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Preventing Students who are At Risk from Dropping out of School

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Preventing Students who are At Risk from Dropping out of School.

A senior thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts
in Humanities.

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Abstract

Preventing Students who are At Risk from Dropping out of School.

Over the course I have spent at Dominican, I have experienced a shift in the way I think. The academic journey I have traveled has brought me a point of rediscovery of who I am. With my degree I will obtain in the near future, I plan on teaching at-risk students, regardless of their age or placement in school. This paper allows me to explore the overall theme of students whom are at risk of dropping out of school. Various topics throughout my paper are discussed: the correlation between poverty and the impact it has on students' performance in school, substance abuse, crime, refugees, and bullying. I provide possible and realistic solutions with every topic. I also include experiences from my life in order to make connections between my education I have received, and why I want to teach.

Preventing Students who are At Risk from Dropping out of School.

According to Statistic Brain.com, “8,300 high school students in America drop out each day.” In addition, 75% of all crimes in America are committed by people who do not have a high-school diploma. How can so many students be dropping out of school daily? Why is America as a whole letting this happen? What is the best solution to this problem? The only solution to combating high-school students from dropping out is to become involved somehow. After I graduate with a degree from Dominican University of California, I intend to teach high school students who are at risk of failure. However, my knowledge is limited in the understanding as to why students throughout America drop out of high school. In order to grasp a better understanding, my intention is to explore the problems and challenges faced by students who are at risk of dropping out of school. I first want to identify the challenges and understand what exactly an “at-risk” student is. Then I want to identify ongoing solutions that are currently being used to prevent high school students from dropping out. I will also include my personal experience or knowledge of each topic I discuss.

In order to address the need for social change within our nation, I find it important to explain the reason I feel it’s necessary to speak out for at-risk students, especially in California. I have been an at-risk student since the first grade. I have found since childhood that attending school has been an ongoing struggle. I was such a disruptive student that I can hardly remember spending any time in class at all. Missing class time because of my behavior problems has led me to miss out on the experience of being a complete and true student. Therefore, it has left me with

the effects of learning gaps. Incidentally, I have overcome these limitations. My intention is to become a teacher and assist at-risk students by overcoming their own academic issues in order to graduate and move on with their lives, so they can be productive people in society.

It is fitting to explain the current situation of at-risk students dropping out at the rate of one every 26 seconds of every day, and the problem of why must be addressed. There are many reasons why high school students drop out of school.

Poverty is possibly the most destructive way to hinder a child's ability to attend school. "Poverty is considered the most devastating reason why 'at-risk' students even exist" (Leroy & Symes 36). There are many school districts in American that are very poor. In part, there is a correlation between the revenue a city receives from property taxes and the funding for school districts per student. "On a national level, nearly half of all property-tax revenue goes to public school. As a result, most districts rely heavily on local funding. In the richest school districts, up to 90% of the school district budget is from residents' taxes" (Sauter). The concept of poverty is complex. Furthermore, what economics does is to create a baseline for students on how much attention they receive in school financially. Funding translates to opportunity for a child to successfully develop as a student and, ultimately, succeed academically.

Take Chappaqua Central School District, N.Y. The annual household income is \$198,382+, with households earning \$200,000+ at 55.7%, and households earning less than \$10,000 at 0.2%. The City is able to generate a large amount of revenue from its residents in order to fund its students. The average expenditure per student is \$24,705. Another interesting finding: "78% of adults in Chappaqua hold a bachelor's degree, which is more than three times the national average" (Sauter).

On the other hand, the poorest school districts are the direct opposite of the wealthiest school districts, but the triangular connection between household income, revenue collected by city from property taxes, and student funding still exists. Therefore, funding for students in poor school districts follows the same system as wealthy school districts. The only difference is that the amount of money provided to school districts by the city budget is extremely low. Take Santa Maria Independent School District, Texas. The median household income is \$17,576. The number of households earning \$200,000+ is 0%. With a local funding for the school district of only 6%, the expenditure per student is \$10,618. “Only 4.5% of the district’s adults have obtained bachelor’s degrees” (Sauter).

The cyclical connection between poverty, economics, and education is a real destructive force. How can the lack of funding of school districts throughout the nation impact our nation’s economy? “Each year’s class of dropouts will cost the country over \$200 billion during their lifetimes in lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue” (Economic Impacts of Dropouts). A more current figure of the destructive impact which high school dropouts have on our nation’s economy: “[T]he estimated tax revenue loss from every male between the ages of 25 and 34 years of age who did not complete high school would be approximately \$944 billion, with cost increases to public welfare and crime at \$24 billion” (Economic Impacts of Dropouts). The lack of funding of an education for children creates an even greater problem. It creates a burden for all Americans. According to an NPR journalist, “[I]t costs taxpayers nearly \$320 billion each year to make up for the lost wages, taxable income, health care payouts, welfare and costs of incarceration” (qtd. in Marion). In addition, high-school dropouts earn \$200,000 less than their high school counterparts who have graduated, and \$1 million less than college graduates. The dilemma that the nation faces is how much of an effect a college graduate has on the overall

economy. If high school dropouts financially make a low amount of wealth in their life and have a limited ability to be consumers, then they also “produce less taxable income for the state and federal government” (Marion).

