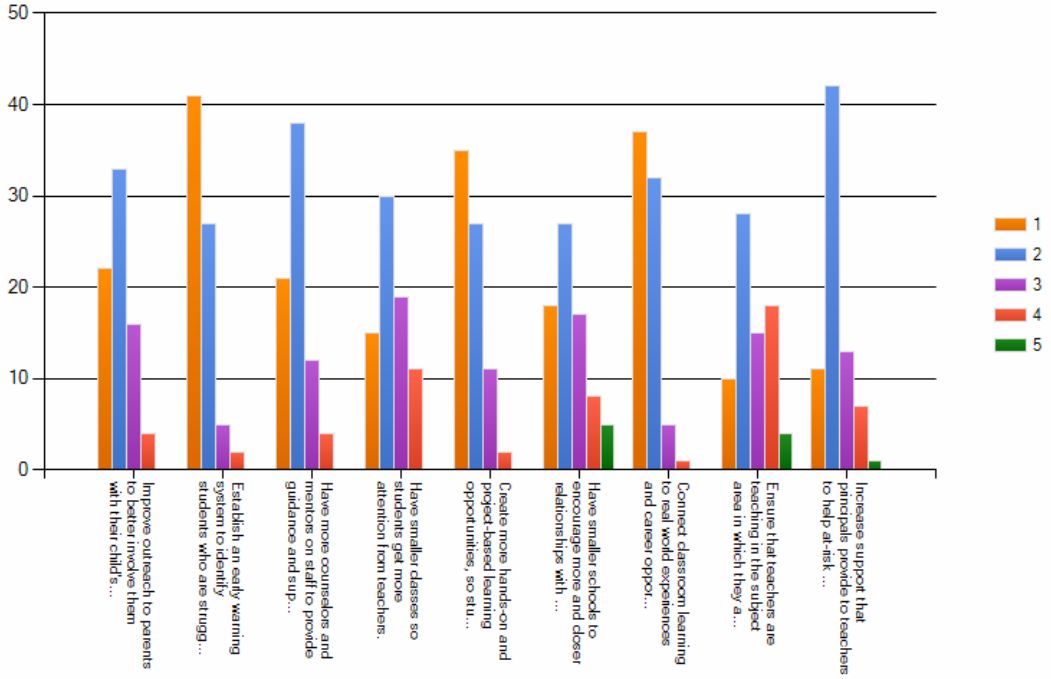
**If the nation's public high schools demanded more of their students, do you agree that at-risk students would work harder to meet these higher expectations? (Hart, 2008)**



