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Effect of Relational Support on Educational Outcomes in an At-Risk Charter School in Florida

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Effect of Relational Support on Educational Outcomes
in an At-Risk Charter School in Florida

by
Eunice Casey

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Eunice Casey under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Abstract

Effect of Relational Support on Educational Outcomes in an At-Risk Charter School in Florida. Eunice Casey, 2018: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: mentoring, at-risk, high school, relational support, one-on-one

The purpose of this applied dissertation was to explore how effectively a one-on-one mentoring relational support program would influence outcomes in attendance, academic achievement, and behavioral issues at an at-risk charter school in Florida. The majority of the students at the selected charter school are at-risk students, defined as such because their present level of academic achievement is significantly below that of their peers.

At the selected charter school, students struggle with low attendance, low academic achievement, and a high number of behavioral infractions. More specifically, low attendance at this school is associated with low academic achievement. This includes failure to complete their academic credits at the same rate as their peers, low test scores, and negative behavioral issues. Study participants included the school's administrative team, instructional staff, and support team who served as mentors, as well as all students enrolled in the charter school. The mentoring program was used for a period of 10 weeks during the 2017-2018 school year.

Mentors and students met for a minimum of 30 minutes per week for 10 consecutive weeks. To establish a baseline during the pretreatment period the researcher began the study by using archived quantitative data on student attendance, credit completion, statewide assessments, behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. The researcher then examined the posttreatment data at the conclusion of the mentoring program. The objective was to evaluate whether the one-on-one mentoring relational support program influenced outcomes in attendance, academic achievement, and behavioral issues.

The outcome of the study suggested that the implementation of a one-on-one mentoring program results in a significant difference in increasing students' attendance and academic achievement. Contrastingly, the same was not evident for students' negative behaviors. The mentoring program did not have a significant effect on students' suspensions and behavioral referrals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Topic of the Study

Research shows that there is a significant relationship between student attendance and academic achievement (Chen & Lin, 2008). Marburger (2006) drew attention to a number of studies that found that high school youth who attend school regularly perform well academically. Over the years, such research has escalated in importance and, accordingly, a number of research studies (Bulger & Watson, 2006; Jensen, 2013; Curwin, 2010; Broussard, Mosley-Howard, & Roychoudhury, 2006) include suggestions that with regular attendance, credit completion increases, standardized test scores rise, and behavioral infractions decrease. Administrators in school districts, and administrators and instructors in traditional public schools, private, alternative education, and charter schools across the country, continue to struggle with nonattendance, spending on programs specifically geared toward decreasing absenteeism; yet the attendance problem continues to intensify (Davies & Lee, 2006). Consequently, it is becoming progressively more difficult to ignore this important relationship between attendance and academic achievement.

Given the importance of the relationship between attendance and academic achievement, at-risk youth enrolled in alternative education schools struggle with attendance for a plethora of reasons. The National Forum on Education Statistics (2009) reported that student absences are attributed to a long list of causes including: non-instructional activities, such as a civic duty (jury duty, National Guard, etc.); religious reasons; physical or mental illness; family emergencies, such as lack of child care, sick relative, or bereavement; disciplinary actions, such as school suspensions; legal or

judicial requirements, such as court hearings; family activities or commitments; vacations; student employment; lack of transportation; skipping school for no reason; and other unknown reasons.

At the selected alternative education charter school in this study, student absenteeism is associated with their failure to progress with credit completion at the same rate as their high attending peers, low test scores, and negative behavioral issues. The focus of this study, therefore, was to explore how effectively one-on-one mentoring relational support would influence outcomes in attendance, academic achievement, and behavioral issues at the school located in the State of Florida. It was expected that if the intervention was successful, attendance, credit completion, and overall academic achievement would increase and the number of in-school behavioral infractions would decrease.

Background and Justification

With various policies put into practice, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Common Core State Standards, and numerous assessments and accountability expectations, the increase in academic achievement has become the ultimate educational goal in school districts across the United States. According to Huitt, Huitt, Monetti, and Hummel (2009), “efforts to improve schooling might be labeled school reform in that they accept that the desired outcome of schooling is academic achievement as measured by standardized tests of basic skills” (p. 1). With this goal in mind and the push for accountability, significant challenges are presented for all stakeholders.

Nevertheless, attendance continues to decline and dropout rates continue to

increase. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), during the 2013-2014 school year, over six million students missed 15 or more days of school, which is 14% of the country's student population, or about one in seven students. The report suggests that absenteeism is a better predictor of graduation than test scores. Martin, Tobin, and Sugai (2002) reported that "dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to experience health problems, engage in criminal activities, and become dependent on welfare and other government programs" (p. 10). Consequently, schools with higher dropout rates are at a communal and economic disadvantage because of the social and financial repercussions of the dropout phenomenon. Additionally, this places pressure on community resources such as law enforcement, social services, hospitals and medical centers, local business, and perhaps most importantly, students and their families.

Nonattendance is problematic for all stakeholders in the education process: school district staff, local school staff, community members, parents, and of course, students. Overall, these learners receive low grades and low statewide standardized test scores in core subject areas, lack motivation, and have increased behavioral problems, all of which are major contributors to their low academic achievement (Sable & Gaviola, 2007).

Florida is not exempt from this nationwide problem and school districts across the state continue to work diligently to improve academic achievement. However, Florida's school districts continue to encounter numerous setbacks. A growing number of at-risk students are consistently absent and, therefore, contributing to the state's consequent high dropout rate. Although slightly increasing, according to the Florida Department of Education (2018) across the State of Florida, the at-risk student graduation rate for the 2015-2016 school year was a mere 62.7% and for 2016-2017 the rate was only 65.1%.

This is significantly below the state's average graduation rate for the 2015-2016 school year, which was 80.7%, and for the 2016-2017 school year, which was 82.3%. Similar to the Florida Department of Education (2018) report, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2017) reported that although slightly increasing during the 2015-2016 school year, Florida's graduation rate was only 80.7% while the national average was 84.1%. According to the NCES report, Florida's graduation rate is in the bottom 15 states in the nation.

The Research Problem

This study developed from a concern about the increasing number of at-risk youth who demonstrated: (a) poor attendance, (b) below grade level achievement scores, and (c) above average number of behavioral infractions in Florida school districts. Students are enrolled in alternative education settings, such as an at-risk charter high school, for a variety of reasons. The majority who attends the alternative education charter high school that participated in this research is classified as at-risk for low academic achievement. As demonstrated, absenteeism is a prevalent problem.

Generally, students are labeled at-risk and enrolled in alternative education schools due to their high absenteeism and consequent low academic achievement. The commonalities among these at-risk learners are falling behind their peers in completion of academic credits and not graduating with their cohort. The underlying reasons for absenteeism include social, economic, and environmental factors. Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, and Heinrich (2008) found that due to excessive factors, such as their living environment and starting absences at an early age, student academic achievement suffers: they fall behind in credits, they experience behavioral issues, and

many of them ultimately drop out of high school.

Consequently, as students adjust to changes from youth to adolescence, there is a need to have appropriate intervention in place that will specifically address their behavioral and emotional development (Erdem, DuBois, Larose, De Wit, & Lipman, 2016). At-risk students suffer from a number of factors that negatively influence their physical and academic well-being (Rossiter, 2015). When unaddressed, this can lead to deviant behavior. “Deviant behavior, including delinquency and drug use is strongly related to dropping out of school” (Gasper, 2012, p. 10). Due to peer pressure from adults, siblings, and friends in their lives, a significant number of at-risk youth become gang members, engage in drug and alcohol use, participate in violent criminal activities, and take part in irresponsible sexual behaviors. Rossiter (2015) reported that:

at-risk students experience isolation and alienation from the middle class, limited exposure to intellectual stimulus during their early developmental stages, increased violence and threats, unemployment, which result in significant; and sustained language and academic deficits, fear of failure, and looking for affirmation in gangs, crime, and early sexual activities. (p. 19)

Thus:

The advantages and disadvantages that children will inherit from the neighborhood they live in, their parents and the resources they provide, the quantity and quality of their child care, and early schooling will either support or seriously diminish their means for attaining marketable skills and school success. (Neuman, 2009, p. 12)

By and large, the reality is bleak. At-risk students do not progress at the same rate

as their peers and, consequently, they find themselves behind in academic credits. Curwin (2010) reported that, “even worse, it begins to affect those students who are motivated to learn and students who do well are castigated and rejected by many of their peers” (p. 18).

In the traditional school setting, the majority of at-risk learners are often unsuccessful because of individual behavioral infractions that slowly deteriorate into criminal activities. Many of them drop out of high school and never earn their high school diploma. Curwin (2010) explained that, “urban settings often foster a culture of accepting and even honoring failure, a mindset that particularly flourishes among the least motivated” (p. 18).

At-risk students are often encouraged to enroll in alternative education schools, such as the at-risk charter high school involved in this study. Prior (2013) reported that, “by utilizing best educational practices, alternative education schools can change not only the academic future of their students, but also their life course trajectory” (p. 9). Kim, Losen, and Hewitt (2010) claimed that the primary reason why alternative education schools were created was to specifically serve the needs of at-risk learners. Students enrolled in alternative education schools are able to receive the appropriate instructional intervention and learning environment necessary to meet their learning needs. “Most of the alternative schools visited are filled with dedicated staff members who actually prefer to teach troubled youth and who provide an atmosphere that fairly shouts, ‘all are welcome’” (Curwin, 2010, p. 19).

Economically, some at-risk youth are products of low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) homes. Cholewa and West-Olatunji (2008) reported that students from low-SES

communities are psychologically distressed and lack interest in the curriculum they are offered.

Children who live below the poverty line, speak a language other than English, have a mother with less than a high school education, live in a family with only one parent present, or live in a single-parent family, will likely be identified as at-risk, meaning they will have fewer accomplishments and more learning difficulties after they start school. (Neuman, 2009, p. 20)

Jensen (2013) asserted that, “until you make school the best part of a student’s day, you will struggle with student attendance, achievement, and graduation rates” (p. 4). Schools must be the place to which learners want to return. Jensen claimed that for students to succeed, especially those from low-SES homes or those with other risk factors, teachers must place emphasis on building students’ resiliency and determination to succeed. Jensen (2013) also stated that, “instead of fixating on politics or semantics, we need to stay focused on the goal of helping kids graduate and become productive citizens” (p. 4). To accomplish this goal, it is imperative for all educators to ensure that all learners are active stakeholders in their own education.

In addition, Curwin (2010) proffered that “sometimes, students’ concerns are far more basic than worrying about social acceptance” (p. 18). Accordingly, these students are at a disadvantage and do not earn their high school diploma because they are repeatedly absent from school and therefore cannot benefit from the instruction being presented. Many come from single-family homes where the parents spend a considerable amount of time outside the home working more than one job. Furthermore:

When a student’s home life is truly toxic—filled with drug and alcohol addiction,

physical abuse, neglect, dangerous or unsanitary living conditions, family members in gangs or prison and the responsibility for raising younger siblings or taking care of parents—just getting to school, let alone graduating can present challenges. (Curwin, 2010, p. 18)

Without a doubt, these students do not attend school regularly and because of their high absenteeism, they do not experience the full scope of the curriculum and instruction they need to be successful in high school and earn their diploma. In addition, they do not receive the guidance and counseling they need at home and in school so they can be successful in high school.

In view of the challenges to educating at-risk students presented, mentoring may be a viable solution to address this problem. Parrett and Budge (2012) reported that, “The National Dropout Prevention Center identifies mentoring as one of the most effective strategies to keep kids engaged in school” (p. 128). By the same token, “statistics shows that charter schools do a better job of educating poor kids, for example in Washington, charter schools are beating out traditional schools by a long shot” (Yanushevsky, 2011, p. 134). Therefore, the effect of a one-on-one mentoring relational support program on educational outcome in an at-risk charter high school in Florida was worth investigating.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

The implementation of mentoring programs across the country has been steadily increasing with a simultaneous proliferation of program variations; however, the same cannot be said for the effectiveness of the myriad of implemented mentoring programs. Anastasia, Skinner, and Mundhenk (2012) challenged that “youth mentoring programs have been on the rise for the past few decades, yet little has been done to synthesize best

practices, as identified in existing research, for programs for mentors to follow” (p. 1). Another key deficiency in the literature is that, given the difference in the racial and ethnic demographics of the school staff population in comparison to the at-risk student population at this school, it may be difficult to create trusting and beneficial mentor-mentee relationships. Prior (2013) claimed that “having adult mentors as an important resource in alternative education schools will benefit students significantly” (p. 33). In addition, Curwin (2010) asserted that “school is often the safest place, both emotionally and physically, in many students’ lives” (p. 17). This is consistent with Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs theory. For learners to connect and build trusting relationships, the racial diversity of the school staff must match the student population. Therefore, given the significance of mentoring in alternative education schools, and to address students’ psychological and security needs, the lowest level on Maslow’s hierarchy, it is important to have a school staff that aligns with the racial and ethnic demographics of the student population.

Audience

Those who could benefit from this study include the staff and students of the at-risk charter high school in Florida that was the site selected for this study. Participating staff included seven teachers: one was in his fifth year of teaching, three were third-year teachers, and the other three were in their second year of teaching. The school principal was in her second year as the school leader; however, she has been a school administrator for more than 10 years. In addition, there was one guidance counselor/academic advisor; one enrollment specialist; one specialist who oversees Exceptional Student Education (ESE), gifted, and bilingual or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); one

data processor; and one office manager who participated.

