May 2021

Understanding School Dropout: An Analysis of the Underlying Causes and Their Significance in Building Meaningful Interventions

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<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2021.CP.02>

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<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2021.CP.02>

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This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Counseling Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Counseling Psychology.

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**Understanding School Dropout: An Analysis of the Underlying Causes and
Their Significance in Building Meaningful Interventions**

by

Kelli K Stewart

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

March 2021

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Abstract

This paper is a review of research regarding high school dropout rates and trends in the United States. Findings on the underlying reasons students are dropping out and analyzing this data can help implement widely accessible multi-level support systems in the schools and design sensible policies to aid students with emotional, and learning disabilities. While building these policies, it is essential to be mindful of our student populations' ethnicity and socioeconomic factors and their educational implications. This paper will address the leading causes for withdrawing before obtaining a diploma (early traumas, homeless, foster and juvenile justice youth, emotional and learning disabilities, cultural/ethnic biases, mental health and, discipline). Researchers have found targeted interventions proven to mitigate learning loss and lower the number of students being pushed or pulled out of their schools before graduation. “Understanding the factors that lead young people to leave school can have significant benefits for these young people and society as a whole” (Zaff et al., 2016, page. 1). The manual is built as a supplement to the literature review. Its purpose is to function as a reference for educators with tips, lessons, ideas and resource’s for students that are at risk for an early dropout. There are four main sections including; interviews from experienced teachers, information on understanding cultural influences and engaging and supporting students families in the classroom.

Keywords: adverse childhood experience (ACE's)s, high school dropout, school connection, individual education plan (IEP), professional development, housing/food insecurity, learning disabilities (LD's), emotional disabilities (ED's), school climate, intervention, equity gap

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge my professors at Dominican University in the Counseling Program for their time and dedication to their students. Each one genuinely put in so much effort and shared personal stories that inspired me to engage and look deeper into myself and what I wanted from the program. They also gave us memorable case studies and real-life experiences to better understand counseling psychology and prepare us for our careers. I want to thank Carlos Molina, EdD., LMFT specifically. Carlos has spent a great deal of time and energy supporting me on this journey. His critique and feedback on assignments and in-class have elevated my experience in the program and made me aware of what is important. He is patient and consistent, and available. I mostly appreciate his kind ways and sense of humor when things have been stressful this last year. Carlos's Human Diversity course gave me insight and changed my perspectives positively, and for that, I am grateful. I would also like to thank Mary Jane Landolina, LMFT, who gave me vast resources and knowledge that I could use immediately in my teaching career and will continue to reference as I continue my journey in education/counseling. Mary Jane provided a binder of resources and information that inspired some of my manual; thank you for your time and commitment to your profession.

I would also like to thank my students, who have each taught me something different and unique. These students have given me a more profound feeling of pride than I ever could have imagined. I am so lucky to have been a part of their journeys. These students make me want to be a better educator and, even more importantly, a better person. Last, I would like to thank my husband for supporting me in this endeavor to get my master's. It took me out of our home and away from our kids many nights, and without his support, I could have never done it! To our kids, thank you for being patient with mommy! I hope I was able to model balance and

commitment and show you that women/mothers can be anything they dream of being; I hope each of your dreams is big and that you choose a life career that gives back to other people and fulfills your heart and soul the way teaching has fulfilled mine.

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Terms and Definitions

Below are common terms that will be repeated throughout the research, and also terms that the author believes are important to define in order for individuals to understand the overall concepts.

Adverse childhood experience (ACE) - “Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events occurring before age 18.” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020)

High school dropout (Status Dropout Rate) - “The percentage of all 15-24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and do not have a high school diploma or an alternative credential, such as the GED.” (*U.S. Department of Education*)

School connection - “To create meaningful experiences and possibilities for students by recognizing them as people and remaking schools and classrooms to value the human experience.” (Block, 2010)

Individual education plan (IEP) - often called the IEP, is a legal document under United States law that is developed for each public school child in the U.S. who needs special education. It is created through a team of the child's parent(s) and district personnel who are knowledgeable about the child's needs. ([wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org))

Housing/food insecurity -

Food security - “is defined as the means that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.” (United Nations’ Committee on World Food Security)

Housing insecurity - “is the lack of security in an individual shelter that is the result of high **housing** costs relative to income, poor **housing** quality, unstable neighborhoods, overcrowding, and, but may not include, homelessness.” (wikipedia.org)

Learning Disabilities (LD) - “Learning disabilities are disorders that affect the ability to understand or use spoken or written language, do mathematical calculations, coordinate movements, or direct attention. Although learning disabilities occur in very young children, the disorders are usually not recognized until the child reaches school age. Research shows that 8 to 10 percent of American children under 18 years of age have some type of learning disability.” (National Institute of Neurological Disorders)

Emotional Disabilities (ED) - “An **emotional or behavioral disability** is a disability that impacts a person's ability to effectively recognize, interpret, control, and express fundamental emotions. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 characterizes the group of disabilities as Emotional Disturbance (ED). This term is controversial as it is seen by some as excluding or even discriminating students with behavior issues and just focuses on the emotional aspects.” (wikipedia.org)

School climate - “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life.” (National School Climate Council)

Equity gap - “An educational equity gap is where there is a significant and persistent disparity in educational attainment between different groups of students.” (Higher Learning Advocates, 2021)

Newcomer Student - “A newcomer is a student who has been in the U.S. 12 months or less and is at Level 1 (Beginning) in learning English as measured on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT).” (California Department of Education, 2008)

Externalizing behavior problems - “a grouping of **behavior problems** that are manifested in children's outward **behavior** and reflect the child negatively acting on the external environment” (Campbell, Shaw, & Gilliom, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 2001)

Introduction

"There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they are falling in" Archbishop Desmond Tutu. After being in education for 20 years and experiencing the constant heartbreak of seeing students who need so much more than their schools are prepared and capable of offering them, I started my journey at Dominican. I hoped to discover ways in which I could acquire knowledge about how to support these students better. It became even more significant than that; I began to see first-hand how the techniques and information I was given helped me grow as a person and a teacher, and I dream bigger of sharing that information with other educators to implement a more supportive, informed educational experience for our youth. An experience based on connection and trust between the students and teachers that is based on better understanding children's development, paying attention to their background, being sensitive to their cultures, and learning more about why students fail and when and how we should intervene.

My hope for this manual is that it will be a way to contribute tools and resources to educators that I feel fortunate to have obtained or come across in my time here at Dominican. There is a strong parallel between a counselor/patient relationship, and the teacher/student relationship. Concepts regarding transference, trust building, flexibility, professionalism, confidentiality, and most importantly a strong mutual respect. I stumbled into teaching merely as a substitute after college and never intended to stay in that profession. Less than six months in, I knew that I had a calling and would be spending a large part of my life in education. I knew that because of the quality of the relationships I enjoyed with students, the results of having those strong connections showed in their successes. I started at 22 optimistic and raring to go! I made

beautiful lesson plans and set up my classroom, but the truth is nothing prepares you for what walks through the door. Those first couple of years, I learned one thing very quickly. A student whose most basic needs are not met, a student who has been exposed to years of unresolved trauma, a student who has suffered from a diagnosed or undiagnosed learning disability or an emotional disorder does not care how lovely your algebra lesson is. Most of those students had been failing for years and by high school are convinced they are "stupid" and perform according to that notion. What I learned over my first-decade teaching was that to get them to accept the knowledge, the facts, the math, you first have to accept and acknowledge what they need from you, what they have been through, who they are, and make a genuine connection with them. That is when the learning begins, and that is what this manual hopes to inspire.

The enclosed literature review presents the data and statistics that point out why students fail to graduate or fail to graduate on time. The main reasons students leave high school are due to poor attendance and low GPA. Research overwhelmingly shows those two factors most often present when children experience early traumas, homelessness, foster and juvenile justice youth, emotional and learning disabilities, cultural/ethnic biases, and a failed outdated discipline system. Reviewing this research led me on a clear path to this project to find interventions to mitigate those factors. The overarching theme of intervention is building a strong connection to the students and keeping them engaged in the school community. This manual is written as a tool to highlight some of the ways to build that foundation. When students feel emotional safety and security, there is no limit to what they can accomplish. Believing that and trusting in myself and my students have been the guiding principle for me as an educator.