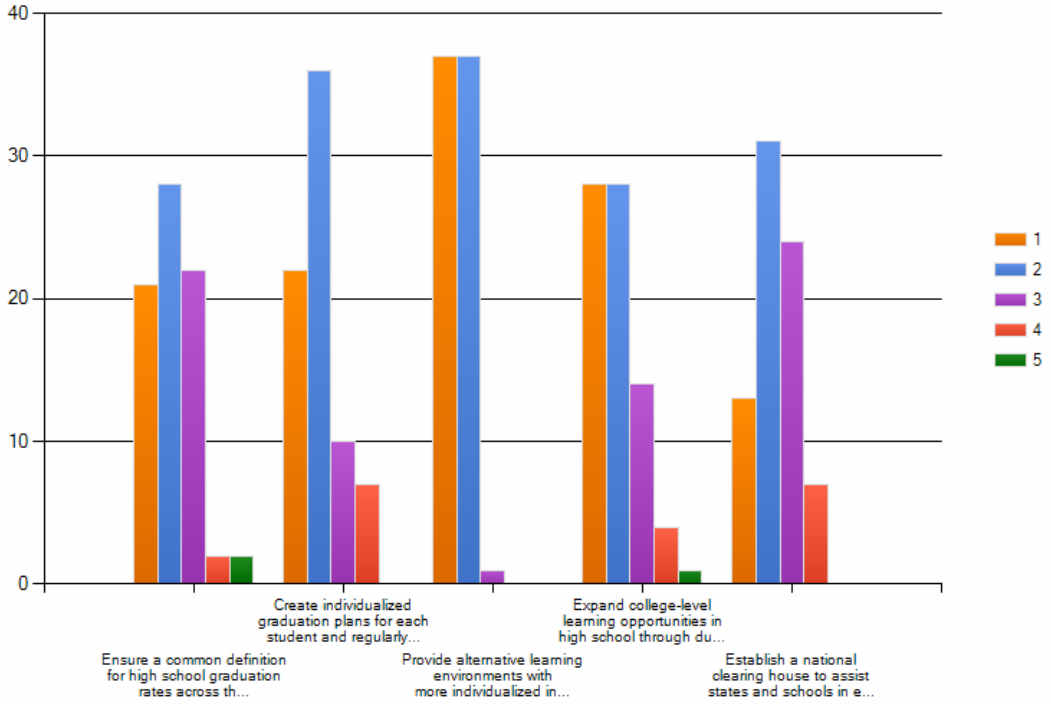

**If there were a commitment to making needed changes and reforms at the local, state, and national levels, how realistic and achievable do you think it would be that the national dropout rate could be cut in half within ten years? (Hart, 2008)**



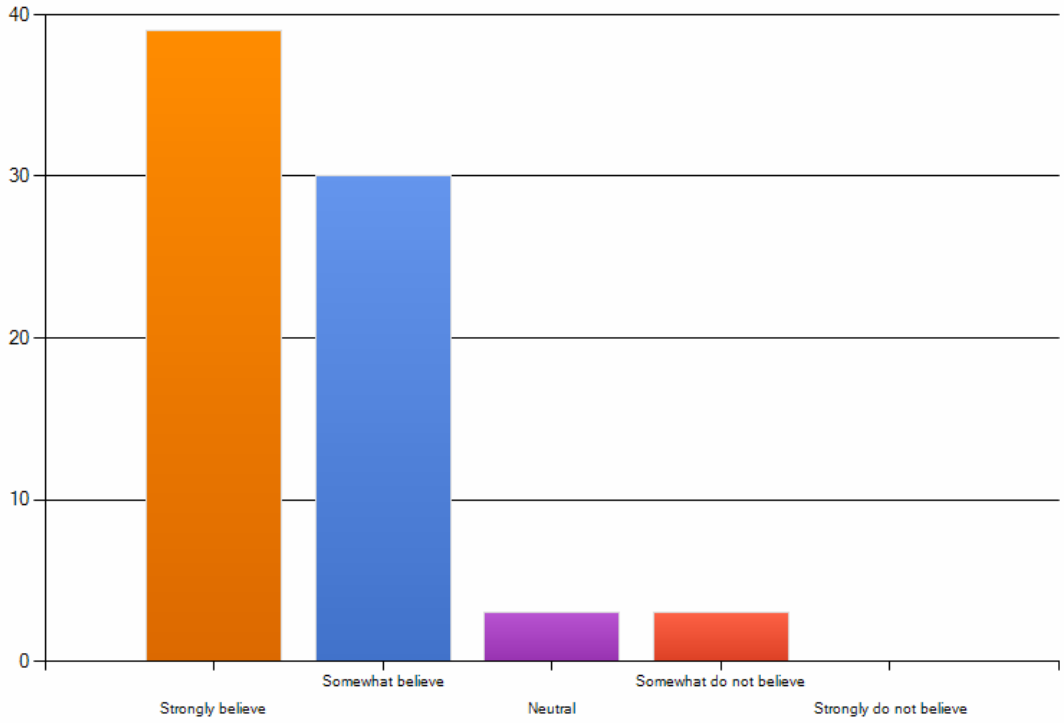
**The following are some suggestions that have been made to help keep students in school and lower the high school dropout rate. For each one, please indicate how much you think it would help reduce the number of students who dropout of high school: (1) Would help a lot, (2) A fair amount, (3) Just some, (4) A little, or (5) Would not help at all. (Hart, 2008)**