As high-school dropouts find it difficult to support themselves, the chances of government assistance intervening in their lives increase. Again, this is due to their inability to graduate. “90% of jobs require a high-school diploma” (Marion). This leaves non-graduates a 10% opportunity of jobs they can choose from, and depending on how well the labor market is doing, the chances of finding a job could be unpromising. A lot of times, the inability of non-graduates being able to properly care for themselves “spills” over to the rest of society. Society has to pick up the financial cost of public assistance, such as welfare and health care.

One way that high school dropouts impact society is the financial loss of state and federal tax revenue. Dropouts typically do not perform as well as their high school graduate counterparts in “annual earnings, employment, and unemployment. [D]ropouts are estimated at 42 percent of what high school graduates pay in federal and state income taxes each year (\$1,600 and \$3,800, respectively)” (Princeton University). Over a lifetime, the financial loss can add up to \$60,000 per student. Theoretically, if we take a realistic group of 600,000 eighteen-year-old dropouts, the approximation of annual loss would be \$36 billion in state and federal income tax (Princeton University).

One way to approach this colossal problem is not for the federal government to take poverty head on, and hope that Congress will approve government aid programs in order to improve the quality of schools. Instead, states could directly fund education by taxing wealthy organizations, such as oil companies. In California, Senator Noreen Evens has proposed a bill that would enforce a 9.5 percent mining tax on companies that take out resources from the

ground or water in California. If passed, this bill could generate \$2 billion a year (New Revenue Proposal). Although this bill is specifically created for California State Universities, it would be a great idea for California to come up with a similar bill that could financially assist high-poverty districts as well.

Other efforts to consider how school districts are funded could include control of a state's budget. Unlike other states, California's educational system receives the majority of its funding directly from the state budget, rather than property taxes.

In January of 2014, California State Board of Education approved new funding guidelines of how monies are to be allocated in order to provide additional assistance to the "neediest schools" (Lambart & Kalb). Around the same time, Gov. Jerry Brown of California proposed his annual state budget. The budget included a 9.9% increase in school funding from K-12. This would provide \$4.6 billion towards schools most in need of financial assistance, such as "English Learner and low-income students or living in foster care" (Warner). In this year's proposal, funding on education would double from last year's. Opponents see Gov. Brown's proposal as being radical and unwise because low-income schools will be receiving priority funding. However, Gov. Brown sees his proposal as a compromise between California local districts, which request the most amount of control over how they choose to spend their money, and civil rights advocates who worry that the infusion will never reach the children it is supposed to help. What is more important, "they [school districts] establish a standard method for districts to determine what they are spending on such students now and how much they should be spending each year as the new funding formula is implemented over about seven years" (California School Funding Reform).

Recently, I had the opportunity to observe first-hand how California funds its students that are most in need. I was invited to observe high school students at a non-public school, Capital Academy. The school is located in Rancho Cordova, east of Sacramento, California. Capital Academy is a privately run school (K-12). What makes Capital Academy different from a traditional public school are several things. First, each child who attends has some type of behavioral issue that has led him/her to end up at Capital Academy. Second, 12 out of 17 school districts within Sacramento County financially pay for each student to attend Capital Academy. Lastly, the school provides a vocational education. The students are taught and trained in the necessary skills, so they can apply them to work and life outside of the classroom.

One of the initial questions I had going into the classrooms at Capital Academy was whether it is worth it for California to fund a school for students who have learning disabilities, behavioral issues, and come from dysfunctional families. Immediately, I knew I was at the right place. As soon as I was in the classroom with students who were struggling to pick up their pencil just to do their work, I felt a connection of how difficult it was to do something as a student that they didn't want to do. I could feel the overwhelming excitement of sharing with the students how challenging it was to sit still in class without causing a disruption as they did throughout the day. Within a half hour into the first session of class, I fell in love with how the teacher would optimistically struggle with each student to push through to the next assignment. I knew I had come to right place.

The connection between high school dropouts turning to crime and becoming incarcerated is real. This is due in part to the fact that high school dropouts lack the necessary skills to obtain a job or post education. "75% of America's state prison inmates are high school dropouts; 59% of America's federal prison inmates did not complete high school" (Harlow).

“High school dropouts are three and one-half times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested, and more than eight times as likely to be in jail or prison” (Fight Crime). The percentage of crime affiliated with high school dropouts is even higher in California – especially as it is the most populated state in America. In 2007-08, according to the California Department of Education estimates, 19 percent of students in a ninth-grade class (i.e., cohort) will drop out over a four-year period. The rates are even higher for Hispanics and African Americans, between 24 and 33 percent (Springer and Stuit 5). In 2007-08, grades 9-12, Hispanics had the highest dropout rate overall of any other ethnicity. However, in recent years, dropout rates have declined. The percentage is down 1.5%, but the problem still persists (Springer and Stuit 5).