Dominican has taught me so much that will help me to help students. Taking the course on human development offered a greater sense of why students act the way they do at different

stages and ages and what to expect as they approach. Assessment and Treatment of children provided tips on talking to teens, warning signs to look out for, information to use in educating parents, and a wealth of resources on lessons/activities that could efficiently work in the classroom. Human Diversity gave me a chance to take inventory of what I believe and where I come from to understand better and appreciate other cultures and identities. Alcohol and Drugs gave me knowledge of the drugs out there and how to assess and work with people suffering from addiction—learning the DSM diagnosis gave me insight into mental health and how to recognize and understand different disorders. The reality is that almost everything that I have learned in my time at Dominican will help me in the classroom and in the education field to support students and promote policies that make sense, and take science and psychology into account.

In an ideal world, all teachers and administrators would have the time and resources to take the classes offered for this Master's program to be better equipped to counsel, support, and connect with students. I hope this manual can be a helpful, quick reference sheet for educators to understand children and create a connection as a foundation to teaching and learning. It is important to note that a significant issue behind many of the factors leading to school dropout is California's funding. The California Children Report Card (California Now 2020) gave California the grade of a D+, "California has been underfunding education and shortchanging children for decades. We are in the bottom half of states when it comes to equitable access to quality early learning programs, resulting in among the largest gaps in school readiness in the nation." Crow, S., & Rock, L. (2015). Keeping that in mind, it is essential to be creative in teacher interventions and school support programs while the state works on this significant issue.

Teaching is an art, and although some of the techniques can be taught, I firmly believe most of it either comes naturally. Each teacher has something to offer and can and should always be evolving and considering new research and data to create a comfortable classroom environment that celebrates Diversity and gives all students an equitable experience. It is much easier said than done, but there are some basics. In my classroom, I spend as much time as I can early on learning as much about my students as I can without intruding and keeping in mind not all students want to share their personal information. If you give space and build trust and disclose small pieces of your own, like when appropriate, the student will eventually feel supported. If the students are involved in extracurriculars, I will go to at least one of their games, plays, or concerts. I find that showing them they matter to me makes it much harder for them to disengage or quit. At the start of the term, I meet with each student one on one and ask them about their math/school experience. After listening and reflecting on what I hear, I ask them what it would mean to start fresh? What if we didn't consider what we have already heard if it was negative? By high school, most students already consider themselves good or bad students and feel that it is their destiny to fulfill that role. Sometimes it takes repeated reminders and positive messages to reverse that feeling. I never grade tests with red pens and never write a letter grade on a test. If a student was unsuccessful on a task, we have a conversation and plan to improve. These are a few of the ways I work to create a connected, supported environment. Throughout this manual, tips, resources and interviews will be offered as interventions to work with at-risk students.

Literature Review

Just over 56 million students are enrolled in K-12 schools in the United States. Those students are the future of our country, the parents of generations to come, our most important asset, and yet so often, the system we have in place fails them. Roughly 25% of Freshman in the U.S. will fail to complete high school on schedule (Silver, Saunders & Zarate, 2015). Some will blame politics, funding, leadership. However, by taking a more in-depth look at the places students slip through the cracks and exit our schools, we can start to understand how to build a more robust, more widely accessible, and equitable educational system. In my 20 years in education at the secondary level and more specifically in my time teaching at a continuation high school and most recently at adult education, I see transcripts that come in each day with the same staggering information. Students who started with C's and maybe some D's, as their four years go by those turn to more D's, incompletes, and F's until finally there is no credit given, no good choices left. You see between one to five schools in that four years; usually, that child starts at a traditional comprehensive school, gets moved to the next tier, a continuation school, or gets moved around to solve attendance and discipline problems. Each time I wonder the same questions, when did the child start to slip, why were they unsuccessful, and what could we have done differently to support them earlier? Reviewing research can help determine the answers to those questions and begin the hard work of inspiring educators and policymakers to implement the necessary changes to support all of our youth.

In the last decade, the statistics show a trend in declining school dropouts but with a higher consequence than ever before for those students who do not obtain a diploma. The following sections will be on each of the leading causes for increased dropout rates, early traumas, differing cultural views, socioeconomic status, mental health disabilities, learning

disabilities, out of date discipline practices, student attributes, failed interventions, and lastly, an overall lack of connectivity between the student and the school. In concluding, the research will look at intervention strategies, adult and vocational education, and how we can move forward towards even higher graduation rates for students. Those interventions should include community resources, local healthcare access, screening prevention, and education/professional development for school staff and families.

Statistics/Implications: Adverse Education Outcomes

The most recent statistics on the high school dropout rate paint a complicated picture that can't be understood simply by reading numbers but are still a significant part of the background. In the last two decades, there's been a decline in dropouts as indicated by a 3% fall in rates since 1990 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), so we are on the right trajectory. As referenced by (*11 Facts About High School Dropout Rates*, 2014), the United States currently ranks 22nd out of 27 developed countries in their graduation rates, with Latino and Black students graduating at significantly lower percentages than their White and Asian classmates. Research suggests that a student without a high school diploma will earn lower wages over their lifetime, have fewer opportunities, be more likely to commit crimes, and have more health problems. Students without a diploma are also more likely to have children who will drop out (McKee & Calderella, 2016). The cost is not only high for the student but society as a whole. Individual schools often referred to as "dropout factories" have significantly higher dropout rates than other schools. Those schools are populated with minority and low-income families, which lends itself to more significant equality issues. State to state statistics vary, with some states doing better than others, but we will look most closely at California for this research.

According to the 2020 Report Card on California's Children (Children Now, 2020), we see many areas for concern. This "report card" is used to give grades to different aspects and programs in California regarding children; topics of education, health, family support, child welfare, and transition-age youth. In 2020 there were an estimated 9,159,978 children in California. It's important to note that roughly 60,000 are in foster care, over one million one hundred thousand are English Learners, 11% identify as LGBTQ, 43% are considered low income, and over 4,000,000 are from immigrant families. The significant ethnicities that makeup California are Latino (over 45%), White (just over 33%) and Black (roughly 10%), with the rest made up of multiracial and American Indian/Pacific Islander. The "grades" given in this report are dismal, and as a state, CA ranks at the bottom of the country in most areas. Most notably, California got an F in school climate, *having caring professionals at school* with over 50% of Freshmen claiming they do not have an adult on campus that they feel cares about them (California Now, 2020). There are also D grades in many significant areas such as preventative screening, health care, early intervention, education funding, teacher pipeline, foster youth health care, and youth discrimination.

Early Predictors of Dropping Out

Several studies have been done on predicting the likelihood of students dropping out and what those factors are in an effort to understand and intervene with appropriate support. Significant factors are based on race, socioeconomics, and family/life. What is difficult is that those predictors can start a downward spiral into not graduating, but it is hard to determine where the patterns begin and why. The most significant example are the early predictors of low attendance, low GPA, and low-class completion rates. We know these are predictors of a student dropping out (McKee & Calderella, 2016), but understanding why they attended less, completed

fewer classes, and have lower grades in the first place can be multi-layered. A study done in Korea gave some fascinating insights that are important to mention as we start to look at interventions in the United States. The study (Kim, Joo, & Lee 2018) found that the most significant predictors in students dropping out were not related to the student. However, the school setting findings suggest that the school size, student to teacher ratio, and academic achievements of the school influenced whether their students dropped out of high school (Kim, et al., 2018).

Another article reviewed on predictors dealt with the notion that students are actually "pushed out" or "pulled out" instead of dropping out. Bradley & Renzulli, 2011 surveyed 5,000 Black, White, and Latino students over time on how they felt in school and why they eventually left. They found that when SES is controlled for Latino students, they are more likely to be "pulled out" than their white classmates. For Black student's differences in SES explained the higher rate of being both pushed or pulled out as compared to their white classmates. To generalize, for Latino students, the outside responsibilities were a more significant factor for them leaving school (pulled out) than for black students who suffered more from internal factors such as not fitting in, not liking the school, not feeling connected (pushed and pulled out). Understanding these predictors is crucial in building schools and systems that work for all populations of students.

Early Childhood Trauma

There is significant research to suggest that children that experience trauma/s early in their development are more likely to drop out of school before they obtain a diploma than children who do not. According to Duke (2020), for more than ten types of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's), there is a direct correlation to adverse related educational outcomes such as

students' plans to graduate, the past month of poor attendance, and low academic achievement. Findings suggest that the higher the number of traumatic incidents, the more significant the correlation to these adverse educational outcomes (Duke, 2020). The ACE's were tracked and compared to look for patterns. Small children who had experienced trauma before or during elementary school failed to meet grade-level standards, had low attendance and behavioral issues. Children with past traumas exhibited "school refusal behaviors," anxiety, depression, and engagement loss. Children with higher numbers of ACE's were more likely to be low income and from ethnic groups other than white or Asian. The second part of this study took a look at early intervention and how targeting these students with early traumas, connecting with them, and creating a supportive environment can mitigate the negative outcomes. Duke, 2020 also adds that through surveys, students who felt they had an adult at school that genuinely cared for them were more likely to succeed, attend, and graduate than those who did not. This important finding was significant across all ages, races, and socioeconomic groups. In this study, the types of traumas accounted for were abuse (verbal, emotional, physical), household dysfunction (addiction in caregivers, jail, a witness of abuse), food insecurity, and housing instability.