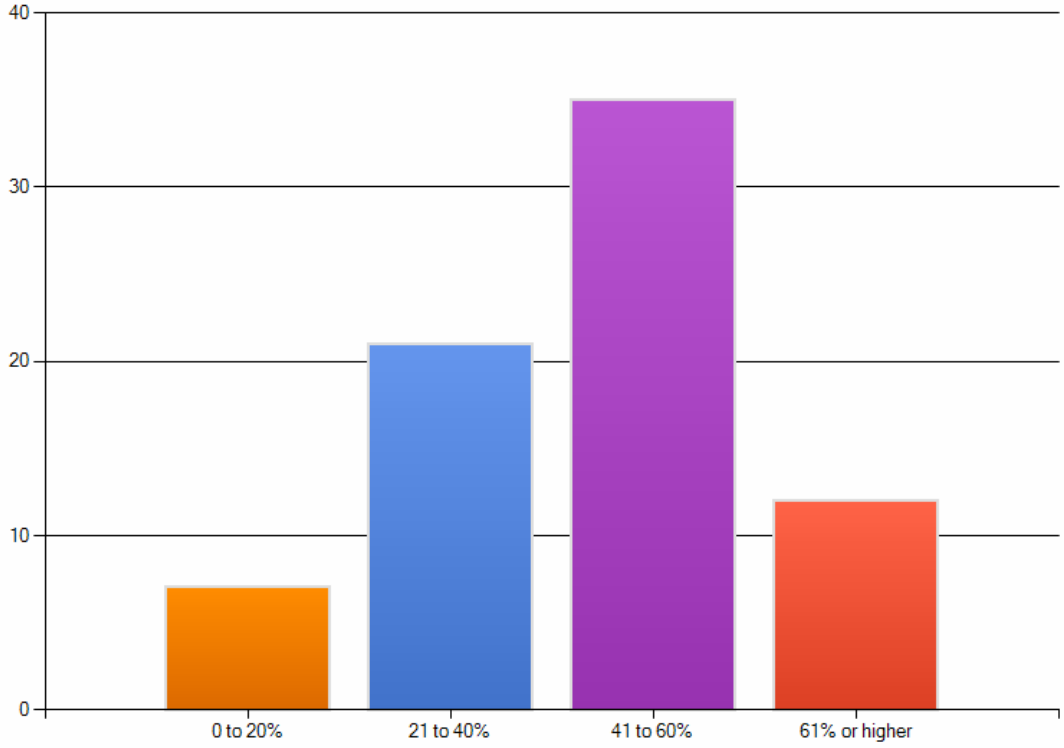

**The following are proposals for reducing the dropout rate. For each one please indicate whether you (1) Strongly favor, (2) Somewhat favor, (3) Neutral, (4) Somewhat oppose, or (5) Strongly oppose the proposal. (Hart, 2008)**