I have seen firsthand the correlation between the close realities of how crime is associated with those who perform poorly in school. I always found my personal situation unique from the rest of my friends. Growing up with a father who was a police officer instilled a particular discipline in me that my friends didn't possess. First of all, most of my friends didn't have fathers, and for those who did, their relationship was poor. Secondly, the arrangement I had with my father was that if I was going to perform poorly in school and be disruptive in class, I would not get in trouble with the law. This arrangement I had with my father has lasted throughout my entire life. Unlike myself, all of my friends who I grew up with at some point or another got arrested or placed in a juvenile facility before they reached 18 years of age. I attribute their misguidance due in part to the fact that they did not receive the appropriate support from home, and their performance in school was way below substandard.

What I have learned from the experience of growing up with my neighborhood friends are several things. The only difference between myself and them is that I had a father who cared; I had someone who watched over me to make sure I didn't get into trouble like my friends; I had

someone who lectured me daily on how I should be performing better in school, and how I should take pride in my work. My father also taught me that I should feel sorry for my friends because they were lacking the love support from home. He explained how I should be compassionate to them and help them when I can. It is because of these reasons I attend Dominican, so I can help at-risk students who are in grave danger of dropping out. I feel the need to show that I have attained a degree, so I can go back and show students who perform poorly in school that it is possible to be successful.

What I have found through my research is that the solution to the national problem of crime in America is not to build more prisons, increase fines, implement more punishments, nor add harsher penalties. There is a way to prevent crime in America even before it happens. According to Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, “children who participate in a high-quality pre-kindergarten setting, have shown an increase in high school graduation rates by as much as 44 percent” (3). In addition to this interesting fact, “a 10 percentage-point increase in graduation rates have historically been shown to reduce murder and assaults by approximately 20 percent” (3). If somehow we as a country could decrease the male incarceration rate by 10%, it would save America almost \$10 billion savings of fighting crime each year (Waibel). Furthermore, Waibel shares “that 10 percent could also prevent over 3,400 murders and 172,000 aggravated assaults each year.”

“In 2000, New Jersey Supreme Court in *Abbott vs. Burke* mandated that the state establish high quality preschool education in the 31 highest-poverty school districts in the state” (The Abbott Preschool Program 1). At the time this educational mandate was implemented, the school districts were performing at a subpar level. “Less than 15% of pre-K classrooms were good to excellent and nearly 1 in 4 was less than minimal quality.”

Then in 2005-06, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) conducted a study to measure if any real progress had been made since the state mandate had been implemented. This is what the study found:

By 2007-08 the vast majority of classrooms were good to excellent; almost none were poor, with very few were even below a score of 4 (midway between minimal and good).

The Abbott model totally transformed the quality preschool education using essentially the same programs (2/3 private) and teachers—though many teachers went back to school for degrees and specialized training in return for higher pay, all received coaching. (The Abbott Preschool Program 1)

In California, the Kindergarten Readiness Act signed into law by Gov. Schwarzenegger in 2010 is underway. Similar to New Jersey's high school mandate to improve the quality of Pre-K education, California has created a new and exciting grade level, Transitional Kindergarten. The new grade level allows children to bridge preschool with kindergarten. Historically, California children have started kindergarten at an earlier age than the majority of other states (TKCalifornia). The primary goal of establishing this law is to insure that students are ready emotionally/socially and reduce the risk of failing academically. "It provides the gift of time that will help students build a strong foundation for success in elementary" (TKCalifornia).

On my recent visit with the high school class at Capital Academy in Rancho Cordova, one of the questions I had prepared to ask them was, did they ever attend or remember attending preschool or kindergarten? Out of the class of 17 male students, over 90% didn't remember attending preschool. Some remember attending kindergarten. In addition, there was a student who didn't pass kindergarten and even a child who was held back in the first grade. The response I received from the class as a whole was that the school experience from a very young age has

been a complete struggle. I found this to be shocking and parallel with my own personal experience. I, too, can recall how difficult it was for myself to attend preschool. In fact, this is where my own struggle with school began. I can recall how I told my mother I didn't want to go back to school at age five, because the teacher would punish me by hitting me when I did something wrong. Reflecting on my past, I would say that this is where my dislike for school and performing poorly began. The more time I spent with the Capital Academy students, the more I discovered the similarities between them and myself.