Furthermore, Duke, 2020 found that in regards to school connection, females were more likely to benefit from the connection than their male counterparts. It was hypothesized that intervening earlier would have a more significant impact on the outcomes. Findings suggest that teachers can feel overwhelmed by some of the students' trauma, and it would be helpful to look at ways to better support and inform the staff so they could be useful in connecting with the students in need (Duke, 2020). These students can often be seen as a distraction in class and exhibit negative externalizing behaviors, which give off a perception to the class and label them

unfairly. The research on early trauma and its adverse effects is robust and cited in almost all literature on dropout rates.

Homelessness, Foster Care and Juvenile Justice Students

Three student populations at risk of many adverse outcomes educationally and as far as physical and mental health wellness are homeless students, foster care youth, and juvenile justice youth, who have spent time in juvenile detention (Gross, Mann, Bluez & Sulkowski, 2017). The article highlights the significant barriers these students face regarding obtaining an education when their most basic needs are not met. These students are often labeled inappropriately and judged by their peers and school staff because of their outward behaviors, and more than half end up dropping out (Gross, et al., 2017). Even more concerning is that these students are often not offered their educational rights and do not have anyone to advocate for them along the way. These three student populations suffered from almost double the suicidality rate and witnessed and experienced homicide and traumas at a far greater number than their peers (Gross, et al., 2017). Regarding the homeless students, there is an element of concern because they often do not feel safe outside of school and do not feel comfortable or safe inside of school. These students suffer from extremely low attendance, and 45% end up repeating a grade (Gross et al., 2017). There are insurmountable barriers to getting an education when students' basic needs aren't met. The population of students, when polled, was very much in favor of getting an education and valued their classes and school but simply cannot make it a priority given their circumstances. Furthermore, Gross et al., 2017 found that teachers are often not aware of the severity of these students' situations or trained in assessing the students' emotional needs before trying to meet educational goals. This study (Gross et. al., 2017) further revealed that these students' mortality rates are 11 to 40 times as high as their non-homeless peers as they are often

exposed to drug abuse and dangerous conditions daily. Homeless students can also feel shame and guilt and often hide their housing problems by withdrawing from social and educational settings. In studying Michigan's homeless population, Downward, Gross et al. 2018 found similar findings with harsh long-term outcomes. The homeless group had gone unstudied and unnoticed and was quickly becoming the most vulnerable population. Homeless students have the lowest graduation rate of all people studied, including students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged, and minority groups (Downward, 2018).

Foster youth is another group that faces unique challenges in a school setting and barriers to accessing an education. Over 60,00 students in California are placed in foster care (Children Now, 2020). Roughly a third of foster care children are placed with a family, and about half are placed in a non-related home with a family and the remaining children are placed in group homes or institutions and often suffer more than the groups with related or non-related families (Gross, Mann, Bluez & Sulkowski 2017). This group often lags academically but has a higher rate of graduating than their homeless peers. Unfortunately, their placement in foster care correlates with adverse outcomes later in life, such as being less likely to attend and graduate from a four-year university (Gross et al., 2017). One issue that stands out with this group is the alarming rate at which students in foster care are exposed to trauma either before placement and during placement. In a separate study (White, Havalchak, Jackson, O'Brien & Pecora, 2007), it was found that as many as 63% of foster youth meet the criteria for a psychiatric disorder. The disorder with the most significant diagnosis was Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), which we can predict presents very poorly and as a discipline problem in young children. Many of these foster students went on to be diagnosed later in life with adjustment disorders. The

classroom issue is that students are dealing with enormous trauma, emotions, and some even are struggling to get their basic needs met, making school work difficult to prioritize.

Juvenile justice youth is a very complicated group to understand; it is complex because you have to look at the statistics on their dropout rates. First, you need to know why adverse behaviors started. Taking a look back at the child's past can help create a real sense of what is going on. Was their trauma, undiagnosed mental health issues, learning disabilities, etc., that led the child to act out? Is there a past drug use pattern, addiction, and other factors that may have gotten the child into trouble? More than one and a half million students are arrested in the U.S. each year and once students are charged, they often go on to commit more crimes and experience long-term adverse effects later in life (Sickmund, Sladky, Kang & Puzzanchera, 2011). Even more concerning is the racial injustice in the statistics as African American youth are way overrepresented in the juvenile system (Sickmund, et al., 2011). The juvenile justice system students are way more likely to struggle academically, fall behind, and often have severe attendance issues. Many have a long history of expulsions and suspensions, creating an even larger academic gap and pushing the students further from the school community. Additionally, many students who commit crimes or even break school rules have a learning disability. However, students with a diagnosis and an IEP fare better when incarcerated than students in juvenile detention without services (Cavendish, 2013). Sadly, youth students in juvenile justice systems are also at higher risk for suicide and homicide with homeless and foster care (Cavendish, 2013). The key takeaway is the statistic that less than half of the students in a juvenile justice placement return to school after their release (Cavendish, 2013). Having that information can help find solutions for a smoother transition and supportive return to school.

Mental Health

When looking at populations with higher dropout rates, we would be remiss to ignore the students with a mental health diagnosis and the students who have mental health criteria and have not had access to or screening for a diagnosis. Staff and peers often misunderstand ED students. In the education world, we use the term Emotional Disturbance as the category under which students can be evaluated and determined to meet special education services' criteria. Mitchell, Kern & Conroy, 2018 found that students with ED's are at higher risk of many negative long-term outcomes such as low social and behavioral issues and academic problems that negatively impact their graduation and post-graduation outcomes. Mitchell et al. (2018) found that when students with ED's do qualify and have IEP's and accommodations, their teachers often do not alter their teaching styles/expectations as they can be unsure how to adjust. These students report higher rates of being bullied and are twice as likely to be suspended or expelled than their non-ED peers. Their behavior is often misunderstood and treated as a disciplinary issue when, in reality, it is a symptom of their disorder. Another study (Linn, Wilson & Arredondo, 2019) highlights the problems faced by low SES students regarding getting treatment and medications. There is a treatment gap in most places, as the mental health community struggles to meet the community's needs (California Now, 2020). Surveys of students in the 9th and 11th grade in California revealed that “there are high levels of chronic sadness and suicide ideation reported among all students; students who are lesbian, gay and bisexula report even higher levels” and that “mental illness is the #1 reason California kids are hospitalized” (California Now, 2020, pg. 15).

Learning Disabilities

Students with learning disabilities (LD's) are a population that is also at a higher risk of dropping out of school (Children Now, 2020) because of an inadequate level of resources and limited access to needed services and supports. Further research to understand more about this statistic and its implications for intervention is necessary. One study (Doren et al., 2014) looked at this population and found that having an LD wasn't the most salient predictor but the individual, family, and school factors and interventions put in place. Specifically, students with a supportive family, a strong school connection, and good relationships with school staff and peers dropped out at much lower rates than those students with LD's that do not have those supports (Doren et al., 2014). The enormous variable here is the state and school system's issue of not keeping up with the caseload and the funding being inadequate to put these supports in place (Children Now, 2020). Milsom, A., & Glanville, J. L. (2010) found that students with LD's that struggle with social skills have lower grades and academic achievement than students with LD's that do not struggle with relationships. The implications are significant when we consider how these students present to teachers and peers and their impact on their grades. Furthermore, (Milsom et al. 2010) found that low academic achievement affected their confidence and led to dropping out.

Culture/Biases

Culture is an important factor when researching and considering interventions in education. We know that Black and American Indian students' dropout rates are significantly higher than other groups, with Latino students only fairing slightly better (Kids Data Report, 2018). We also know that Black and Latino's students receive more punitive school discipline than white students even when identical crimes are committed (Blake et al., 2020) and that a

racial disparity increases when there is also an ED or LD for those populations. These students' culture can be so influential, and how that is understood and valued can play a huge role in how the students integrate into the school setting (Bradley et al., 2011). A study done by Ogbu, 2004 found that cultural factors play an essential role for Black students and that they tend to feel compelled to "act White" or "act Black" to fit in. If they think their culture has an oppositional attitude towards education, it can influence them to do poorly or drop out. The same study done by Bradley et al., 2011 looked at the Latino culture, which puts the family at the center and can have implications when students are needed to work and support each other, making school a secondary priority. Students' diverse backgrounds in California are not reflected in the classroom as research shows that teachers' ethnicities do not reflect the same ratios as their students (California Now, 2020), and students are more likely to graduate high school if they have a same-race teacher in grades K-3.