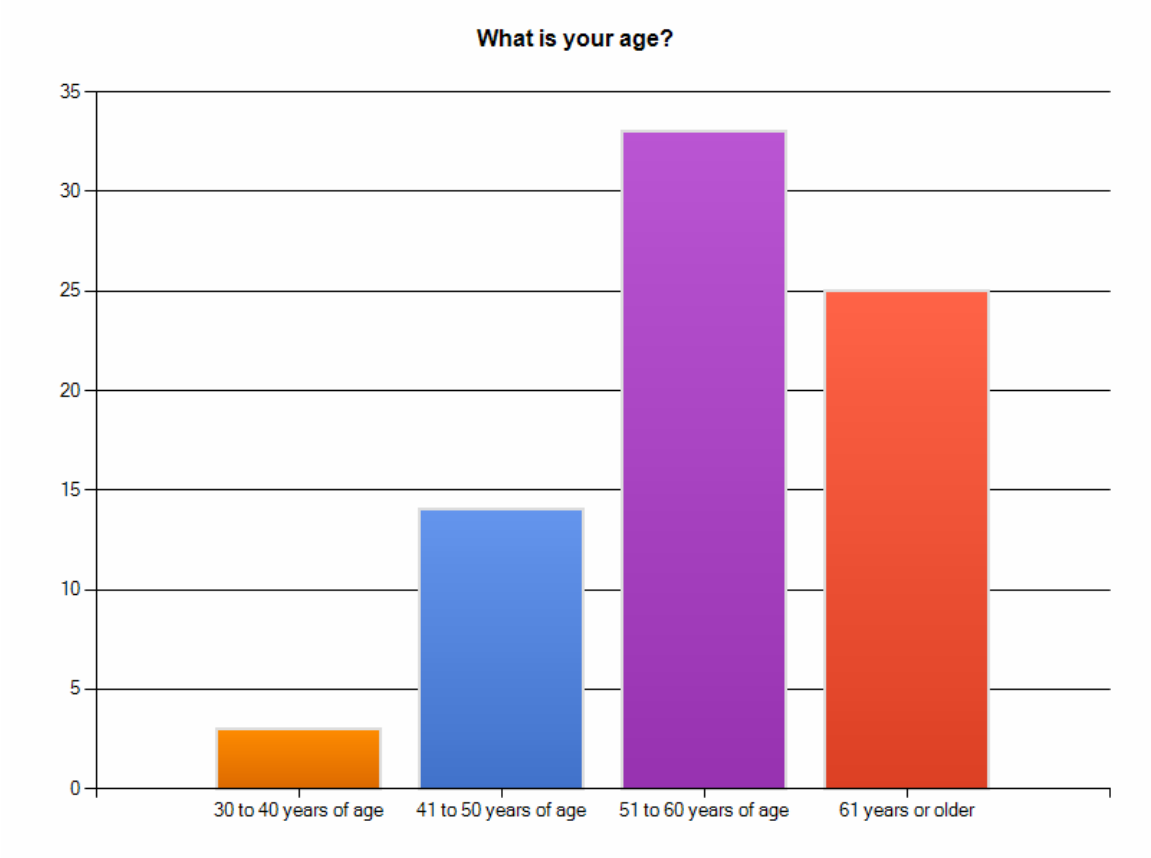


**In your role as the superintendent of your school corporation, do you believe you have the ability to reduce your corporation's dropout rate?**




**What percentage of your school corporation's students are on free and reduced lunch?**




What is your age?
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
30 to 40 years of age
41 to 50 years of age
51 to 60 years of age
61 years or older

## APPENDIX D: The Indiana Public School Dropout Dilemma: Differences in Superintendents' Perceptions Survey Data

**2. The following are some reasons why students drop out of high school before graduation. Please indicate whether you think that the reason is a (1) Factor in most cases, (2) Factor in some cases, (3) Neutral, (4) Factor in just a few cases, (5) Not really a factor in any cases.**

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The student cannot keep up with the school work.** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 29 | 43 | 9 | 14 | 2 |
| Principals | 12 | 49 | 0 | 32 | 7 |
| Teachers | 18 | 38 | 1 | 31 | 12 |
| **The student cannot get along with teachers.** | | | | | |
| Superintendent | 5 | 48 | 17 | 27 | 1 |
| Principal | 3 | 33 | 0 | 43 | 21 |
| Teacher | 6 | 31 | 1 | 42 | 20 |
| **The student cannot get along with other students.** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 5 | 40 | 14 | 36 | 2 |
| Principals | 0 | 33 | 0 | 49 | 18 |
| Teachers | 5 | 34 | 0 | 45 | 16 |
| **The student has a child.** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 1 | 24 | 6 | 64 | 2 |
| Principals | 3 | 36 | 0 | 51 | 10 |
| Teachers | 6 | 39 | 0 | 45 | 10 |
| **The student has to care for a family member.** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 0 | 12 | 13 | 55 | 18 |
| Principals | 2 | 24 | 0 | 51 | 23 |
| Teachers | 5 | 30 | 1 | 47 | 17 |
| **The student is bored and does not find school interesting.** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 18 | 55 | 4 | 14 | 6 |
| Principals | 21 | 49 | 0 | 24 | 6 |
| Teachers | 20 | 40 | 1 | 29 | 10 |
| **The student associates with other students who have dropped out of school.** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 9 | 64 | 5 | 16 | 4 |
| Principals | 27 | 51 | 0 | 20 | 2 |
| Teachers | 37 | 41 | 1 | 17 | 4 |

**The student has to get a job to make money and cannot attend school at the same time.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 1 | 36 | 10 | 45 | 5 |
| Principals | 7 | 37 | 0 | 45 | 11 |
| Teachers | 13 | 35 | 1 | 40 | 11 |