Another crisis our society faces with at-risk students is teen pregnancy. Close to one-third of high school girls who drop out of school refer to premature pregnancy as the main reason (Dropout Rates in the United States). Another startling fact: "3 in 10 teen American girls will get pregnant at least once before age 20. That's nearly 750,000 teen pregnancies every year" (11 Facts about Teen Pregnancy). The majority of young women who dropped out of school attended school districts with a graduation rate of 60% or less. The dropout rate for ethnic women in general is even greater. "One in two Native American female students, four in ten Black female students, and nearly four in ten Hispanic female students fail to graduate with a diploma each year" (When Girls Don't Graduate We All Fail). The responsibilities of high school parents can obstruct the opportunity of graduating. There are many obstacles high school parents face while attending school, such as discrimination, the challenge of juggling schoolwork with parenting responsibilities, and lack of access to child care, transportation, and other critical services. The accumulation of miscellaneous factors that impede a student's chance of graduating can be overwhelming and result in dropping out. In conjunction with teen pregnancy, female high school dropouts are considered economic risks. In connection with their risk status, women who have dropped out of school have a higher chance of unemployment. If a girl who has dropped out

of high school lacks the necessary skills in order to compete in the labor market, how is she going to support herself? How is she going to support her child?

In the last 20 years, America has seen a dramatic decrease in teen pregnancy. With a decline in birth rate of 52% from 1991, our nation is at a historic low across all ethnic levels. As of 2012, according to The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy:

- The teen birth rate among non-Hispanic white teens was 21 births per 1,000; a 6% decline from 2011 and a 53% decline from 1991.
- The teen birth rate among non-Hispanic black teens was 44 births per 1,000; a 7% decline from 2011 and a 63% decline from 1991.
- The teen birth rate among Hispanic teens was 46 births per 1,000 teens; a 7% decline from 2011 and a 56% decline since 1991.

These figures are also consistent with California's decline in teen pregnancy by 64% since 1991. "In the last year alone, the decline was 8%" (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy).

What are some of the ways our nation has been able to reduce teen pregnancy? As of 2009, the Obama administration began to fund "evidence-based programs" that were proven to work in the reduction of teen pregnancy. "The balance was set aside for developing promising strategies, technical assistance, evaluation, outreach, and program support" (Reducing Teenage Pregnancy 1). This was the first time federal monies were allocated for sexual education.

An alternative way to reduce teen pregnancy came from an unexpected method led by a well-known television channel, MTV. One of MTV's popular shows, *16 and Pregnant*, is

relatively popular with teen viewers. What is remarkable is that “according to a study conducted by Professors Melissa Kearney of the University of Maryland and Phillip Levine of Wellesley College released early this year, the MTV Teen Mom franchise did far more good than harm” (Goldstien). The professors used “Google trends” and “Twitter” to document responses of viewership. Along with this collection of data, they tracked and correlated their finds with contraception use or abortion as options to prevent unwanted pregnancy:

We find that *16 and Pregnant* led to more searches and tweets regarding birth control and abortion, and ultimately led to a 5.7 percent reduction in teen births in the 18 months following its introduction. This accounts for around one-third of the overall decline in teen births in the United States during that period. (Levine & Kearney)

Out of the 12 Capital Academy students I spoke with regarding the topic of teen pregnancy, only one shared that he was soon to be a father. I found this remarkable, because when I attended high school, a small continuation high school, three-fourths of either male and female students were parents. There were so many high school parents when I attended that we had a daycare specifically for the children of the teen mothers and fathers. Furthermore, I always felt uncomfortable with the students who had to miss out on the traditional experience of high school because they were parents. One of the ways I would address the problem with teen pregnancy would be to become a serious advocate of teen sports, especially for women. One of the greatest forms of pregnancy avoidance for teens is to either engage in sports or after-school program of some kind. I have seen studies where teens, especially women, who are active in sports can reduce their chances of getting pregnant by over 80%.

Another leading reason why at-risk students drop out of high school is substance use. “[C]linical experiences with substance-using adolescents reinforce the notion that drug use leads to declines in academic motivation, study habits, and goal-setting” (DuPont et al.). Adolescents who were in recovery have reported that as their drugs problems increased, they became dispassionate about school and became distant due to their affiliation with other kids who used drugs, rather than associating themselves with students doing well academically. In addition, there is a profound and negative cycle when a student uses drugs and is in academic risk of failing school. “Substance use influences the student’s relationship with the school, a feedback loop is created in which substance use undermines bonding to teachers and school engagement, which in turn contribute to academic failure, which in turn leads to further increases in substance use” (DuPont et al.). In addition, “according to the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Twelfth grade aged youths who had dropped out of school were more likely than similarly aged youths who were still in school to engage in current cigarette use, alcohol use, binge alcohol use, marijuana use, nonmedical use of psychotherapeutic drugs, and use of any illicit drugs” (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration).