Discipline

Discipline has long been a hot topic in the education world, and practices and systems continue to evolve based on the most up to date research. The good news for California, at least, is that it seems to be an area where we are making improvements as the number of suspensions is declining (California Now, 2020). There has been a vast shift in approach towards promoting a positive school climate with less punitive punishments. The concept of suspending students for misbehaving when most of those students are the ones that need the school setting for safety and learning is in itself counterintuitive. New policies have recently come on this year that bans suspensions for defiance or disruption from K-8th grade (California Now, 2020). This is mentioned in this research because we know that when students are suspended or expelled, it increases their likelihood of disengaging, getting in repeated trouble, and eventually dropping

out. The issue is that we also can't just allow students to act out and risk their safety and others' safety. Stakeholders must pay special attention to creating a discipline system that is just and corrects behaviors with positive support. Students need to feel connected and understood, and valued for what they can contribute. What is most concerning is that students of color are disciplined more frequently and more harshly than their white peers. Students who receive undue or unnecessarily harsh discipline often end up in the "system," juvenile youth, expelled, or drop out (Losen, et al., 2015). The idea (Ferguson, 2003) of a "reputation bias" in the classrooms based merely on a student's ethnicity has more considerable and more severe consequences for these students in their later adult lives. Zero-tolerance policies and other authoritarian school-based discipline practices increase students' chances of dropping out and developing feelings of anger, insecurity, and misunderstanding (Puzzanchera & Kang, 2013). Students with ED's are often misunderstood and disciplined in disproportionate numbers, primarily when the teacher and administrators do not understand their disability (Puzzanchera & Kang, 2013).

Interventions

Providing interventions is essential in all school settings and should be provided and implemented promptly for all scenarios to ensure students are learning and feel safe (Zaff et al., 2016). In looking at interventions specifically to decrease dropout rates, it is essential to refer to research done for proven effective programs and methods. The interventions need to address the following: the learning environment in the classroom, policies on discipline, parent/family education, staff professional development, school climate, diversity and equity training, assessment of children for mental health, and access to resources for the many student needs. The Journal of School Health article (Dupere, Dion, Leventhal, Archambault, Crosnoe & Janosz, 2018) regarding early traumas and triggering events had positive data to support the

following interventions they tested to improve school climate: those interventions were in regards to introducing a supportive adult mentorship program, designing more diverse and flexible environments, applying classroom management strategies that are positive in origin, create opportunities for student, family and community input in developing curriculum, providing staff professional development to meet the diverse needs of students and reviewing the disciplinary policies to ensure they are fair and applied equitably. The more youth felt involved and were allowed to participate in their school decisions, curriculum, and policy-setting, the better the short and long-term outcomes (Dupre et al., 2018). The mentoring program was proven a success in that it allowed youth to experience a sense of connection and caring with an adult invested in their education and future.

Another overarching intervention is using a strengths-based model to support students. The Center for Promise, a research institute at Boston University, adopted this model (Zaff et al., 2014) with Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory as their guiding model. Five core competencies imbedded in this intervention model: responsible decision-making, self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, and self-awareness. The model is based on a fundamental belief that all students have strengths and are embedded within a multi-layer ecology (community) that offers assets and develops in bidirectional and dynamic ways with that environment influencing them. The focus is on finding students' strengths and supporting and aligning them to increase positive outcomes. Staff should engage in this work with students who have adverse experiences, disabilities, and diverse backgrounds. Focusing on students' strengths and presenting them with opportunities to engage in positive solutions can change their life trajectory. The critical finding in this study that supports this approach is in denying the stereotypical belief that students drop out of school because they are incompetent (Zeff et al.,

2016) when the reality is that students who dropped out possess the same competencies as those who don't; they need support in seeing and using those. What is so ideal about this approach is that it doesn't just help them graduate; assisting students in seeing and using their strengths can help them throughout their lives (Weber, Becker, Christiansen & Mingeback, 2018). Other interventions found to be successful were parenting education; one such study found that providing parents with training on handling externalizing behavioral problems and addressing and supporting their students in the home improved the parent-child relationship. These courses also decreased disruptive classroom behavior (Weber et al., 2018).

Regarding students with Emotional Disabilities, research done (Linn, Chagqui, Wilson & Arredondo, 2019) found that students need interactions with their *culture of disability* in the community to normalize and integrate the ED population. Recommendations that came from the study (Mitchell, Kern & Conroy, 2018) on supporting students with ED's are to (a) revise the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) terminology and criteria so that it is more comprehensive and has a more appropriate educational based definition, (b) provide regular, universal screening for signs of social, emotional, and behavioral problems (c) use multi-tiered systems of support that offer preventative interventions to address the needs of all the students when they first emerge, and (d) integrate delivery models that allow greater access to services that will enhance and benefit students with disabilities. An approach widely accepted as beneficial in many school settings is having students with ED's share those in a comfortable way and educate their class on how that impacts their learning and what they experience. Students exposed to these presentations show empathy, and students feel more understood, which connects them to their community and increases their chances of staying in school (Wahl, Brister & Thompson, 2019).

Providing teachers with specific targeted interventions in the classroom can help students feel connected and engaged (Mitchell, Kern & Conroy, 2018). Mitchell et al.; suggested interventions include proper reinforcement of teacher praise, how to offer opportunities for all students to respond, training on instructional methods with direct, explicit instruction, how to use whole-class peer tutoring, and positive reinforcement for behavioral support.

Student Attributes/Vocational Education

An essential part of the research into why students dropout of school involves looking at what students are interested in learning and what their plans require regarding training and schooling. Vocational education has long provided students with non-traditional education and opportunities to learn trades/skills that could benefit them post-graduation. Research suggests that taking vocational courses compels students who would have otherwise dropped out of high school to graduate (Kreisman & Stance, 2019). In the same study, Kreisman & Stance (2019) found that taking upper-level vocational classes positively impacts wages that increase with the number of courses taken. The more specific and advanced the courses are, the better the chances for job security and positive outcomes (Kreisman & Stance, 2019).

Limitations

This study's limitations are that it only includes the research chosen and cited and may not represent all populations and places. Second, statistics and data (California Now, 2020) reported represent the most up to date information on California students, but much other research reviewed included studies outside of California. Thus, this research helps examine dropout factors in a general form, assuming the patterns and trends are mostly consistent across the United States. Thirdly, this research did not include drug/alcohol use as a factor for drop out, and the reasoning for that presented in a study by Gasper, J. M. (2012), who found, “Results

suggest that drug use and delinquency add little to explanations of dropout. Rather, drug use, delinquency, and dropout are driven by a process of precocious development rooted in early school failure” (page 1). For this reason the research is focused on these early factors and their influence on school failure. Lastly, this research did not include one of the major barriers to students accessing and receiving support, a lack of funding and an “uncoordinated, unlinked, and disconnected educational system” (California Now, 2020 pg. 74).

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many factors and underlying reasons students do not remain in school and obtain a high school diploma, and it is not always just one influence but often a complex combination of many factors. There is “an alarming achievement gap in California fueled in large part by a lack of public resources, poverty, and institutional racism” (California Now, 2020). Further research should include ways to address these startling statistics and focus on interventions that mitigate this crisis. Students who do not graduate from high school on a traditional timeline may seek alternative programs, but very little research supports these programs and teachers (DeCaua et al., 2007). Building an alliance with community resource partners and providing individualized education can help students progress towards and meet their needs (Housel, 2020).

Section 1: Teacher Interviews

The following are interviews from actual teachers with over 20 years of experience. The interview questions were written as a way to promote teachers that have been successful in working with at-risk students to share their tips and triumphs in working with students. I selected an elementary and a high school teacher to gain a broader perspective. The overarching theme I gathered from doing these interviews is building a connection with students to gain cooperation and the desired, acceptable behavior a teacher hopes for in his/her classroom. The second theme I found was one of creating mutual respect between the student and the teacher. Lastly, I encourage all teachers to help each other!! Share resources that work; see the resources suggested in number six. Sharing doesn't happen nearly enough in the teaching community. I think there is a stigma around asking for help as being lazy or copying. Hopefully, these interviews will shed some light and inspire more questions and conversations.

Teacher Interviews

Teachers took the survey voluntarily. They were given the topic of the manual and their names will be kept confidential.