**The student misses too many days of school and cannot catch up.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 28 | 48 | 2 | 18 | 1 |
| Principals | 42 | 44 | 0 | 12 | 2 |
| Teachers | 45 | 39 | 0 | 13 | 3 |

**The student does not have enough support at home from a parent or guardian.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 48 | 45 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Principals | 45 | 43 | 0 | 11 | 1 |
| Teachers | 61 | 28 | 0 | 10 | 1 |

**The student is not prepared for high school**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 12 | 37 | 14 | 31 | 4 |
| Principals | 18 | 42 | 0 | 30 | 10 |
| Teachers | 22 | 40 | 0 | 27 | 11 |

**3. There are different groups and individuals that could have responsibility for students dropping out of high school. Please indicate how much responsibility you think each of the following groups has for students dropping out of high school. Please indicate whether you think that the reason is: (1) All the responsibility, (2) Most of the responsibility, (3) Neutral (4) Some of the responsibility, (5) Very little of the responsibility.**

| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The student** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 14 | 66 | 6 | 12 | 0 |
| Principals | 12 | 62 | 1 | 25 | 0 |
| Teachers | 19 | 57 | 0 | 22 | 2 |
| **The parents of the student** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 17 | 66 | 4 | 12 | 0 |
| Principals | 10 | 59 | 1 | 28 | 2 |
| Teachers | 19 | 55 | 0 | 23 | 3 |
| **High school teachers** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 4 | 32 | 10 | 45 | 6 |
| Principals | 3 | 19 | 1 | 54 | 23 |
| Teachers | 2 | 11 | 0 | 60 | 27 |
| **Principal** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 2 | 20 | 17 | 46 | 13 |
| Principals | 4 | 18 | 1 | 54 | 23 |
| Teachers | na | na | na | na | na |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Superintendent** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 0 | 17 | 9 | 46 | 26 |
| Principals | na | na | na | na | na |
| Teachers | na | na | na | na | na |
| | | | | | |
| **The school system** | | | | | |
| Superintendent | 9 | 23 | 17 | 39 | 10 |
| Principals | 7 | 21 | 1 | 59 | 12 |
| Teachers | 3 | 16 | 1 | 63 | 17 |
| | | | | | |
| **The broader society** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 2 | 29 | 12 | 42 | 13 |
| Principals | 4 | 14 | 1 | 56 | 25 |
| Teachers | 4 | 14 | 1 | 52 | 29 |
| | | | | | |
| **Elected officials at the local, state, and national levels** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 0 | 17 | 8 | 37 | 36 |
| Principals | 1 | 8 | 1 | 44 | 46 |
| Teachers | 4 | 9 | 1 | 42 | 44 |

**4. When it comes to students at your high school(s) who are at risk of dropping out, do you feel that your high school (1) Does too much, (2) Does enough, (3) Neutral, (4) Could do somewhat more, (5) Could do a lot more?**

| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Keeping students from skipping class** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 4 | 61 | 9 | 22 | 2 |
| Principals | na | 47 | 0 | 46 | 7 |
| Teachers | na | 46 | 1 | 35 | 18 |
| | | | | | |
| **Keeping students interested and engaged in coursework** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 1 | 25 | 12 | 48 | 13 |
| Principals | na | 13 | 0 | 72 | 15 |
| Teachers | na | 39 | 2 | 47 | 12 |
| | | | | | |
| **Providing support for struggling students** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 1 | 38 | 12 | 40 | 8 |
| Principals | na | 25 | 0 | 58 | 17 |
| Teachers | na | 53 | 0 | 38 | 9 |
| | | | | | |
| **Helping students with problems outside the classroom that affect their school work** | | | | | |
| Superintendents | 1 | 29 | 16 | 49 | 4 |
| Principals | na | 24 | 0 | 67 | 9 |
| Teachers | na | 44 | 2 | 41 | 13 |

**Engaging parents and encouraging them to be involved in their children's education at school and at home**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 1 | 24 | 9 | 53 | 12 |
| Principals | na | 21 | 0 | 60 | 19 |
| Teachers | na | 40 | 1 | 42 | 17 |