In addition to the on-site school personnel, administrators and instructional staff from comparable high schools and alternative education charter schools, school district personnel, parents, and students could also benefit from this research. Comparable schools and other at-risk charter schools who review the results would be able to determine whether implementing a one-on-one mentoring relational support program would be beneficial to students in their schools. District personnel would also be able to ascertain whether or not a one-on-one mentoring relational support program would positively influence attendance, academic achievement, and behavior in schools in their district, particularly in support of at-risk learners.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are provided.

Alternative education school is typically the term used for the educational placement where at-risk youth are referred or assigned to continue their education. In other words, those who are unsuccessful in a traditional educational setting are placed in alternative education schools. Simonsen, Britton, and Young (2010) reported that there are four common reasons why students are referred or placed in alternative education schools:

- based on the individual needs as ascertained by school officials who evaluate the student's progress and make a determination for their placement;
- by request by some parents for alternative education placement;
- the need to address negative behavioral actions resulting in a disciplinary consequence;

- and receipt of a mandate by the court or juvenile system.

At-risk students are unsuccessful in fulfilling their required credits and are not on track to complete their high school requirements and graduate along with their cohort. At the school level, instructional teams review and analyze student data, such as attendance, credit completion, standardized test scores, and number of discipline infractions to determine whether they should be labeled as being at-risk. Ravitch (2007) suggested that at-risk youth have a much higher likelihood than their peers of similar age of dropping out of high school.

Common Core State Standards are the national state standards for curriculum and instruction that school district leaders, school principals, administrators, and teachers are required to implement. Common Core State Standards is defined as the curriculum and instructional standards specifically created to ensure that students are receiving instruction across the nation that is based on nationwide common educational expectations for all students in kindergarten through 12th grade (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2018).

ESEA is an act that was passed specifically to address and ensure educational reforms. It was a key element of President Johnson's War on Poverty, as well as a huge effort at producing much needed education reforms including an attempt to ensure school funding to assist disadvantaged students (Steeves, Bernhardt, Burns, & Lombard, 2009).

Mentoring is defined by Roberts (2000) as a:

formalized process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning with a less experienced and knowledgeable person so as to facilitate that person's

career and personal development. (p. 162)

Relatedly, the definition of mentor, according to the MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership (2005), is a helpful and experienced person who develops a supportive relationship with a person who needs guidance in achieving one or more goals. Further, *one-to-one mentoring*, is when a more experienced person, the mentor, forms a supportive relationship with a less experienced and unmotivated student, the mentee, in a dyadic relationship.

NCLB was passed in an effort to ensure that the entire education system is held accountable at all levels. *NCLB* increased assessment, concurrently increasing accountability. To ensure that schools and school districts are held accountable, this legislation relies on the examination of standardized test scores nationwide.

Purpose of the Study

Research shows there is an increasing emphasis on mentoring and its potential for positive impact on learners in at-risk schools. Research also shows that there is a strong connection between attendance and academic achievement. Accordingly, the purpose of this quantitative study was to collect and analyze pretreatment and posttreatment data to explore whether participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program would increase student attendance, academic achievement, and positive behavior at an at-risk charter high school in Florida.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

In 1965, Public Law 89-10, also known as ESEA, was enacted and, in 2002, NCLB became law. NCLB was anticipated to be the gateway to legitimate educational accountability. Wolk (2010) reported that “although standards-based accountability has been the national reform strategy for nearly two decades, accountability gained momentum with the passage of the NCLB Act” (p. 23). Additionally, NCLB is widely referenced as a legal and binding document that will ensure perpetual improvement of student academic achievement in the U.S. education system from kindergarten through 12th grade. In support of this goal, Liu (2013) reported that “risk factors measured as early as the first grade are as important as those measured in the later educational career” (p. 46). Unfortunately, “NCLB was intended to focus on the plight of the disadvantaged, but its emphasis on increased testing and accountability has probably widened the educational gulf between the haves and have-nots” (Wolk, 2010, p. 21). Though now controversial, it remains an important aspect of the policy context of this study.

In discussing assessment and accountability, Erwin (2010) reported that “unfortunately for the last decade, the emphasis or obsession in U.S. education has been on raising academic standards and student (and teacher) accountability through frequent standardized testing” (p. 7). With the emphasis on accountability at all levels, the need for increasing student academic achievement, and the challenge of decreasing the country’s high dropout rate, the staff in school systems across the nation continue to scramble for solutions. “Scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress remain dismally low and almost 30 percent of the nation’s public schools have been

designated as low-performing under NCLB” (Wolk, 2010, p. 24).

In the process of addressing low academic achievement, schools are forced to mitigate a variety of factors that act as learning barriers. For instance, students fail to succeed due to poverty, broken homes, and being unable to grasp the formal education that schools generally provide (Wolk, 2010). Further, Goodwin (2011) offered a range of influences that impact academic achievement, such as social, emotional, psychological, and physical factors. Yet, as Curwin (2010) noted, “while we do not have the power to change our students’ family lives, we do have the power to give them a welcoming, supportive, and safe school environment” (p. 17). Curwin (2010) explained that in far too many cases, the streets are more attractive to our youth than our city schools are, and that when students drop out of school, for whatever reason, incarceration is often their next stop. In addition, Goodwin (2011) reported that “for the less fortunate students, high quality instruction and challenging curricular pathways, while necessary, are not sufficient to ensure academic success” (p. 85).

Consequently, when it comes to how to best meet the needs of at-risk learners, at the forefront of all school improvement efforts is the goal to implement or optimize practices that work. One such practice that has the potential for success is mentoring.

Denmark and Klara (2010) claimed that:

In the process of growing and learning, young and inexperienced persons, or even older persons who need to continue their learning and acquisition of new skills, will look to someone who is more experienced than themselves for guidance, nurturance, and training. (p. 4)

Research shows that for learning to take place, it is imperative that teachers connect and

build positive relationships with students. Hattie (2012) asserted that “one simple way in which to turn students off learning is for them to have a poor relationship with the teacher” (p. 29). Mentoring provide teachers and learners with viable opportunities to build positive relationships.

Several researchers assert the value of mentoring in the educational setting. Hattie (2012) maintained that “the essence of positive relationships is the student seeing the warmth, feeling the encouragement and the teacher’s high expectations, and knowing that the teacher understands him or her” (p. 29). Hattie (2009) also asserted that “the power of positive teacher-student relationship is critical for learning to occur and this relationship involves showing students that the teacher cares for their learning” (p. 128). Suárez-Orozco, Sattin-Bajaj, and Suárez-Orozco (2010) reported that “an engaged child is fully present: working at the edges of his or her competence with the careful assistance and scaffolding provided by a caring mentor” (p. 8). Denmark and Klara (2010) explained that “people who act as mentors play an important role in the development of their protégés by helping them to develop themselves to their full potential” (p. 4). Schools that implement mentoring strategies or programs have the potential to increase student attendance and engagement in the learning process, and decrease in-school behavioral infractions.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to examine the effects of mentoring relational support on educational outcomes at an at-risk charter high school in Florida. With this in mind, the historical context of mentoring is next explored, followed by the theoretical framework of this study. The literature review also includes consideration of the factors associated with at-risk learners academic achievement.

Historical Context

Riggs, Musewe, and Harvey (2014) reported that mentoring is evident as far back as Biblical figures, such as Abraham and his son, Isaac, and David and his son, Solomon. Mentoring has a long-standing history, also dating back to Homer's epic tale, *The Odyssey*. Odysseus set off to fight in the Trojan Wars, asking loyal friend and mentor, Telemachus, to care for and educate Odysseus' son. This tale is an early version of the term familiar in education, *in loco parentis*, which means the educator takes the place of the parent (Irving, Moore, & Hamilton, 2003).

In more recent scholarly work, there is an increasing interest in mentoring. For instance, Miller (2002) claimed that mentoring has increasingly gained high profile and influential backers, including many leading politicians. In addition, Miller traced three waves of mentoring evident in contemporary American history, and in tracing the third wave, noted the following:

1989: President Bush endorsed mentoring in a television commercial.

1989: New York's First Lady, Mathilda Cuomo, declared 1989 as The Year of the Mentor.

1990: Several large corporations and national organizations, such as the United Way of America and the National Education Association, announced their support for mentoring.

1994: The Office of Juvenile Justice successfully introduced the Juvenile Mentoring Program.

1997: At the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, it was announced that every child in America should have access to "an ongoing relationship with a caring adult

mentor, tutor, or coach” (Lauland, 1998, p. 31).

1998: Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs received large-scale federal funding to encourage children from low-income homes to go to college.

2001: President George W. Bush backed an expansion of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, working with four leading service organizations.

Miller (2002) documented that a volunteering approach, as opposed to educational policies at the federal level, gave rise to the push for mentoring. According to Miller, the Presidents’ Summit of 1997 included both Republican and Democratic Presidents and that this translated into many pledges, such as that of the Governor of California who pledged that there would be a further 250,000 mentoring relationships across the state during the next few years.

Mentoring relationships can be a result of familial and non-familial ties. Riggs et al. (2014) suggested that mentoring is not limited to family influences on its younger members. In fact, mentoring pairs whose ties are not familial, but are related to shared interests, vocations, and skills, are evident throughout recorded history. According to Riggs et al., as a result of changes in the family structure in the United States, adults outside of the immediate family who mentor adolescents has, over time, become progressively important.

As noted, relational support, or mentoring, is not a new phenomenon. While the conceptual term may take on different names, the meaning is similar and is prevalent across many cultures. Riggs et al. (2014) have noted that throughout the world mentoring often has taken the form of apprenticeships where experienced individuals assumed

responsibility for offering guidance to younger, less experienced apprentices or protégés as they learned to do tasks that were important to the survival of their immediate and extended family, or their society as a whole.

In addition, there is the potential for a reciprocal benefit that may result from the relationship between the mentor and the mentee. In addressing the mentoring relationship, Denmark and Klara (2010) asserted that “mentoring is an enriching experience that enhances the lives of both the mentor and the protégé” (p. 4). Tolan et al. (2013) claimed that although there is generally a mutual relationship between the mentee and the mentor, the mentee is more often than not the primary person with the most benefit as a result of the relationship.

Rosebrough and Leverett (2011) declared that “wisdom and trust matter in the education of the whole learner and a wise and trusted teacher can be a mentor” (p. 52). Riggs et al. (2014) explained that with mentoring, adults guide the young as they learn through meaningful activities designed to transfer values, knowledge, attitudes, and skills that create an unbroken chain of traditions within their cultural groups. In addition, Rossiter (2015) reported that “there is almost always a strong adult somewhere in the family who guided [students] through school, demanding solid performance and behavior” (p. 19).

Theoretical Framework

An increasing number of studies have included the exploration of mentoring and effective mentoring programs. According to Dominguez and Hager (2013), a theoretical framework is the foundation upon which mentoring programs are built and used to ascertain how mentoring is conceptualized and implemented. Dominguez and Hager

asserted that it is important for researchers within the field to be cognizant of these frameworks and their relationship to the planning and development of mentoring programs.

Researchers have been consistent in finding that mentoring is central to the drive toward increasing student academic achievement. Erwin (2010) asserted that:

It is more important than ever for young people to develop the qualities that enabled our success, character traits that will help them learn and achieve well in school, perform satisfactorily in the workplace, communicate effectively, and develop and maintain positive, trusting relationships in their lives. (p. 7)

Accordingly, in framing the need for a one-on-one mentoring relational support program, mentoring theories were examined as an important tool to improve academic achievement. For instance, students exposed to economic risk factors are more apt to struggle with attendance, behavior, and academic achievement (Gogoi, 2014; Riggs et al., 2014). Additionally, those from low-SES homes are more likely to drop out of high school. Kuriloff, Soto, and Garver (2012) claimed that “Most achievement gap research has explored racial differences in public school settings, typically focusing on the low academic performance of students of color in urban, low-income environments where schools are under resourced” (p. 92). Furthermore, the associated financial and opportunity costs of dropping out of high school can negatively affect communities in which these students live (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Cohen & Piquero, 2009; Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012). Gottfredson (2013) reported that:

Communities with concentrations of disadvantaged populations tend to have

difficult to manage schools, making both education and prevention programs hard to conduct and leading to a continuing cycle of disadvantage and high rates of delinquent behavior in school and the community. (p. 90)

Unfortunately, economic barriers are not the only factors affecting attendance, behavior, and academic achievement. It is revealed in this review that there are a number of social barriers as well, including single-parent households, poor health, limited technology, the student and parent immigration status, and large family size (Bulger & Watson, 2006). These barriers significantly affect attendance. Marburger (2006) and Chen and Lin (2008) found that regular attendance positively affects academic achievement; therefore, these barriers are a cause for concern.

Researchers have asserted that schools need to provide a supportive environment that positively impacts student engagement (Chase, Hilliard, Geldhof, Warren, & Lerner, 2014; Walker & Greene, 2009), and mentoring can help. “All children need reliable, positive adults in their lives” (Jensen, 2013, p. 15). In addition to the need for positive relationships, there is a need for an effective school discipline climate (Arum & Velez, 2012) and to some degree, motivation is also a key factor. To illustrate, Wolk (2010) reported that, “given that standards alone do not motivate students, conventional schools do more to stifle students’ motivation than to foster it, although student motivation is probably the most important prerequisite to learning and school success” (p. 34). A one-on-one mentoring relational support program holds the potential for long-term positive effects on the individual and their motivation, as well as on their community (Broussard et al., 2006). Furthermore, mentoring is low cost, convenient, and potentially provides significant academic benefits (Coller & Kuo, 2014; Grossman et al., 2012).