California faces the same problems as the rest of the nation. “Results from the 2009–2010 California Healthy Kids surveys indicate that 58 percent of 11th graders in California report having used alcohol or drugs in the past six months” (Substance Use at School). That’s more than half of all kids having tried an illegal substance of some kind. Substance use has been connected to external problems outside of school, such as law enforcement issues (8.1%); attendance (6.8%); failure to come to class; and “engaging in unprotected sex” (8.4%) (Substance Use at School). Internal effects of drug use by at-risk students’ exposure to long term drug use possibly leads to acute cognitive difficulties, such as difficulty concentrating and sleep

disturbances. In turn, these negative effects cognitively could make it difficult to “function academically” (DuPont et al.). Other studies have found that large amounts of alcohol consumption can impair brain development. Furthermore, brain damage can lead to poor decision making, spatial and attention deficits (DuPont et al.).

The cognitive effects of drug use, ultimately, can lead to academic failure. These effects of substance abuse can set students on a downward spiral of failure. They no longer possess the ability to academically do well—at least well enough to pass—because of damage their brain has received from substance abuse.

One way to reduce teen substance abuse is to prolong the period before teens even try alcohol or drugs in the first place. “Research indicates that adolescents who begin drinking before age 14 are significantly more likely to experience alcohol dependence at some point in their lives compared to individuals who begin drinking after 21 years of age” (Preventing Adolescent Substance Abuse). How can prolonging the period before a student’s experience of trying alcohol or drugs affect their academic experience? “It would reduce the number of negative consequences, such as physical or sexual assault, unintentional injuries, memory problems, legal problems, and impaired school performance” (Preventing Adolescent Substance Abuse).

However, in order to prevent alcohol or drug use, parents, guardians, and teachers must be able to identify risk factors as to what leads to substance abuse in the first place. One way is to identify the students’ home environment. If students live in an environment where they are exposed to abuse of some form, such as neglect or physical abuse from their parents [ineffective parenting], then the students may be at risk for alcohol or drug use.

Another “risk factor” for students who are may be candidates for alcohol or drug use are children who lack social skills, or tend to display “inappropriate, shy or aggressive classroom behavior.” This is another telling sign that a child may not be able to appropriately conduct himself or herself in the classroom. There is a possibility that the student may lack the necessary social skills to interact with other students (Preventing Adolescent Substance Abuse).

Lastly, what I consider to be the most powerful way to determine if students are at risk of trying alcohol or drugs is to examine the students’ parents’ use of alcohol or drugs. Parents are a child’s first role model in life. Therefore, part of development of a child is to mimic or adopt his or her parents’ habits and customs. If a parent has an alcohol or drug problem, then by the children witnessing their parents’ inappropriate behavior of substance abuse, they most likely will adopt how their parents value and treat alcohol and drugs.

I have personally seen this directly. The majority of my friends, if not all of my friends growing up, drank before the age of 14, because their parents drank before the age of 14. I have seen how detrimental alcohol and drug abuse can be. I have been to rehabilitation homes to visit my best friend as he would try and try again to overcome his addiction with alcohol and drugs. Now, reflecting on my friend’s substance abuse problems, I clearly identify where his problem originated; it began with his father self-medicating with alcohol and drugs on a daily basis for years.

Reflecting on my past, I can now see how dangerous it was to be a teenager in high school:

A typical weekend night would begin with getting ready for a party by having a drink at the house. One of my friends would pick me up drunk while he was smoking marijuana. My friend who was driving would hand me a drink and marijuana. We both would drive and pick up

other friends who would join us in the car with their own alcohol and marijuana. We would then go to the store to pick up liquor or beer. We would wait until we found someone old enough to buy for us, because neither my friends nor I were 21 years of age. By the time we would get to the party we were so wasted.” A lot of times, my friends and I would party all week regardless if it was a weekday or not, and a lot of the parties we went to, the parents of our friends were partying with us.

Another growing concern to our nation is the growing acceptance of legalizing marijuana. America has come to an impasse, with the freedom of using marijuana for personal, recreational, and medicinal purposes and a government that is reconsidering its views and laws on how marijuana should be treated. With economic revenue in the billions from the possible state and federal taxes, we might consider, in the not too distant future, marijuana as a legal commodity that any American consumer can purchase. However, what has been overlooked is the impact it will have on children across America.

What Americans have not taken into account is the rising trend of marijuana use among teens. There is a misconception of marijuana use in American. Currently, the majority of Americans think marijuana use is down; however, this is not true. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, teens agree, “the growing perception of marijuana as a safe drug may reflect recent public discussions over ‘medical marijuana’ and movements to legalize the drug for adult recreational use in some states.” This attitude has led to an upward trend of marijuana use by teens (Illicit Drug Use).

Marijuana was a ubiquitous topic with the students at Capital Academy. Every classroom I sat in to observe, at least one student would bring up the use of marijuana or some other illegal drug. One young man I sat with most of the day would explain how difficult it was to be at

school. He felt school was such a waste of his time, because he could be out selling drugs, making money. The teacher would interrupt our conversation to praise the young man for coming to class instead of skipping class to go sell drugs. The teacher would continue to reinforce the student's choice for attending class with positive and motivational comments such as, "Come on, you can do it. You can do it! You have come so far. You only have a couple months until you graduate!"