**5. In a recent national survey of high school dropouts, many former students said they stopped going to school because they found it boring and uninteresting or they did not see the relevance of school to real life. Do you think that these students were speaking to an important cause of dropping out or were they just making excuses?**

**Speaking to an important cause of dropping out**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 73 |
| Principals | 69 |
| Teachers | 50 |

**Just making excuses**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 26 |
| Principals | 29 |
| Teachers | 42 |

**6. If the nation's public high schools demanded more of their students, do you agree that at-risk students would work harder to meet these higher expectations?**

**Strongly agree**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 4 |
| Principals | 19 |
| Teachers | 13 |

**Agree**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 28 |
| Principals | 11 |
| Teachers | 6 |

**Neutral**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 21 |
| Principals | 4 |
| Teachers | 6 |

**Disagree**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 41 |
| Principals | 21 |
| Teachers | 12 |

**Strongly disagree**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 5 |
| Principals | 45 |
| Teachers | 63 |

**7. If there were a commitment to making needed changes and reforms at the local, state, and national levels, how realistic and achievable do you think it would be that the national dropout rate could be cut in half within ten years?**

**Completely realistic and achievable**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 17 |
| Principals | 27 |
| Teachers | 17 |

**Fairly realistic and achievable**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 30 |
| Principals | 34 |
| Teachers | 30 |

**Neutral**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 8 |
| Principals | 0 |
| Teachers | 4 |

**Somewhat realistic and achievable**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 32 |
| Principals | 33 |
| Teachers | 33 |

**Not realistic and achievable**

| | |
|---|---|
| Superintendents | 12 |
| Principals | 6 |
| Teachers | 16 |

**8. The following are some suggestions that have been made to help keep students in school and lower the high school dropout rate. For each one, please indicate how much you think it would help reduce the number of students who dropout of high school: (1) Would help a lot, (2) A fair amount, (3) Just some, (4) A little, or (5) Would not help at all.**

**Improve outreach to parents to better involve them with their child's educational progress and challenges.**

| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 29 | 44 | 21 | 5 | 0 |
| Principals | 51 | 27 | 19 | 3 | 0 |
| Teachers | 63 | 14 | 17 | 3 | 3 |

**Establish an early warning system to identify students who are struggling in middle and junior high school and get them the support they need.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 54 | 36 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| Principals | 71 | 15 | 11 | 3 | 0 |
| Teachers | 70 | 13 | 12 | 3 | 2 |

**Have more counselors and mentors on staff to provide guidance and support to at-risk**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 28 | 50 | 16 | 5 | 0 |
| Principals | 53 | 23 | 21 | 3 | 0 |
| Teachers | 50 | 14 | 21 | 7 | 7 |

**Have smaller classes so students get more attention from teachers.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 20 | 40 | 25 | 14 | 0 |
| Principals | 54 | 16 | 23 | 6 | 1 |
| Teachers | 75 | 11 | 10 | 2 | 2 |

**Create more hands-on and project-based learning opportunities, so students can see**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 46 | 36 | 14 | 2 | 0 |
| Principals | 67 | 23 | 9 | 1 | 0 |
| Teachers | 60 | 15 | 17 | 5 | 2 |

**Have smaller schools to encourage more and closer relationships with adults.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 24 | 36 | 22 | 10 | 6 |
| Principals | 47 | 26 | 20 | 4 | 3 |
| Teachers | 53 | 14 | 18 | 7 | 6 |

**Connect classrooms learning to real world experiences and career opportunities through service learning, work study, and job shadowing.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 49 | 42 | 6 | 1 | 0 |
| Principals | 68 | 18 | 12 | 2 | 0 |
| Teachers | 70 | 12 | 13 | 3 | 2 |

**Ensure that teachers are teaching in the subject area in which they are licensed.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 13 | 37 | 20 | 24 | 5 |
| Principals | 37 | 20 | 22 | 16 | 4 |
| Teachers | 55 | 11 | 18 | 7 | 6 |