Please complete the following:

- a. How many years have you been in education? Teacher # 1: 25 Years/Teacher #2: 20
years
- b. What grade/s do you have experience teaching? Teacher # 1: K-5/Teacher # 2: 9-12th

1. How do you build a connection with your students? What steps do you take the first days/weeks of the school year to ensure that students feel safe and trust you to support them?

Teacher # 1 Building connections takes quite some time. In the first month of school, I try to plan many activities centered around students being able to share about themselves. I do not grade these activities in order to build trust and have students see that they won't be judged for sharing about themselves. I set up journals where students can share thoughts and feelings with me. We build on community circles so that students have a safe place to share with their classmates, too. I make sure to share about myself as often as I can. I share personal stories about my struggles as a student and how I worked through them. I share about events in my life that helped me to get where I am today. The students usually enjoy seeing the personal side of their teacher. I am an ally to all my students and let them know that we are a family in our classroom, we are all here for each other, and can support one another, no matter what we face each day.

Teacher # 2 In the first week of school I learn students' names. I have found that this is the first step to showing them I am interested in them as people not just as a learner. I also find an activity that allows me to get to know them personally. For example, I ask them to write down 3 topics that they could teach me about. In the first couple of weeks I make attempts to talk to each student about their topics.

2. How do you deal with students that have severe/chronic behavior issues in the classroom? What helps you to stay patient and motivated when things are difficult?

Teacher #1 I find that personal, one-on-one conversations with students are most helpful.

I try to be upfront in letting them know how their behavior makes their classmates/me feel. Sometimes I will chat with a student and then give them a choice to either talk to me and write about what they are feeling. Sometimes this little separation, me giving them space and allowing them to still express themselves, is very telling. I have had students track their behavior to help, too. Conversations with parents can be helpful (and telling, too), but I have found that those with chronic/severe behavior issues tend to have more issues when the parents are involved. Sometimes the behavior stems from home, most likely the way they are treated extends to the classroom or the school yard. Constant positive feedback and reiteration that the student can trust me is key. It takes time.

Being patient, letting some things go, and coming back every single time so the students see that I am there and won't give up on them is key. In several situations, having a class meeting where the students can express how the student's behavior is making them feel is so powerful. As long as the communication from the peers was gentle, kind and directed with good intentions, I have seen day and night switches in students behavior.

Talking to my colleagues, getting advice from behavior specialists, and administration is key as well. Sometimes having a teacher that the student previously connected with come back into the picture can be helpful. Allowing the student to go back to them for a visit or a daily check in with that teacher can help bridge a gap.

Breathing, believing, and reiterating that you're their ally, can make all the difference.

Teacher # 2 First rule is to never rise to their level of behavior. I also think that if you treat a behavioral issue the same as you would a physical wound, it helps in showing the student you care. Many times, behavioral issues are internal wounds that need to be healed. If we approach a behavior problem with “how can I help you?” or “how can I fix this?” I see a different response from students. Depending on the age and severity of the problem, and if I can get the student calm, I try to recreate the scenario and almost role-play to get a different result.

3. What information (on the child's background) is the most helpful from the family/counselor/administrators when you have students with learning or emotional disabilities in your class? What is the best way they can support you?

Teacher # 1 Learning the family situation is key. Most behavior issues stem from how the child is treated at home. Going back to the previous teacher to see what behavior management worked in their classroom. Most counselors will keep information private, but can offer general behavior management accommodations. If the child frequented the principal’s office, asking the administration for their observations and advice is helpful as well.

I have found that asking the child straight out what works in the classroom for them and what doesn’t work is very powerful.

Teacher # 2 I do like knowing processes that have been successful in the past. However, I also don’t like to know details about past behaviors. I like to be able to give the student

the opportunity to have a fresh start. Also, if parents (or other teachers, case-managers, etc) know that the student is already having a bad day, knowing to not push or to expect too much can be extremely helpful.

4. What lesson plans, activities, programs have you worked with or tried that you feel were successful in helping students with social/emotional health and learning?

Teacher # 1 Running a Morning Meeting each morning is helpful. Giving the students the tools, forum, and guidelines on how to share their feelings safely in class with their peers and teacher is key. Giving all a safe place to express themselves and defending those who have that “violated” for lack of better word, is important too. I have found Second Step, Soul Shop, and Mind Up to be helpful resources. Students enjoy hearing from outside speakers, as well.

Teacher # 2 Mindful minutes! I started this in a remedial math class. The students had very little success in math in previous years and the class was right after lunch. The students would come in and I would turn off the lights. We would go through a series of breathing exercises that only took a few minutes of class time. I did not make the students participate, just asked that they remain quiet so others could. The first 2 weeks was difficult because the students really resisted. By the 4th week, most of the students were participating. About 2 months into the program I didn’t do it one day and the students all begged for it!

I also loved teaching a lesson on Origami. We used YouTube so that we could pause, rewind and retry the activity. It also showed that you could make mistakes and go back and fix the mistakes.

5. If you have a child in your class that you know has a difficult home life or has been exposed to adverse childhood experiences, how do you best support them? How do you hold them accountable to learn and be responsible while still being empathetic to their situation?

Teacher # 1 Give them grace. Listen and don't talk back, just listen. Sometimes, when you give that grace, allow a pass on an assignment as it may be, all of a sudden, you can see a student step up to do better by you, the teacher, because you allowed that grace which they may have not received from another teacher/adult in charge. When you acknowledge that increase in work/productivity and relate it to how they are doing better for themselves, how it's improved a mindset, that reflection for them can be powerful. Setting/writing down goals can be helpful, but it's important to follow through at each step. When the student sees you are truly following through with the support, that can make all the difference. Many times, the issue can be about trust. As a teacher, you really need to work hard on gaining and holding that trust. The smallest negative comment or drop on holding up your end of the bargain and make all that hard work disappear.

Teacher # 2 First of all, we as teachers have to know that sometimes the most we can do for some students is show them an adult that cares about them. It may mean that emotionally they are not ready to fully accept learning the content. With a student like this, I hold them accountable to different standards, attendance, participation, responding, etc. Accountability can look different for each student. As for content, being creative with allowing a student to choose how to demonstrate their knowledge is also important.

6. In an ideal world, what resources would teachers have access to that could help them foster and create the most supportive learning environment for all students regardless of race, background, or disabilities?

Teacher # 1 Smaller class sizes! This would help create more contact time, more one-on-one time, to help students. Having a social emotional program run throughout a district with proper training for ALL so the language and steps are the same throughout schools and grade levels would be amazing too. Then again, not all social emotional programs fit each school's needs the same, but it would be amazing if there was one out there that did. We need more counselors available to help with larger issues and then time for counselors to help bridge communication for the teacher and student when needed. Always, more training for teachers with the ever changing needs that arise.

Teacher # 2 This is difficult. After 20 years of education I still don't feel like I have truly been trained on how to deal with all students' backgrounds. And I'm not sure it'll ever happen. I think in an ideal world we would have more counselors and therapists in

education that could provide the supports students need. I'm not sure teachers (especially content-specific teachers) are going to ever become professionals in this area.

7. Keeping in mind that statistics show that students who feel connected to their school, classroom and teacher have lower dropout/failure rates and less behavioral problems is there anything else that comes to mind or that you want to share? Especially for new teachers and or administrators creating policies/programs and allocating funds?

Teacher # 2 I have had classes of as few as 10 to as many as 36. I have found that a smaller-class size, for me, allows me to connect with students more personally. What's interesting to me is that every time I have ever mentioned this to an administrator or district-level manager I always get the same response: "There is no data to prove that smaller class-size improves learning". I find this extremely difficult to believe. Perhaps the answer is that if teachers are taught how to build the best connections with students and the class sizes are smaller than we will see improved learning.

Section 2: Creating Meaningful Connections as an Intervention

Much research has been done on high school dropout rates and the relationships/connection students feel to the school to look for patterns and correlations. As stated in the enclosed literature review, students who feel connected to their school and perceived as a meaningful part of the community experience far fewer adverse outcomes, (Naomi N. Duke, 2018). Knowing that and acknowledging how we work to create these connections with students is of crucial importance. Naomi N. Duke, 2018 found the following factors increase students perception of feeling connected and reduced adverse outcomes; having adult mentors available on campus, creating opportunities for flexibility in the learning environment where appropriate depending on the individual student circumstances, fostering a positive learning environment, creating opportunities for student, family and community involvement in the development of curricula, supporting the professional development of teachers and staff on the diverse emotional, developmental, academic and social needs of the student and lastly reviewing disciplinary policies to ensure they are fair and equitable.