While writing this segment of my paper, I have come to a realization that if I am going to teach, then I should create a "no drinking alcohol and no drug policy" for myself. I now believe my own personal prevention, especially concerning recreational alcohol consumption, will have a direct impact on the prevention of students and my own children experimenting or using alcohol or drugs in the future. The bottom line is that if we really want to make sure our future is headed in the right direction, then we must consciously be aware of how our personal habits affect the children around us (Illicit Drug Use).

Let's take the attention away from why students drop out of high school and focus attention on their parents. How do parents affect their children's success at school? Well, students spend 70% of their time away from school. Once a student is off the campus grounds, his or her time is the responsibility of the parent. "[T]wenty-three percent of high school dropouts shared the main reason as to why they dropped out of school is due to the 'encouragement' and 'support' of their parents" (Sheehy). How do parents retort to this statement? Furthermore, "21 percent [of parents] said they dropped out after having a child of their own, according to the survey... who have not completed high school..." (Sheehy). Clearly, there is a pattern of students who drop out of high school leading to the chances of their child dropping out of school as well.

Another consideration of why parents are not involved in their children's academic life is because parents' involvement actually declines as students grow older, so that it is less in secondary schools than in elementary (LaBahn). According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are several reasons why there is a decline of parents' involvement as children mature in age (edweek.org). Parents of children who are in middle school believe their children should be able to do their work on their own. Furthermore, the parents feel they are not experts (edweek.org). Also, parents feel their child has few too many teachers during a school day who really possess a full understanding of who their child is (Rutherford et al.). However, it might be that the parents are intentionally neglecting their children. "They simply may not have the time, resources, or know-how to help out" (LaBahn).

Even though I had very loving and supportive parents, a lot of the times they did not have the time to spend with me when I got home from school. They were busy working long and odd hours trying to support our family. By the time they got home, they were too tired to help me with my homework. There were also times when they felt my homework was too much of a challenge for them to help me with. In addition to this, if teachers did call, it was not to reach out and introduce themselves to my parents. It was always because I was disruptive in class, again, and how poorly I was doing in class. I remember holidays being the worst time of the year, especially Christmas. I can remember how teachers would always call before winter break to complain about my behavior, never providing to my parents solutions how I could improve.

One thing I really liked about Capital Academy in Rancho Cordova was how the faculty would reach out to the parents on a daily basis. Teachers did their best to unite the students with their parents as much as possible. One teacher explained, when they have to call a student based on their attendance, behavior, or academic issue, they would do their best to provide praise and

solutions to the parent(s). However, a lot of the times, the students' parents never returned the teacher's calls, or it was difficult to get hold of them.

One of the realities of when I become a teacher will be the struggle of involving the parent(s) in their child's academics, especially if the child is at risk of dropping out. One of the strongest allies students have is their parents. This includes all of the components of a student's family. "Family involvement is one of the most important contributors to school completion and success" (Leuchovious). The key to having a child succeed academically is to have the parent(s) involved, focusing on their child's strengths, placing their child in the right school environment, establishing expectations for their child, and doing what they can to prepare their child for adulthood (Leuchovious).

As a teacher, I know I will have to advise and instruct students' parents on ways to become involved in their child's success, so they can graduate high school. Here are some of the topics I will have to incorporate into my method when having to counsel parents:

- Maintain contact with your child's teachers throughout high school.
- Monitor school attendance. If your child is skipping school, it may be a warning sign that he/she is having trouble.
- Encourage your child to seek out extracurricular activities or employment where they can develop positive relationships and have success outside of a classroom setting. Many schools provide after-school and summer programs that cultivate new interests.

Encourage your child to participate in at least one extra-curricular activity at school or with other students. These activities can help your child feel part of the group, important to the school, and more motivated.

- Help your child explore career options that interest the child in the education needed to be successful in those careers.
- Let your child know that individuals who earn a high school diploma are likely to earn twice as much each year compared to those who don't have a high school diploma or equivalency.
- Help your child establish graduation as a priority. Keep track of the credits he/she needs in order to graduate.
- Identify postsecondary goals. The most important questions to ask are: What interests your child? What is your child good at? Postsecondary technical training or two-year community college programs are appropriate paths to meeting employment goals. If attending a four-year college is the way to reach his/her vocational goal, put steps in place to make this happen. (Leuchovious)

As a teacher, I will have to become a leading advocate in parent awareness for their child's success. I will have to develop a personal inquisitiveness to look towards schools that are succeeding and understand why they are succeeding while others are failing. When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level; furthermore, those students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently (Schargel and Smink 52-54). The more parents are involved in their child's education, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior – it makes perfect sense!