Review of the Literature

Grossman et al. (2012) stated that mentoring is associated with close interpersonal connections and positively influences youth through changes in their approach to developing other relationships. With care and support, mentors can challenge negative views that youth may hold of themselves and promote the importance of establishing positive relationship with adults (Grossman et al., 2012). Through mentoring, adolescents receive the psychological support they need to help build their self-esteem and to feel confident in themselves and their actions. In support of mentoring, Grossman et al. suggested that positive socio-emotional experiences with mentors may help to generalize mentees' feelings and actions, thereby enabling youth to interact with others more effectively.

It is important to recognize the traits of an effective mentoring relationship. Tolan et al. (2013) reported that a mentoring relationship is significantly different from the relationship that may exist between a professional and his or her client, a parent and a child, or a relationship that a teacher maintains with a student. With mentoring, the primary focus is on building a relationship and having a caring adult to support and guide the adolescent. Denmark and Klara (2010) explained that “there are many definitions of mentoring, including an extreme classical view which sees mentor relationships as intense, emotional interactions between an older person and a younger person” (p. 4).

To make a significant impact on student academic achievement, implementing a well-grounded mentoring program is a viable option. Rosebrough and Leverett (2011) stated that “students want to be accepted not only as learners but also to have teachers mentor them and invest in them as complete individuals” (p. 52). Therefore, for

mentoring to be effective, there has to be buy-in from and good fit between each party. A prospective mentoring program should include a determination of the demographic characteristics of the youth served and mentors available, such as age and gender, so that there is a foundation upon which to build the relationship.

Building relationships is one of the key ingredients in mentoring. Rosebrough and Leverett (2011) asserted that “education and mentoring should be about the people and that investing in students is about relationships” (p. 50). Typically, youth involved in mentoring need to demonstrate or learn positive social skills in order to formulate meaningful relationships with their peers and adults. Jensen (2013) explained that “children who grow up with positive relationships learn healthy, appropriate emotional responses to everyday situations” and that “children raised in poor households often fail to learn these responses because of absent or stressed caregivers” (p. 15).

Furthermore, through an effective mentoring program, students should be able to realize the perceived benefits of attending school, learning, and achieving academically. When mentoring is used to address delinquency, the mentoring used generally involves an older adult from the community who provides opportunities for imitation, advice, experiences that show care and interest for the mentee, emotional support, information, and advocacy through the one-on-one relationship (Tolan et al., 2013).

Mentoring relationships cannot change neighborhoods or family circumstances, but if they can keep children in school, they might contribute to the completion of later milestones (e.g., college graduation, employment, and success in early adulthood) (Broussard et al., 2006). Having highlighted the importance of mentoring, it is essential to note that mentoring, when effective, is a short-term solution that has the potential for

long-term benefits. Goldner and Scharf (2014) stated that with mentoring, a strong possibility exists for helping students learn how to support each other and that including a mentoring program as part of a high school curriculum provides adolescents with much needed support.

Successful mentoring programs. There is a significant number of mentoring programs across the country. The primary objective of the majority of these programs is to assist youth or families and to provide support toward improvement of their social and/or economic status within urban communities. Specifically, Big Brothers/Big Sisters is the model that provides mentoring within most urban communities (Coller & Kuo, 2014). Bilchik (2011) reported that “another successful program that has a mentoring component is the Civil Citation Program in Miami, Florida which diverts eligible juvenile misdemeanor offenders from the arrest process” (p. 26). According to Bilchik, a needs analysis is first conducted for the youth involved in this program before they are referred for services.

The academic benefits of a successful mentoring program in schools and the relatively low cost involved in implementing such a program help students in need. Their academic performance increases when they are involved in a mentoring program in their school setting (Grossman et al., 2012). However, some mentoring programs have deviated from their mission to support, nurture, empower, and assist youth who need mentoring. There is a noticeable shift in the focus of most mentoring programs from one of relational support to a more academically oriented structure. Some of these programs have minimized the emphasis placed on developing caring relationships (Grossman et al., 2012). The reason for this shift can be attributed directly to increasing accountability

pressures on schools and the constant challenge of improving student academic achievement. Additionally, the directors of mentoring programs frequently face challenges of successfully pairing mentors with mentees and monitoring the activities of their relationships (Coller & Kuo, 2014).

Given these points, the overarching consensus is that the community, family, struggling schools, and the whole student benefit from mentoring. In their qualitative findings, Coller and Kuo (2014) suggested that improvements in learners' attitudes, classroom behavior, and attendance through successful mentoring programs may be a significant cost-effective strategy that schools can use to support at-risk students. Similarly, Parrett and Budge (2012) asserted that there is ample evidence that mentoring works; most educators are aware that for learners to be successful they need to have meaningful relationships with an adult, and mentoring provides students with opportunities to establish this form of relationship.

At-risk students. While there are varieties of definitions for at-risk students, generally it is acceptable to refer to struggling learners. Accordingly, there is a considerable amount of literature about at-risk students and their academic achievement. For instance, "when a child's early experience are chaotic, or if at least one parent is absent, the child's developing brain often becomes insecure and stressed and this insecurity is more pronounced among children living in poverty" (Jensen, 2013, p. 15). Bulger and Watson (2006) explained that at-risk now includes a plethora of limitations to learning and found that there are a number of additional at-risk factors, such as single parenthood, poor health, limited technology access, social status (e.g., immigrant), and secondary school influence on youth as they prepare for college. Additionally, Neuman

(2009) stated that “At-risk students are likely to progress poorly in school, with concomitant risks associated with poor grades, retention, special education placement, school dropout, and, later, adult unemployment and inability to be self-sufficient” (p. 50).

It is suggested through existing research that the definition of at-risk has broadened over the years. As noted, at-risk not only relates to learning, race, ethnicity, and class, but also “the at-risk designation is usually associated with poverty, as we’ve seen, although it may include many other factors” (Neuman, 2009, p. 50). Neuman (2009) stated that “despite variances in the formulas for identifying those at risk, the implications are the same and disadvantaged children’s trajectory is poor” (p. 50). With the wide array of factors that influence academic success and lend to the at-risk classification, it is safe to say that students’ home environment and their low-SES impact their academic achievement significantly. Jensen (2013) stated that “many poor children simply do not have the repertoire of necessary social-emotional responses for school and it is easy to misinterpret low-SES students’ emotional and social differences as a lack of respect, poor manners, or laziness” (p. 16). In general, these factors influence learning and ultimately the level of educational achievement. Jensen (2013) also stated that “it is more accurate and helpful to understand that many poor students come to school with a narrower-than-expected range of appropriate emotional responses and many simply do not know how to behave” (p. 16).

Identifying factors of at-risk students. In view of the widening definition of the at-risk student, it is important to identify generally accepted characteristics of an at-risk youth and the factors influencing their academic achievement. Parrett and Budge (2012) reported that “most students who drop out—more than a million a year—leave school

between the ages of 14 and 16 after enduring years of schooling in which minimal achievement, frustration, embarrassment and failure were daily realities” (p. 12). Ream and Rumberger (2008) adopted a broader perspective in their suggestion that several factors impact the high school dropout process. According to Ream and Rumberger, these factors include academic performance, attitudes toward school, classroom engagement, and behavior. The term *at-risk* was used by Lesk (2015) to reference fifth to 12th grade learners who are below grade level in terms of their credit completion and grade-level skills; students who are habitually truant from school; adolescent parents; and all eighth graders who are retained or below grade level as evidenced by their scores on state assessments in each content area.

Many students who participate in mentoring programs live in single-parent homes and consequently are enduring the effects associated with not being in contact with a non-resident parent. Ultimately, these students may engage in self-blame and feel they are the primary reason for the existing problems in their adult relationships (Grossman et al., 2012). Grossman et al. reported that such youth may feel particularly vulnerable to and responsible for problems in subsequent adult relationships. Consequently, at-risk learners without the necessary support will continue in a cycle of challenges that they are unequipped to successfully overcome. Overall, the academic achievement of at-risk students is impacted by a number of personal, familial, and socioeconomic challenges.

Financing the at-risk student. Another factor to consider is the high cost associated with the consequential failures of at-risk students. One significant consequence of the high dropout rate is the substantial financial burden on society. In appraising the cost of school dropouts, Cohen and Piquero (2009) calculated that up to

age 18 the cost associated with an at-risk student and adjusted for crime, drugs, and high school dropout is estimated to be from \$2.6 to \$5.3 million over a lifetime. Cohen and Piquero (2009) asserted that for a typical “high risk” student with more than six police contacts, the cost can easily run between \$4.2 and \$7.2 million over a lifetime.

Furthermore, Cohen and Piquero (2009) stated that the “cost of a heavy drug abuser is estimated to range between \$840,000 and \$1.1 million, although \$700,000 of that amount is the cost of crime committed by heavy drug abusers and hence already included in the crime cost estimates” (p. 46). A reasonable approach to address this issue would be to implement programs that will specifically address or target at-risk youth and, consequently, decrease the financial burden associated with the long-term consequences of those who make detrimental decisions.

In their 2009 study, *Left Behind in America: The Nation’s Dropout Crisis*, Northeastern University’s Center for Labor Market Studies and the Alternative Schools Network (2009) found that the excessive cost associated with the dropout rate is presenting a financial burden not only on families and communities, but also on the nation and that we simply cannot afford to continue to absorb this substantial cost. Furthermore, the study claimed that:

It is our responsibility as a society to explore every potential means to address the dropout crisis and if we do nothing, the cost of inaction will be steep-not just for the 6.1 million out-of-school youths who will remain mired in joblessness, dependence and poverty, but for the economic and social well-being of our nation as a whole, for years to come. (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009, p. 16)

Socioeconomics at home. Inasmuch as there is an existing high cost that society absorbs as a result of the lack of effective support systems for at-risk students, so too there is a high cost for the low-SES of at-risk students' families. In general, a student's SES status is influenced by the education level, employment, and income of the adults in the home (Gogoi, 2014). This definition of low-SES is comparable to that discussed by Riggs et al. (2014) who reported that issues such as single parenting, inadequate housing, and limited job opportunities can plague the adults in the lives of under resourced urban adolescents. According to Riggs et al., the emergence of their racial identity, unsafe streets, and a range of seductive and negative distractions provide the backdrop for young adolescents living in depressed urban areas as they attempt to survive, learn, and grow into healthy adults. Riggs et al. stated that when families experience unrelenting and excessive challenges, many adults find it almost impossible to function in roles that set positive examples for their children. In particular, adults and parents of at-risk youth struggle to assist and support their children socially, academically, and financially.

Gogoi (2014) claimed that the extent to which family members influence, encourage, and provide learning opportunities for young adults ultimately impacts the adolescents' academic achievement. To address the issue of improving student academic achievement, leaders of school systems across the country spend a considerable amount of time and money analyzing data and ascertaining best practices that will result in decreasing the nation's dropout rate. Ream and Rumberger (2008) suggested that "improving high school dropout and graduation rates continues to be a formidable educational challenge in the United States" (p. 109). Parrett and Budge (2012) reported that "most of our high schools continue to demonstrate little success in closing long-

standing achievement gap between low-income and more advantaged students” (p. 12). In addition, Jensen (2009) reported that “Children raised in poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance” (p. 14).

Parents and/or guardians. The literature demonstrates that there is a myriad of economic and social issues that contribute to the struggles that at-risk students experience on a daily basis. Another important factor to consider is that the distressed adult at home cannot effectively support the at-risk youth. As noted, adults in the home who are themselves experiencing significant challenges find it difficult to serve as role models for at-risk students. Jensen (2009) reported that low-income parents are often overwhelmed by diminished self-esteem, depression, and a sense of powerlessness and inability to cope—feelings that may get passed along to their children in the form of insufficient nurturing, negativity, and an overall general failure to focus on their children’s needs. One possible implication of this is that the unsupported at-risk learner will end up dropping out of school. Jensen (2009) also reported that poor children often feel isolated and unloved, feelings that kick off a downward spiral of unhappy life events including poor academic performance, behavioral problems, dropping out of school, and drug abuse.

Parents or guardians as role models play a significant part in their student’s motivation to participate in the learning process. In other words, the positive influence of parents or guardians can have an encouragingly optimistic effect on student’s success. On the other hand, it is important to note that a negative parental influence may lead to an

undesirably adverse outcome in student learning. For example, a parent who regularly engages in criminal activities will more than likely have a negative impact on his or her child. Cohen and Piquero (2009) stated that one important factor to consider is that in addition to the effects of incarceration, the children of parents who have a history of engaging in criminal activities are themselves at risk of also becoming criminals. Cohn and Piquero noted that, as a result, when ascertaining the total cost associated with a career criminal, crimes from one generation to the other are another important factor worth considering. Parents alone are not the definitive answer. Schools must implement programs to support at-risk students as well.

Why students are unsuccessful in school. Dimartino and Clarke (2008) reported that over the last decade, educators have identified six areas in which high schools begin to fail their students:

Depersonalization—high school offers few options that appeal to young people with distinctive interests, talents and aspirations; *lack of adult support*—high school students spend a great deal more time talking with friends than with caring adults and instead follow peers because there is no alternative; *unresponsive teaching*—teachers use the same plan for all students; *imperceptible results*—when students do not earn good grades, the rewards are elusive; *invisibility*—only the most notable students earn recognition; and *isolation*—students need opportunities to engage the larger community so they can aim their education toward a clear purpose. (p. 5)

All six areas can be directly addressed with mentoring. Through mentoring, at-risk learners are able to receive the relational support they need and, consequently, feel

empowered to work toward their personal and academic success.