There are many ways to create a connection with students depending on the teacher, age group and community. Author Tara Brown, (2018) suggests these four ways of strengthening a connection: learn and use students names as quickly as possible, make emotional deposits by smiling, complementing, giving a quick high 5, be a great CEO (Chief Emotional Officer) by creating a stable, consistent learning environment, embrace a strengths-based approach by finding out students interests and emphasizing on their strengths and translate them into the classroom. Joshua Block, author of "Making a School About Connection" (2014), suggests similar approaches suggesting "to create meaningful experiences and possibilities for students, let's begin by recognizing them as people and remaking schools and classrooms to value the

human experience." Block's (2014) work suggests that this work is rarely done after the early years of elementary and is still equally important in higher grades. His suggestions include

- checking in with students regularly,
- creating a classroom of respect,
- being present for students in an authentic way,
- alleviating feelings of marginalization,
- responding to students' work with kindness and validation and making it fun.

The Inclusion Lab, a program by Brooks Publishing (2020) gives five universal practices to support young children's positive behaviors. The first concept is to use a 5:1 ratio of encouraging comments to every one time you comment or correct challenging behavior. Second to always use a predictable schedule. This is important for all students but especially at risk students who may have had a traumatic past with unpredictable people and events. Establishing routines within routines is explained as a way to think carefully about the developmental goals you have for your students and make sure the routines provide opportunities for children to practice skills related to that goal. As a team or individual teacher it is shown to be effective if the behavioral expectations are taught and not just expected. Model these behaviors and point them out when you see them. Lastly the program discusses ways to teach peer-related social skills in a supported environment with adult cues and guidance.

Creating a journal for students to write in and reflect on daily can be an excellent way to build rapport with students as well, see appendix for suggestions. Other suggestions for students with traumatic backgrounds would be for the class to do a "lifemap" so they can reflect and decide how much they want to share with the class, those assignments should never be a mandatory share as some students may only want the teachers to see or maybe no one at all. An

activity that can help students with disabilities is to ask those students if they would like to do a report on their disability and share it with the class. If done right, with compassion these projects can offer students a great outlet to share and often their peers will be more empathic and show compassion for the remainder of their schooling together. Example, if a student has ADHD or Dyslexia and felt up to it, they could become an expert on this topic and do a presentation to the class. No matter how you work to support students, it's important to ensure that students have a relationship with at least one adult in the school. “Only 56 percent of students said that they could go to a staff person for help with school problems; only 41 percent said that they could talk to an adult in school about personal problems” California Now, (2020). Increasing those numbers will positively influence the students' probability of graduating.

In working with students with disabilities such as ADHD there are several tips and interventions that work well for a variety of disabilities. “In 2016, an estimated 6.1 million U.S. children 2–17 years of age (9.4%) had ever received an ADHD diagnosis.” Melissa L. Danielson, (2018). These students have been found to have much higher discipline incidents and dropout rates. “Nearly one-third of students with the most common type of ADHD either drop out or delay high school graduation. That rate is twice that of students with no psychiatric disorder.” Healthy Day News, (2010). Given that information it is imperative that educators are well versed in ADD/ADHD symptoms, how they present and how best to work with this student population. Having this information and knowing what to expect can reduce students drop out rates significantly. As with many other disorders having a teacher that understands who you are and why you act the way you do can create a positive connection and feeling of support for the student. The following information written by Edward Hallowell, (2012) was presented during a

course on Assessment and Treatment of Children with Professor Mary Jane Landolina at Dominican University.

- Set up predictable schedules and rules. All children need structure, but for those who have ADHD, schedules and rules are as essential as maps and roads are for drivers. Without them, these kids can get completely lost.
- Have kids with ADHD sit near you. Being physically close to the teacher increases a student's level of attention. Being far away makes it easier to lose track of what's going on.
- Break down large tasks into small ones. A large task can intimidate anyone, but it completely bamboozles and overwhelms the student with ADHD, which can lead him or her to give up or suffer a meltdown.
- Introduce new material in terms of old. For example, "Today we start studying fractions. Fractions are just division written differently, and you've already mastered division."
- Balance structure with novelty, so that when the class gets overstimulated you introduce structure, and when the class gets bored you introduce novelty. Too much new material gets confusing, and too much drill gets boring.
- Make sure the class gets recess, and provide frequent brain breaks (brief periods of exercise in which students stand near their desks or stations). Physical exercise, even for one minute, presses the reset button on the brain and refreshes students mentally.

“Make sure students with ADHD know you like them and are on their side. These kids really need you. You can help them turn what could be disastrous outcomes into spectacular successes. Helping kids with ADHD excel takes a lot of time and energy. But your energy is much better

spent if you think of your work not as treating a disability, but as helping your students unwrap a gift” Edward Howell (2012). No matter the disability or situation, creating a connection with your student and ensuring they feel connected and valued will help them to be successful and navigate their journey through school.

Section 3: Cultural Competence as an Intervention

Human beings across cultures need to feel heard and understood,” Marbell-Pierre.

Having students with diverse backgrounds in your classroom can be such a gift and such a value when everyone feels respected and connected. It can also be a source of tension for teachers and embarrassment when they feel they don't understand the culture or speak the language. A blog from the website Imagine Learning, Author Unknown (2010) that offers many resources for teachers suggests these six tips for teaching in a Diverse Classroom:

- Learn about your own culture
- Learn about your students’ culture
- Understand your students’ linguistic traits
- Use the above knowledge to inform your teaching
- Use Multicultural books and materials to foster cross-cultural understanding
- Know about your students’ home and school relationships

These tips are a great start; understanding your own bias can also be helpful. It's important not to ignore the differences but also not to point to them or use them as an example in class. If at a loss or if you don't understand something, it can be helpful to ask for guidance. Several books on this topic have been written; see appendix.

Classrooms are more diverse than ever before, yet so many teachers are untrained and unsupported in educating students with diverse backgrounds. Major themes regarding teaching in diverse classrooms are pointed out in the article "Policies and Pedagogies for Students of Diverse Backgrounds" by Ibrahima Diallo (2016). Many educational policies do not address the needs and issues that many of our diverse students face. The policies are outdated and focus on the

ideologies of the dominant culture. The textbooks and curricula can also be silent about or insensitive to some aspects of diverse students' backgrounds. This can make students lose interest or, even worse, feel ignored. Texts for your classroom should represent the students you teach and be sensitive and up to date. They should be sensitive to the student's cultural history and offered in the language they are most comfortable speaking or given resources to access/understand the information. It is suggested in the article, Diallo (2016) that the following considerations should be made.

- The need for policies to acknowledge diversity and outline clear pedagogies to reflect diversity in the classrooms.
- The importance for curricula and textbooks to be carefully designed and selected so that they acknowledge and include diversity, especially linguistic and cultural variations in the context of foreign language teaching.
- The need for teachers to be educated to be able to go beyond prescribed curricula and textbooks in search of variety and diversity in their classroom activities.
- The necessity to provide teachers and students with opportunities to critically reflect and further their knowledge and experiences with diverse classrooms.

Section 3: Family and Home Life, Understanding the Background

"The family is the most effective and economical structure for nurturing and sustaining the capacity of human beings to function effectively in all domains of human activity—intellectual, social, emotional, and physiological"- Urie Bronfenbrenner. When we think about creating interventions, there should be a component to support and involve the families. School staff should be trained on including parents; there are several programs out there (such as Project Appleseed, projectappleseed.org) that offer resources and ideas on how to involve all parents and not just a select few. One article on barriers and benefits to family involvement stated the following very clearly. "Children of involved families also graduate at higher rates and are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education programs" Riggins-Newby, (2004).

Another option for parents that have children with externalizing behavior problems (**externalizing behavior problems** refers to a grouping of behavior problems that are manifested in children's outward behavior and reflect the child negatively acting on the external environment (Campbell, Shaw, & Gilliom, et al., 2001) is to participate in parent training. Many insurance companies such as Kaiser (kp.org), which is here in CA, and individual counties offer free parenting classes. When parents can learn techniques to work with their children at home, it can positively affect their behavior in the classroom (Weber, Beck & Christiansen, 2018). The *California Now Report Card* (2020) reports that 69% of parents say they would use more positive parenting strategies if only they knew them.

When it comes to youth in foster care or the juvenile justice system, we know that they seriously lack emotional support. We often have to rely on the teachers and schools to provide that guidance and support. There are some efficient ways to provide this support. Merely telling

the student that you are there and that they can come to you if they need anything can actually go a very long way. Simply saying, what is it that you need from me can show them that you care.