Currently, in California and the Southwest states, sons and daughters of immigrant parents are dropping out at an alarming rate. With the influx of Latin families being drawn to America for the opportunity of work and financial stability, they are consumed by long hours of

work. “Immigrants and language minority students (i.e., English learners) are among the fastest growing populations in U.S. public schools” (Morse).

Their responsibility of work doesn't leave parents enough time to assist their children with their school work. In addition, these parents lack the necessary skills in order to assist their children to become academically successful. “Their parents often work multiple jobs or shift work to support their families, which drains the time available to supervise their children or assist with their homework or school activities” (Morse). According to Ann Morse, with the National Conference of State Legislatures:

One in five children in the United States is an immigrant or has immigrant parents. The number of children of immigrants in the United States tripled from 6 to 20 percent between 1970 and 2000. (Three-fourths of these children are U.S.-born with immigrant parents, while one-fourth are foreign-born.) By 2015, the Urban Institute estimates, children of immigrants will constitute 30 percent of the nation's school population, if the current high levels of immigration – over 1 million per year – are sustained. (2)

It is difficult to foresee an optimistic perspective of how all the children of immigrant families will succeed in school and go on to do great things, as reality tells the opposite.

One of the main reasons I want to teach at-risk students is because I want to see Native-Latinos and Non-Native Latinos equally succeed. Historically, I have struggled throughout my academic journey since I was a young boy all the way to now while I earn my degree. I have seen other Latinos, specifically of Mexican descent, struggle and fail in school. As a teacher, I plan to take the offensive by reaching out to young Latino students and help them succeed academically. First and foremost, I must learn Spanish. To take this proactive stance, I have signed up for Beginners Spanish next semester. I will have to communicate effectively with

Latino students who only speak Spanish. I must be able to effectively instruct them. I will also have to be able to communicate with their parents if their primary language is Spanish. Most likely, I will have to become involved in the Latino community that is associated with the students I will be leading. "If California was home to 10.2 million immigrants in 2011, which is greater than the total population of Michigan," then as a teacher, voter, and American citizen, there is no other alternative but to reach out to the new and incoming future of America and teach and instill American values (New Americans in California).

Another group of non-native-born people who arrive in American are refugees. Often, people will mistake refugees as being the same as immigrants; however, there is a difference.

A refugee is a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence..., is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." (Best in Continuing Education and Development)

Families of refugees most of the time have a difficult time with their children assimilating to American culture. Furthermore, the children have even a more difficult time being placed in the appropriate grade or school setting. This misplacement often results in academic failure. Nearly 25% of foreign-born students and 16% of those with foreign-born parents do not complete high school (Kulgar).

The United States takes in 73% of all refugees who need third-country resettlement as identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Nearly three million refugees have been resettled in the U.S. in the last 30 years, at an annual cost of approximately \$700

million (School Success for Refugee and Immigrant Youth). In my state of California, the city of San Diego is home to one of the largest refugee communities in the country. “Between 2007 and 2012, the city took in some 20,000 Iraqi refugees, many of them women and children. They joined a burgeoning population of refugees from Bhutan and Burma. San Diego’s Somali community numbers around 10,000 and is clustered around the Little Mogadishu neighborhood in City Heights” (Hill). Refugee students are three times more likely to drop out of school than U.S. born Latino students. This makes refugee students from other countries the most at-risk students.

What is required for refugee students to become successful is well-organized mentoring and tutoring programs. These programs can first measure their current academic level, then isolate the areas that need improvement. It also requires not only the teachers and community to get involved, but the nation as a whole. San Diego Unified received \$22 million from the state in order to better prepare teachers and tutors to better handle the flux of refugee students (Hill).

Living in California, and having the privilege of working at San Francisco International Airport, I have seen many different types of people from all around the world. I have been exposed to many cultures from all around the world with a small proximity of space. I have found that language barriers are superficial and are a small obstacle that can be overcome. What matters is that people find a way to bridge communication and learn from one another. Another goal of mine is to teach refugee students. I feel I have a responsibility as an American to help those who are in need of help, especially those who are children who need the proper education in order to succeed from one year to the next, until they graduate. One way is to teach those who are refugees that America has a long tradition of people who have come from other countries without having any possessions, nor being able to speak English, and have been able to live

successful and peaceful lives. This would be a major theme that I would constantly reinforce in refugee students.

It is to my astonishment how another group of high school students are at risk of failure. Students who are bullied or teased are in danger of academic failure. They are victimized by aggressive and inappropriate behavior from other students. Some of the students who become victims of bullying fit a specific model, such as:

- Are perceived as different from their peers, such as being overweight or underweight, wearing glasses or different clothing, being new to a school, or being unable to afford what kids consider “cool”
- Are perceived as weak or unable to defend themselves
- Are depressed, anxious, or have low self-esteem
- Are less popular than others and have few friends
- Do not get along well with others, seen as annoying or provoking, or antagonize others for attention (Stopbullying).