The effectiveness of mentoring programs can be enhanced when there is a concerted effort to target specific developmental assets and positive development outcomes, such as having mentors engage with mentees in activities designed to enhance students' social and emotional competence (Erdem et al., 2016). There are an increasing number of studies that include suggestions that meaningful relational mentoring support will have a positive impact on the development of at-risk youth and their academic achievement. For example, Goldner and Scharf (2014) suggested that by serving as advocates and role models, it is possible for mentors to positively influence the development of their protégés' identity. Additionally, Goldner and Scharf stated that mentors may positively impact their protégés' motivation for learning and their overall academic achievement by providing targeted activities that focus on each individual's areas for development.

Self-esteem. Another key point to note is the significant importance of the psychological need of human beings to feel valued, supported, and respected. Walker and Greene (2009) asserted that students who understand the importance of the impact of their efforts on their future, that they are valued in their classrooms, and that their teachers and peers support them, are more likely to concentrate on fulfilling their individual goals. Additionally, and equally important to students, is the significance of forming and sustaining meaningful positive relationships that focus on trust and respect (Sullo, 2009).

As mentioned, mentoring provides opportunities for adolescents to build their self-esteem and feel confident about themselves. Parrett and Budge (2012) proffered that

“poverty shapes one’s view of self and others” (p. 40). Sullo (2009) claimed that when students are involved in a positive relationship, they feel some form of connection, show competence, can effectively navigate choices, and enjoy and share a safe environment. In short, when learners are confident and feel valued and respected, they will want to participate in the learning process.

Attendance and tardiness. Frequent absences and chronic tardiness can significantly disrupt learning. The reasons for starting the school day late can vary greatly: youngsters oversleeping, parents getting their children to school late, and students missing the school bus and having to rely on neighbors to give them a ride (French, 2013). Furthermore, Prior (2013) reported that the “typical students enrolled in alternative schools are poor, minority adolescents with exceptionalities and these students need to benefit from the support that mentoring provides” (p. 28). Primarily, when these youth are not in school, they lose academically. In particular, those with excessive absences and tardiness are at a learning disadvantage.

Student engagement. The evidence suggests that mentoring is a viable option for improving academic achievement. Chase et al. (2014) stated that although the majority of our students receive the contextual support they need and display the potential to be successful in school, they become disengaged, thereby making them more susceptible to a negative impact on their academic achievement. With mentoring, students receive the support they need to feel a sense of belonging, remain engaged, and be successful in school. The perception of belonging, as fostered by the recognition of a supportive environment, has been found to positively impact engagement and achievement within school and community settings (Walker & Greene, 2009). According to Walker and

Greene, resiliency and learning are not isolated occurrences and instead must be considered in conjunction with the student's personal interactions and the perceptions formed as a result of these interactions.

Furthermore, research findings prior to this study show that a student's behavior may be used as an indicator to determine their grade point average. Chase et al. (2014) noted that:

Behavioral school engagement emerged as the strongest predictor of GPA [grade point average] in the high school years and that this may reinforce the notion that study skills and effort in school, key components of behavioral engagement, could contribute to academic success. (p. 892)

Chase et al. suggested that even when students believe and accept the importance of school as evidenced by their cognitive engagement, at times they may behave in ways that are counterproductive to their academic success.

Once students feel a sense of belonging, which mentoring helps to provide, they become more likely to succeed academically. It is, therefore, important for all learners to feel a sense of belonging and be constantly engaged in school and the learning process. To accomplish this, it is important that school administrators and instructional staff provide students with a learning environment that ensures that they feel safe and free to engage in their learning.

Standardized tests. Statewide assessment is another key factor that contributes to the failure to successfully earn a high school diploma. Riggs et al. (2014) reported that since as early as the 1970s, the National Assessment of Educational Progress has been used to test student progress in the United States, specifically in the math and reading

content areas. The purpose of nationwide testing is to keep policymakers, educators, and members of the general public more informed about trends in student performance. However, now this testing trend has slowly evolved into state and school districts, including statewide standardized assessments as part of high school graduation requirements.

The practice of using assessment data is not a new phenomenon. Mertler (2014) explained that “teachers have been using data about students to inform their instructional decision-making since the early movement to formalize education in the United States” (p. 1). We are in an era where to effectively teach and to meet the learning needs of all learners, teachers must rely on assessment data. Mertler (2014) stated that “data driven educational decision making refers to the process by which educators examine data to identify students’ strengths and deficiencies and applies those findings to their practice” (p. 1).

Today, for students to graduate and earn a high school diploma, their performance on assessments is a determining factor of whether or not they graduate. In fact, to meet their learning needs, the expectation is that educators use assessment data to drive the curriculum and differentiate their instruction. For this purpose, educators use a combination of both formative and summative assessments. “Local assessments including summative assessments (classroom tests and quizzes, performance based assessments, portfolios) and formative assessments (homework, teacher observations, student responses and reflections) are also legitimate and viable sources of student data for this process” (Mertler, 2014, p. 2). In general, assessment data are used to determine instruction and to measure academic progress.

Unfortunately, assessment results as a key component of the high school graduation requirement place at-risk students at a disadvantage, especially when considered in conjunction with their living and learning conditions. For example:

Living in poverty affects many of the basic necessities that people of middle and upper-income levels tend to take for granted, such as personal appearance, condition and size of home (if one is not homeless), availability and quality of food, health and well-being, and even the value of one's work. (Parrett & Budge, 2012, p. 40)

Mentoring promises to address or minimize some of these disadvantages that at-risk students encounter on a daily basis.

Graduation rate. Paulson (2012) stated that the high school graduation rate is moving up at a markedly slow pace in the United States, but about one in four students and 40% of minorities continue to be unsuccessful and fail to graduate within the required four years. This is especially true for at-risk students who do not have adequate support to help them to be successful and, ultimately, earn their high school diploma. The goal of all schools is to ensure that all learners are successful in completing all the requirements needed to earn a high school diploma. According to the *Monthly Labor Review* ("The High School Graduation Rate," 2008), a high school diploma sets the baseline for the minimum level of education needed in order to be successful in today's competitive labor market and the U.S. high school graduation rate (i.e., the proportion of the population that has graduated from high school) is an important social and economic statistic.

Behavioral themes. Inasmuch as the curriculum and instruction elements of earning a high school diploma are important, the behavioral and disciplinary expectations are also key components to student success. Porter (2007) reported that “many young people lack the self-esteem and impulse control needed to choose responsible behavior” (p. 34). In other words, in addition to the policies and procedures governing curriculum and instruction, school systems across the nation also need to factor in disciplinary procedures and how to best promote positive behavior among peers while promoting learning.

Arum and Velez (2012) suggested that school disciplinary climates are made up of multiple elements and are best conceptualized as joint functions of the actions of students and educators. School disciplines as administrative regulation or social control sets the parameters within which attitudes, behaviors, and subcultures in schools are expressed. School discipline manifests itself in administrative actions and student behaviors, norms, and values (i.e., school discipline as peer environment). School discipline and behavior are additional areas where mentoring has the potential to lead to positive results.

Highlighted in the literature was the fact that strong curriculum and instruction does not guarantee academic success. Prior (2013) claimed that “given that at-risk and delinquent students are at great risk of launching and/or continuing down a criminal trajectory, the relationship between school and these youth is paramount” (p. 52). Mentoring may provide students with opportunities to build meaningful relationships that may result in improving their academic achievement. Jensen (2013) stated that “although most teachers have traditionally succeeded in reaching students who come from middle

and upper income homes, they struggle to reach economically disadvantaged students” (p. 7).

Students spend a preponderance of their time in school, so it stands to reason that the affiliations they build with peers, faculty and staff at a school are just as vital as the significant relationships, such as marriage, that affect an adult’s self worth. (Prior, 2013, p. 52)

Dropouts. It has become increasingly important for educators to address the country’s dropout crisis. The dropout crisis has an impact on everyone in one way or another. According to researchers at the Center for Labor Market Studies and Alternative Schools Network (2009), the United States is in the middle of a high school dropout crisis that has been a long time in the making and that this dropout crisis will especially impact Blacks, Hispanics, and males in particular. Further, American students who leave school without earning their high school diploma have significantly lower earning potential and fewer job opportunities. It is estimated that a person who has graduated from high school and earned their diploma will earn \$400,000 more than those who do not. This provides another compelling reason for schools to implement mentoring programs for at-risk students.

Mentoring relational support as the solution. Mentoring is an increasingly important area in the grand scheme of addressing the needs of at-risk youth, especially in an alternative education school where the majority of students are at risk or have a high probability of dropping out. Fader (2013) reported that “mentoring programs are one proven means of supporting youths by connecting them with caring adults” (p. 224). Similarly, Jensen (2013) claimed that with mentoring, students experience a sense of

control over their own lives, are able to foster dependable relationships, and ultimately, are able to improve their academics.

There are several environmental factors, such as education, SES, social cohesion, and exposure to influential role models that significantly impact student development (Tolbert & Maxson, 2015). Research has recently surfaced that highlights the need for positive role models to serve as mentors for struggling students (Bilchik, 2011; Fader, 2013; Jensen, 2013; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Prior, 2013).

Mentoring programs are often available to meet varied students' needs at all levels of study. These programs differ in terms of location and structure and in relation to their purposes, the roles mentor and mentee play, and when and how the mentoring occurs (Brondyk & Searby, 2013). Mentors help to provide adolescents with the psychological tools they need to be successful in their personal lives and in their education. "The teacher is the decision maker, mentor and coach and a popular teacher becomes a model to his or her students" (Yanushevsky, 2011, p. 102).

While mentoring by adults is important in the school setting, there are researchers who suggest that peer mentoring is the answer. As an example, Jensen (2013) asserted that it is in mentoring each other that students will be able to build dependable relationships. Ream and Rumberger (2008) stated that friends have the potential to improve one's quality of life and, in turn, enhance the quality of the broader community. The consensus is that mentoring plays a key role in adolescents' development and their academic achievement. Garvey, Stokes, and Megginson (2009) stated that coaching and mentoring are often associated with transition, development, and growth.

Research Questions

At the at-risk charter school selected for this study, the average daily attendance rate ranges between 50% and 55%. As a result of this poor attendance rate, students at this school are significantly behind their peers in credit completion; have a low success rate on the state's reading and math standardized tests; have a high rate of behavioral infractions; and, at the end of their high school years, are more likely to receive a certificate of completion rather than a high school diploma. For the most part, these students do not graduate and receive a certificate of completion because they are unsuccessful in meeting the mandated testing requirements to receive an official accredited high school diploma. For these reasons, this study focused on the impact of at-risk students' participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program in an alternative education charter high school in Florida.

In summary, providing students with mentoring opportunities may help to provide at-risk youth with the tools they need to be successful in meeting their high school requirements. Therefore, this research study was designed to answer three research questions.

1. To what extent does participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program influence the attendance of at-risk students?
2. To what extent does participation in a one-on-one peer mentoring relational program influence at-risk student academic achievement, specifically their reading and math standardized test scores, and credit completion?
3. To what extent does participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program influence student behavior as measured by (a) behavior referrals, (b)

suspensions, and (c) expulsions?

This literature review highlighted evidence that absenteeism and subsequent low academic achievement are national problems. An increasing number of researchers have shown that student academic achievement is impacted negatively by absenteeism. For these reasons, the objective of this study was to determine whether the implementation of a one-on-one mentoring relational support program would positively impact educational outcomes in an at-risk charter high school in Florida.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to determine whether participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program in an at-risk charter high school in Florida would increase attendance and academic achievement, and decrease behavioral infractions. Studies confirm that student attendance impacts their academic achievement. This chapter explains the research design and methodology employed in conducting this study of the efficacy of a mentoring program.

Participants

In conducting this quantitative study, the researcher completed a comparative analysis of the data from the students included in the pretreatment control group with data from those who were counted in the posttreatment group. The mentoring participants for this study included the administrative team members, instructional staff, support team members, and students of the at-risk charter school located in Florida. The administrative team consisted of the principal; guidance counselor; ESE, gifted, and an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) specialists.

Mentor participant sampling. Because this is a small charter school, the instructional staff who received invitations to participate in the mentoring program included two math teachers, two English/Reading teachers, one science teacher, one ESE teacher, and one social science teacher. The support team who were invited to participate included the data processor, office manager, and enrollment specialist. All staff received an invitation to participate in the one-on-one mentoring relational program and to serve as mentors to the students included in the sample group. School personnel volunteered to

serve as mentors and were not compensated for their participation.

Student participant sampling. Because all enrollees at the charter school where the study was conducted are at-risk learners, and the study specifically pertains to the at-risk high school population, it was therefore convenient and practical for the researcher to invite the entire student body to participate in the one-on-one relational support mentoring program. In essence, while there are a variety of definitions for at-risk students, the participants at this charter school nevertheless fall under the at-risk category. The reasons for this designation at this charter school include the ratio of students from single-parent homes to those in homes with both parents, those from low-SES homes, and students in foster care, low attendance rate with excessive tardiness, increased number of behavioral issues, and low academic achievement. This is consistent with a “nonrandom” and “convenience sampling” approach. “Convenience sampling is sometimes referred to as haphazard or accidental sampling as the investigator selects individuals because they are available and willing to participate” (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013, p. 16). “Nonrandom assignment of participants to each condition allows for convenience when it is logistically not possible to utilize random assignment” (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013, p. 22).