The school and teacher can use some straightforward strategies to engage families and the community. Here are a few from *The Inclusion Lab*, (Brooks Publishing, 2019); send personalized letters home, ask parents the best way to communicate with them, keep a communication log, phone home (with good news or just to say hi), ask if a home visit is preferable (check with the student also), come up with solutions together, invite parents into your classroom. Creating a strong connection to the family can help the student feel more valued and understood and show that they can trust you.

Section 4: School Site Professional Development

School districts can choose many different ways to support their students and teachers in providing these supportive connection interventions. Below is a useful list of programs that are aimed at creating a strong student/school connection. One example of a program, *City Connects Intervention* (Boston College, 2010), provides intervention by working with families to connect them with the resources already in their community. They provide comprehensive student support that addresses the students' individual needs and connects them with interventions and coordinators. The coordinator meets with the school staff, and the plan is reviewed each academic year. This program uses a strengths-based model and is tailored to the student's social/emotional/behavioral developments. Funding these programs can be difficult, although there are grants available. The second program is a toolkit of easily accessible resources for teachers based on a restorative approach. Five main practices involve the class coming to safe agreements and respecting each other while processing each activity. The last program listed is for younger students and is based on positive behavior theories.

All teachers should be trained in trauma-informed practices and be supported in assessing and identifying students who have been exposed to or are currently experiencing trauma. Teachers should also be given resources on how to help students dealing with home/food insecurity and have a plan for addressing these students' needs in class. We can't pretend these issues don't affect a student's ability to perform academically. In an ideal world, teachers would be given time (by the district/union contract) to set up meetings with each of their students in the first few school weeks. They could have time to chat and discuss what barriers there may be to the student's success in class and just an opportunity to connect with the teacher.

School districts should also be offering teachers and staff support and training on immigrant students. In the appendix, there is a resource from the county of Marin. In California last year, there were 4,195,000 students from immigrant families in our schools. These children have varying levels of comfort and familiarity with our school system and need to feel valued by our school communities to succeed. "Immigrants and refugees face numerous challenges, including financial hardship and poverty, home instability, and family separation. Because of the violence and systematic discrimination that they endure, clinical levels of trauma and anxiety are normal. Such factors make learning about immigrants and refugees an emotional experience." Fernando Estrada, Ph.D., 2014.

Table 1 School Site Programs

Program	Overview	Access/Link
School Connect	A Program specifically for High School students on social-emotional learning. Has 80 ready to use lessons designed to strengthen relationships.	www.school-connect.net *Sample lesson attached in appendix
Panorama Education - Restorative Practices Toolkit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Proactive Circles</i> - <i>Respect Agreements</i> - <i>Dialogue Circles</i> - <i>Restorative Inquiry</i> - <i>Re-Entry Circles</i> 	https://go.panoramaed.com
Brooks Inclusion Lab	5 Universal Practices to Support Young Children's Positive Behavior	www.brookeinclusionlab.com

Conclusion

In concluding this manual, it's essential to reflect on the vast and complex aspects of teaching in general and impossible to ignore the added stressors teachers face during this current pandemic. Working on this manual while working with my Adult Education Students and concurrently watching my own children struggle through distance learning has given me and the entire world a better perspective on just how important teachers are to our society.

Unfortunately, it has shed a very bright light on how broken the education system is in California. The lack of funding and stressed infrastructure have literally broken down, and our children are the ones who will suffer. There is an enormous responsibility that comes with choosing to be in education under normal circumstances, and that responsibility can feel overwhelming at times. This manual is limited in its ability to provide all that is needed to address the complex problems of education in California. Still, I am hopeful that it can be a useful resource and a starting point for the hard conversations on why our children fail and how we can better address those students' needs.

The past year has also been a pivotal time in the long fight for equality and shown the ramifications of people of color not graduating at the higher average rates can have on our society. I genuinely believe that if we could wrap our arms and minds around all children from the start and create strong and trusting connections, we would see the benefits of that for years to come. The school and surrounding community should be a place where children feel safe and welcomed, so they are free to learn and thrive, getting to the point where everyone thinks that safety is something we have made significant progress on; there is still a lot more to be done. Bringing awareness is something I feel passionately about; so many beautiful books and

insightful lessons have been developed, and if teachers are given the time and money to access these children would benefit greatly.

Statistics

Graduate Counts and Rates by Student Group

Released by: California Department of Education 2020

This chart showing California High School Dropout rates shows the stark reality of an equity gap and a sad reality for our Foster Youth, Homeless Youth and Students with Disabilities suffering the worst percentages. Implementing interventions and connecting these students to an advocate who can assure the family/student is receiving services and aware of resources is imperative.

Table 2 2020 California Graduation Counts/Rates

Ethnic/Racial Designation or Program	2020 Graduate Count	2020 Graduation Rate
African American	21,431	76.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	2,043	75.8%
Asian	41,931	92.6%
Filipino	13,119	92.4%
Hispanic or Latino	218,460	82.2%
Pacific Islander	2,035	84.4%
White	99,722	87.9%
English Learners	48,613	69.1%
Foster Youth	4,706	58.2%
Homeless Youth	24,297	69.7%
Students with Disabilities	40,918	68.4%
Statewide Totals		84.3%

Data and Statistics from the 2020 California Children’s Report Card (Children Now, 2020).

*It is important for educators to understand and know the statistics unique to the area they are teaching and to use these statistics to guide their lessons/classroom management styles.

- “Due to inadequate access to needed services and supports, students identified with disabilities are less likely to graduate from high school than other students.”
- “State funding for special education is not keeping up with caseload. The most common student disabilities are learning, speech, and language disabilities.”
- “Childhood trauma can negatively impact long-term physical and mental health and wellness.”
- “Children with 4 or more ACEs are 27% more likely to not have a college degree.”
- “More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of youth experienced trauma prior to involvement with the juvenile justice system and are further traumatized if they are incarcerated.”
- “Only 57% of California’s 9th graders report a caring relationship with at least one adult at school.”
- “Schools with more students in poverty and students of color have more vacant teaching positions and teachers with substandard credentials.”
- “Mental illness is the #1 reason California kids are hospitalized.”
- “There are high levels of chronic sadness and suicide ideation reported among all students; students who are lesbian, gay and bisexual report even higher levels.”
- “In California 43% of students are from low-income families.”
- “In California 61,501 students in 2020 were in foster care.”
- “In California, 4,195,000 students are from immigrant families.”

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Appendix A
Sample Lesson Plans For Teachers

Cultural Diversity

Lesson Author: Allison Milewski

<http://archive.pov.org/singingwithangrybird/lesson-plan/>

Singing with Angry Bird

Student Handout A: Cultural Competence Page 1

“Cultural competence” describes our ability to interact effectively with people who have cultural experiences, beliefs, practices, values, ways of communicating and traditions that are different from our own.

Awareness:

- Being comfortable with the differences that exist between ourselves and people we encounter and not presuming our values and expectations are superior.
- Understanding that we cannot make assumptions based on our very limited sets of cultural experiences
- Seeking assistance from a member of a new culture who can help us understand the community and how to interact respectfully

Knowledge:

- Understanding the cultural, political and social factors that influence how people from another culture interact and communicate
- Being aware of and navigating the power structures related to social class, gender, race, caste and so on
- Identifying specific information about another culture that will improve communication and mutual understanding

Skills:

- Learning about multiple aspects of a culture through research, tutoring, participation and collaboration
- Communicating accurately and appropriately through speech, gestures and writing (including seeking assistance from community members when necessary)

Singing with Angry Bird Student Handout A: Cultural Competence Page 2

Instructions: Watch the film and note characters, scenes and quotes who/that demonstrate the three elements of cultural competence:

AWARENESS	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS
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Journal Prompts for Teens and Adults

Creative Resilience Counseling 2020

1. What is the best compliment you have ever received?
2. In your opinion, what is the best song ever written?
3. If you could know one thing about the future, what would it be?
4. What is something you feel nervous about right now?
5. What is your happiest memory?
6. What is something that you did that you are proud of?
7. I get mad when...
8. What calms you down when you get mad or upset?
9. What is something that went right today/this week?
10. If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?
11. Name two ways you can show self-control at school, at work, or at home.
12. What would be the title of your autobiography?
13. If you had to pick one song to play continuously, non-stop, in the background of your life, what would it be?
14. What is one item you can't live without?
15. If you could add, change, or cancel one rule in your school/work, what would it be?
16. If you could add, change, or cancel one rule at home, what would it be?
17. Who do you trust the most and why?
18. Where do you feel the most safe and why?
19. What is one word you would use to describe your family and why?
20. How do you think others view you? Why?
21. If you could travel back in time to three years ago and visit your younger self, what advice would you give yourself?
22. What do you like the most about yourself?
23. Tell about a time when you felt sad. What helped you get through it?
24. What is the first symptom you notice when you feel mad? Stressed?
25. Who is someone you consider a real-life hero and why?
26. Who do you wish you had a better relationship with, and what would make it better?
27. List 10 things that make you smile.
28. When things seem tough, I want to remember _____.
29. What is something that you have overcome?
30. What do you think your life would look like if you didn't have anxiety or depression (or something else)?
31. Write the words that you need to hear.
32. What does your best day look like?
33. What would you like to be remembered for?
34. Build a list of 15 songs that can help change your mood.
35. Write about three of your best talents.
36. List three things that you would do if you weren't afraid.
37. What are five things that help you feel better when things are difficult?
38. Write about 10 things you are grateful for.
39. What is your favorite memory?
40. Choose one thing that triggers your anxiety or depression, and write about a few ways that you can combat this trigger.
41. What makes you happy?
42. How do you define yourself?
43. What is one fun fact about yourself?
44. What is going right in my life?
45. What's bothering me? Why?
46. One goal I want to set for myself this month...
47. What does success look like to you?
48. What makes you feel truly alive?
49. What do you want your life to look like in five years? 10 years?
50. What am I afraid of? Why?