According to J. Carney, “peer victimization has been conceptualized as a chronic stressor that has a traumatic impact on adolescent development, disrupting the individual’s self-concept and trust in others, and leading to avoidant behavior and social withdrawal.” Long-term effects of a student being victimized by bullying or teasing can lead to severe emotional problems, being fearful for their safety, being less engaged in their classroom, and most of all, being likely to avoid school all together (Cornell et al. 10). Along with these findings, research has concluded that the psychological distress of those students who are victimized impairs a student’s motivation and performance in school (Buhs et al.). “Others are more isolated from

their peers and may be depressed or anxious, have low self-esteem, be less involved in school, be easily pressured by peers, or not identify with the emotions or feelings of others” (Stopbullying).

Bullying could possibly affect more than a handful of students in one particular school. The impact of inappropriate aggression towards students could be a school-wide issue contributing to many factors. According to Bowen & Bowen, schools located in high-crime, urban areas may have low rates of attendance because of stressful circumstances, exposure to violence, and lower community expectations for school success (320). From personal experience, I can recall being bullied as a child. Growing up in San Francisco and living in the East Bay for a small period of my life, I fell victim to many times of being bullied. By the time I had moved to the nice, comfortable setting of Petaluma, Ca., I must have been exposed to more fights at age 12 than most people had experienced throughout their entire lives. Some of the violent situations I had encountered as a small boy from other children gave me a twisted view on life. I’m sure the trauma I endured getting jumped and mugged as a child has left me with unidentified and untreated issues; however, I have overcome these problems, and I now feel very comfortable in my own skin. This leads me to another reason for becoming a teacher. I want to protect and prevent bullying in my community as much as possible.

Another reason why I find bullying to be detrimental to a child’s education is that it interferes with the child’s learning environment. One thing my mother’s famous teachings for me was, “how to live in peace.” My mother did her best to create an environment for both my sister and me without exposure to unwanted distractions, such as inappropriate behaviors between her and my father. She never allowed us to use curse words in the house. She never allowed fighting between me and my sister, and she always made people feel welcome in her house. To this day, my mother’s values are instilled in me. Wherever I go, either at work or my own house, I do my

best to live in peace. I try to create a very comfortable setting wherever I am. This is another value I want become an advocate for as a teacher. I will constantly preach to students the importance of living in peace. A safe and supportive school climate can help prevent bullying. “Safety starts in the classroom. Students should also feel and be safe everywhere on campus—in the cafeteria, in the library, in the rest rooms, on the bus, and on the playground. Everyone at school can work together to create a climate where bullying is not acceptable” (Stopbullying).

One of the things I was impressed with at Capital Academy was the peaceful setting the school had. A large portion of the students at the school had criminal records, so therefore the structure of the school was designed so that teachers had radios to communicate with other faculty. Teachers also had the ability to communicate with the security that monitored the hallways. If a child had to use the restroom, then he had to be escorted. After the student had used the restroom, the restroom had to be searched for contraband. This strict and very controlled structured setting was the only way to allow the students to fully concentrate on their class work. Even though it was an artificial setting, it was a lot more peaceful than the traditional school they were used to.

Some other ideas on the prevention of bullying would be:

- Develop rules with students so they set their own climate of respect and responsibility.
- Use positive terms, like what to do, rather than what not to do.
- Be a role model and follow the rules yourself. Show students respect and encourage them to be successful.
- Make expectations clear. Keep your requests simple, direct, and specific.

- Reward good behavior. Try to affirm good behavior four to five times for every one criticism of bad behavior.
- Set a tone of respect in the classroom. This means managing student behavior in the classroom well. Well-managed classrooms are the least likely to have bullying (Stopbullying).

Never thinking I would ever make it this far, my academic journey has led me so close to attaining a degree. I now can do away with the idea that I am an at-risk student. I now consider myself a scholar. Now I have a new standard for myself, to continuously learn, practice what I have learned, then teach someone what I have learned. The little that I have exposed myself to regarding at-risk students has proven one thing: I want to teach and I want to especially teach students on the verge of dropping out of school. My goal is not to save students. That would be an unrealistic attempt at going about my dream. What I surrender and promise to become is a committed teacher to improving my community through doing my best by developing young men and women. I promise to become a passionate advocate of helping developing students' minds.

I clearly understand the obstacles I will face daily. As a teacher, I will encounter children who have been neglected by society because of the vast impact of poverty. I will take on the never-ending challenge of students battling substance abuse, and how it will deter them from living a successful life. I will have to put up with the misbehavior of students who most likely have witnessed juvenile detention at some point of their adolescent lives. I will defend the students who are victims of bullying, and help create a comfortable environment for all students. Making connection with students' parents will lead myself out of my comfort zone; however, I will use my will to teach as a guiding

factor to reach out, especially to students of families who have either immigrated to the United States or refugees who have been relocated. Not to leave out women at-risk of dropping out of high school, I will become a responsible and respectful advocate of women's education and ability to be successful. This is my future; this is my reality.