In accordance with prudent research practices, the sample set was drawn from the school district’s larger student population and those involved in the study formed the study’s subgroup or sample set. Those who formed the sample set were also the experimental group who received the treatment of the one-on-one mentoring relational support program. Golyaev and Paarsch (2016) reported that “for sample data to be useful, the number of observations must be large enough to be representative of the population”

(p. 229). The number of recruited students, who agreed to participate and who provided signed consent to participate in the program, was large enough to serve as the sample or subset group. These participants included ESE, ESOL, and general education students. All participating students enrolled at the selected alternative education charter high school in Florida were between the ages of 15 and 21 years.

Another key factor is that results from this research on the effects of a one-on-one mentoring relational support program on educational outcomes and behavior may have limited generalizability to the district's overall student population. However, the results may be generalized and used to help make decisions with regards to the district's at-risk student population. Muijs (2011) explained that "in quantitative research we often want to generalize from our sample to the population" and "the population is the group of people we want to generalize to" (p. 13). The overall student enrollment population count for the 2017-2018 school year for the school district is presented in Table 1 and Tables 2 through 8 present additional district and school demographics.

Table 1

School District's 2017-2018 Total Student Enrollment

School Type	Enrollment
Pre-K	5,939
Elementary (K-5)	96,374
Middle (6-8)	48,335
High (9-12)	70,686
Centers	5,090
Charter Schools	45,093
Total	271,517

Table 2

School District's 2017-2018 Traditional High School Student Enrollment

Grade	Enrollment
9	17,753
10	17,995
11	17,682
12	17,256
Total	70,686

Table 3

School District's 2017-2018 Charter High School Enrollment

Grade	Enrollment
9	1,786
10	1,885
11	1,888
12	2,452
Total	8,011

Table 4

Study's Selected Charter School 2017-2018 Enrollment

Grade	Enrollment
9	22
10	44
11	54
12	134
Total	266

Table 5

Study's Selected Charter School 2017-2018 Gender Characteristics

Gender	Student Count	Percent of Total Enrollment
Female	114	42.9%
Male	152	57.1%

Table 6

School District's 2017-2018 Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Student Count	Percent of Total Enrollment
White	139,325	51.3%
Black	109,338	40.3%
Asian	10,255	3.8%
Native American/Native Alaskan	2,091	0.8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	581	0.2%
Multi-racial	9,927	3.7%

Note. Total = 100.1% due to rounding.

Table 7

Study's Selected Charter School 2017-2018 Race and Ethnicity Characteristics

Race/Ethnicity	Student Count	Percent of Total Enrollment
White	95	35.7%
Black	163	61.3%
Asian	0	0.0%
Native American/Native Alaskan	4	1.5%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0%
Multi-racial	4	1.5%

Table 8

Study's Selected Charter School 2017–2018 Risk Factors

Risk Factors	Student Count	Percent of Total Enrollment
ELL	84	31.6%
ESE	22	8.3%
Free and Reduced Lunch	235	88.3%

District wide enrollment demographics show that as of the first day of school for the 2017-2018 school year, there were a total of 271,517 students enrolled in the school district. Of this number, 70,686 were high school students. Of the total number of secondary students enrolled in the district, 0.8% were Native American or Native Alaskan, 3.8% were Asian, 40.3% were Black or African American, and 51.3% were White. Additionally, there were 33.8% Hispanics, which included those who identified themselves as Hispanic or Hispanic and another non-Hispanic language.

With regards to English Language Learners (ELL), district totals showed that there were 12.5% ELL students and 12.8% Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students. In addition, 62.7 % were classified as economically disadvantaged. Serving as the sample population from which participants were recruited to participate in this research, the demographics at this at-risk charter school indicate that for the 2017-2018 school year there were 266 enrolled students. Of this number, none were American Indian, none were Asian American, 61.3% were Black or African American, 21.8% were Hispanic, and 35.7% were White. Of the total enrolled, 31.6% were ELL, and 8.3% were ESE. In addition, of the total enrolled students at this alternative education charter school, 88.3% were classified as economically disadvantaged.

Instruments and Data Collection

Muijs (2011) explained that “one distinct advantage in conducting a quasi-experimental research is that the researcher is able to use a natural education setting” (p. 25). Accordingly, the researcher used a natural school setting to conduct this study of adolescents participating in a one-on-one relational mentoring support program at an alternative education charter high school in Florida where the majority of the enrolled students are classified as being at-risk. Muijs also claimed that because of the natural education setting, using the quasi-experimental method is a good tool for assessing the effectiveness of new educational programs. As in the case of this study, the program being assessed is the one-on-one mentoring relational support program. Additionally, “however good our research design, or sophisticated our statistical analysis, the results will be meaningless if we aren’t actually measuring what we are purporting to measure” (Muijs, 2011, p. 57). Thus, using non-probability convenience sampling, the researcher applied a *t*-test to measure the differences in means of the pretreatment and posttreatment group of students who participated in the one-on-one mentoring relational support program.

Before the implementation of the mentoring program, all research data were collected from the school’s records department. As principal of the at-risk school in this study, prior to accessing the data, the researcher sought and received site approval from the school’s administration to conduct this study. The researcher used the data to determine whether there were differences between the pretreatment control group and the posttreatment group that received the one-on one mentoring relational support. The researcher began the study by first collecting archived data on student attendance, credit

completion, statewide assessments, and number of behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. No identifying individual student information was included in this study.

Student attendance. According to the study school district's attendance policy, all compulsory age learners are required to attend school every day of the 180-day school year or the equivalent on an hourly basis. Student attendance data were collected for comparative analysis of pretreatment and posttreatment of the one-on-one mentoring relational program.

Student assessment. All students in the study school district are required to take various statewide standardized assessments. To establish proficiency in reading, depending on the cohort year, students attending this alternative education charter high school are required to take the following standardized assessments: Florida Standards Assessment English Language Arts (FSA ELA) in the fall or spring of each school year, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test 2.0 (FCAT 2.0) Reading Retake in the fall or spring of each school year, and the ACT/SAT (reading concordant scores). For students to meet the state-mandated reading requirement criteria to earn a high school diploma in Florida, the student must be successful in at least one of the mandated reading assessments. For the purpose of this study, students reading scores from the FSA ELA Spring 2017 were compared with the scores from Fall 2017.

With regards to math, for students to meet the Florida Department of Education high school graduation math requirement, they must pass at least one of the following statewide assessments: Algebra I Next Generation Sunshine State Standards End-of-Course in the winter or spring of each school year, Florida Standards Assessment End-of-Course Algebra 1 (FSA EOC Algebra 1) in the fall or spring of each school year, and the

Program Evaluation Review Technique (PERT) Assessments. To address the student assessment research question, the researcher collected data for means comparisons on student assessment results from Spring 2017 and Fall 2017 using FSA EOC Algebra 1 standardized assessment scores.

The researcher began by collecting data on the number of students tested, the number and percentage of those meeting proficiency, and students' overall FSA EOC Algebra 1 assessment scores pretreatment of participating in the mentoring program. Data were again collected and proficiency and learning gains were analyzed posttreatment. To reiterate, Spring 2017 FSA EOC Algebra 1 assessment data served as the pretreatment data and Fall 2017 FSA EOC Algebra 1 assessment data served as the posttreatment data for means comparison.

Credit completion. To determine if there were significant differences between the pretreatment and posttreatment of the mentoring program the researcher collected and analyzed student credit completion data for both periods. For the pretreatment period, the researcher used the number of credits each participant completed during Fall 2016. After the implementation of the one-on-one mentoring program, the researcher then collected data on student credit completion for Fall 2017 for means comparison.

Student behavior. In Fall 2016, which serves as the pretreatment phase of the mentoring program at this alternative education charter high school in Florida, the number of students who received behavioral referrals were 24 (9.7%); suspensions were 17 (6.9%); and 0 students were expelled (0.0%). During the posttreatment period, data were collected on the number of students receiving behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions for means comparison.

In summary, with the school's administrative approval, the data were collected from four sources from the school's data reporting system:

1. Attendance data by the sample group at the school-wide level for the 2016-2017 school year from archived and current data sets recorded on the study site.
2. School-wide assessment results from the state's standardized Reading (FSA ELA) and Math (FSA EOC Algebra 1) assessments.
3. Credit completion data were collected from archived and current data sets recorded on the study site.
4. Behavioral infractions from archived and current data sets recorded at the study site.

Procedures and Design

This was a quantitative quasi-experimental study. "Quasi-experimental research designs are also referred to as field research (i.e., the research is conducted with an intact group in the field as oppose to the lab)" (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013, p. 22). Muijs (2011) stated that:

quasi-experiments are often used precisely because such random allocation is not possible or practical and that typically, the experimental group will be decided by which settings (e.g. schools, classrooms or factories) have volunteered or been selected to be part of the intervention. (p. 23)

In addition, "quasi-experimental research is especially suited to looking at the effects of an educational intervention, such as a school improvement program, a project to improve a specific element or a professional development program" (Muijs, 2011, p. 24). This aligns with the purpose of the study, which was to determine whether or not

implementing a one-on-one mentoring relational support program would be beneficial to students and result in an increase in their attendance, credit completion, proficiency on statewide assessments, and a decrease in behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. Furthermore, the researcher used the within-subjects approach. The data collected and analyzed from the group of students for the pretreatment phase were again collected from the same group of students for the posttreatment phase of the study.

The researcher began by using archived quantitative data to establish the pretreatment baseline of the program. To examine the impact of the program, the researcher then examined similar data at the conclusion of the mentoring program. For attendance and behavior, school-wide data from Fall 2016, the pretreatment period, was collected and compared to Fall 2017 posttreatment data. To measure the effectiveness of the mentoring program on student academic achievement, standardized assessment and credit completion data were utilized. The FSA ELA and FSA EOC Algebra 1 assessment scores from Spring 2017 were compared with the assessment scores from Fall 2017. Additionally, credit completion data from Fall 2016 were compared with credit completion data from Fall 2017.

Upon receiving approval to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the established timetable for the implementation of the one-on-one mentoring relational support program was 10 weeks. Both the mentors and mentees received a formal invitation by letter to participate in the mentoring program. Once student and parent consent was received, participating mentors and students received an outline of the details and purpose of the mentoring program.

The One-on-One Mentoring Relational Support Program

Mentoring is about transition, change, and transformation and can help us to explore our story, think new thoughts, and realize a new future (Clutterbuck, Garrett-Harris, Garvey, Megginson, & Stokes, 2006). Because the majority of the students who participated in this study falls under this umbrella, the leaders of this mentoring program sought to build students' self-esteem, personal and social skills, motivation, attitude, overall behavior, aspirations, and academic achievement. By targeting these areas of growth it was hoped that attendance and academic achievement would improve and behavioral infractions decrease.

On a weekly basis, students met with their assigned mentor one-on-one for a minimum of 30 minutes, at which time the mentor discussed with the mentee their attendance, credit completion, statewide assessments, behavior, and college and career opportunities. In addition, mentors also discussed with mentees, the following pre-determined mentoring topics:

1. Week one included a discussion on the impact of culture on the individual's personality.
2. Week two covered how being a part of a group affects behavior and why people break the rules.
3. Week three covered society and personal choice and the high school dropout rate in the United States and Florida.
4. Week four included how and why we judge each other and our actions.
5. Week five included a discussion on self-control and coping with stress.
6. Week six included discussions on the roles that family and religion play in

society and how societal trends affect our health.

7. Week seven covered why people vote and why people work.

8. Week eight covered how people decide what to do after high school, the economy, and employment.

9. Week nine included resume writing, mock interviews, and a discussion on the interview process.

10. Week ten included discussions on social change, personal choices, and a mentoring wrap up.

Before each mentoring meeting, the mentor reviewed each student's attendance, academic progress, and behavioral infractions. During the meeting, the mentor and mentee discussed and set weekly attendance, credit, statewide assessment preparation, and behavioral goals. Using a mentoring log, mentors kept track and collected data on their mentoring sessions with students including their attendance, credit completion, and behavioral infractions.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis phase of an educational research project it is vital to evaluate the quality of the data presented; “the two major concerns about data are representativeness and trustworthiness” (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 101). According to McKenney and Reeves (2012), “representativeness refers to how well the data actually represent the problem, the context, and/or participant voices and trustworthiness pertains to how valid and reliable each source of data is” (p. 101). In other words, the data collected must directly speak to the research problem. For this study, it was imperative that the researcher ensured that the data collected and presented were relevant to the

study's research problem.

To answer the study's research questions, the researcher used non-probability convenience sampling to collect pretreatment and posttreatment data to examine comparative differences in the means of attendance, academic achievement, and behavioral infractions before and after student participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program. The research questions, null hypotheses, and alternative hypotheses follow:

RQ1. To what extent does participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program influence the attendance of at-risk students?

H₀₁. There is no significant impact on student attendance based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program.

H_{a1}. There is a significant impact on student attendance based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program.

RQ2. To what extent does participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program influence at-risk student academic achievement, specifically their reading and math standardized test scores, and credit completion?

H₀₂. There is no significant impact on student academic achievement based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program as measured by student standardized reading and math test scores and credit completion.

H_{a2}. There is a significant impact on student academic achievement based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program as measured student standardized reading and math test scores and credit completion.

3. To what extent does participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program

influence student behavior as measured by (a) behavior referrals, (b) suspensions, and (c) expulsions?

H₀₃. There is no significant impact on student behavioral infractions based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program.

H_{a3}. There is a significant impact on student behavioral infractions based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program.