Simple Ways to Build a Connection With Your Students:

- Have students write a poem using 30 words to describe themselves.
- Have students do an autobiography about themselves and their lives and share with a partner or the class if they would like, can also ask if they would like to just share with you.
- Go to students sporting or extracurricular activities.
- Meet with students and their caregivers, even if its not conference week.
- Have students do a report about their disability if they have one and feel inclined to educate the class. For example if a child has ADHD and wants the class to know what that feels like for them or how to help them in the class, empower them to be the expert and share. Obviously at their own pace and will.
- Have students help create class rules and norms, including everyone.
- Go into the community with your class, take as many field trips as possible.
- Be mindful of different cultures and languages and celebrate those as much as possible.
- Check in with students often and casually.
- Don't be afraid to ask students, "What do you need from me?", "How do you learn best?"
- Pay attention to students' moods and what's going on with them at home, if you see red flags talk to your administrator or counselors.
- When you need guidance, ask for it.
- Use students names, disclose some information about yourself when you see fit.
- Have fun, let creativity happen and be consistent.

Appendix B

Resources for Educators

The table below has important implications for educators. Knowing the developmental stages and norms for each age can help a teacher know what to expect and how to support the child's goals for each stage. Teachers should be encouraged to learn about the stages and theories of development for children in the age groups they are teaching.

Table 3 Developmental Stages and Norms (McDevitt and Ormrod, 2007)

Age Range	Typical Characteristics	Implications for Teachers
Early Childhood Ages 2-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of babyish appearance - Endless energy for gross motor skills, likes running, hopping, climbing - Acquire more fine motor skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide ample opportunities to play outside or in the gym. - Give Children rest and quiet time after activity. - Encourage fine motor skills through puzzles, blocks and crafts - Choose a variety of activities to appeal to all children
Middle Childhood 6-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in height and weight. - Sophistication of gross motor skills and incorporation of them into structured play. - Participation of organized sports. - Increase in fine motor skills like writing and drawing. - Athletic talents and interests begin to show themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrate physical movement into school activities - Provide day to day opportunities for self-organized play. - Teach children the basics of various sports. - Encourage children to participate in various organized sports. - Encourage the practice of fine motor skills.

Age Range	Typical Characteristics	Implications for Teachers
Early Adolescence 10-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Period of rapid growth. - Beginning of puberty, may be self-consciousness about appearance and body changes. - Boys can be increasingly aggressive. - Young teens differ greatly in terms of strength, endurance, talent and skill. - Visible gender differences arise. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Act as a role model in terms of physical fitness and health. - Allow for privacy when changing for sports, PE. - Explain the concepts of sexual harassment and that it should not be tolerated in any circumstance. - Encourage students to participate in leisurely activities that will use their time and skills wisely.

Resources from Marin County on Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Students

Table 4 Lesson Objectives for Teachers with Immigrant/Refugee Students Authored by Fernando Estrada, Ph.D., For the Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL) School of Education Loyola Marymount University, 2017 (<https://www.californianstogether.org/>)

	Objective 1	Objective 2
Lesson 1 Relational Support	<i>Key aspects of interpersonal support</i>	<i>Strategies to optimize trust</i>
Lesson 2 Asking and Responding: <i>Thoughts</i>	<i>How to probe with open questions</i>	<i>Responding supportively</i>
Lesson 3 Asking and Responding: <i>Feelings</i>	<i>How to probe with open questions</i>	<i>Responding supportively</i>
Lesson 4 Student Emotional Stress	<i>Key aspects of emotional stress</i>	<i>Strategies to respond to</i>

Table 5 Online Resources for Educators

Website/Name	Information Available	Student Demographic
https://www.marinschools.org Social Emotional Learning	Links to several sites on social emotional learning for students, through art, lesson plans, activities, free printables	All age groups
Social-emotional-learning-activities www.centervention.com	Centervention - 75 FREE Social Emotional Learning Activities (ready to use)	- Sorted by age group
CDE-Resources for Students in Crisis https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/cg/mh/studentcrisishelp.asp	- teen & youth help hotline - crisis lines (suicide, help, transgender support) - trauma support/networks -teen mental health guide Self - care for educators	-teens and young adults -educators -parents/families
https://wideopenschool.org Wide Open School	- emotional well being - diversity	- sorted by age group
www.gettingsmart.com	- Developing connections with students - equity/access	- articles for educators of all grade levels
https://educatorsusa.org	Diversity Education and Lesson Planning for Teachers (Cross Cultural)	- Focuses on grades 5-8

Appendix C

Reading List for Educators

Recommended Reading List for Educators

1) *Ferrari Engines, Bicycle Brakes* By: Edward Hallowell

Advice to educators about how to help students with ADHD fulfill the potential of their powerful brains.

2) *Prevent-Teach-Reinforce for Young Children* by: Glen Dunlap, Ph.D., Kelly Wilson, B.S., Phillip S. Strain, Ph.D., Janice K. Lee.

Summary: The Early Childhood Model of Individualized Positive Behavior Support: Home Early Childhood“ Resolve persistent behavior challenges in early childhood settings with this practical guide to the popular Prevent-Teach-Reinforce for Young Children (PTR-YC) model, ideal for strengthening social-emotional development in preschool children.”

3) *Hanging In: Strategies for Teaching the Students Who Challenge Us Most*, by: Jeffrey Benson (2014)

4) *Connecting with Students*, by: Allen N. Mendler, 2001

5) *The Knowledge Gap: The hidden cause of America's broken education system--and how to fix it*. Natalie Wexler Aug 2019, Penguin Publishing

Appendix D

Sample Student Surveys

Teacher Survey Idea

This could be done confidentially twice a year so that students feel like they have a chance to feel heard and help promote changes when they aren't feeling understood/valued.

Please rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 10. 1 being disagree, 10 being absolutely agree or somewhere in the middle.

1. I feel valued by the students in our class.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE								AGREE	

2. I feel valued by the teacher.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE								AGREE	

3. I feel like my culture is understood and respected in our class.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE								AGREE	

4. I feel like my teacher cares about me and my education.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE								AGREE	

5. I feel comfortable in my classroom around other students on campus.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE								AGREE	

6. I feel excited to come to class each day.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE								AGREE	

7. I feel safe to participate in class discussions.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE								AGREE	

8. I feel like there is an adult on this campus I could go to if I have a problem.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE								AGREE	

9. I feel that I am learning new concepts and am capable of keeping up with the work.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE					AGREE				

10. I feel confident that I can be successful in this class.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
DISAGREE							AGREE		

If you would like to set up a meeting with me, you are free to leave your name and I will reach out to you to discuss this survey and your concerns. _____ (name, optional)

Please feel free to write any other comments you have regarding this class environment and your experiences.

--

What are some questions or concerns you would like on the next survey?

--

Student Interest Activity/Project

This could be used at the start of school or any point during the year. You can ask students if they want to present or just share with you. You can make this into a project, a poem, a power-point. Be creative, have fun!

1. Where did you grow up?
2. Where were you born?
3. What is one thing you want us to know about you?
4. How do you learn best?
5. What does the word family mean to you?
6. What role do friends play in your life?
7. How do you learn best?
8. What is the best place for you to do your work?
9. What is something that comes to mind that is a happy memory?
10. What do you look forward to in the future?
11. What is your favorite subject?
12. Where is one place you hope to visit one day?
13. How can I best support you in our class?
14. Who is someone you can trust?
15. What occupation/s interests you?