**Increase support that principals provide to teachers to help at-risk students.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 14 | 56 | 17 | 9 | 1 |
| Principals | 39 | 27 | 27 | 5 | 1 |
| Teachers | 46 | 16 | 25 | 8 | 4 |

**9. The following are proposals for reducing the dropout rate. For each one please indicate whether you (1) Strongly favor, (2) Somewhat favor, (3) Neutral, (4) Somewhat oppose, or (5) Strongly oppose the proposal.**

**Ensure a common definition for high school graduation rates across the fifty states and make graduation and dropout data available at the district and school levels and by racial and ethic subgroups.**

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 28 | 37 | 29 | 2 | 2 |
| Principals | 45 | 34 | 1 | 10 | 10 |
| Teachers | 34 | 36 | 6 | 13 | 11 |

**Create individualized graduation plans for each student and regularly communicate with parents about progress toward completing the plan.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 29 | 48 | 13 | 9 | 0 |
| Principals | 53 | 34 | 0 | 10 | 3 |
| Teachers | 47 | 25 | 2 | 13 | 13 |

**Provide alternative learning environments with more individualized instruction that gives students at risk of dropping out more choices to make school more relevant to their lives and goals such as schools of technology, sciences, the arts, or ninth grade academies that support incoming freshmen.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 49 | 49 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Principals | 71 | 25 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Teachers | 77 | 19 | 1 | 2 | 1 |

**Expand college-level learning opportunities in high school through dual enrollment early college programs and Advanced Placement programs.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 37 | 37 | 18 | 5 | 1 |
| Principals | 58 | 34 | 0 | 6 | 2 |
| Teachers | 61 | 25 | 2 | 6 | 6 |

**Establish a national clearing house to assist states and schools in evaluating and disseminating existing research and best practices.**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Superintendents | 17 | 41 | 32 | 9 | 0 |
| Principals | 27 | 53 | 0 | 14 | 6 |
| Teachers | 30 | 42 | 4 | 10 | 14 |

**10. In your role as the superintendent of your school corporation, do you believe you have the ability to reduce your corporation's dropout rate?**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Strongly believe** | |
| Superintendents | 52 |
| **Somewhat believe** | |
| Superintendents | 40 |
| **Neutral** | |
| Superintendents | 4 |
| **Somewhat do not believe** | |
| Superintendents | 4 |
| **Strongly do not believe** | |
| Superintendents | 0 |

*For Appendix D, teacher and principal data was taken from the Bridgeland et al., (2009) report. Questions 2-9 are some of the survey questions that were used by the same report in conjunction with Peter D. Hart Research Associates, INC (Hart, 2008). Data on superintendents was collected for the purpose of comparing responses to those of teachers and principals and was created by the researcher using a modified version of the same survey used by Peter D. Hart Research Associates in their phone interviews with both teachers and principals.

## APPENDIX E: Survey Cover Letter

November 1, 2010

Dear Indiana Public School Superintendent:

You are being invited to participate in a research study about Indiana's dropout dilemma. The study is based on getting Indiana superintendents' perceptions concerning the dropout rate in Indiana. The study is being conducted by David Adams and Dr. Robert Boyd, faculty sponsor, from the Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations program at Indiana State University. The study is being conducted as part of a dissertation. As a superintendent in Indiana, you were randomly selected as a possible participant in this study. **In approximately one week**, you will receive an email notification containing a link to the survey if you choose to participate.

There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study. There are no costs to you for participating in the study. The information you provide will briefly explain superintendent perceptions concerning the dropout issue in Indiana. The questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to complete. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but the information learned in this study should provide more general benefits.

Your participation in this survey will be kept confidential. Participant identifiers will be collected only for the purpose of maintaining a record of participation so that survey participation percentages can be validated and to lessen the risk of duplication. Again, participation will be kept confidential. No information concerning participants will be included in the data or related publications.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. By completing and submitting this electronic survey, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact my advisor or me at the addresses listed below. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or if you feel you've been placed at risk, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored programs, Terre Haute, IN, 47809, by phone at (812)237-8217, or by email at irb@instate.edu. Thank you in advance for taking a few moments to contribute to this important issue.

Sincerely,

*David A. Adams*

David A. Adams
Superintendent
Shelbyville Central Schools

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