According to Muijs (2011):

as a researcher, you will have to try to collect as much information as possible on as many variables as you think might be relevant to outcomes when doing quasi-experimental research and you can then try to control statistically for the effects of these variables. (p. 25)

Accordingly, in determining the effects of the one-on-one mentoring relational support program on student attendance, the one-on-one mentoring support was the independent variable. “The treatment is also known as the intervention or program (i.e. the treatment is technically the independent variable and also referred to as a factor” (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013, p. 12). Consequently, student attendance was the dependent variable because it was the variable that would be influenced by the mentoring program. The same can be said for statewide assessments, credit completion, and the number of behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. In determining the effects of the mentoring program on statewide assessments, credit completion and behavioral referrals, suspensions and expulsions, the one-on-one mentoring relational support program was the independent variable and the statewide assessment results, credit completion, and number of behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions were all dependent variables.

Validity and Reliability

Edmonds and Kennedy (2013) explained that “the validity of a measurement tool simply means that it measures what it is developed to measure” (p. 3). Muijs (2011) explained that “reliability refers to the extent to which test scores are free of measurement error” (p. 63). Accordingly, using the school’s records department data retrieval system, the researcher collected pre and post data in four areas: (a) student attendance; (b) statewide assessments; (c) credit completion; and (d) number of behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. For the purpose of this study, the data used to measure attendance were valid because they are the same data that the district and state uses to measure and report student attendance rates. With regard to statewide assessments, these are also the data that the district and state use to measure student mastery of standards, proficiency level, learning gains, and overall academic achievement. Assessments are usually developed or selected to measure the content represented in the standards and that assessments influence practice by signaling to educators which aspects of curriculum are effective (Merrell, 2012).

While it is important for teachers to be able to observe and assess student learning in the classroom, it is imperative to include analysis of student performance on standardized assessments as another measurement of student learning. Merrell (2012) asserted that:

although teachers can see their pupils learning new things and developing, without standardized assessments at regular points throughout their education it is difficult to estimate whether a child is making good progress compared with others of the same age, ability and time in school. (p. 297)

Similarly, Faxon-Mills, Hamilton, Rudnick, and Stecher (2013) stated that:

Districts and schools respond to the standards and assessment and their use for accountability by setting policies related to curriculum, resources, teacher support, etc. and some of these policies influence instructional practices directly (e.g., new textbooks), while others operate indirectly by changing teachers' knowledge or beliefs or key features of the school in which they work. (p. 7)

Rossiter (2015) asserted that standardized assessments and grades of students in high poverty areas are the two primary ways in which we assess learning. Credit completion data are also used across the state as a measure of academic achievement at the grade and high school completion level. In Florida, students are expected to successfully complete 12 semester long classes (six per semester) per school year to be on track to graduate at the end of their fourth high school year.

Concerning behavioral referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, these data are collected by schools, districts, and the state and are used to identify or determine interventions needed for student academic success. Rossiter (2015) maintained that an honest assessment of classroom behavior is imperative for student success and stated that, "disruptive behavior should bring quick reassignment to remediation, but in this case to strengthen not academic skills but social ones" (p. 168).

Limitations

There were four identified limitations to this study. The limitations encountered were the use of convenience sampling, the transient feature of the student population at the charter high school used for this study, teachers' mentoring training, and the timing and duration of the study.

Convenience sampling did not give way to randomizing the study population. The study was conducted at one at-risk charter school with a small population of 266 students for the 2017-2018 school year. Muijs (2011) stated that, “generalizing to the population is not something we can automatically do and samples are often not totally representative of the population” (p. 65). The study results are, therefore, only generalizable to the specific population included in this study. In this case, the impact of the effect of a one-on-one mentoring relational program is generalizable only to at-risk students. Additionally, due to the demographics of the study, the results have limited generalizability. This also led to the presence of outliers and biases that may have impacted the study results. A key factor to note is that the grade levels that were targeted were limited to ninth to 12th grade. Consequently, the study did not include students at the elementary and middle school level.

Concerning the transient feature of the student population of this study, the attendance rate ranged between 50% and 55% for the school year. In other words, because many students were not in school on a regular basis, they did not receive the full benefits of the school’s ongoing academic program. For instance, many were arrested for parole violations and other criminal activities. This trend was evident prior to, throughout, and after the implementation period of the mentoring program. As a result, it was difficult to monitor the impact of the one-on-one, mentoring relational support program that was implemented. Specifically, because of the transitory characteristics of the population, it was difficult to track these students’ progress.

The third limitation was teacher mentoring training. Some teachers were trained and had previously attended mentoring and student success workshops. However, not all

teachers who served as mentors were trained on effective mentoring techniques. This lack of training may have impacted the mentor-student relationship and consequently resulted in negative outcomes post the implementation of the mentoring program.

Lastly, the study was conducted over 10 weeks in the first semester of the school year. The period in which the program was implemented may not be sufficient to determine long-term effects. Additionally, the study was conducted during the first semester and with a set number of mostly homogeneous high school students. Almost all students at this charter school are at-risk learners. Furthermore, because the study was conducted during the first semester and the first semester is a time when most seniors are preparing to graduate, this factor may have skewed the results of the study.

Despite these limitations, the data gathered in this study could be beneficial in determining how to best support the needs of at-risk learners. While the school does serve a transient population, and the study was being conducted over a short time period with a small sample of at-risk high school students, the researcher anticipated that the information gathered from the research study could inform decisions about subsequent mentoring programs.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to present the results of the data analysis. First, this chapter provides an overview of the research study design and research questions. Second, this chapter provides the demographic characteristics of the sample. Third, this chapter describes the results organized by research question.

The purpose of this study was to explore whether the participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program at an at-risk charter high school in Florida would increase student attendance, improve academic achievement, and decrease behavioral infractions. This study involved the implementation and evaluation of a one-on-one mentoring relational support program because prior research has indicated that providing at-risk students with mentoring opportunities provides them with the tools they need to be successful in meeting their high school graduation requirements.

A ten-week, one-on-one mentoring relational support program at an at-risk charter high school in Florida was implemented at the beginning of the first semester of the 2017-2018 school year, Fall 2017. Upon IRB approval of the research design, potential participants received informed consent forms with information about the study and their role should they consent. Participants were provided with the option to agree or disagree with participation in the study. Only staff and students who returned signed consent forms participated in the study.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent did participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program

influence the attendance of at-risk students?

2. To what extent did participation in a one-on-one peer mentoring relational program influence at-risk student academic achievement, specifically their reading and math standardized test scores and credit completion?

3. To what extent did participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program influence student behavior as measured by (a) behavior referrals, (b) suspensions, and (c) expulsions?

Participation Rate

All students at the selected charter school between the ages of 15-17 years were invited to participate. The parents of these students were informed of this study and they received the required consent forms. However, of the 118 students between the ages of 15-17 years who were invited to participate, none of the parents consented for their student to partake in the research. As a result, no students from this age group were participants in this study.

All students at the selected charter school between the ages of 18-21 years were invited to participate. They were informed of this study and received the required consent forms. Due to their age, parental consent was not required. Of the 118 learners between the ages of 18-21 years who were invited to participate, 80 (54.05% of this age group and 30.08% of the school's total population) agreed to participate and signed their consent. Therefore, 30.08% of the school's student population formed the sample group for this study.

All staff members at the at-risk charter school involved in this study received an invitation to participate and served as mentors in this study. Of the 14 staff members

eight agreed to participate (57.14% of the staff) and mentored participating students.

The groups of students who did not participate in the study were:

1. Students who did not struggle with attendance. Accordingly, those who attend school a minimum of four days or more per week were not included or invited to participate in this research.
2. Students for whom the school has documented success on the various statewide proficiency exams and those who were on track to graduate in terms of their credit completion. In other words, those who demonstrated proficiency on the reading and math state standardized assessments were not included in this study and all students who were progressing with their credit completion and were completing a minimum of six classes per semester or 12 classes per year did not participate in this study.
3. Students 15-17 who did not receive parental permission and/or those who did not sign the assent forms were not included.
4. Additionally, students 18 years or older who did not complete the consent form were also not included.

Participant Demographics

The study was conducted using a sample of 80 students from various grade levels from the at-risk charter school in Florida that participated in this study. Table 9 demonstrates the demographic characteristics of the students. More than half of the sample (56.3%) of the participants in the study were male and (53.8%) were not ELL students. The majority of the participants (97.5%) were students without disabilities. More than half (56.3%) did not have free and reduced lunch. More than half of the

students (53.7%) were in grade 12, followed by 21.3% in grade 11, 17.5% in grade nine, and 7.5% were in grade 10. In addition, the data also showed that about two thirds of the participants (68.7%) were Black while approximately a third of the participants were multi/Hispanic (18.8%) and 12.5% were White.

Table 9

Student Demographics

Variable		<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Male	45	56.3
	Female	35	43.7
English Language Learners	Yes	37	46.7
	No	43	53.8
Students With Disabilities	Yes	2	2.5
	No	78	97.5
Free and Reduced Lunch	Yes	35	43.8
	No	45	56.3
Grade	9	14	17.5
	10	6	7.5
	11	17	21.3
	12	43	53.7
Race/Ethnicity	Black	55	68.7
	Multi/Hispanic	15	18.8
	White	10	12.5

Mentors. All staff members who participated in this study were current employees of the at-risk charter school in Florida where the study took place. The eight mentors of this study were drawn from the 14 staff members at this school and are between the ages of 25-50 years. This mentoring team was taken from the school's support staff, instructional staff, and the administrative team. The gender and ethnicity characteristics of the mentors are presented in Table 10 and their roles are presented in Table 11.

Table 10

Participating Mentors' Gender and Ethnicity

Gender	Total	African American	Hispanic	White
Female	6	4	1	1
Male	2	1	0	1

Table 11

Participating Mentors' Roles

Role	Count
ESE/ESOL Coordinator	1
Reading Teacher	2
Math Teacher	2
Science Teacher	1
PE/ESE Teacher	1
Social Science Teacher	1

Results

Result question 1. This research question focused on evaluating the extent to which participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program influenced the attendance of at-risk students. The mean number of absences was used to measure attendance. In Fall 2016, mean absence was 19.94 days, whereas in Fall 2017, mean absence was 12.31 days (see Table 12).

Table 12

Student Absenteeism

Absences	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fall 2016	19.94	13.185
Fall 2017	12.31	11.545

Note. $N = 80$.

In order to evaluate the extent to which participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program influenced the attendance of at-risk students a hypothesis was developed.

H_{01} . There is no significant impact on student attendance based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program.

H_{a1} . There is a significant impact on student attendance based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program.

A *t*-test analysis was used to test the hypothesis ($t = 3.892, p = 0.000$). The assumption of equality of variances conducted using Levene's test was not violated ($F = 0.879, p = 0.350$). The results indicate that there is a significant difference between student attendance and participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program.

Specifically, absenteeism significantly decreased after participation in the one-on-one

mentoring relational program as depicted from pretreatment absence ($M = 19.94$) to posttreatment absence ($M = 12.31$). Therefore, H_{01} can be rejected.

Result question 2. This research question was developed to explore the extent to which participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program influenced at-risk students' academic achievement as measured by standardized test scores and credit completion. Students' standardized test scores were measured using the FSA ELA Spring 2017 assessment and Fall 2017 assessment, as well as the FSA EOC Algebra 1 Spring 2017 assessment and the Fall 2017 assessment. Figure 1 shows that 95% of the participants had not met their reading requirement during the Spring 2017 assessment and thus were invited to participate in the mentoring program. Similarly, Figure 2 shows that more than two-thirds of the participants (68.75%) had not met the math requirement and were therefore invited to participate in the mentoring program.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the one-on-one mentoring relational support program for students who failed to meet their reading and math requirements and were behind in credit completion, a hypothesis was developed.

H_{02} . There is no significant impact on student academic achievement based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program as measured by student standardized reading and math test scores and credit completion.

H_{a2} . There is a significant impact on student academic achievement based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program as measured student standardized reading and math test scores and credit completion.

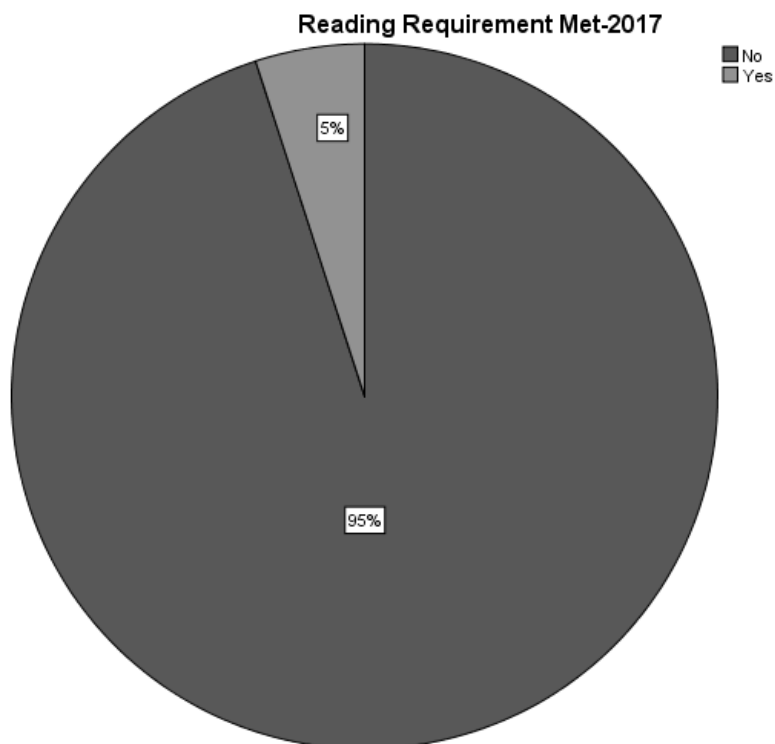


Figure 1. Student Spring 2017 reading performance on statewide assessments.

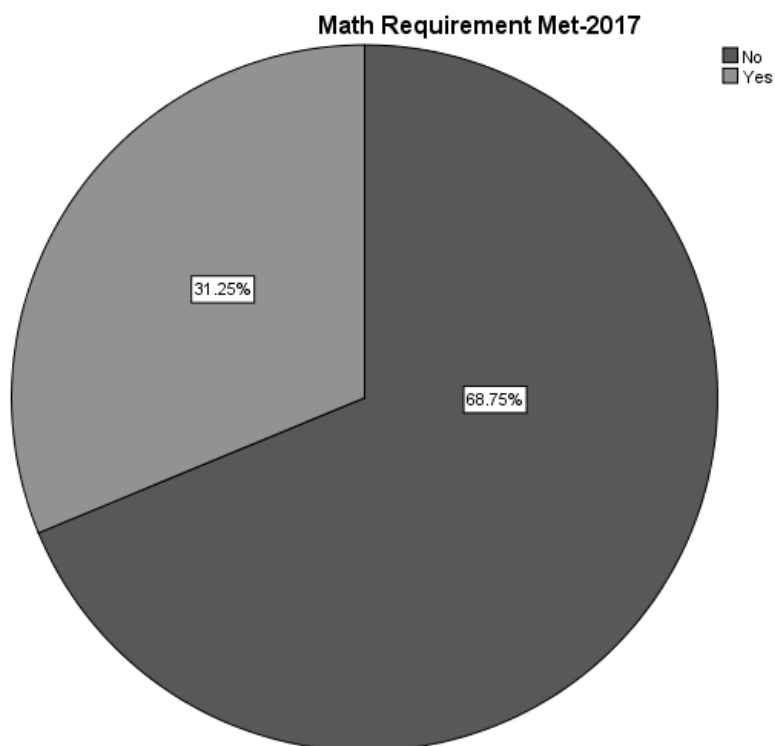


Figure 2. Student Spring 2017 math performance on statewide assessments.

A *t*-test analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis. Table 13 displays the results of the reading and math assessment scores before and after the intervention of the one-on-one mentoring relational program. The results show that students' mean reading test score in Spring 2017 was 304.86. Students' mean reading test score in Fall 2017 after participation in the one-on-one mentoring relational support program was 317.88. Students' mean math assessment score in Spring 2017 was 430.07. Their mean math test score in Fall 2017 after participation in the one-on-one mentoring relational support program was 458.22.

Table 13

Reading and Math Test Scores

Test Scores	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Reading Scores Spring 2017	74	304.86	18.752
Reading Scores Fall 2017	74	317.88	18.418
Math Scores Spring 2017	60	430.07	33.006
Math Scores Fall 2017	60	458.22	45.204

The result of the *t*-test analysis of reading test scores ($t(146) = 4.256, p = 0.000$) indicates that there is a significant difference between student academic achievement as measured by reading test scores prior to and after participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program. Further, the assumption of equality of variances was not violated ($F = 0.033, p = 0.856$).

The result of the *t*-test analysis of math test scores ($t(107.99) = 3.896, p = 0.000$) indicates that there is a significant difference between student academic achievement as measured by math test scores prior to and after participation in a one-on-one mentoring

relational support program. Further, the assumption of equality of variances was not violated ($F = 16.495, p = 0.000$).

Table 14 illustrates the number of credits completed by students in Fall 2016 and Fall 2017. The results indicate that the mean credits completed in Fall 2016 was 0.90 whereas the mean credits completed in Fall 2017 after the implementation of the one-on-one mentoring relational support program was 2.05.

Table 14

Credits Completed

Test Scores	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Fall 2016	0.90	1.411
Fall 2017	2.05	2.728

Note. $N = 80$.

The result of the *t*-test analysis of credit completion ($t(118.44) = 3.349, p = 0.001$) indicates that there is a significant difference between student academic achievement as measured by credit completion prior to and after participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program. Further, the assumption of equality of variances was not violated ($F = 13.987, p = 0.000$). Therefore, H_{02} can be rejected.

Result question 3. This research question was developed to examine the extent to which participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program influenced student behavior as measured by (a) behavior referrals, (b) suspensions, and (c) expulsions. The expulsion was discarded from the analysis as a variable as none of the students were expelled during the time period of the study.

Behavior referrals. The researcher examined whether participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program would help decrease the number of behavior

referrals students from the alternative charter high school in Florida receive. Table 15 shows that 30% of students received behavior referrals in 2016-2017 whereas only 7.5% received behavioral referrals in 2017-2018.

Table 15

Behavioral Referrals

Referrals		<i>N</i>	%
2016-2017	Yes	24	30
	No	56	70
2017-2018	Yes	6	7.5
	No	74	92.5

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the one-on-one mentoring relational support program on student behavior infractions, a hypothesis was developed.

H₀₃. There is no significant impact on student behavioral infractions based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program.

H_{a3}. There is a significant impact on student behavioral infractions based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program.

A chi-square analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis in terms of behavioral referrals ($\chi^2 = 1.236, p = 0.266$). The result indicates that there is no significant difference between students' behavioral infractions prior to and following participation in the one-on-one mentoring relational program as measured by the number of their behavioral referrals.

Suspensions. An analysis was conducted to determine whether the intervention of the one-on-one relationship support program would help decrease the number of student

suspensions. Figure 3 shows that 21.25% of students received suspensions in 2016-2017 whereas Figure 4 shows only 2.5% received suspensions in 2017-2018.

In order to evaluate the effect of the mentoring program on student suspensions, H_{03} was again tested using a chi-square analysis in terms of suspensions.

A chi-square analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis in terms of suspensions ($\chi^2 = 0.554, p = 0.457$). The result indicates that there is no significant difference between students' behavioral infractions prior to and following participation in the one-on-one mentoring relational program as measured by the number of their suspensions. Therefore, H_{03} cannot be rejected.

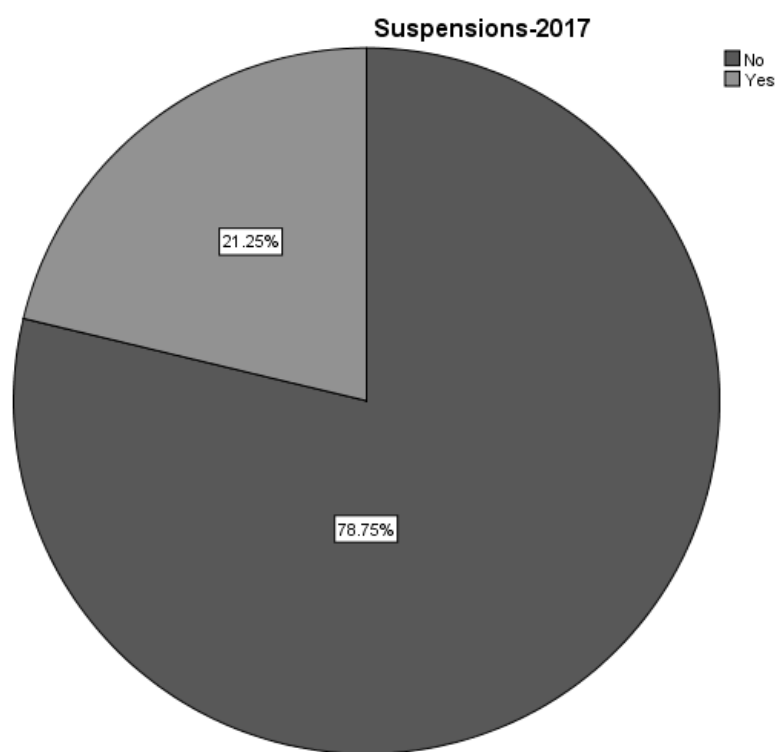


Figure 3. Number of suspensions in academic year 2016-2017.

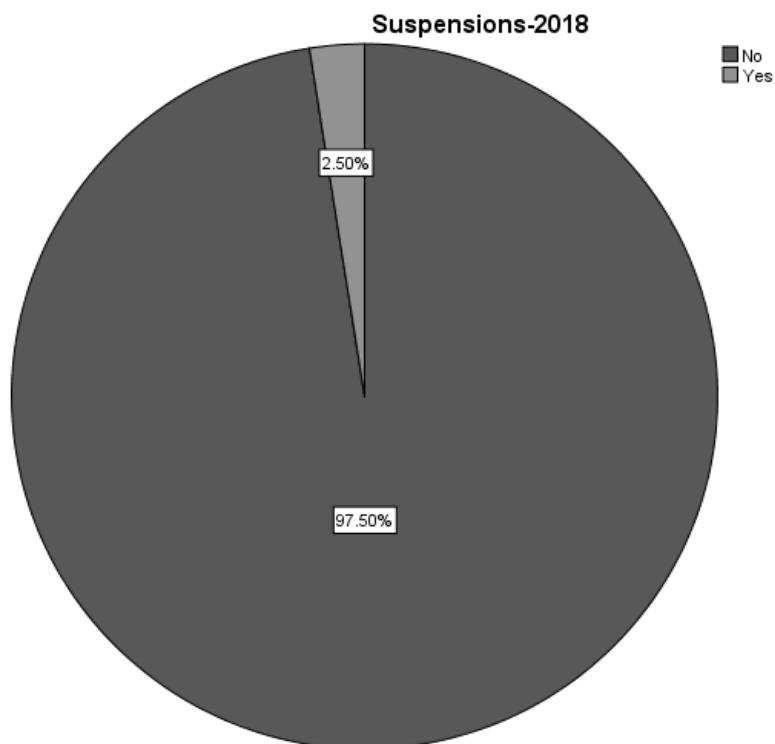


Figure 4. Number of suspensions in academic year 2017-2018.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore whether or not the participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program would increase student attendance, improve academic achievement, and decrease behavioral infractions. The study addressed three research questions that focused on determining whether mentoring relationships would result in an improvement in attendance, an increase in academic achievement, and a decrease in students' negative behaviors at an at-risk charter high school in Florida. The results showed that providing students with mentoring opportunities may help to provide at-risk youth with the tools they need to be successful in meeting their high school requirements. This chapter focuses on discussing the results of this study in relation to the literature. First, a summary of the results is presented, followed by interpretation, context of results, and implications. The chapter closes with limitations, a conclusion, and recommendations.

Summary of Results

As stated, the research study was guided by three research questions. The first research question focused on evaluating the extent to which participation in a mentoring relational program influenced the attendance of at-risk students. The results from a *t*-test analysis indicated that there was a significant difference in student attendance pre and post their participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program. The results show that the one-one mentoring relationship support program helped in decreasing absenteeism. H_{01} , there is no significant impact on student attendance based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program, was rejected.

The second research question explored the extent to which participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program influenced at-risk students' academic achievement, specifically standardized test scores and credit completion. The research question examined the effectiveness of the one-on-one mentoring relational support program in improving students' FSA ELA and FSA EOC Algebra 1 standardized test scores. The *t*-test analysis indicated that there was a significant difference between student academic achievement prior to participation and following participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program as measured by students' test scores and credit completion. The results show that the one-on-one mentoring relationship support program helped improve students' academic performance as measured by their reading and math test scores as well as their credit completion. H_{02} , there is no significant impact on student academic achievement based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program as measured by student standardized reading and math test scores and credit completion, was rejected.

The third research question examined the extent to which participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program influenced student behavior as measured by (a) behavior referrals, (b) suspensions, and (c) expulsions. Behavior related to expulsions could not be analyzed as planned as none of the participants had been expelled during the time frame of this study. Inconsistent with current literature, the results of the chi-square analysis revealed that there was no significant difference between student behavioral infractions and suspensions prior to participation and following participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational program. H_{03} , there is no significant impact on student behavioral infractions based on participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational

program, could not be rejected.

Interpretation of Results

As has been noted, the focus of the study was to determine whether or not the one-on-one mentoring relationships between mentors and students would result in an improvement in attendance, increase in academic achievement, and decrease in students' negative behaviors in an at-risk charter high school in Florida. It was expected that providing students with the right mentoring opportunities may well help to provide at-risk youth with the tools they need to be successful in meeting their high school graduation requirements, specifically increasing their academic performance and decreasing their behavioral infractions.

First, it was predicted that the one-on-one mentoring relational support program would help increase student attendance. The pretreatment data demonstrated that the number of absences in Fall 2016 was substantial. However, the intervention of the mentoring support program contributed to a decrease in the number of absences in Fall 2017. The results revealed a positive effect of the one-on-one mentoring relationship support program in improving student attendance. This demonstrates that when experienced individuals in schools for at-risk learners purposefully take the time and opportunities to guide, nurture, and train young inexperienced and at-risk youth to continue with their learning and acquire new skills, student attendance increases. As expected, providing students with the mentoring support they needed helped to improve their attendance.

With regard to academic achievement, the results indicated that the at-risk students who undertook the standardized reading and math statewide assessments in the

Spring 2017 academic year prior to the intervention of the mentoring relational support program had low test score results on their FSA ELA and FSA EOC Algebra 1 standardized tests. This was attributed to the lack of mentorship, which may have also contributed to students not realizing the value of studying. As anticipated, with the intervention of the mentoring program, their reading and math scores improved.

The results also indicated that students' credit completion significantly increased upon the intervention of the mentoring relational support program. In view of the results, mentoring and support programs are certainly necessary strategies that school systems can use for facilitating maximum learning and for fulfilling the educational mission of ensuring that students are successful in earning their high school diploma. Mentoring support programs provide students with the necessary tools, such as motivation and encouragement, to embrace studying and understand the importance of earning their high school diploma.

Similar to attendance and academic achievement, the research study examined the effect of the mentorship program on decreasing students' negative behaviors as measured by referrals and suspensions. Given that it has been reported in prior literature that mentoring significantly contributes to decreasing negative behaviors, it was expected that the mentoring relationship support program would make a significant difference in decreasing negative behaviors as measured by suspensions and behavioral referrals. However, while the results show that the implementation of the one-on-one mentoring relational program made a significant difference in student attendance, assessment scores (FSA ELA and FSA EOC Algebra 1), and credit completion, the same cannot be said for students' behavioral infractions. The implementation of the one-on-one mentoring

program did not make a significant difference in decreasing referrals and suspensions. The results demonstrated that the one-on-one mentoring program was ineffective in providing students with the support necessary for making wise choices and ultimately there was no significant reduction in their negative behaviors.

Context. Prior research shows that mentoring relational support is considered effective in improving attendance, academic achievement, and behavior. Additionally, research shows that student attendance is directly related to their academic achievement. However, school districts across the country continue to struggle with absenteeism and high dropout rates. The goal of this intervention program was to specifically address nonattendance, academic challenges, and behavioral issues that prevent at-risk students from earning their high school diploma.

Research shows that there is a significant economic cost associated with at-risk students who drop out of high school. This factor presents a substantial burden on society. Prior studies claim that the country, communities, families, and the individual learner all benefit from student participation in mentoring. Research also shows that due to mentoring, there is a significantly positive difference in attendance, attitudes toward learning, academic achievement, and the number of students ultimately earning their high school diploma. In general, mentoring addresses their psychological and emotional needs, leads to a progressive shift in students' attitudes towards school, and ultimately an increase in their attendance and academic achievement (Jensen, 2013, Parrett & Budge, 2012; Sable & Gaviola, 2007).

The at-risk charter high school involved in this study struggles with student attendance and their academic achievement. In an effort to address this problem, this

study included the implementation and evaluation of student participation in a one-on-one mentoring relational support program. As mentioned, after implementing the mentoring program, the results of the data analysis were used to determine whether or not these mentoring relationships improved attendance, academic achievement, and behaviors. Research question one examined whether the one-on-one mentoring relational support program would improve student attendance. Accordingly, attendance was evaluated by identifying the number of absences experienced by students in two consecutive academic years. The results revealed that the mentoring relational support program helped improve student attendance. The number of absences decreased after the implementation of the mentoring program. This study result is consistent with prior research.

To illustrate, Hattie (2009) established that implementing new mentoring relationship programs have the potential of increasing student attendance. Similarly, a study by Guryan et al. (2017) indicated that mentorship programs are effective in reducing student absenteeism. The results of this study are also consistent with Gordon, Downey, and Bangert (2013) who found that school-based mentoring programs significantly lower unexcused absences, and with Hocking (2008) and Robinson, Lee, Dearing, and Rogers (2017), who revealed that mentoring and support reduces the rate of absenteeism. Therefore, the support programs and mentors can be considered effective for identifying and remedying situations in which students are at risk for problematic absenteeism. Mentoring programs provide students with opportunities to openly receive compassionate support from their mentors. This type of support aids in activating student development and they learn from their mentors who also serve as role models. In addition, teacher-student relationships are considered critical for learning and the

relationships developed through mentoring, between teachers and students demonstrate that teachers care about their students' learning. Consequently, students willingly come to school to receive the care and nurturing readily available to them.

The second research question focused on exploring whether the one-on-one mentoring relational support program would result in an improvement in student academic performance in reading, math, and credit completion. The results demonstrate that it significantly contributes to the improvement in academic achievement. Students' reading and math scores and their credit completion improved after the implementation of the mentoring relational support program. The results of the study were consistent with prior research (Bonin, 2013; Kendricks, Nedunuri, & Arment, 2013; Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schütz, Carbon, & Schabmann, 2014). These researchers reported that mentoring programs provide students with psychosocial components that help them confidently adjust to the school environment and also reduce their tendency to drop out of school. Moreover, providing a school environment that includes and embraces mentoring fosters the development of students' self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, leading them to concentrate more on their studies.

With regard to student scores on the FSA ELA, the results indicate that reading test scores increased after the implementation of the one-on-one mentoring relational program. Researchers have reported that mentoring programs improve student reading performance by strengthening learners reading and writing skills (Chatham-Carpenter, Heistad, Licari, Moser, & Woods, 2014; Gordon et al., 2013). The results also indicated that students' math scores increased after the implementation of the one-on-one mentoring relational support program, which is consistent with various studies (Hudson,

2010; McCavit & Zellner, 2016); students achieved higher scores on their standardized math tests when compared to reading after the implementation of the one-on-one mentoring program. Prior research suggests that teachers are more concerned with providing support and guidance in math content areas when compared to other subjects, such as science (Hudson, 2010). Mentors provide students with differentiated instruction that includes and encourages continuous pedagogical responses, being open to ideas, timely feedback, and identifying key learning areas to improve student math performance (Hudson, 2010). Mentoring students and discussing their performance in math classes and on their math assessments requires time as well as dedication and commitment that ultimately drive students towards increasing their math academic achievement.

The study's third research question asked whether the one-on-one mentoring relational program would aid in reducing negative behaviors including suspensions and behavioral referrals. Existing research suggests that students benefit from mentoring programs as they focus on improving students' attitudes and classroom behaviors that are also cost effective to implement. Many scholars believe that mentoring works, and most educators are aware that for students to be successful, they need to have meaningful relationships with an adult and that mentoring provides this needed form of relationship (Parrett & Budge, 2012). The mentors and leaders focus on building students' self-esteem, personal and social skills, motivation, attitude, aspirations, and overall behavior that should contribute to the elimination of their negative behaviors. As reported, mentoring programs are designed for students, especially at-risk learners who come to school with a range of inappropriate emotional responses who do not know how to behave (Jensen, 2013).

In contrast, the results of this study indicate that the one-on-one mentoring support program implemented does not significantly aid in reducing suspensions and behavioral referrals. This is inconsistent with prior research (Coller & Kuo, 2014; Gordon et al., 2013). For example, Arum and Velez (2012) reported that the mentoring process is an effective strategy for managing student behaviors and Moore (Benoît) (2014) reported that mentoring and supporting students decreases incidences of suspensions. Behavioral referrals are managed through building strong relationships between students and their mentors where they get the opportunity to share their issues. School-based mentoring programs have also been considered to be effective in reducing behavioral referrals. For instance, students who participate in school-based mentoring programs are considered to have low discipline referrals when compared with those who do not participate in mentoring (Gordon et al., 2013). Mentoring programs should have a positive effect on student self-esteem, retention, and improving peace and equity that lead to reduced suspensions. Teachers, parents, and guardians use mentoring programs that support students and seek to address and result in minimizing disruptive behaviors and decrease suspensions. However, this was not evident in the results of this study.

Overall, the study results indicate that the one-on-one mentoring relational support program did not contribute to improved student behavior. The at-risk students who participated in this mentoring program did not have a significant reduction in the number of suspensions. The results are inconsistent with the findings of Toms and Stuart (2014), that mentoring programs that serve students contribute to a positive reduction of suspensions. In general, research asserts that students who have the opportunity to participate in mentoring are more likely to adapt to morally accepted behaviors and

reduce incidences of criminal activities. However, this was not the case at the alternative charter school where the one-on-one mentoring relational support program was implemented.

Implications. Mentors provide a supportive environment that encourages student attendance and discourages dropouts (Prior, 2013). While the one-on-one mentoring relational support program actively focused on raising student self-esteem and the sense of belonging that should have positively influence student behaviors, this was not evident in this study. However, the mentoring program did contribute to the improvement of attendance and academic performance.

The results indicate that student attendance and their reading and math scores increased as a result of the mentoring interventions. The practical implications of these results are that schools should continue to implement mentoring programs that greatly contribute to the improvement of student attendance and academic achievement and that teachers who also serve as mentors should employ pedagogical strategies as guiding initiatives to this purpose. Schools should also continue to focus on the necessity of behavioral interventions among students that is positively related to their performance. This is consistent with Hoffer (2010) who reported that mentoring has become popular in schools as a retention tool and for encouraging students to attain academic success. Research has indicated that mentoring programs that do not reduce suspensions may be attributed to the strategies used to manage student behaviors (Moore [Benoît], 2014). Continuous monitoring and caring and supporting teacher-student interactions can help manage student behaviors. Caring for students can enable them to make decisions on whether to leave or stay in school (Hoffer, 2010).

Limitations

Typically, limitations of a study are identified as the barriers to objectivity and generalization that are beyond the researchers' control, but must be present to conduct the study. As noted earlier, there were four identified limitations to this study. These limitations include the use of convenience sampling, the transient population, teacher mentoring training, and the time constraints involved in this study.

Convenience sampling implies that randomization is absent from the study and the nonrandom sampling method used in this study contributed to outliers in the data. The use of non-probability statistical analysis has limitations that are attributed to the lack of representativeness, presence of bias, and outliers that have an effect on study results (Yang & Banamah, 2014). The presence of outliers also contributes to increased suspicion of the internal and external validity of the study results because they affect sample estimates and decrease the precision of estimates regarding the population. (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). The study results are only generalizable to the sample being studied rather than the entire population, which is also attributed to non-probability sampling. Moreover, convenience sampling has low power to detect subgroup differences and variations in the sample (Bornstein, Jager, & Putnick, 2013). Consequently, there is the likelihood of errors in the sampling process.

Another key factor was the transiency of the student population at the study charter school. Transiency was significant and may have impacted the outcome of this study. Students who are regularly arrested, have jobs, and for a plethora of other reasons are frequently absent from school are not able to receive the full scope of the mentoring program or the school's rich academic curriculum and instruction.

As noted earlier, another limitation is the uncertainty of teacher training and its affect on student academic performance. Some mentors may have received training and gained experience in mentoring prior to the implementation of the 10-week one-on-one mentoring relational support program, while others may not have. This may have affected the outcomes.

Finally, as indicated, the time constraint of this study was another limitation. The researcher was pushed to work under pressure, especially in such cases where certain sources of information provided strict deadlines. Time became a hindrance towards the processes of data collection and data analysis. Within the 10-week long mentoring program, the researcher was not able to include the upcoming spring assessment data after program implementation. Consequently, only the fall assessment data could be used to determine the effects of the mentoring program.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, mentoring focuses on shaping the behaviors of at-risk learners through guidance, motivation, and improved self-esteem. Teachers play an important role in the attendance of their students through monitoring their performance, and providing encouragement and timely feedback. Teachers must take note of the number of absences of an individual and attempt to intervene by identifying the cause of absenteeism. As a result of the implementation of the mentoring program, the increased care in student learning reduced absenteeism. This should also be accompanied by the monitoring of student behaviors and activities that may give teachers or mentors accurate and timely information to identify students who are most at risk for absenteeism. Moreover, creating an enabling environment that allows students to advance their

learning effectively can challenge absenteeism.

The mentoring relational support program in this study contributed to an increase in student academic performance as measured by their reading and math test scores and credit completion. The study established that students' reading scores improved after the implementation of the mentoring support program. In general, teacher mentoring is observed to strengthen students' reading skills as they help students focus on key areas, such as vocabulary and writing. Moreover, the study established that the math test scores were higher than reading test scores. The teachers are greatly concerned with students' performance in math compared to other subjects, such as science. Teaching students to be open to new ideas and also providing timely feedback encouraged their performance in math classes and credit completion.

While the results demonstrated that the one-on-one mentoring program made a significant difference in terms of increasing students' attendance, their reading and math scores, and credit completion, the same cannot be said for behavioral infractions. The results exhibited that the mentoring program did not contribute to the improvement of behaviors of at-risk students. The intervention of the mentoring program did not contribute to a decline in negative behaviors, such as suspensions and behavioral referrals. The implication of this result is that mentors either do not focus on providing psychological and emotional guidance to mentees that can enhance discipline among students or some mentors may not have had the appropriate mentoring training to do so. Teachers who provide guidance regarding negative behaviors and their outcomes have led to the reduction in suspensions and behavioral referrals.

Further research. The focus of this research was to determine whether the implementation of a one-on-one mentoring relational support program would effectively lead to a decline in student absenteeism, improve academic performance, and reduce negative behaviors, such as suspensions and behavioral referrals. The research study did not establish the significance of the mentor program in reducing students' negative behaviors. This could have been attributed to the lack of use of the right strategies in conducting the mentoring program. Therefore, it is recommended that future research explore strategies that teachers could use to monitor students' behaviors over time to assess their academic performance and changes in behavior. Furthermore, in order to increase student performance, schools should focus on first providing training and mentorship to teachers in order to increase the effectiveness of the mentoring program. Research is recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of the training and mentorship to teachers in enhancing mentoring programs.

The study results indicated that mentoring program does not have an effect on students' negative behaviors, such as suspensions and behavioral referrals. Future research should be aimed at examining the causal factors of student suspensions and their effects on academic performance. Further studies are recommended to examine whether student suspensions have an effect on their academic performance.

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